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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Dayton Area Chamber, in partnership with local consulting firm The Oniru Group,  
launches new entrepreneurship program for restored citizens**

DAYTON, Ohio (August 19, 2020) – The Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce announced today a new pilot entrepreneurial training program that will engage restored citizens in business planning to help curb the prison-to-poverty pipeline. In fall 2020, the Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce, The Oniru Group, and the Montgomery County Office of Reentry will launch the initiative, entitled “*REACH! Entrepreneurship Redefined.*”

While there is an abundance of technical assistance boot camps for businesses, a gap exists in servicing formerly incarcerated residents who have an interest in entrepreneurship, according to Belinda Matthews Stenson, Director of the Minority Business Partnership at the Dayton Area Chamber.

“After speaking with the Montgomery County Office of Reentry and conducting extensive research, we believe offering entrepreneurship services for returning citizens will be a value-added service for our community,” Stenson said. “Due to the increasing challenges this population faces in trying to reenter the workforce, there is a need to equip them with skills and a network to start their own businesses.”

REACH! (Reentry Entrepreneurship Assistance CoHort) is a 7-week program that will provide services to citizens referred by the Montgomery County Office of Reentry, which provides education and training to restored citizens through the signature Reentry Career Alliance Academy (RCAA).

“About 95 percent of our graduates have successfully transitioned back into their communities without post-program prison commitment,” said Jamie Gee, Office of Reentry Manager.

RCAA graduates who have expressed interest in entrepreneurship will be enrolled to participate in the upcoming pilot cohort which will convene at the Reentry Training Center.

“Our returning citizens deserve to be given the tools they need to succeed, and becoming an entrepreneur or small business owner really allows them to be a vital part of their local communities,” said Commissioner Debbie Lieberman, co-chair of the Montgomery County Reentry Council.

The REACH! Initiative is a program under the KeyBank Business Boost & Build Dayton Pathways program consisting of several strategic partners (Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce, Minority Business Assistance Center, The Oniru Group, LLC and Wesley Community Center) that have worked diligently to connect minority- and women-owned firms to business education, contracting opportunities and access to capital to support their businesses. The Pathways component has also provided support to individuals to enhance employment skills and career opportunities. Donerik Black, a consultant with the Oniru Group, LLC will serve as the lead instructor of the entrepreneurial reentry pilot.

“We are extremely excited about this pilot program,” Black said. “This program is specifically designed to deliver education and training for individuals interested in developing a viable skill and business ownership as a post-release career option and potential anecdote to recidivism.”

REACH! will strive to put an end to the revolving door of prisons and reverse the societal harms of recidivism. According to the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation, approximately 35.3% of prisoners released to Montgomery County in Ohio were arrested within 3 years (2018). Researchers have linked such recidivism to unemployment, education, and inability to reintegrate into society after prison. Entrepreneurship provides an opportunity for restored citizens to start their own business and invest in their communities while minimizing systemic discrimination often faced in a challenged job market. Our work provides education to individuals with criminal backgrounds, equipping them to rise above the stigma associated with their conviction - creating a path to economic opportunity.

***About the Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce*** – The Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce brings together more than 2,200 businesses and organizations in a 9-county area surrounding Dayton, Ohio. The Chamber strives to improve the region’s business climate and overall standard of living through public policy advocacy, economic development initiatives and providing networking and training opportunities for its members. Nationally awarded with “5-Star Accreditation” from the United States Chamber of Commerce, the Dayton Chamber is widely recognized for its innovative programs and outstanding contribution to positive change in the region. Information about the Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce is available at [www.daytonchamber.org](http://www.daytonchamber.org) or 937-226-1444.

***About JumpStart Inc.*** – JumpStart is a nationally recognized investing, entrepreneurial support and economic development organization dedicated to unlocking the full potential of diverse and ambitious entrepreneurs to economically transform entire communities. For more information, visit [www.jumpstartinc.org](http://www.jumpstartinc.org) and follow [@JumpStartInc](https://twitter.com/JumpStartInc) on Twitter.

***About KeyBank*** – KeyCorp’s roots trace back 190 years to Albany, New York. Headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio, Key is one of the nation’s largest bank-based financial services companies, with assets of approximately \$146.7 billion at September 30, 2019. Key provides deposit, lending, cash management, and investment services to individuals and businesses in 15 states under the name KeyBank National Association through a network of over 1,100 branches and more than 1,400 ATMs. Key also provides a broad range of sophisticated corporate and investment banking products, such as merger and acquisition advice, public and private debt and equity, syndications and derivatives to middle market companies in selected industries throughout the United States under the KeyBanc Capital Markets trade name. KeyBank is Member FDIC.

***About KeyBank Foundation*** – KeyBank Foundation serves to fulfill KeyBank’s purpose to help clients and communities thrive, and its mission is to support organizations and programs that prepare people for thriving futures. The Foundation’s mission is advanced through three funding priorities – neighbors, education, and workforce – and through community service. To provide meaningful philanthropy that transforms lives, KeyBank Foundation listens carefully to understand the unique characteristics and needs of its communities and then backs solutions with targeted philanthropic investments. KeyBank Foundation is a nonprofit charitable foundation, funded by KeyCorp.

***About the Montgomery County Office of Reentry*** – The Montgomery County Office of Reentry serves as a community-based pre- and post-release resource and point of entry (hub) for individuals with misdemeanor and felony convictions, some of which have served time in jail and/or prison. Individuals are referred to the Office of Reentry through a variety of sources including but not limited to corrections facilities, parole and probation officers, service providers, and other community stakeholders. The Office of Reentry is dedicated to addressing the holistic needs of returning and restored citizens, through effective

resource optimization, coordination, networking and advocacy. For more information, call us at 937-546-9448.

***About the Oniru Group, LLC*** – The Oniru Group works closely with a select few service providers to socially and economically disadvantaged businesses to identify and develop programming to overcome the common barriers to successful business ownership. The Oniru Group has taken very deliberate steps to make sure that we foster a strong climate for small business growth with many local community partners including college and universities, economic development agencies, chambers of commerce, and other community organizations. To find out more about our workshops go to [www.onirugroup.com](http://www.onirugroup.com) or call us at 937- 397-7796.