

**2023**



**CELEBRATING 20 YEARS**

**ANNUAL  
REPORT**

**Prepared By:**  
Mara White



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# Who We Are



Step-Up, Inc. was founded in 2003 by two community members who saw the effects of HIV on their family, friends, and neighbors. Step-Up has since expanded from a two-person operation into a premier provider of HIV care, HIV prevention, HIV/HCV/STI testing, and Reentry Services.



At Step-Up, we take a person-centered approach and focus on improving the health of the underserved and marginalized communities by meeting our clients where they are at, opposing inequity and stigma, and empowering individuals.

## 2023 BOARD MEMBERS

- Eric David | Chairman of the Board
- John Randolph | Vice Chairman and Secretary
- Jon Markee | Treasurer
- Bryn Jackson
- Marissa Miller
- Paula French
- Rich Farmer

## Where to find us

**Visit us**  
4755 Kingsway Dr, Suite 300  
Indianapolis, IN 46205

**Contact us**  
(317)259-7013  
info@stepupin.org

**Connect with us**  
www.StepUpIN.org



# A Message From Our CEO



## **Michael Martin Drain**

President and CEO

I am honored to address you as the new President and CEO of Step-Up, Inc. It is with immense pride and excitement that I share with you the incredible accomplishments we have achieved together in the past year.

First and foremost, our commitment to excellence and service expansion has been realized through the strategic growth of our team. I am thrilled to announce that we have successfully expanded our staff to meet the increasing service needs of our community. This accomplishment is a testament to our dedication to providing the highest quality support to those who rely on us for assistance.

One of our most significant achievements is the impressive 71% retention rate in housing and employment for the individuals we serve. This milestone reflects the effectiveness of our programs and the commitment of our team to empowering individuals to build stable and fulfilling lives. I commend my team for their dedication to this crucial aspect of our mission.

Our continued efforts to build strong community partnerships have yielded remarkable results. We have seen a substantial increase in collaborations with local organizations, businesses, and government agencies. These partnerships not only enhance the scope of our services but also contribute to the creation of a more comprehensive and interconnected support system for our clients.

Step-Up, Inc. continues to take the lead in the field of reentry by expanding its reach by establishing a presence in nine correctional facilities. This expansion enables us to provide INPEP training and peer support to incarcerated individuals, facilitating their successful reintegration into society. This accomplishment is a significant step forward in our ongoing mission to break the cycle of incarceration and empower individuals to lead meaningful and productive lives.

In addition to our correctional facility expansion, Step-Up, Inc. has continued to make a positive impact within our community. We proudly provided services to 823 individuals living with HIV, offering a diverse range of programs tailored to address their unique needs and challenges. This accomplishment reflects our commitment to making a tangible and lasting difference in the lives of those we serve.

# 2023 Highlights

» Step-Up hosted a Community Health Worker and Certified Recovery Specialist training in June. A long-time reentry client was able to attend and obtain their certification. Read more about his story on page 17.

» Step-Up hosted the National Public Health AmeriCorps staff and Serve Indiana for a site visit.

» PEP Program Specialist, Ladessa Sparks, was selected to represent the voice of a person with lived experience during Marion County Re-Entry Coalition's Electronic Monitoring Simulation and Panel discussion. Read more about her story on page 21.

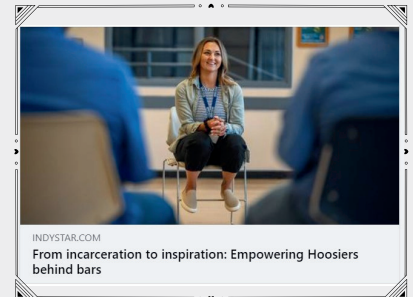


» PEP Program Manager, Jessica Beyer was featured in the Indy Star: From Incarceration to Inspiration

» Step Up was featured in WFYI for our partnership with IndyGo to offer free testing during their Wellness in Transit program.

» Connections Plus Program set a record high for clients served during our Falling into Care Community Day event with over 263 individuals in attendance.

» Step Up was featured in Mirror Indy for our partnerships with mutual aid organizations for offering free testing underneath the I-70 and Kentucky Avenue overpass.



# Year in Review



## January

- Step Up solidified the plan to move forward with CaseWorthy, a case management platform to support and enhance services provided by all agency staff. This was made possible through the generosity of The Indianapolis Foundation.
- Step Up was awarded 1,000 7-day full fare bus passes from the IndyGo Foundation.



## February

- Staff visited the Indiana State House to represent for HIV Advocacy Day and National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day.
- OutPEP holds its first graduation for participants of the Madison County Problem Solving Court.



## March

- PEP team members presented at the World Tuberculosis Summit.
- Quality Manager, Mara White, attended the national Training-of Trainers Program in Dallas, TX. This advanced capacity-building training is designed to refine skills in training others on quality improvement principles and practices.



## June

- Step-Up was honored to be a Change Maker finalist for Impact 100 Greater Indianapolis.
- LEAP-IN team held their first event during Indy Pride festival.



## May

- PEP team presents at the 2023 Infectious Disease Summit, showcasing Correctional Health is Community Health.
- Director of Reentry; Abby Carr, Quality Manager; Mara White, and Step-Up Founder; Paula French, planned and hosted an event to celebrate Step-Up's 20 years of service.



## April

- Connections team held the Spring into Care Community Day event at the Haughville Library providing food support, hygiene products, haircuts, and access to supportive services.

# Year in Review



## July

- COMPASS program launches and begins its first initiative that aims to provide Transgender/ Gender Diverse community members with support and assistance for gender affirming care.



## August

- Mental Health Clinician, Jason Jones, attended a 5- Day Intensive Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy training in Tacoma, WA.
- Step-Up announces the 2022 Employee of the Year, Mara White.



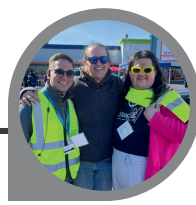
## September

- PEP and LEAP-IN team members presented at the 2023 Unity Conference.
- COMPASS program begins its second initiative that aims to address health disparities of those impacted by the criminal legal system.



## December

- Step-Up announces the 2023 Employee of the Year, Jake Zello-Dean.
- Quality Manager, Mara White, was invited to New York to participate in the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) & the Center for Quality Improvement and Innovation (CQII) Expert Meeting on Sustainability.



## November

- Connections team held its second community day event of the year, Falling into Care, on the Far East Side. This event provides essential food, warm coats, flu shots, testing, and access to vital supportive services.
- HepLink Care Coordinator, Joey Beyers, and AmeriCorps Member, Trevor Payne, were nominated for the 2023 Serve Indiana Awards.



## October

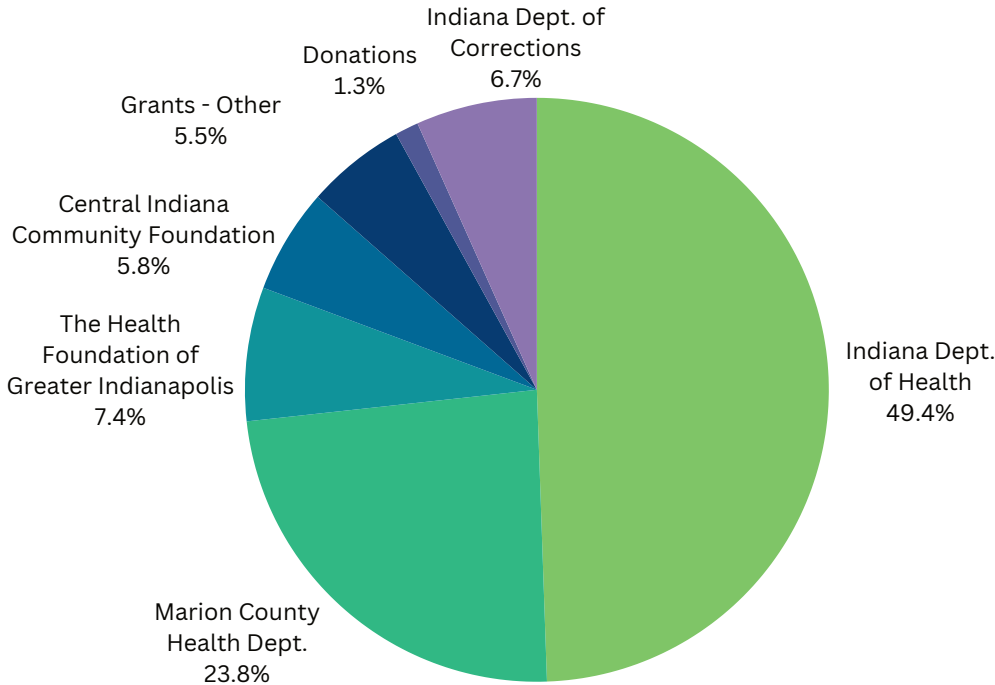
- Reentry team members attend the National Conference on Correctional Health, learning how to improve correctional health care while emphasizing the importance of people with lived experience.
- Step-Up was recognized as a recipient of the Christel DeHaan Legacy Fund on Christel DeHaan's birthday.

# Financial Statement

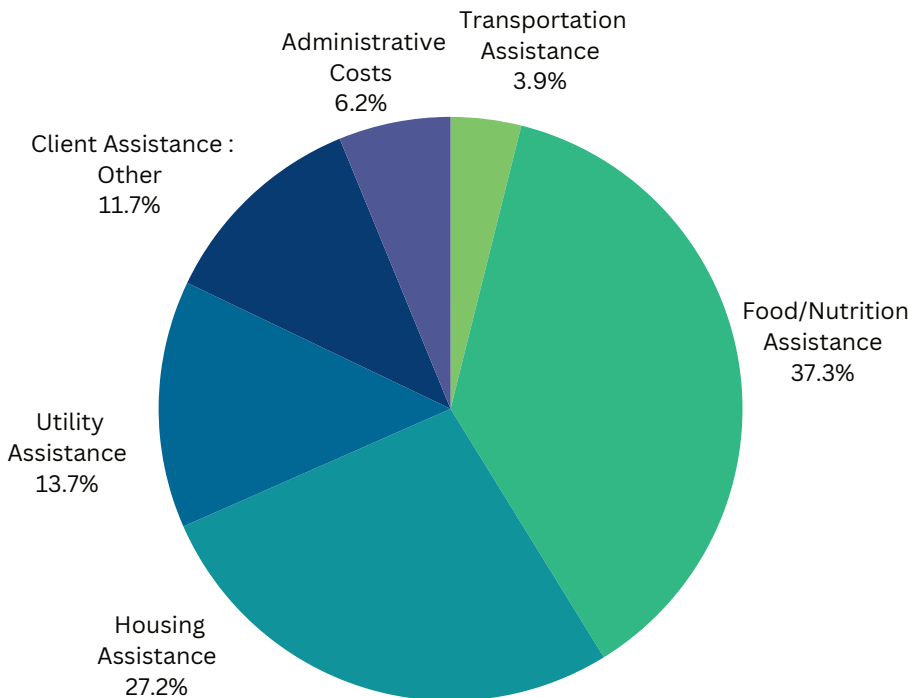


Special recognition for the services made possible by the generous support of the  
**CHRISTEL DEHAAN FUND FOR SUPPORT OF STEP-UP, INC.**

## HOW WE RECEIVED OUR REVENUE FOR OUR CLIENTS



## HOW WE SPENT OUR REVENUE ON OUR CLIENTS



### No Entry Program

Step-Up is working hard to bring back No Entry, a program focused on working with youth to address factors that often lead to incarceration with the goal of diverting participants from becoming involved in the criminal legal system to begin with. Previously receiving acclaim from Mayor Joe Hogsett, this program worked in partnership with two Indianapolis High Schools to interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline through early intervention. While some tangible goals of No Entry are to help students recover academic credits, graduate, and move on to thriving careers, these goals simply cannot be achieved without attending to stressors in our students' lives. As such, staff are trained to mentor students to grow in areas of self-care, coping skills, anger management, and resilience. They also emphasize the importance of mental and physical health. Ultimately, the goal of No Entry is simple: We reroute futures seemingly destined for incarceration by illuminating a new path toward success. We look forward to making this program bigger and better in 2024.



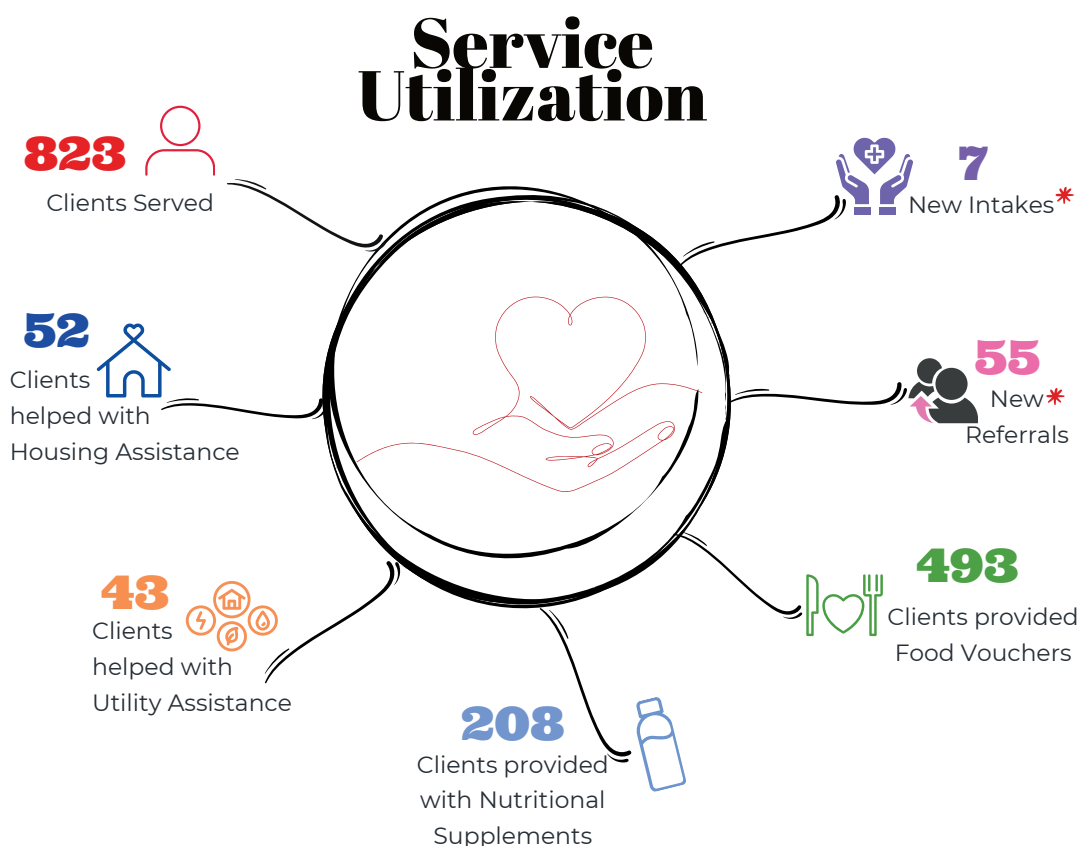
# HIV Client Care

At Step-Up, our HIV Client Services staff takes a person-centered approach to HIV care and understands that an HIV diagnosis is just a part of the overall health of an individual. What sets our Client Services team apart is that our staff truly advocate alongside their clients to fight for access to their own wellness.



In addition to many health care needs, people living with HIV often face discrimination, stigma, homelessness, food insecurities, and poverty. Overcoming these barriers to health is central to our model of care. Every day Step-Up walks alongside people who need a little extra support to achieve their health and life goals. We are pleased to provide this care to help our clients thrive.

Services offered through our HIV Client Care program are not only for Step-Up enrolled clients. In fact, in 2023, of the 823 clients we served, 481 of those individuals received their primary care with other Ryan White funded providers or agencies.



**12%** ↑

Increase in total clients served

**26%** ↑

Increase in external clients served

\* New Intakes refers to the number of newly diagnosed individuals who are linked into care for the first time. New Referrals refers to the number of individuals who are living with HIV and transferred to Step-Up's care.

# HIV Client Care

## Client Feature Stories

### Unveiling the Potential

Following a period of substance use, this client is now two years in recovery. Despite this major milestone, 2023 did not pass by without barriers.

After facing a roadblock with their employment, this individual was connected to Step-Up's Housing Case Manager, Emily, to discuss their career goals. Through this discussion, the client was able to identify that they had a passion for working with individuals who are currently in a similar situation to where they previously were.

This client was then connected to programs to obtain a Community Health Worker and Certified Recovery Coach certification. While earning these certifications, the client received rental assistance necessary to remain stably housed.

This client is now working in their dream area and is close to reaching another major milestone of completing their bachelor's degree. The client has expressed to their housing case manager how appreciative they are in Step-Up for seeing the potential and passion in them when they could not even see it themselves.

### Supportive Services

A Step-Up client had been residing in the same residence for several years and successfully maintained their expenses. This client engaged with our Housing Case Manager to work on coming up with a better sustainable housing plan after facing habitability concerns such as mold.

Shortly after, the client was notified they were pulled for Section 8 but was hesitant about the Section 8 process. The House Case Manager provided support and navigated this process alongside the client by attending each of the initial appointments with them.

The client then faced another hurdle and was informed their current landlord would not allow them to move out early.

Utilizing Step-Up's partnership with Indiana Legal Services, an agreement was made with the landlord that allowed them to proceed with the move. The Housing Case Manager was able to assist the client with locating housing that met all their needs and was willing to accept the Section 8 voucher.

The client is now settled into their new housing and is thrilled. After a recent home visit from the Housing Case Manager, she reports she has never seen the client so happy.

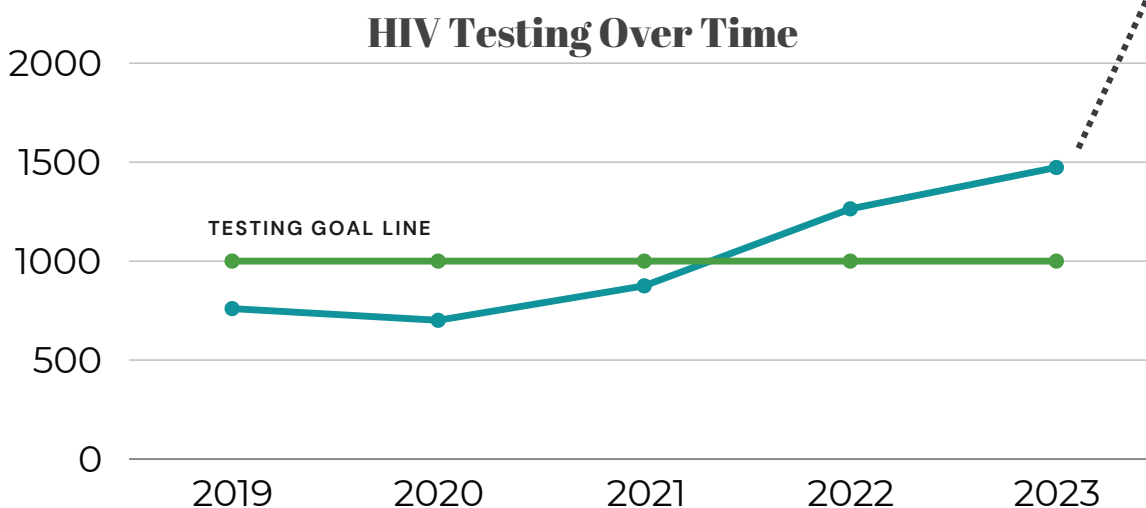
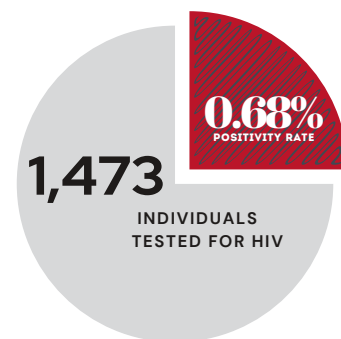
# Outreach and Prevention

Prevention staff at Step-Up dedicate their efforts to offering vital services and implementing evidence-based programs that are designed to limit or prevent the transmission of HIV, STIs, and hepatitis C (HCV) for key communities. Staff provide free and confidential testing services, linkage to pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) services, distribute essential risk and harm reduction supplies, and re-connect individuals into HIV care – all of which are designed to empower the communities we engage and work towards improving the overall health and wellness of communities at an elevated risk for HIV/STI/HCV transmission. What distinguishes the Prevention staff at Step-Up is our philosophy to bring our services directly to our clients in the communities where they live, work and thrive, rather than having our clients meet us at our office. By providing in different neighborhoods, our staff builds trust with community members and fosters lasting relationships with key partner organizations. That is why our staff are often found providing navigation services at a local park, enhancing risk reduction education at a food pantry and hosting community-wide wellness events in parking lots of a local library.



## TESTING SERVICES

Each year our Prevention staff continues to set a record number of HIV tests performed. Our strategic programming and large outreach efforts substantially contribute to this increase. From 2021 to 2022, testing efforts increased by 44% and rose another 17% in 2023. In 2024, we hope to acquire a mobile unit to expand the reach of essential prevention services, including testing, navigation, education, and PrEP services, to marginalized populations. Bringing these services to the most at-risk populations will allow us to further align our efforts to Indiana's Plan to Ending the HIV Epidemic (EHE) and reduce the number of new HIV infections.



# Outreach and Prevention



The Community Outreach, Mobilization, and Peers Addressing Social Services (COMPASS) Program, utilizes the community health worker model to address gaps in services and unmet need(s) based on the social determinants of health for the Transgender and Gender Diverse (TGD) community. The program's Community Navigator role is an outreach and community navigation hybrid position that increases access to HIV care and harm reduction services, reduces new HIV diagnoses, and promotes health equity among the TGD community - a population that is both underserved and heavily impacted by health care disparities.

## The Power of Resilience

The program's first enrolled client had recently moved to Indiana to be closer to family. After struggling with substance use disorder, the family was reluctant to allow this individual access into their lives.

From living in shelters, where they never felt safe, to rooming with individuals who became violent after learning of their gender identity, this client remained resilient and worked tirelessly to create their own personal homeostasis.

Community Navigator, Kipp, was able to assist this individual with getting approved for financial assistance which allowed them to relocate into a safe and stable environment.

## Gender-Affirming Care

Through a collaboration with Step-Up's Community Navigator, Kipp, and AmeriCorps Member, Trevor, a client was able to secure a *gender marker X* (a marker used for unspecified or other gender identities) on their driver's license and locate affordable housing within their budget.

With those barriers addressed, this individual then expressed their interest in engaging in therapy services. They were connected with a gender affirming provider that same day and have been actively participating in therapy since.

The client reports feeling stable, safe, and well taken care of with their therapy provider.

## Advocate for Change

Community Navigator, Kipp, met a mother of a trans boy during an event at Indy Pride's Community Dinner. Post event this individual reached out about issues they faced with their son's school's bathroom policy. Kipp was able to walk her through how to handle this and provide resources and navigation.

This individual shared that through the pressure she put on the school, it resulted in multiple wins – from changing his name so he would no longer be deadnamed in class to allowing him to be able to use the boy's restroom without any repercussions.

# Outreach and Prevention

## LEAP IN

### LISTEN, EDUCATE, AND PREVENT

The LEAP-IN Program is a branch of the CDC's National HIV Behavioral Surveillance (NHBS) program whose purpose is to administer a survey that collects data on behavioral risk factors for HIV, HIV testing behaviors, use of HIV prevention strategies, and access to other preventative services. Each year the NHBS program focuses on one of three focus populations: people who inject drugs (PWID), men who have sex with men (MSM), or heterosexually active persons at increased vulnerability for HIV transmission. While the NHBS program has been facilitated by the CDC since 2003, the LEAP-IN Program first began operations in 2022.

During 2023, the LEAP-IN Program conducted its first MSM cycle. During this cycle, the LEAP-IN Program recruited, interviewed, and tested participants at MSM-dominated venues throughout Indianapolis. Venues included bars, restaurants, dance clubs, dating apps, gay pride celebrations, retail businesses, raves, social organizations, and street locations. The program operated at a variety of days and times to ensure the program had a random sample of MSM recruited. All participants who completed the survey and HIV test received an \$80 cash incentive. In addition, the program distributed Narcan, condoms, and lubricants free-of-charge.

The LEAP-IN Program published its first-ever Comprehensive Data Report and presented their findings during the 2023 Unity Conference. This data report summarizes the key findings from the PWID 2022 cycle and details how this data impacts program and service delivery for organizations who serve PWID in Central Indiana. Copies of the report can be accessed by emailing Manuel Gonzalez-Carrasco at [mgonzalez@stepupin.org](mailto:mgonzalez@stepupin.org) or Conner Tiffany at [ctiffany@stepupin.org](mailto:ctiffany@stepupin.org)

333

PARTICIPANTS  
INTERVIEWED

20.6%

HIV POSITIVITY RATE

51.7%

WERE PEOPLE OF COLOR

65.7%

WERE UNDER THE AGE OF 40

### 2023 MSM CYCLE - PRELIMINARY FINDINGS:

- A total of 81 events were conducted from the beginning of June through December 10th.
- 93% of participants interviewed indicated they had sex with a man in the previous 12 months.
- 65.7% of participants were under the age of 40.
  - This age group is overrepresented in new HIV diagnoses in Indianapolis.
- 51.7% of participants were people of color.
  - Black and Latine participants were the largest two subgroups represented.

# Outreach and Prevention

## CONNECTIONS PLUS

This outreach program is centered around HIV and STI prevention with key populations in non-traditional settings. The Connections Program held its first ever Community Outreach Day event in July of 2022. This event focuses on providing testing and bringing together resources and community partners directly in the neighborhoods where our clients live. Due to the success and expressed need for more of these events by attendees, this program has continued hosting these events twice per year, targeting multiple key locations.

Connections Plus has expanded the number of community partners and services offered to not only include HIV/HCV testing, but to also include onsite HIV/HCV case management, vaccination services, employment services, and access to food, hygiene, winter coats, and housing. These events truly bring the community together and increase access to underserved populations by providing a one-stop-shop directly in their neighborhoods.

The Connections Plus program also incorporates community navigation services to individuals not living with HIV or HCV, providing support to address food, transportation, and housing insecurities.

*SPRING INTO CARE  
EVENT OUTCOMES*

**150**

IN ATTENDANCE

*FALLING INTO CARE  
EVENT OUTCOMES*

**263**

IN ATTENDANCE

**WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE PART OF THE  
EVENT?**

**"All of it. The DJ was nice, free stuff, friendly people, and coats"**

COMMUNITY DAY ATTENDEE

**"I enjoyed getting to meet people in the neighborhood and educate them on resources we provided."**

COMMUNITY DAY PARTNER

# Outreach and Prevention

## HARM REDUCTION

In 2023, Step-Up began restructuring the Harm Reduction Program to offer additional services that further reduce the risk of substance use. The program began prioritizing street outreach efforts to engage clients experiencing housing insecurity. Internal data from the LEAP-IN program indicated that, of the five hundred people who injected substances, over 65% were previously or currently homeless. Data also indicated that participants who had experienced housing insecurity were far less likely to know about harm reduction services. As such, the harm reduction program engaged over 1,300 clients during street outreach excursion and outreach efforts. The program also distributed over 800 safe injection kits, 294 safe smoking kits, and 450 wound care kits to clients engaged in services.

Step-Up also began a partnership with Marion County Public Health Department to open a Safe Syringe Program (SSP). Through this partnership, Step-Up will address the increase in HIV diagnoses attributed to the sharing of needles. To deliver the program, Step-Up fostered a partnership with Aspire Indiana Health to operate the program out of their Indianapolis clinic - just down the street from Step-Up's office. The SSP will operate out of Aspire every Monday, beginning March 25th, 2024, from 2:00PM – 6:00PM. Since the program is operating at Aspire's clinic, participants will also have same-day primary care appointments available and can meet with a provider to schedule any behavioral health care needs.

**COMING SOON!**

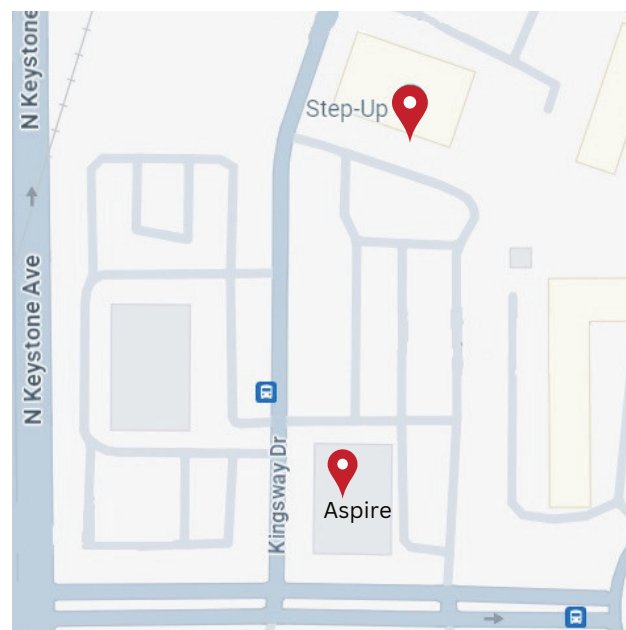
**StepUP**  
INC.

**SAFE SYRINGE  
EXCHANGE**

**Mondays 2:00pm - 6:00pm**  
**Starting March 25, 2024**

**2506 Willowbrook Pkwy**  
**Indianapolis, IN 46205**

In partnership with **Aspire**  
Indiana Health



# Outreach and Prevention

## PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Step-Up recognizes that partnering with trusted community organizations and leaders is essential to truly improve the health and wellness of individuals we aim to serve. During 2023, Step-Up fostered new, and strengthened existing, partnerships to provide wholistic, person-centered care to any client accessing services through the agency.

Below are a few notable partnerships during 2023:

- IndyGo: Step-Up was invited to offer free HIV/STI/Hepatitis C testing at IndyGo's Julia M. Carson Transit Center for their *Wellness in Transit* program initiative.



Free STI testing and other health services now available at IndyGo's downtown transit center

IndyGo has partnered with a local nonprofit and a health care provider to expand its mobile health clinic. The clinic now offers free testing for sexually transmitted infections and a range of other services.

[www.wfyi.org](http://www.wfyi.org)

- Mexican Consulate: Step-Up had the honor of hosting officials from the Mexican Consulate to determine how our agencies can collaborate with one another to bring services, testing, education, and prevention to Mexican Nationals living in Central Indiana.
- City of Indianapolis' Office of the Mayor: Step-Up hosted officials from the City of Indianapolis' Mayor's Office to collaborate in providing wholistic resources and services to populations experiencing housing insecurity.
- MS-IL Staffing & Packaging: Step-Up invited MS-IL staffing agency to both of our Community Day events. Staff at MS-IL went above and beyond to not only connect community members to employment opportunities, but to translate information into Spanish so our staff could freely communicate with individuals from the Latine population.
  - At the end of the year, MS-IL Staffing chose Step-Up as one of two recipients of their donated food vouchers, which were ultimately provided to our clients during the holiday season.





# Reentry Services

Our Reentry Services at Step-Up are rooted in wellness, recognizing the importance of both physical and mental health in one's likelihood to achieve their goals and avoid reoffending. Through a holistic approach, our services address the challenges associated with reentry at various points on the continuum, serving those following release from incarceration, those currently experiencing incarceration, and those at risk of violence and criminal legal involvement.



In combination with treatment, case management, mentorship, and therapeutic interventions provided by our staff, these tools eliminate barriers that historically hinder success. As a result, clients are empowered to lead fulfilling lives, resulting in decreased recidivism and violent crime in our community.

## ELEVATION

Step-Up's Elevation program provided individualized, client-driven case management services to 122 individuals, including assistance with basic needs, goal setting, benefit navigation, housing, food, employment, and other referral services. Services also included providing free and low-barrier mental health and substance use disorder treatment, which involves creating an individualized care plan for each client served. Of the clients who received mental health services, 96% reported feeling happy and hopeful and having interest or pleasure in their lives.

As is the case in many reentry programs, clients involved in the legal system have unique circumstances that should inform treatment protocols on a case-by-case basis. Simply put, there may not exist the luxury of having several months to fully address all trauma experienced over a client's lifetime. To continue to meet the needs of our clients, our reentry clinical staff expanded clinical services to offer Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy.

This therapeutic approach was chosen as it offers a lot of flexibility for both the therapist and client in terms of the qualitative and quantitative approach to treating trauma. What makes this type of therapy especially useful is the ability of the practitioner to assess client need while also considering the timeframe needed for the client to successfully complete the treatment. With an EMDR approach, clinical staff can address presenting trauma as well as trauma experienced over a lifetime.

# A Journey of Hope and Healing Through Recovery

In January of 2023, a long-time reentry client with a history of falling in and out of care, reengaged in services after his release from incarceration. Through barrier buster funds provided by the agency, this client, who had battled substance use disorder for an extended period of time, was able to secure housing in a sober living facility. Working with Reentry Mental Health Clinician, Jason Jones, this client engaged in dual diagnosis treatment and forged a path towards sustainability.

In June of 2023, Step-Up hosted a Community Health Worker and Certified Recovery Specialist (CHW/CRS) training at its office. This client was not only able to complete the training but went on to become certified as a CHW/CRS. Since that time, he has worked to maintain his recovery, obtained employment, and completed intensive outpatient treatment. The client also continues mental health counseling at Step-Up.

As a result of his commitment to improve his mental health, he has gained insight and judgment that he passionately wants to share with others.

The Elevation grant made it possible for clinical staff to provide the mental health treatment this client requested, as well as provide access to employment assistance to alleviate the cost of work uniforms and shoes. According to the client,

**“I am very grateful to have a place to finally, for the first time in 27 years, take the opportunity to heal properly from any kind of injury.”**

Having accomplished so much in so little time, this person is focused on his health, family, and giving back to the community.

Nearing two years in recovery, this client expressed hope for the future as evidenced by the concrete goals he has outlined as part of his individual service plan. With a solid support system in place, he plans to continue residing in sober living into the next year and completing some college courses at Ivy Tech.

# Reentry Services



Through a unique referral program with the Indiana Department of Correction (IDOC), Step-Up’s HepLink program serves as the hub that receives referrals for all individuals being released from incarceration with a known HCV diagnosis. The Hub Care Coordinator begins education and case management services with these individuals during their incarceration, ultimately linking them to a care coordinator in their community following release.

This program focuses on walking alongside individuals living with hepatitis C from the time of diagnosis through sustained virologic response (SVR), or cure. Through the wrap-around services provided by our HepLink staff, 110 individuals were provided with education, tools, and resources necessary to complete treatment in 2023.

In addition to IDOC hub services, HepLink receives referrals from internal testing efforts and external partners to provide HCV linkage to cure services.

**149**  
INDIVIDUALS IN  
IDOC WERE  
REFERRED TO THE  
HEPLINK HUB CARE  
COORDINATOR

Among referrals received directly from the Indiana Department of Corrections (IDOC), HepLink Care Coordinator, Kris, implemented the process of completing pre-release intakes for individuals near release and who were not treated while incarcerated.

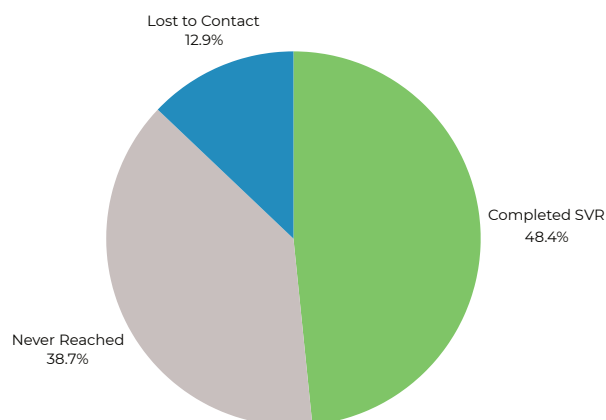
**39** ALREADY HAD  
A SVR PRIOR TO  
THE REFFERRAL

**110** LINKED TO A  
HEPLINK CARE  
COORDINATOR

This process, combined with participation in the HCV ECHO and IN-HAMP training, increases participant engagement and provider capacity to treat for HCV.

## HepLink Care Coordination

- Out of the 110 referrals sent to the Hub Care Coordinator, Step-Up received 32 of those referrals.
- Common barriers identified for low percentage of SVR documented :
  - Clients are unable to be reached after initial referral.
  - Clients initially engaged and then become lost to contact.
  - Client motivation to send lab results.



# Reentry Services



In 2023, our reentry team expanded programming even further to include peer support through COMPASS – Community Outreach, Mobilization, and Peers Addressing Social Services. This program uses the community health worker model to navigate the complicated health systems and address the health disparities of those impacted by the criminal legal system. Community Health Workers have a close understanding of the communities they serve. This improves the link between health and social services and improves the quality and cultural competence of care.

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## Client Feature: Overcoming Barriers

Step-Up Reentry client, Patrick Mix, whose history includes multiple felonies – encompassing violent charges, substance use, and illegal vehicle operations has demonstrated resilience and determination to rebuild his life, despite the legal barriers he faces.

Since his release in 2019, he has been under the supervision of community corrections, home detention, where he has utilized hotels to provide stable housing to complete this supervision. Patrick's journey reflects the complexities and obstacles that justice-involved individuals often encounter, including housing instability, license revocation, and financial instability due to limited income opportunities.

Throughout his involvement with Step-Up, Patrick has exhibited a strong commitment to personal growth and community support. He has actively engaged with the agency's services, particularly in public health advocacy and prevention, utilizing resources such as disease testing to prioritize his well-being.

**“I am proud and honored to have him a part of our program.”**

Since working with Step-Up's Reentry Community Health Worker, Chad, Patrick has made significant strides towards self-sustainability. He has been connected and successfully obtained an employment opportunity offering better wages and an increase of \$5.00 an hour, completed a driver's safety program leading to the reinstatement of his license and savings on outstanding fees totaling over \$4,500.00, and secured his own stable housing with the support of Step-Up's emergency financial assistance program.

Reentry Community Health Worker, Chad reports that, “Mr. Mix has become sustainable within a two-month span and as a new Reentry Community Health Worker at Step-Up, I am proud and honored to have him a part of our program.”

# Reentry Services



Through a partnership with Fairbanks School of Public Health at I.U. and the Indiana Department of Health, the Indiana Peer Education Program, INPEP, trains individuals living in incarceration to be Peer Health Educators. Once certified, these individuals use their training to provide general health and harm reduction education to their peers inside the Indiana Department of Corrections (IDOC). INPEP Peer Educators cover topics such as handwashing, COVID-19, hepatitis C, HIV, Substance Use Disorder, tuberculosis, diabetes, and more. In August of 2023, INPEP expanded into its ninth IDOC facility.



OutPEP, the Outside Peer Education Program, is an extension of INPEP. OutPEP focuses on providing health and harm reduction education around the state by hiring INPEP Peer Educators following their release from IDOC. By partnering with community organizations, such as problem-solving courts and homeless day centers, the program enhances community health.

**294**  
PARTICIPANTS IN  
IDOC HAVE  
BECOME  
CERTIFIED PEER  
EDUCATORS

OVER  
**3,500**  
INDIVIDUALS IN  
IDOC  
COMPLETED THE  
PEER-LED  
EDUCATION  
WORKSHOPS

## Community Health Worker and Certified Recovery Specialist Training

In June of 2023, Step-Up hosted fourteen peers who were trained and certified to receive their CHW/CRS certification. Of those fourteen, five were previous INPEP Peer Educators.

**5** HOSTING  
PARTNER  
ORGANIZATIONS

**42** WORKSHOPS  
HELD

**463**  
INDIVIDUALS  
EDUCATED



Rockville Correctional Facility Graduates - August 2023

## Putnamville Correctional Facility Graduates - February 2023



# Navigating Change: A Personal Journey Through Electronic Monitoring and Advocacy

By: Ladessa Sparks

## Monitoring Simulation

In the quiet moments of some mornings, I found myself yearning for the day when the inconspicuous black box on my ankle would cease to be a constant companion. It had been over 6 years incarcerated and 7 months on house arrest, and I couldn't wait to move forward with my life. I had been working diligently as a PEP Program Specialist at Step-Up, Inc. for 10 months, well on my way to gaining the freedom I deserved. It was a pivotal experience on November 1st that transformed my perspective, making me appreciate the unique opportunity I had to share my lived experience and advocate for change within the system

Stepping into the Electronic Monitoring Simulation organized by the Marion County Reentry Coalition, I embarked on a journey that would not only challenge my assumptions but also amplify my commitment to driving positive change for individuals on house arrest. Uncertain of what lay ahead, I was motivated by a profound desire to be a voice for those, like me, seeking a system that fosters success. This simulation is designed for participants to experience the barriers that impact an individual navigating the barriers of electronic monitoring while trying to successfully reintegrate into society. As a result, doors are opened for discussions that can alter the narrative of electronic monitoring and help to shape policies and practices.

During the event's planning phase, I seized the chance to interview for a panel seat. This seat was reserved for someone that had navigated the complex system that is electronic monitoring, the reality I was living at that time. To my surprise, I was selected, setting the stage for a unique and transformative experience.

On the day of the event, my role took an unexpected turn—I found myself in the shoes of a jailer during the simulation. The act, even if only pretend, was a stark departure from my expectations. The simulation unfolded as an eye-opening experience, not only for the participants but also for me.

While I had navigated a relatively smooth transition due to robust support and immediate employment, witnessing others grapple with the challenges of house arrest underscored the inherent difficulties faced by many.

“ I was motivated by a profound desire to be a voice for those, like me, seeking a system that fosters success.

—Ladessa Sparks

”

## Panelist Discussion

Post-simulation, the focus shifted to a panel discussion featuring representatives from community corrections, a second chance employer, a case manager, and an individual with personal experience—me. The discourse delved into the intricacies of community corrections, highlighting systemic barriers, and proposing tangible ways to enhance policies for the holistic success of individuals under its purview.

The power of the moment lay in witnessing personnel from community corrections genuinely listen to suggestions for system improvement. The panel became a forum for breaking down barriers, addressing systemic shortcomings, and collaboratively exploring avenues for reform. It's a profoundly rewarding feeling to see firsthand the impact of sharing ideas and experiences, with Marion County Community Corrections and embracing initiatives that are aimed at ensuring individuals successfully complete their reentry journey.



**President and CEO, Michael Martin Drain, being placed on electronic monitoring equipment.**

In retrospect, November 1st not only marked a day of personal reflection but also symbolized a broader commitment to advocacy and change. As we continue to navigate the complexities of community corrections, my hope is that shared experiences can inspire critical conversations resulting in transformations in policies, fostering a system that empowers individuals on their path to success.

Additionally, I am grateful for the unwavering support and guidance I received from Step-Up throughout my transition from incarceration to house arrest. Their belief in my potential and their willingness to stand by me through every challenge has been a driving force behind my desire to share my story and advocate for change.



**PEP Program Specialist, Ladessa Sparks, speaking as a panelist, sharing her lived experience.**



**Learn more about the Marion County Re-entry Coalition at: <https://www.marioncountyreentrycoalition.org/>**

# We couldn't have done it without your generous *support.*

This year Step-Up celebrated its 20th birthday! Although we have grown over the past 20 years, our commitment to our clients and community has not changed.

We would like to extend a special thank you to our Board of Directors who volunteer their time and our volunteers who create safe sex kits, assist with Indy Pride parade and festival, and so much more. To our community partners who donate clothing, hygiene products, turkey vouchers for the holiday season, and adopting families for our Christmas Assistance requests, we are so appreciative for your assistance to our clients and their families.

Step-Up is so grateful to the generous individuals, agencies, and businesses that provided financial support to our programs in 2023. As highlighted in our annual report, together we can do so much more!



## A Special Thank You to The Bag Ladies.



The Indy Bag Ladies are one of the oldest HIV/AIDS fundraising organizations in the country.

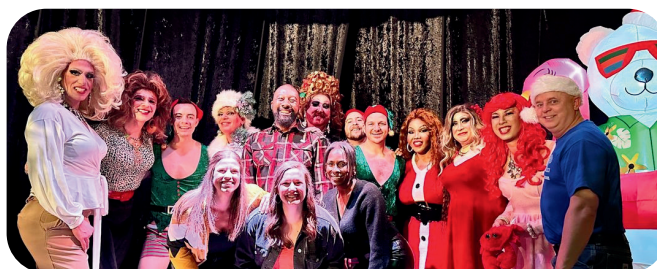
Their record setting fundraising for Step-Up in 2023 was amazing and we are so grateful for their support.

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 Ladessa Sparks | PEP Program Specialist  
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 Matt Seymour | NHBS Lead Interviewer  
 Michael Martin Drain | President and CEO  
 Michael Robinson | Testing Manager  
 Rachel Biddle | Connections Plus Community Navigator  
 Rande Jackson | Outreach and Testing Coordinator  
 Rasha Darkazli | Non-Medical Case Manager  
 Renzo Bell | PEP Program Specialist  
 Roy Smithson | Non-Medical Case Manager/Receptionist  
 Sherika Sides | Client Services Program Manager  
 Stephanie Jackson | HepLink Care Coordinator  
 Sylvia Thomas | Outreach and Education Coordinator

## A special Thank you to all our staff.

I want to send out a special thank you for the time and effort you took in leading the services highlighted in our annual report. It is so vital that we tell OUR STORY and communicate our impact to the community we serve.

Step-Up, Inc. has a long legacy of service, outreach and collaboration and we should be proud to tell of the good work we do on a daily basis.

Thank you for your contribution and let's celebrate this WIN.

—Michael Martin Drain, President and CEO





# GET INVOLVED



## Volunteer

Join us for our Packet Parties and hear what Step-Up is doing for our communities. Visit our website at: <https://stepupin.org/volunteer/>



## Donate

Help make a difference and donate today. As little as \$4.00 helps provide a one-day bus pass for a client. With a donation of \$100.00 or more, your generosity will be commemorated with a customizable, engraved leaf on our Donor Tree located at our office.



## Shop our Collection

Support Step-Up, Inc. by purchasing from our store. A portion of each purchase goes back to support our work.

<https://www.bonfire.com/store/step-up-store/>



## Follow us on Social Media

Follow us on social media and stay informed about the latest news from our organization.



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