

# NewERA412

## Executive Summary

### Community Partner

Taili Thompson

### Student Consulting Team

Brent Hong

Maksym Korniyev

Joseph Perrino

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## Background

The team worked with Taili Thompson of NewERA412, a small volunteer-led non profit that seeks to connect formerly incarcerated individuals with the resources needed to reintegrate back into society.

*NewERA412's mission is to increase the political equity and social capital of individuals who have experienced the Criminal Justice System through an inclusive and diversified process of reintegration assistance and opportunities in Allegheny County.*

The organization mainly operates out of local universities and community centers, and manages a team of roughly 15 street outreach workers (SOWs). NewERA412 also maintains a catalogue of resources and intangible local connections that they leverage to further their mission.

## Project Description

### Project Opportunity

In Allegheny County, the cyclical effects of violence on recidivism indicate a greater need for a support system that could break this cycle, and ultimately reduce recidivism rates in the region. To better equip NewERA412, two core problems needed tackling: *interaction documentation*, and *client accessibility*. Poor documentation inhibits the flow of external funding to the organization, while client accessibility is curbed by SOWs not being able to effectively provide constituents with the most recent physical copies of relevant resources. Between SOWs not having the most up-to-date information and having to file paper evidence of each interaction, NewERA412's resource referral process took days.

### Project Vision

The team set out to develop a sustainable web application that could serve as both, a freely accessible platform of NewERA412 resources, and as a system that could document and verify NewERA412 street outreach. By expanding on the efforts of the previous consulting team, we hoped to bring a truly mobile-accessible and effective browsing experience to NewERA412 constituents. In this spirit, we aimed to give the system's admins the power to update resources quickly and easily, as to always ensure the accuracy of the publicly available information. Further, through a digitally streamlined and user tested process, the website was intended to allow SOWs to make referrals on the go. While replacing the paper outreach forms that SOWs typically used, the application would digitally alert constituents in order to connect them to resources and information present on the site. While, in the back-end, our application would document these interactions in their entirety.

## Project Outcomes

A public-facing resource page was developed, providing visiting constituents with a searchable collection of the most recent assets known to NewERA412. This was supported by the application being deployed on a permanent hosting platform.

A simple form for digitizing the referral process was created, replacing the legacy paper-based filing method and significantly cutting down on the time needed to make a referral. SOWs became able to digitally manage individuals on their caseload, and easily refer them. For the first time, the web application also used a mechanism to verify whether a constituent accessed the Email or SMS notification sent from a NewERA412 referral.

Finally, a new professional relationship with WorkHardPGH, a local IT organization, was also fostered by the team. WorkHardPGH would be a tech support entity for the organization and provide persistent hosting and emergency maintenance for their application.

Throughout the project, we designed several iterations of wireframes, created an entity-relationship diagram, drafted artifacts for sending resources via SMS, and conducted multiple rounds of user testing.

## Project Deliverables

The deliverables include a web application deployed at [newera412.com](http://newera412.com), developed using industry best practices and handed off to WorkHardPGH. In the webapp, admins are able to manage resources, create tags for filtering, view referrals being made in the system, download a data spreadsheet, and gauge SOW and case load progress. SOWs are able to create referrals and manage their own case load, while adding and removing constituents. Guests to the website can freely filter and search resources. Outside of the app, user training documents and code-level documentation for WorkHardPGH were also generated.

## Recommendations

Currently, the application lacks a feedback mechanism that could further build social capital in the NewERA412 process. We would recommend the implementation of resource reviews, either in the form of surveys, or textual comments, similar to functionality on websites such as Yelp or Amazon. Also, enhancing the referral process to accommodate recurring and group referrals would greatly improve the flexibility of the system. In addition, we would recommend embedding a Google Map for resources with an address, which would make it easier for returning citizens to be able to visualize the locations of specific resources. Finally, the application would benefit from formal stress testing, as well as a series of user interface and compatibility improvements.

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## Student Consulting Team

**Brent Hong** served as the team's design lead and client transition manager. He is a third-year student majoring in Information Systems and Human-Computer Interaction, with a minor in Intelligent Environments. This summer, he will be a Software Engineering Intern at Amazon.

**Maksym Korniyev** was the QA lead and client relationship manager. He is a third-year Information Systems student with a minor in Software Engineering. This summer, he will intern at Novetta Mission Analytics, and looks forward to a career in web development.

**Joseph Perrino** was the project manager and backend developer. He is a third-year student majoring in Information Systems with minors in Game Design and Technical Writing, and will be graduating in May 2021. He looks forward to a career in game or software development.