



ARKANSAS

# *Poised*

## TO LEAD THE NATION IN SUPPORTING FAMILIES

---

GOVERNOR'S INITIATIVE  
GAINS NATIONAL EYE

By Robin Mero

---

**I**MAGINE A YOUNG FAMILY IN CRAWFORD COUNTY, EXPERIENCING A CATASTROPHIC EVENING. THE TWO PARENTS ARE HIGH ON METH AND HAVING AN ARGUMENT. WHEN POLICE RESPOND AND DISCOVER ACTIVE WARRANTS, THEY ARE ARRESTED AND THEIR CHILDREN ARE SWEEPED AWAY INTO PROTECTIVE FOSTER CARE.

A complicated reality awaits this couple who are overwhelmed by the chasm between who they are today and the suitable, healthy parents that their children need and deserve.



Dozens of nonprofits and social service agencies exist in Crawford County to help this couple piece together the elements of a healthy home, but how can the couple progress when they're enslaved to a drug habit and defeated by circumstances?

Envision connecting this couple to a caseworker with a strong awareness of the social services that Crawford County has to offer. She assembles a team of service providers for the family, securing SNAP benefits and health insurance, affordable housing options, solutions for transportation and identifying a substance-abuse counselor for treating the drug addiction. A payment plan is negotiated with the courts, resumés are built and distributed, the Department of Child and Family Services worker is kept informed.

The couple can focus on solving problems and compounding days of sobriety and productivity, while the care team communicates about their progress and responds to challenges that arise. This is Restore Hope Arkansas.

"All the agencies, nonprofits, and training programs in a community now operate independently of each other, and the people who we are attempting to help actually need more than one agency can provide," Restore Hope executive director Paul Chapman says. "Therefore, if we want to close in on better outcomes for families, instead of starting a new program, what we need to do is help existing programs to work better together."

Restore Hope today is operating in six Arkansas counties and aims to reach the 25 largest counties in Arkansas by 2025, making

**"IF WE WANT TO CLOSE IN ON BETTER OUTCOMES FOR FAMILIES ... WHAT WE NEED TO DO IS HELP EXISTING PROGRAMS TO WORK BETTER TOGETHER."**

**- PAUL CHAPMAN  
RESTORE HOPE  
ARKANSAS  
EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR**

**▲ PHOTO:** Restore Hope Arkansas in collaboration with Winthrop Rockefeller Institute at the iR3, Incarceration: Recidivism, Reentry and Reunification summit in 2021.

collaboration between social service providers the missing link to creating population-level change for justice-served families.

"At Restore Hope, we help a community do what it's already signed up to do; we don't provide the social services ourselves," Chapman says. "The organizations are already there. They just need something to connect them."

### **INSPIRATION AND ACTION**

When Gov. Asa Hutchinson took office in 2015, he inherited the fastest-growing prison population in our nation. A staggering number of Arkansas children were relegated to poverty and foster care, and waves of 6,000 prisoners reentered communities each year with 48 percent of them being unemployed and having little hope of transforming their conditions and habits.

At one point in that era, Arkansas ranked highest in the nation for the percentage of children having at least one parent who had been incarcerated: 16 percent.

Hutchinson went directly to the faith community for help, forming a Restore



# REUNIFICATION RATES

WITH PARENT(S)

**76%** vs **43%**

100 FAMILIES

STATE OF ARKANSAS\*

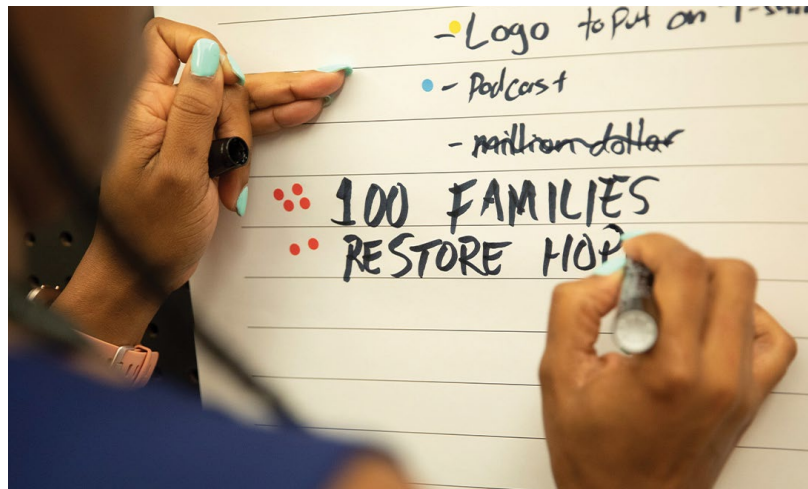
WITH PARENT(S) OR RELATIVES

**80%** vs **59%**

100 FAMILIES

STATE OF ARKANSAS\*

*\* from the 2021 Annual Report Card (arkansas.gov)*



Hope initiative and task force, on which Chapman, who was part of Fellowship Bible Church of Little Rock, was asked to serve.

When a Restore Hope summit was held in Little Rock during the summer of 2015, the governor shared his dismay that half of the children needing protective services were coming out of drug environments.

“When we see (drug problems) impacting and endangering children, I hope we will give some thought to the root cause, as well as making sure we have the solutions for our children,” Hutchinson challenged the group. “The people in this room reflect the people of Arkansas in that we care, we hope, we desire, we want to serve. It’s a matter of mobilizing that concern that exists in the hearts of Arkansans.”

“Let’s not depart this summit with only hope,” Hutchinson pleaded. “We need to follow with action.”

Chapman presented ideas and was called upon by the governor to implement them. Now in its sixth year, Restore Hope has the hard data to demonstrate efficacy and scalability of its initiatives.

**“...WE CARE,  
WE HOPE,  
WE DESIRE,  
WE WANT TO  
SERVE. IT’S A  
MATTER OF  
MOBILIZING  
THAT CONCERN  
THAT EXISTS IN  
THE HEARTS OF  
ARKANSANS.”**

**- GOVERNOR  
ASA HUTCHINSON**

► **PHOTOS:** The iR3, Incarceration: Recidivism, Reentry and Reunification summit in 2021 was a two-day event where participants identified strategic objectives.



IN THE PAST 3 YEARS  
*100 Families Initiative has helped reunite*  
**126 FAMILIES**  
*meaning*  
**344 CHILDREN**  
 WERE REUNITED WITH  
 THEIR PARENTS



FAMILY PRESERVATION:  
*100 Families Initiative has preserved*  
**1,183 FAMILIES**  
*meaning*  
**2,638 CHILDREN**  
 REMAINED SAFELY IN THEIR  
 HOMES WITH THEIR FAMILIES

## STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

IN THE PAST YEAR, WE HAVE HAD THE FOLLOWING OUTCOMES FOR PARENTS THAT ENROLLED IN THE 100 FAMILIES INITIATIVE



**87%**

INCREASE IN  
 FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT

**257**

PARENTS GAINED  
 EMPLOYMENT

**77%**

FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT  
 RETENTION RATE



MOVED  
**221**

FAMILIES INTO  
 STABLE HOUSING

MOVED  
**181**

PARENTS INTO  
 STABLE RECOVERY

MOVED  
**281**

CLIENTS FROM  
 CRISIS TO CAREER

**FAMILIES SERVED HAD ON AVERAGE A 42% INCREASE IN INCOME**

### THE DATA

The overall reunification rate for families that have a child removed and put into foster care in Arkansas is 43 percent. At last measure, those families participating in Restore Hope's programs experienced 76 percent reunification.

"Just by helping organizations in a community to manage a family's issues together, with a shared mission and constant communication, you're able to have that kind of impact," Chapman says.

In Crawford County, as an example, 66 percent of families coming into the program were unemployed; that has been reduced to 23 percent. Seventeen percent of families didn't have transportation, which has been reduced to 4 percent.

Overall during the past year, 1,270 clients with 2,719 children were served; 257 gained employment, 221 homeless families moved into stable housing, and 181 parents who had been using drugs or alcohol at intake moved into stable recovery.

"All these factors impact reunification," Chapman says. "You're not getting your kids back until you're into an apartment or house that's environmentally sound. You're not going to get them back if you're actively using, so we look at recovery."

"The data produced through the alliances has value far beyond the individual family level," Chapman says. "Bringing data to a situation allows things to be more centered on fact rather than observations."

**RESTORE HOPE ALSO HAS PROGRAMS FOCUSED DIRECTLY ON RE-ENTRY AND REDUCING THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO RETURN TO PRISON.**

An even more important measure than reunification is the thousands of times that the removal of children from a household has been prevented.

"As Americans, we're not nearly as impressed with prevention. We have the best healthcare system if you're sick, but not so much for preventing sickness. In the same way, everyone is very impressed, and they should be, by the reunification numbers the communities are getting, but more impressive is the prevention of removals. The reunification rate is hundreds of kids but the prevention of removal is thousands upon thousands of children. It's just, wow; do you get excited about something that didn't happen? As Americans, traditionally we don't."

Restore Hope also has programs focused directly on re-entry and reducing the number of people who return to prison, yet accumulating that data will take at least 4-6 active years, Chapman says.

► **PHOTO:** Paul Chapman, Restore Hope Arkansas Executive Director.

## COMMON OBJECTIVES

The willingness to work together can be slow to develop between the agencies and nonprofits that desire the same results but may compete for the same funding dollars.

“Your outcomes are terrible and you know it,” Chapman is known to admonish people working in social services, “and no one from Washington or Little Rock is going to come save you. You’re going to have to plot a course and journey it out together. Coming to that realization is step one of becoming good.”

Each county fashions its own alliance, so that its case managers know and use the resources there. All that is needed is for one organization to step forward to serve as the hub. Recently the Journey Church in Russellville started an alliance in Pope County, and the Literacy Council in Texarkana established one in Miller County. Restore Hope provides training, helps these organizations find funds to hire case workers, and provides access to software, called HopeArk, which allows the care team members to track a family and communicate with each other about needs and issues, with the necessary privacy compliances built in.

Chapman asks, “Are you tired of spending money and never seeing population growth change?”

“We just need someone to call from Pine Bluff, from Fayetteville. We’ll send our affiliate program agreement. We’ll train them.”

## THE BROADER PATH

Chapman’s work to strengthen Arkansas families gained intensity more than a decade ago, when he was visited at Fellowship Bible Church by a woman armed with a laptop and entreaty: “The Bible says that the church is to care for orphans. You seem to be the leaders of the church; my slides say there is a crisis in our community and therefore there are orphans. I’m coming to make you aware – and I want to know what you’re going to do about it,” he recalls her having said.

Chapman and his wife eventually adopted two children (they already had three). And while he had planned to fund his children’s college educations by re-joining the banking technology sector

**“WHEN PEOPLE BEHAVE BADLY, THE WAY WE CARRY OUT JUSTICE HAS CONSEQUENCES ON FAMILIES. ALL OUR ACTIONS SHOULD BE TO STRENGTHEN AND PRESERVE FAMILIES. THE HUMAN APPROACH TO CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM IS TO TEAR SOMETHING DOWN.”**

**- PAUL CHAPMAN  
RESTORE HOPE  
ARKANSAS  
EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR**

where he worked in the 1990s, his trajectory was altered by the governor’s plea at the Restore Hope summit.

During both his banking career and his prior involvement with a prison pre-release program, Chapman had studied collaboration. He was influenced by the Stanford Social Innovation Review’s 2011 report on collective impact, which lamented the lack of results from decades of attempted education reform and highlighted some remarkable exceptions that succeeded by using collaboration.

He also is personally invigorated by confronting problems.

“When people behave badly, the way we carry out justice has consequences on families. All our actions should be to strengthen and preserve families,” he says. “The human approach to criminal justice reform is to tear something down; on the left, to say law enforcement and courts are ineffective and racist, on the right, to diminish social organizations.”

“The balanced, middle approach is to preserve our institutions; they need to be built up and aligned. And the most important institution of all is the family,” Chapman says.

“Governments and nonprofits should always seek to involve and strengthen family, to hold family up as a high value. The stronger we can make families, the more we prevent crime. But really, that happens outside of the government’s purview,” he says.

“States throughout the country have been contacting Restore Hope for information about implementation of the program,” Chapman says, reverberating Hutchinson’s words of 2015:

“We have two objectives, two missions, of all the needs in our state to be focused on: children, and those who need a second chance. Arkansas has an opportunity to be a national leader.”

Now imagine again that Crawford County couple, benefiting from services, rising above drug habits and regaining custody of their children. They find good jobs and have a third child; the household is reconstructed, healthier, and structured. You will meet the Myer family in this issue.

“We in Arkansas have been called upon to collaborate and vigorously address the unrelenting challenges that continue to cripple thousands of our families,”

Chapman says.

“Our social service agencies and nonprofits, together with the criminal justice system, can no longer operate independently. The most foundational institution of all – the family – needs the worthy resources that already exist in our communities, with the added elixir of alliance that can for our state truly Restore Hope.” ◀

