

## WiFi as agent of change for the incarcerated

### Entry Statement (Out of the case):

From connecting the unconnected and the growth of free city WiFi, we have all benefitted from the ever-growing access to data and information. WiFi is now available even in the most remote regions of the world. But there is one group that has gone largely overlooked in their ability to access WiFi: the incarcerated.

Prison reform is a hotly debated topic with one side wanting stricter sentences and the other greater rehabilitation. One thing both groups can agree on is that WiFi enabled tablets are transforming the corrections environment. Likely the most underserved WiFi population, the incarcerated have traditionally had limited access to media and communication, and for good reason. Communication must be monitored and anything that is scarce will be fought over, creating an atmosphere of tension and aggression, which threatens the entire corrections community. From fights stemming from long wait times for phone use, to gangs blocking access entirely to other prisoners, jails can be a hostile environment that puts the physical and emotional safety of inmates and guards at risk.

### And then came WiFi.

Global Tel Link (<http://www.gtl.net>), a leader in corrections communications, has been providing communications networks to jails across the country. As an existing provider of communications service to Pima County Jail in Arizona, Pima County approached GTL about developing secure tablets for inmate management. Pima County Jail believed that incarcerated individuals would be less of a disruption and a danger to others if they had personal devices that allowed for on-demand access to music, games, and educational resources including law libraries such as Lexus/Nexus. What initially began as a program to distract and occupy inmates turned into an accidental innovative and revolutionary rehabilitation program.

### WiFi as Change Agent

GTL began development of a tablet with a custom and unalterable boot loader. Next, they would need a WiFi solution that had the ability to provide not only reliable WiFi in challenging steel and concrete jails, but also have the security in place to monitor all of the tablets connected, as well as in any the airspace. Mojo was able to meet these all of the requirements and with its included Wireless Intrusion Prevention (WIPS) technology, it could shut down any tablet trying to connect to another network and ensure that no unauthorized devices could access the secure network.

With WiFi deployed and custom tablets created, the pilot program launched just over one year ago at Pima County Jail. Inmates and their families can pay for the service that allows inmates access to the WiFi enabled tablet to make calls to their families from the comfort of their cells, eliminating the fights that took place around shared phone usage. Other features include access to email, music, games, educational courses, and a law library. With WiFi access, inmates no longer have to be escorted to a secure location that houses a tamper-free computer to

access the online law library that jails, by law, must provide inmate access. However, all content and communication is sanctioned, monitored, and recorded.

### **A Win/Win:**

The success of the WiFi program has exceeded all expectations. No one anticipated how much access to WiFi could transform not just the inmates, but the entire jail environment. Pima County Jail could immediately see that inmate behavior improved considerably so as not to risk losing their tablet. The jail became a safer and less hostile place for guards as inmates were placated by having access to entertaining and enriching information.

In addition to a reduction in recidivism rates among inmates and a safer workplace for jail officers, other highlights include:

- 50% reduction in suicide attempts
- 50% reduction on inmate on inmate fighting
- 50% reduction on inmate on staff fighting

Having access to engaging and educational content and the ability to communicate with family members in a private setting has led to a massive reduction in stress levels amongst inmates and officers throughout the facility. Because the program is fully funded by the inmates and their families, there is no cost to the county or their taxpayers. In fact, GTL splits the generated revenue with the jail to support additional inmate programs. The ability to create a more peaceful and productive jail environment has generated a great deal of interest from other institutions around the country wanting to replicate this model. Pima County Jail receives calls every week from other corrections facilities wanting to know more about their inmate program. Mojo, in partnership with GTL, is now providing WiFi to over 35 correctional facilities across the country with similar success and the program continues to grow. The program has caught the attention of the media and has recently been covered by the Washington Examiner and PBS.

WiFi has the power to unify and better people even in the most unexpected places.

### **Washington Examiner Article**

<http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/how-tablets-are-helping-us-clean-up-our-prison/article/2633199>

### **PBS Interview and Article**

<https://news.azpm.org/p/news-articles/2017/8/18/115539-episode-329-logging-in-when-youre-locked-up-tablets-in-jail/>