What is RELINK?
When justice-involved people leave jail, they often face a unique set of challenges that can limit their abilities to succeed and stay out of the criminal justice system. RELINK is a St. Louis Integrated Health Network (IHN) initiative that combines one-on-one support with referrals to committed community partners in health, mental health, housing, employment, and education. Through this collaborative support system, we hope to reduce health disparities, improve system coordination, and decrease the risk of 18 to 26 year-olds returning to jail.

This report details successes, challenges, and recommendations based on RELINK’s first two years*.

Who are our clients?

- **94%** 18-26 years old
- **87%** African American
- **61%** Male
- **63%** from St. Louis City
- **40%** on probation or parole

*BARRIERS FOR RELINK CLIENTS

RELINK clients face numerous challenges. Without support these challenges increase the risk of returning to jail or even death.

- **History of Substance Abuse**
  - 87% of clients

- **No High School Diploma or GED**
  - 56% of clients

- **Self-Reported Poor Mental Health**
  - 41% of clients

- **Uninsured**
  - 62% of clients

- **Unemployed**
  - 50% of clients

RELINK Who’s Who

Three key groups support RELINK clients’ successes:

- **Community Health Workers (CHWs)** - Assist clients before and after release
- **Integrated Health Network (IHN)** - Manages the RELINK grant and employs CHWs
- **Health and Social Services Network (HSSN)** - 20+ partners who provide essential services to RELINK clients

*Report timeframe: February 6, 2017 - September 30, 2018
CLIENT EXPERIENCE

Stage 1: Pre-Release
CHWs connect with jailed individuals, enroll them, and provide multifaceted support.

- 95 clients have been enrolled in RELINK
- Clients spend an average of 162 days in pre-release (eligible for release)

PRE-RELEASE SUPPORT SERVICES
On average, CHWs spend 50 hours in St. Louis jails every month.

- Emotional Support & Trauma-Informed Activities
- Release Readiness Classes
  - About RELINK
  - Accountability
  - Empowerment
  - Community Resources
  - Goal Setting
  - Substance Abuse
  - Employment
  - Trauma
- Courtroom Advocacy

Stage 2: Post-Release
CHWs empower clients’ successful reentry by providing service referrals, health education, and training.

- CLIENTS UTILIZE WRAPAROUND SUPPORT UPON REENTRY
  - Job Training: 33%
  - Social Support*: 22%
  - Mental Health: 15%
  - Medical: 10%
  - Substance Use: 8%
  - Education: 7%
  - Housing: 5%

- POST-RELEASE SUPPORT
CHWs host monthly workshops for released clients to work on their goals and learn about community resources.

- 72% of appointments made are kept

Follow-Up & Outcomes
CHWs provide ongoing support to clients and continually make an impact on clients’ lives.

- 97% of clients have not returned to jail
- 50% of those employed work full time
- 30% of clients enrolled in degree, certificate, or vocational programs
- 57% of clients had insurance coverage
- 40% of clients reported improved health status

"If I didn’t join the RELINK program, I wouldn’t be on the path to greatness. From the physical help to motivation, the Community Health Workers and the rest of the IHN staff have been a great help.”
- RELINK client

Post-Release Highlights:
- RELINK clients report feeling empowered to seek resources.
- Service providers from multiple industries (e.g., health, criminal justice, public benefits and resources) collaborate to respond to clients quickly and support their reentry.

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Challenges:
- A lack of data infrastructure and information sharing across reentry leads to gaps in coverage and support.
- CHWs, Reentry Case Managers and Discharge Planner have limited capacity to meet the large volume of client needs.

- Challenges:
  - There are few options for safe, long-term housing.
  - There are limited inpatient mental and behavioral health treatments for uninsured and under-insured clients.
  - Clients have few choices in health and social services due to community supervision requirements.
LESSONS LEARNED

RELINK is in its third year. Here’s what we’ve learned about effective reentry programming:

- Health is often overlooked in reentry programming, but supporting a client’s health is a critical aspect of keeping them out of jail.
- When the criminal justice system, health, and social service systems work together, we save costs and improve community safety. However, we still need to improve client trust and service utilization.
- A focus on preventative services, such as mental health, housing, and education for people ages 18-26 could reduce system costs and improve the overall health of the community.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Ask your organization to advocate for and sustain the following strategies:

- Develop diverse funding sources to sustain and expand successful deflection, diversion, and re-entry strategies and programs.
- Develop multifaceted diversion systems for justice-involved individuals with robust partnerships that maintains continuous access to essential supports such as housing, mental health services, life skills/job training.
- Support the reform of policy, practice, and strategic change for criminal justice and policing systems.
- Promote and prioritize trauma-informed and culturally sensitive organizational and institutional practices.