

W/B HIDTA Treatment and Prevention Spotlight

Baltimore City Circuit Court,
Baltimore, Maryland



The LINKS Program provides comprehensive therapeutic services for youth aged 12 – 18 involved in juvenile court and their families within Baltimore City. LINKS is a collaborative effort between the circuit court for Baltimore City Juvenile Court and Behavioral Health Systems Baltimore to provide service linkages, specialized groups and connections to community-based resources, including:

- intensive inpatient and outpatient services for substance use and mental health
- psychiatric rehabilitation program services
- needs assessments
- diagnostic services
- preventative care
- anger management
- supportive services (school, housing, employment, etc.)

Funding from the Washington/Baltimore HIDTA supports the LINKS program in assisting youth who need higher levels of care through critical service and resource linkages. The program provides comprehensive supports to bolster youth well-being and long-term outcomes, with a clear emphasis on growing skills needed to succeed after completing the program.

Individualized support addresses each youth's unique needs, addressing challenges such as anger management, substance use, mental health, housing, employment, and educational success. Youth participate in eight-week group sessions led by social workers and specialized facilitators, with topics ranging from healthy coping skills and safe sleep practices to employment readiness and housing resources. Upon completing the program, participants are recognized during a certificate ceremony celebrating their progress.

LINKS provides structure and support for youth, helping them build confidence and reconnect with school and their academic goals. The program recently held their adolescent resource fair that provides connections to potential career pathways and student scholarships. Further support has included providing formal wear and haircuts.

Personal stories highlight the impact of the program. One participant entered the program withdrawn and unwilling to trust anyone. She was a young mother who struggled with the realization that her daughter's first birthday passed while she was incarcerated. She eventually built trust with program staff, and, to help her experience that important milestone, staff created a gift package for her daughter so she could express her love despite being separated. Ultimately, she was able to improve her grades from mostly Ds to As and Bs and began to transition out of the juvenile system. Stories like hers reinforce what the LINKS program strives for, which is helping youth achieve well-being and recognition that they can work towards a better future.

Renée Myrie, a Juvenile Court Services Coordinator for LINKS, echoed the philosophy of the program, stating, “We treat them like kids, regardless of their mistakes. They are a human, not just a number.”

Funding from the Washington/Baltimore HIDTA will help the program expand and meet the needs of the youth they serve. Substance use remains one of the most common challenges facing their participants, with many reporting the use of marijuana or pills as a way to deal with stress. Through education, mentorship, and consistent support, staff work to show participants healthier ways to manage life's challenges. The program is looking to grow capacity in different needed specialty areas and is working towards the ability to hold groups more often.



Looking forward, the program hopes to continue expanding services, strengthening community collaborations, and providing training that helps professionals meet youth where they are. With strong judicial support and a shared commitment to helping youth succeed, the program continues to demonstrate that accountability and compassion can work hand in hand by giving youth the structure, encouragement, and opportunities they need.