

Welcome to the NCJA Podcast. Listen to lively discussions with a variety of guests about promising criminal justice practices and programs worth taking closer look at. Hear interesting ideas from around the country on a variety of important and timely topics, and learn how you can adjust or adapt your Beringian grant program for improved success. Thanks for joining us. We hope you enjoy.

Iyana Crawford:

Hello everyone. Welcome to another episode of the NCJA Podcast. Today we have a very special guest, Andre Peart, who will discuss the innovative application being used in the reentry space. We'll explore the significance of reentry and how this application is transforming the way agencies deliver reentry services. We hope many of you will consider integrating it into your frameworks. Welcome Andre and thank you for joining us today. Would you mind briefly introducing yourself?

Andre Peart:

Oh yeah, for sure. Thank you for having me too as well. I'm Andre Peart, the Founder and CEO here at Untapped Solutions. We're a case management and workforce platform, operations throughout all 50 states, and we're headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, and New York City.

Iyana Crawford:

Thank you, Andre. So what is Untapped Solutions and what all can it do?

Andre Peart:

Definitely. So just going into, we like to say we're two different things, right? Because we're a workforce platform, but we're also a case management platform. And as you look at those, those are two completely different things, but they interface sort of the same, which is why we're one platform. On the case management side, Iyana, we deploy social service technology that allows social workers, nonprofits, staff, caseworkers to not just manage their clients, not just put progress notes and document interactions, but also our system takes all that information and helps that caseworker now make actions happen. Right. Does these progress notes lead to this client needing mental health? Do these progress notes say the client needs a job, they just lost their job last week. That really puts more work on staff. Right. If it's not that direct caseworker getting them now mental health referrals, now having to get them a new job, it's somebody else in the organization that now has to do that responsibility, taking away from some client.

Our system takes that information, says, oh, sounds like you need a referral. Let's find that nearest mental health provider. And it automates those kind of actions to start intake with those outside providers or internal providers if they have that kind of network. If it comes to these jobs, same thing. Let's get the client a job, but that work doesn't have to be on the human being all the time, right? Technology can come in to help that human being, moving the needle faster, getting to more clients served, and whatever sector people are working with, recidivism, homelessness, mental health, we're helping those numbers finally get reduced. So that's how we deploy. That's what our case management does on that side.

On the workforce side, we're used by employers. Employers come to us, they post jobs on our platform instead of going to other because we're a platform where they can hire untapped talent,

right, formally incarcerated, those who are homeless, those who have unique backgrounds. Why they use our platform over others? We have just, again, that network of case management providers training these individuals. So employers are getting more stable talent. They're not just here to hire formerly incarcerated people. They're getting formerly incarcerated people who are skilled, trained, who have met the needs and who are work ready. So we're just one of those preferred platforms to come to, but that's what we do at Untapped Solutions.

Iyana Crawford:

Wow. Andre, and that's awesome. You mentioned something so important, that not only will job seekers be getting talent, but they will be getting talent that aligns directly with those skills through Untapped Solutions. So thank you for sharing that. I think many of our listeners will be aware of the importance of reentry when it comes to criminal justice and beyond, but is there anything you'll like to say about its importance and how has that into Untapped Solutions ethos?

Andre Peart:

Yeah, definitely. So one, reentry. Right. I can say how important it is and talk about that all day, but I'll just focus on our philosophy at Untapped Solutions and how we see it important. Reentry to us is important because it's outdated, right, and we saw this. We saw this as social workers at the company, as case workers. Most importantly, we saw this as clients of these non-profit staff. We saw this as being the people who had to come home from prison and work with these individuals who had good intentions, bad operations. Right. And those two things don't go well together, and I think we all know that in any sector. So when we bring it back to reentry, our philosophy was that people, no matter how important the program is, no matter how important the main goal or the outcome to get this person stabilized, we can't do that with just human beings alone, right?

600,000 people coming home from prison every year. She's still working on the case plan from 2023 and now whatever city she and she has that load of people coming back home, and that's not stopping for her or him, right, speaking about that caseworker. Therefore, nobody can never satisfy clients because it's just a revolving door. Now, when you pair that caseworker with technology, you have amplified what they can do and what they can do is now have more impact. So that what's important to us is that we actually make reentry look like 2024 and bring it to a modern standpoint. Right. Because truth be told, it's not in a modern standpoint at all in our view at Untapped Solutions. So it's important that we bring it to a modern standpoint and help people re-understand that technology is now used in every industry and it's becoming a must and it must become a must here in reentry too as well.

Iyana Crawford:

That's so important what you said, because really they're doing a disservice to the clients that they serve, especially if they're behind or still processing paperwork or cases from previous years. So thank you for sharing that. You talked a little bit about your philosophy. How did this app come into fruition and how has it grown over time?

Andre Peart:

Definitely. So it came straight through self-experience, right, but a couple different experiences. Right. Initially, we used to call a platform called ConConnect. That's when we were just a job and service board. Formerly incarcerated people can come out of prison or whether they were already out, they had any type of run with the law and they can apply to jobs. Why we built that, because I served about five and a half years in New York State Prison. Right. So my initial trauma after getting out of prison was, wow, it's so hard for me to get a job. I can't do this for my daughter. I can't do this. I can't live the lifestyle that I'd like to live. So I was inspired to create another LinkedIn. Right. I came on LinkedIn. I loved what LinkedIn stood for. I was on their networking, like posting things in the feed, but I was like, I'm really not getting any bites here, and I already know why.

So I was inspired to reinvent that for people like me at the time. That did really well. That's why today as Untapped Solutions, we still have this job board workforce component, but I then ventured in to being a caseworker at a nonprofit as I still had ConConnect, which was a small business that couldn't pay the bills. Right. It was just that dream still, little small beta idea and my adventures as a caseworker and seeing again, the inefficiencies now pairing my mindset with, oh, I'm not in the client seat anymore. I'm the one helping the client, and this sucks how I got to tell these people, no, your referral is not through. No, this is not ready. Oh, you didn't get what you wanted out the program and everything seemed like it was just supposed to be okay, and I wasn't okay as a once upon a time client given those kind of answers. So I left and now I had that inspiration to say, we need something more than a job board. Actually, we need technology for the whole social service nonprofit industry, and that's why we are what we are today.

Iyana Crawford:

How do you support the app? What has the funding landscape look like from the beginning days to today?

Andre Peart:

So from the beginning, self-funded, right? We always started this as a for-profit company, and I'll tell you why, and I always like to give the answer. We started because when I saw nonprofits, I saw nonprofits, right? I understood the process of growing a nonprofit, and when I looked at a nonprofit, the process versus a for-profit, I saw local funders, donors, different philanthropic groups. I saw a bunch of other individuals that would be applying for these same grants. I saw all that, but most importantly, I saw my impact in the future. I said, all right, well, I secure this funding. I'll get to two, 3 million. I'm really ambitious, but what does that do impact wise? I'm servicing New York City. Maybe I'll grow and become New York state, and what will it take to get to all 50 states? Let's do research. Let's look at those other big enterprise nonprofits and look at what it took for them.

And I didn't honestly like the amount of years it looked like it was going to take for me to get there. Right. I knew that this was a problem in my community of New York, but Los Angeles, wherever Iyana's at, wherever our families and friends are at, it's the same issue. And my vision was just a lot bigger. So I went the for-profit route because I saw for-profit companies grow faster. Right. I knew, I started learning about this thing called venture capital, right, and as a black individual, I didn't know Jack about venture capital before prison, early after prison. Shortly after prison I learned about it and what it could possibly potentially do, but I also knew it wasn't an endeavor many

people that look like me had taken, but I still, I'm going to go try this venture capital route. This seems like the right route that'll get me to having this company from New York to New Jersey to all 50 states in the matter of time based on pretty much my work ethic.

So we actually started raising venture capital, which was hard. We probably got over a hundred no's, but eventually we got one phone call from Techstars out of Atlanta, and instead of us applying this time, we got told no two times. We finally got a phone call and they said, Hey, we found [inaudible 00:09:24], but one of those sites you can put your idea on and people look and if they like it, they'll call you. Got the call. They told us to pitch. Long story short, we got into Techstars. That was our first \$120,000 investment. That was an equity investment. And from there, the no's stopped and we actually raised about \$1.7 million in probably about seven months, 800,000 about non-dilutive funding from partners, REDF, DreamWork, Robin Hood, Village Cap. The majority of that venture capital from different investors such as Google, De-Carceration Fund, and other investors.

Iyana Crawford:

Nice. Yeah, and you talked a little bit about venture capital. That's something that I'm recently learning about and that there is a space for criminal justice and reentry in venture capital. So thank you for talking about that. How do you engage individuals to join, use the app either as employers, service providers, or users?

Andre Peart:

Yeah, definitely. So a couple of different ways. I'll start off with employers because they're a big part of our platform, but the main thing is, right, the social service aspects. So with employers, we do a lot of outreach, right, that cold outreach, those emails, those phone calls. More importantly, we work with associations, right? If you're a technology industry, we work with technology association who you go to for all your advice. Right. If you're manufacturing, you probably go to the manufacturing association of electricians for your advice on hiring, operations, tips, tools, technology, different upcoming practices, and we've learned that was the best way because us going to any company that's bigger than us, which almost every company is because we're a startup, right, especially in our emphasis stages, why would you listen to us on the importance of fair chance or hiring formerly incarcerated individuals? Right. Let's be very transparent because we're a business and we should be.

Why would you pay us any mind? Who is Andre Peart and who is Untapped Solutions? Right. The better influence and more targeted was, we need to really talk to those people they already listened to and see if they'll first listen to us. Why would these associations listen? Part of their job is to listen to those new trends to share with their membership base, right, similar to what we probably all do here and some of us in our roles. So that was the best way to go. That leads into the organizations. We know they're known as CBOs. We actually call organizations CDOs, client driven organizations. Why? We don't like to label them nonprofits. Right. So we created our own terminology, because you can be a for-profit serving clients, you can be a hospital, you can not be a 501(c)(3). So client driven organizations was a similar approach. Right.

More so we're mission aligned, so we're not like another CRM like the ones that are out there that are just sales driven, they have a product, they're selling to the nonprofit. We're mission aligned.

Our product is solely built with features aligned to increase not just better data analysis, but your client outcomes, your impact, and we're built by pretty much X nonprofit staff, X clients.

So we go in with that philosophy when it's direct, when it's cold, when we're calling you, you never heard about us, but we take that same philosophy from the employers and talk to foundations. Foundations are funding you, right? These big partners are giving you the money. These state entities, these governments, we know that they want better impact. We know they want better data being given to them. Right. We know that they know nonprofits are only able to reach 8% of their alumni, so how can you really tell me how well my money was spent if you can't really talk to your clients and tell me how life is doing for them? How is life really going? And we're the companies solving that. So they're willing to listen to a problem that they've had since the start of this, right, when reentry started some 70 years ago. We're actually coming talking to foundations to deploy our technology to their portfolios that can utilize us, and that's how we're able to reach hundreds and get on calls where we do stuff like this, podcasts, webinars, co-collaboration and all that kind of good stuff.

Justice impact individuals. That was probably the easiest for us. And we like to just say untapped individuals. We know everywhere they're at from the projects, the neighborhood, the train station, outside, parole, probation, in the shelters. We know where our people are at and where they're suffering, and we're in all those places. Right. It goes back to the nonprofits. If we're in the shelter integrated, where do you think every single one of their clients end up at? Inside of our platform where they know they can get jobs and services.

We're inside DLC already on the tablets. You already made your profile. Claim it when you get out. Right. So it's the same thing. So we're already there. Or if you get, the biggest way is word of mouth. "Hey, Iyana, have you heard about Untapped Solutions?" "Oh, no, I haven't." "Here. You should sign up. It's a social network," which is why we use the social network aspect and why it looks like another version of Facebook, but more like LinkedIn for the untapped, more of a professional networking, but we know what the powers of social network can do, and that's how we sort of capture all those three user bases.

Iyana Crawford:

Wow. That's powerful. And we know the influence social platform has on making professional connections and introducing new opportunities. You talked a little bit about data. You have a data dashboard geared towards onboarding state agencies as partners, right? Could you speak to a little of what kind of data that dashboard provides? Do you have a lot of state agencies on the platform, and if so, what sectors are they primarily in?

Andre Peart:

So we have exactly over 3000 agencies on the platform. Right. And these may not be all state. We're talking nonprofits, some state agencies, government, prisons, hospitals, Saint Vincent Hospital. But if we're just talking about what a state agency can see when we come in and do this customization, it depends. It's two different routes, right? This state agency could be serving clients themselves, and it could be our regular CRM dashboard where they're able to see that program status, client outcomes, track clients past them being in the program because we have a really cool unique feature that we invented. So we can track alumni status, intervene, help people as they

leave and say, wow, our program really is great. Look at these alumni doing really well or programs not as good as we thought. 40% of our alumni aren't doing well. They're back in the system. They're back in this kind of environment.

That's powerful data. If we're talking about the state dashboard, where the state says, we're deploying this system to 10 agencies we fund and we'd like to see their impact, that dashboard is very simple, right? It's a dashboard that shows every organization they fund and the impact of the organization, pretty much what their clients are doing, how their alumni are doing. How long did it take their clients to get to these services?

The most important part of our platform for any agency, lyana, is that alumni tracking. It's all the cool stuff we already do. The automation, the AI, to getting your client a job on its own, but past that is powerful of when your client leaves you, you can still intervene, you can still help. I mean, on day three of leaving and graduating, if they end up going back into relapsing, because the whole time they didn't was that connection with the caseworker. Now the caseworker is no longer there, and now they're facing the world on their own and they're thinking about using drugs. Our system can help stop that and communicate back to that caseworker that, "Hey, this client is thinking about doing this. This client is now back to being unemployed." Those are things that no system is able to do, and that's really why any agency across the board is coming to Untapped Solutions for.

lyana Crawford:

Okay. And you mentioned just not state agencies being partners, but I know you have a wide swath of employers active on the platform. Do opportunities for job seekers run the gamut, or are they typically in a particular field?

Andre Peart:

No, actually, so we're in a bunch of all different fields. When we were ConConnect, we always told people, Hey, the majority of these jobs are pretty much like hands-on. That's what we are seeing, but we already knew about these employers. Before I had a criminal record, I already can get those kinds of jobs. Right. And they really weren't creating any sort of sustainable lifestyle for me. And it's those same jobs that are just now giving back to us with a record. So we knew that from jump and never made that our go-to-market, which is why today we're happy to, like if you look through our job board, we have finance, we have media, creative marketing, all these different things, but it takes a lot to train in companies and building technology that understands job descriptions and places it with somebody who doesn't have a conflicting criminal record, like bank robbers, don't see jobs at the bank, right, that kind of stuff. And that's how using that technology and those kind of philosophies, then we were able to diversify our job board.

lyana Crawford:

What kinds of successes have you seen so far?

Andre Peart:

A lot of those we can talk about, and I think our biggest successes is from the organizations. Some of our biggest successes, when we see an organization who's been around maybe five, six years, they've serviced 4,000 clients and everything is stored in a spreadsheet. Right. Everything has been

shorted in Excel. That means that you have not really, you're nowhere near unlocking your true power, your true impact, your true potential. You don't even know what... And if you're doing that good, once we start putting all that data in the system and show you the insights of how you could've prospected better, how you could've improved these programs year over year. That's the biggest excitement because it's not like another CRM that's out there where you just put the data in and you're left alone. Our data is readable for nonprofits to understand here, you need to do this for this program, you should be doing this. These clients are not doing well.

So that's really the biggest success stories for us to just get a lot of these orgs off of spreadsheets. And then some of our other success stories is those organizations that are on 500, 300 licenses into bigger CRMs, right, and then we get them off and we see, oh, snap cost is reduced by 34%, and we see more people getting hired. We know who the nonprofit staff are that get hired. And that means a lot when more people can get jobs, why nonprofits typically hire the people they're servicing or the type of people they're servicing. Right. So we really look deep into what success looks like, not just, oh, the product was sold. Their data is more cleaner. Right. That money saved, what does it do for that nonprofit? What do they plan to do with the money they're now saving? More people have also got hired. Then job seekers, we have over 30,000 people connected to jobs and services in our four years of existence.

Iyana Crawford:

Well, I think that's so important that not only are you setting them up, but you're also tracking it to see how you can better assist them. So that's really good. Speaking of successes, are there any future plans for the platform that you're able to share or that you'd like to share?

Andre Peart:

Yeah, just the use of AI, especially because I know the audience we're speaking to, like sometimes when you say AI, it's like, what is that still? I'm not trying to use that. It's dangerous. And we have a lot of powerful partners that nonprofits are familiar with, right? Robin Hood Foundation, DreamWork, REDF, these are all the people funding them, and they're funding our AI initiatives and such a thing as like caseworker assistance. It's really powerful stuff. Caseworkers need assistance, not just executive staff.

I think more importantly, the person who needs an assistant is the client facing staff, not the executive staff. Right. I should have an assistant helping me do all these. It's not just 50 clients. It's 50 clients with seven needs each. Therefore, I have 100 and something. I'm not good at math, but you all know the math theorem 50 times seven and what that looks like. That's too much work. There's too many tasks. It's just too much. So assistance now to caseworkers, that's probably the thing I'm most happiest about, because I wish I would've had that. And I can just see their faces now when they have this tool. So all the AI things is what I'm really most excited about.

Iyana Crawford:

Okay. Well, thank you, Andre. Are there any last thoughts that you would like to share? I see you're very heavily in the community. I'm always seeing you on LinkedIn. I just saw you did a backpack drive. So is there anything else that you would like to share with our listeners?

Andre Peart:

Yeah, but while we're on the backpack drive, behind me I have 200 more that I'd like to get out of my apartment. So if you guys need backpacks, these are national backpack drive. We are, again, our philosophy is we're not in one community. We are in every community, which is why we like being a technology company. We don't have to be in Texas to be your friend and partner. We're a community-based partner from right here in my apartment. So if you share this with the audience, or I know this comes out in September, please share this with whoever. Other things is, just talk to us.

We know that nonprofits, and especially in reentry, they end up doing a lot of work with providers and consultants that are not in reentry when they go looking for technology or consultants who really don't, they may have the best interest, but not have the best knowledge on how this reentry org should be set up. And we love doing that. It's what we do day in and day out. We help reentry orgs upgrade and modernize their operations, and we do it in the most affordable manner and the most affordable company because again, we're backed by foundations who have helped us understand how to do business with nonprofits. Right. So we always like to put reassurance, and our ask is just reassure yourself by talking to us and doing work with us and watch what the work can do.

Iyana Crawford:

Thank you, Andre. There'll be more information about the backpack drive in our episode description.

Andre Peart:

When we do talk to state agencies, we have the same identical conversation, and we know their influence with these reentry organizations is powerful because of the money that they're able to give, the resources that come with that capital, the training. Right. But we also know that that training is not the most updated. Right. Just because you're the state agency capital does not mean you're the person with the best ideas. And if we just paint that, right, if state agencies, this is directly to them. If you look at venture capital, these investors have billions of dollars, but they've given us millions because we have an idea that they don't have. Right. So it's the same kind of thing. Right. So if state agencies can say, "Hey, let's take a look. We may be stuck in the past and we can do more impact." What does that look like? It looks like technology paired with a human being and the right points.

I truly know that at Untapped if, we're right now, probably the only company with that kind of philosophy, with that mission, when it comes to a CRM and case management system versus the ones that are out there, which is why we're fast-growing. And we need to talk to more state agencies to be able to deliver that message to them so they can deliver that message to the people that are listening to them. Right. So that's my message to them. Talk with us so we can help get on the same page together, and that message can be we agree to the message together, and now we send that message out to the other stakeholders.

Iyana Crawford:

All right. Thank you so much, Andre, for being on the NCJA Podcast. This has been an incredible, insightful conversation, and I'm so excited to see all that Untapped Solution continues to do. I hope our listeners look more into this application and can apply to their work.

Andre Peart:

Yeah. Thank you. It was a pleasure.