

INTRODUCTION

The New York Reentry Education Network (NYREN) is a growing coalition of individuals within community-based organizations, government agencies, and institutions of higher education who have made a collective commitment to changing the landscape of reentry education in New York. The NYREN was founded in 2009 when a group of like-minded individuals committed to improving the quality of and access to educational programs for justice-involved people came together to problem-solve and learn more about each other's work. Forged with the dual conviction that there is an urgent need to make education a more central part of reentry strategies *and* that effecting large-scale, sustainable change on this issue requires cross-sector coordination, the Network has been collaborating for over three years to share information, educate stakeholders in reentry education, and mobilize around common issues impacting formerly incarcerated individuals.

The mission statement of the NYREN is:

1. **To enable people with criminal justice involvement to receive quality education appropriate to their needs so that they become fully engaged and productive members of their communities;**
2. **To make education a core component of the reentry policy, strategy and practice in New York; and**
3. **To shift public priorities and resources from incarceration to educational access and success for communities affected by mass incarceration.**

NYREN'S GROWING COLLECTIVE IMPACT

- Over the past two years, the Center for Institutional and Social Change (CISC) has been collaborating with the NYREN to develop their capacity to pursue their mission with a Collective Impact approach.
- This project stems from the same conviction that drives other Collective Impact projects – **that cross-sector collaboration, coordination and shared vision and goals are necessary for large-scale change.** In this case, the NYREN coalesced because of the realization that changing the landscape of reentry and shifting resources and priorities from incarceration to educational access and success required a fundamental shift in the orientation of work – from individual organizations' pursuits to collective goals and strategies.
- NYREN's collective impact capacity developed through gradually building strong relationships and trust across sectors and roles, and those relationships have created a foundation for the Network to become increasingly strategic and systems-oriented in its approach to making education central in reentry.
- NYREN's distinctive collective impact approach includes:
 - **Grassroots/Organic Development:** Over the last 3.5 years, the Network has developed organically and has become increasingly strategic and systems-oriented in its approach to moving the field of reentry education forward.
 - **People at Multiple Levels/In Different Positions:** Unlike traditional Collective Impact initiatives that emphasize the need for CEO-level buy-in, the NYREN is composed of individuals who sit at multiple levels across a variety of sectors. These are individuals who are in it for the long haul. They are located in a variety of positions within:

- Community-Based organizations
 - Front-line staff, such as case managers, teachers and outreach workers
 - Programmatic leaders in specific content areas of education (e.g., educational assessment, workforce development, college admissions), including leadership by people with criminal justice involvement
 - Executive Directors
- Government agencies – Corrections, Education (District 79) Probation, the former Mayor’s Office of Adult Education
 - Individuals working inside correctional facilities as well as individuals in the community
 - Participation varies, including mid-level staff and executive-level staff
- Academic Institutions – CISC, Prisoner Reentry Institute at John Jay College of Criminal Justice
- A variety of individuals – people working across the continuum of educational opportunities and within a variety of places that need coordination in order to increase educational access and success – means that the NYREN is connected to different networks and knowledge
- **Working on Multiple Levels:** NYREN sits within a critical space between individual interaction and large-scale institutions where groups coalesce and create a local context for action based on enduring relationships and shared understandings (Fine 2012). Thus, the network is positioned to be a key player in linking policy level interventions to everyday practice.

THE EVOLUTION OF NYREN

- **Membership Growth**
 - Origin: 9 Community Based Organizations, 3 Government agencies
 - Current: 15 Community Based Organizations, 4 Government agencies, 2 academic institutions, 1 Coalition
- **Development of Internal Structure/Organization**
 - Mission, operating principles, coordinating committee
 - Collaboration with CISC to develop strategy and capacity for collective impact
- **Continuous Communication**
 - Listserv created in May 2009 with 4 users
 - Has grown to include over 100 recipients, with 66 unique contributors representing 33 organizations
 - Average of 19 messages/month, with a total of 895 emails sent as of December 2012
 - Listserv communication centers around: meeting planning, sharing NYREN minutes and reports, information sharing, educational program opportunities, employment opportunities, funding opportunities, policy decisions, and advocacy
 - Website launched January 2013

NETWORK BUILDING HISTORY

- **Strategic Visioning Sessions (Retreats in 2009 and 2011)**
- **Product Development**
 - Fact Sheets for general public (since 2011)

- Services and Eligibility Matrix for provider referrals (2012)
- Poster and info sheet for East River Academy students (services, eligibility, and location)(2012)
- NYREN Publications
 - NYREN Strategies for Engaging Students Involved with the Criminal Justice System (June 2012)
 - Success Stories from Rikers, for circulation to NYREN members and Rikers staff (June 2012)
- **Development of Organizational Structure**
 - Operating Principles, MOU, and Coordinating Committee
- **Development of Working Groups**
 - Rikers Island Working Group
 - Higher Education Working Group
- **Research on NYREN by CISC**
 - Analysis of interviews and focus groups of NYREN members and partners
 - Network mapping (development of technological tool and preliminary survey results)
- **Staff Expansion**
 - Reentry Education Transition Specialist (March 2011)
 - Staff Associate and Associate Research Scholar for CISC and NYREN (June 2012)
 - Columbia Law students conducting research and developing website
- **Pathways of Possibilities Conference (February 2013)**
 - 180 participants, 20+ volunteer staff from member agencies.
 - Over 100 people attended the evening screening of “Passport to the Future” film and Theater for Social Change performance.
- **Development of conference/NYREN website**

THE WORK OF THE NETWORK (MUTUALLY REINFORCING ACTIVITIES)

- **Joint Presentations/Exchanges**
 - NYC Discharge Planning Committee (May 2010)
 - NYC Department of Correction
 - Reentry Fair (Fall 2011)
 - Presentations on NYREN at DOC-DOE “Education Management” Meetings
 - Presentations on NYREN at DOC Trainings of School Area Officers (since Spring 2011)
 - Planning Meeting for (later postponed) DOC Partnerships Symposium (Summer 2012)
 - NYC Department of Education East River Academy
 - NYREN Exchange with ERA Transition Staff (November 2011/January 2013)
 - DOE/East River Academy- NYREN Outreach Operations Meeting (September 2012)
 - NYC Department of Probation
 - NYREN Workshops at DOP Professional Development Conferences (June 2012/January 2013)

- **Joint Grant Proposals & Funding Projects**
 - Funding of four member organizations and the Reentry Education Transition Specialist through Reentry Transitions Grant, administered by the Mayor's Office of Adult Education – Osborne Association, Future Now, College Initiative, College and Community Fellowship (Funded May 2010- March 2013)
 - Ford Foundation Grant to CISC – Community Renewal through Reentry Education Network Development (Funded 2012- 2014?)
 - U.S. Department of Education (DOE) Model Demonstration Projects on Promoting Reentry Success through Continuity of Educational Opportunities (PRSCEO) – Fortune and CISC (Applied December 2012)
 - US Department of Justice (DOJ) Office of Justice Programs, Encouraging Innovation: Field-Initiated Programs (Applied April 2013, response pending).

- **Advocacy**
 - Mobilizing quickly around topics that have implications for NYREN organizations and the clients they serve
 - Letter to DOC and DOE about the closing of Rikers schools (July 2010)
 - Education from the Inside Out Coalition – letter regarding admissions processes at certain SUNY campuses (December 2011)
 - Justice Assistance Grant letter sign-on (May 2012)
 - Letter to NYS Deputy Commissioner for Adult Career and Continuing Education Services for Workforce Investment Act Title II and Welfare Education Program RFP (January 2013)

- **Emerging and Proposed Projects**
 - Info-Sharing Pilot, ERA and NYREN CBOs
 - In-Network Trainings for Capacity-Building and Leadership Development
 - Development of Workshops to Train Gatekeepers in Corrections and Education
 - Blueprint for Reentry Education and Legislative Advocacy Agenda
 - Place-based Higher Education initiative in the Bronx
 - Additional Working Groups/ Learning Communities out of Conference

EXTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS

From a review of CISC interviews alone, NYREN members indicated being connected to over 50 community-based organizations, educational institutions, and government partners besides those already represented within the Network.

- Existing Reentry Coalitions/Networks
- Broad Community Service Organizations
- Partners/Collaborators, including Government
- Additional partner organizations in Arts, Health, Housing, Legal Advocacy, Literacy/Education, Prison/Justice/Reentry, Workforce Development, Youth