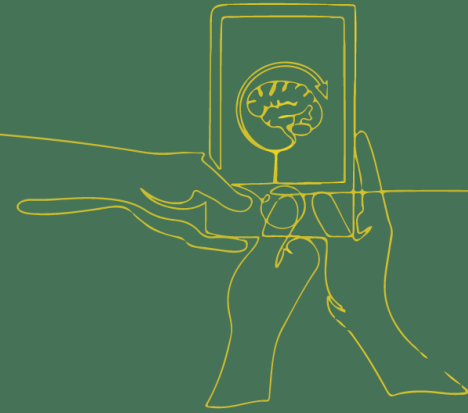# BREAKING NEWS

Solutions Network: Breaking the Cycle of Incarceration

The Team

- Community Partners
- People with lived experience
- Researchers
- Policy Makers

Meet the Research Coordinators

Charles Ozzoude
Charles brings a unique cross-sectoral experience in research and consultations across public sector, academic, community, clinical, and non-profit settings, as well as a passion for health equity.

Penny Dowedoff
Penny holds a PhD in Sociology from York University and specializes in health equity, assisted reproductive technologies and global health, qualitative methodologies and community engagement.

Madison Ford
Madison holds a Master's of Public Health from Lund University and has past experience in quantitative and qualitative research of mental health and addiction, specifically problem gambling, as well as a passion for social inequities in health.

Our Focus: Release, Re-entry, and Brain Injury

In March 2020, we gathered to discuss the design, development, and implementation of a tool that might help people break the cycle of incarceration. We focused on the potential of a mobile application to address some of the challenges of community re-entry, particularly for those who have experienced a brain injury. We created a list of features around which we could build an app. We envisioned how to integrate the app into practice and we talked about success. Some measures of success include screening for Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and that the app would be useful for the people that engage with it.

Soon after our March meeting, the world turned upside down. The pandemic has underscored the urgent need for tools to help people released from custody. The research team has been putting together the necessary background to support our solution, drawing on the symposium discussions, research literature, and current TBI app landscape. This newsletter provides a snapshot of this work.

Our Work: App Research, Landscape, and Features

Research exploring the scope and efficacy of apps as health management tools for TBI is limited. Our exploratory literature review focused on identifying the contours of this emerging area of research. TBI apps were often used for memory aid and organizational tools, particularly for goal setting and tracking. Common app features for cognitive improvement included alarms, budgeting tools, lists, GPS, calendars, find your phone services, medication and behaviour trackers, e-book readers, games, and brain training.

Though evidence of the efficacy of the apps is limited, the majority of studies in our review indicated that the apps are related to moderate improvement in performing cognitive tasks, setting and achieving goals, and managing TBI-related symptoms.

The review highlighted the need for an app specific to the TBI-related challenges in the context of release from custody and community re-entry. None of the apps in our review of the TBI app research or TBI app market targeted people experiencing social marginalization, including the precariously housed and homeless or those with lived experiences in the criminal justice system.

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Screening Features · Memory Features · Navigation Features · Communication Features · Self-Management Features · Social Support Features

Drawing on the network objectives, symposium discussions, literature review, and competitive analysis, we identified six types of features to consider for the app.

Screening features provide ABI/TBI diagnostic tools.

Memory features record and prompt important appointments, tasks, or responsibilities.

Navigation features identify important service locations, restricted areas, and transportation services.

Communication features facilitate information seeking and sharing, social interaction and coordination, and everyday accessibility across a range of settings.

Self-management features for monitoring and regulating thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Social support features connect users with people who can help them navigate difficult situations, make informed decisions, and achieve greater community integration.

Our Solution: A Reminder App?

We learned a lot from the symposium on what the app could look like. At our next meeting we want to dig more deeply into what the first version of app will be. Here is one suggestion we can talk about:

✓ A common issue resulting in re-incarceration for those with TBI was missing appointments. To help prevent this, we could build a simple **calendar-based reminder app.**

✓ The app can remind people about release conditions (e.g. curfew), appointments (e.g. probation/parole, medical, support services), and other important tasks (e.g. not missing their treatment routine).

On the right are quotes from a study of men recently released from custody in Ontario on what helps them stay on track with their goals.

We are excited to revisit these discussions with you at our next meeting.

"The phone calls … trying to remind me of what dates I have to go here or there … because when I do take the medication sometimes my mind is everywhere else … so it would be a focus, a reminder, like I said to you to text me … The next day I can forget about everything."

"[My] alarm [helps, and] my grandmother … helps to make sure that you know I'm on track … Usually I make a calendar so I know with all of the things I have to do. It helps me keep my appointments."

Looking Ahead

Getting involved: Think about how you want to be involved in the project. We could, for example, form subcommittees around particular areas of our work, such as App Research, App Design, App Development, and Integrating the App into Practice.

Engaging people with lived experience: We heard from you that we need to engage people with lived experience as much as possible in each area and phase of our work. One way we are doing this is by collecting some qualitative data from people with lived experience about app features they think might help when they are released from custody. We are currently developing the interview guide and working on the REB submission.

Look out for our call for feedback on the interview questions, and think about whether you/your organization could help us with recruiting interview participants. Going forward, we might also consider adding more people with lived experience to subcommittees, advisory positions, or as full network members and look to your advice on who to reach out to. We thank you for the feedback in April on potential new members, which we've compiled for our reference as we continue to work on this together.

Staying connected: Please complete the Doodle poll so that we can schedule our next network meeting.

Questions or feedback? You can reach us at Madison.ford@unityhealth.to
For more information, visit our website at maphealth.ca/breaking-the-cycle

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