

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Offender Fraud Committee

Department of Corrections

Kay Crockett
Will Jones

Jennifer Hall
Angela Marmion
Darlene Wansing

Lisa Jones
Jennifer Miller

In 2005 volunteers from several divisions within the Missouri Department of Corrections sought authorization to form an Offender Fraud Committee. With endorsement from the Department's administration, the team began their work with a goal to improve public safety by identification and prevention of fraudulent offender activities, and to hold offenders accountable for intentional misrepresentation to others.

The Committee conducted detailed research, sponsored focus groups, and gathered data, which verified that Missouri's inmates were actively participating in a variety of fraudulent activities. The Committee discovered several inmates were even earning thousands of dollars annually through creative prolific letter writing campaigns promising personal relationships, soliciting funds for fictitious religions, medical or treatment programs, or to pay for legal or release fees. Unsuspecting and misled citizens were sending in thousands of dollars each week which the inmate used to purchase snacks or other commodities in the institutional canteens. Additional cases of government fraud, banking fraud and other deceptive practices were also identified. Use of internet pen-pal websites was especially profitable for those offenders involved in fraudulent activities.

As a result of this Committee's work and recommendations, the Department has implemented a number of changes to curb fraud, identify misleading activities, and hold those involved responsible for their behavior. These recommendations have already benefited the Department, citizens, and taxpayers of Missouri.

Dozens of offender accounts were frozen and available funds were confiscated and used to pay for costs of their incarceration. An offender fraud alert was posted on the Department's website and news releases were made which urged citizens to use caution and verify offender information. A ban was placed on offender use of internet pen-pal sites. Staff training, mail, and procedural changes were made to supplement the Department's mission to ensure public safety and rule violations were broadened.

Through this Committee's initiative the State of Missouri has improved their service to the state's taxpayers and also improved public safety.

For additional information on this team's accomplishment please contact Matt Sturm at 573-526-6499 or at Matt.Sturm@doc.mo.gov.



State of Missouri
2007 Governor's Award for Quality and Productivity

NOMINATION FORM

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Department: Missouri Department of Corrections

1. Project or team name.

Offender Fraud Committee

2. List the name of all team members, job titles and organization.

Lisa Jones, Constituent Services Officer, Office of Director, Dept. of Corrections
Jennifer Miller, Superintendent, Chillicothe Correctional Center, Div. of Adult Institutions, Dept. of Corrections
Angela Marmion, Legal Counsel, Office of Director, Dept. of Corrections
Jennifer Hall, Mailroom Supv., Chillicothe Correctional Center, Div. of Adult Institutions, Dept. of Corrections
Kay Crockett, Victim Services Coordinator, Director's Office, Dept. of Corrections
Darlene Wansing, Asst. Inmate Finance Officer, Div. of Human Services, Dept. of Corrections
Will Jones, Functional Unit Manager, Div. of Adult Institutions, Dept. of Corrections

3. Nomination category.

(Check only one)

☐ INNOVATION

☒ CUSTOMER SERVICE

☐ PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

☐ TECHNOLOGY IN GOVERNMENT

☐ EFFICIENCY

4. Why did you select this nomination category?

The Offender Fraud Committee's main premise was to ensure the state's constituents and taxpayers received excellent service through increased public safety, fewer opportunities for victimization, enhanced public perception of the Department, and the department's extended ability to hold offenders accountable for criminal and fraudulent activity.

II. BACKGROUND

1. When did the team begin?

The team was chartered on July 14, 2005, by Matt Sturm, Legislative Liaison to the Department.

2. When did the team implement this project?

Part of the implementation began in mid-2006, followed by full implementation in February, 2007

3. How long has the project been implemented?

☐ 0 - 3 Months

☐ 4 - 6 Months

☒ 7 - 9 Months

☐ 10 - 12 Months

☐ 12 or more

☐ On-going Project

III. RESULTS/ACCOMPLISHMENT

1. What did the team accomplish? *(Use specific data and examples to identify accomplishments and whom benefited: i.e. agency, division, department, citizens, individuals, etc. Information must be included for nomination to be considered for GAQP.)*

The Committee's findings and recommendations have benefited Missourians, other individuals, the Department and the offenders themselves in a number of ways.

As example, the Committee's examination of offender accounts revealed, that dozens of female offenders were so adept at this form of scamming that they had profited almost \$10,000 annually from numerous men within the community by making false promises and providing misleading personal and release information. This was reported to the Attorney General's Office, who then froze the offender's accounts and confiscated available funds to pay for cost of incarceration. This practice continues as it is identified by the Department's Inmate Finance Office, who now watches for this type of activity, clearly a benefit to Missouri's taxpayers.

With the addition of the offender fraud alert posted on the Department's web page, along with news releases encouraging citizens to verify information before becoming involved in a potential scam, numerous new and long-standing scams have been identified and ended. Offenders found to be involved were held accountable. This has benefited the State's well-intentioned citizens as well as numerous other individuals from throughout the United States and other countries. Even offender family members have learned of misleading information from their incarcerated loved one who falsely claimed a need for funds to pay for Bible Study courses, medication, educational courses, etc.

The Department also benefits because we now deal with fewer frustrated citizens who call or write to seek reimbursement of lost funds.

Offenders also benefit because they are forced to lead an ethical life style during incarceration. Defrauding family and the public is a form of selfish and self-centered thinking commonly associated with criminalistic behavior. By practicing morality during incarceration, offenders learn to become productive and law-abiding citizens as they prepare for release.

2. Which of the following describes the benefits of the accomplishment? (Check all that apply and provide an explanation)

- ☐ cost reduction ☐ time savings
☐ improved process X other: describe

The Department regularly received contacts from upset citizens who had been bilked out of money by offenders. In most cases, the offenders misrepresented themselves or their situation to one or more individuals claiming a romantic interest or a need to pay for certain items or services provided by the Department of Corrections, etc. Citizens have sent the offender money, often hundreds or even thousands of dollars. The offenders often used false personal information or made false promises to gain the trust (and cash) of unsuspecting citizens. In addition to this type of activity, there are many other cases of fraudulent activity that has involved government fraud, bank fraud and other deceptions of a legal nature.

It was also determined early on that the Committee's role should, most importantly, including promoting prevention rather than dealing with fraud after it occurs. Previously the Department's role was more reactionary than proactive in averting fraudulent activities. Through prevention it not only averts deception of the public, but also promotes pro-social standards upon the offender population and lends a sense of comfort to the public when proactive notification is made. As a Department, it was recognized that we have a responsibility to uphold our mission, which in essence, states we will protect the public. This promotes good stewardship, improved service to Missouri's taxpayers, and reduces staff time spent responding to complaints.

III. RESULTS/ACCOMPLISHMENT (continued)

3. Explain how the accomplishments of the team are beyond regular duties and responsibilities (150 words or less).

This was not a department-appointed team. The members of this team saw the need, submitted a request to form a team to explore the problem further, and provide feedback to the Department's executive staff. Approval was obtained and the team met to plan a course of action and obtain statistical data to verify their observations. Based upon team's findings, a number of procedural changes and modifications to current practices were made throughout the Department, all geared to improve public safety and customer satisfaction. It should be noted that the team completed these activities in addition to their regular duties.

IV. MEASUREMENT/EVALUATION

1. Explain how the team measured and evaluated this project (Describe in detail the process and results).

It should first be recognized that it is difficult to measure "preventive" practices. How do you evaluate the number of cases of fraud that were averted? While we cannot count those numbers definitely, we can confirm that there are numerous cases of offender fraud identified as a result of the news release and publicity surrounding the Department's confirmation of the Committee's recommendations. These are verified through correspondence and phone calls received by the Department in response to implementation of the Committee's recommendations.

In one case, an elderly double amputee war veteran from Texas had sent large sums of money to a Missouri inmate who claimed it was needed for her medical studies and to pay for a bus ticket to Texas so she could care for him upon her impending release. Upon learning of the potential for a scam the man contacted the Department and learned she was actually serving a life sentence and had no release date. Numerous other cases of a similar nature are documented and are available upon request.

Perhaps the most verifiable measure was the late 2005 freezing of 33 female prisoners' accounts once it was learned they were actively involved in soliciting thousands of dollars through pen-pal websites. The 33 women named in that legal action had more than \$291,860 deposited into their accounts while in prison, an average of almost \$9,000 each. It was also verified that several dozen female prisoners were profiting almost \$10,000 each year through their letter-writing campaigns and false promises. (As example in one case, department records verify that between October 1, 2004 and October 1, 2005, one offender received a total of \$11,466.40 in incoming deposits from 29 men, another offender received \$9,264.05 from 17 men, another \$9,226.07 from 19 men, etc. etc.). This practice has ceased and those cases turned over to the Missouri Attorney General's Office for review under the Missouri Incarceration Reimbursement Act. (Previously the Attorney General's Office only sought notification once an offender's account reached a current balance of \$2000 or more). Those offender account balances, once in the thousands, is now on average about \$130.00.

In November of 2005, at the time the Committee submitted their recommendations, there were, as example, 67 female and 23 male offenders from Missouri active on one pen-pal website. Through implementation of the Committee's recommendation to ban offenders from participating in pen-pal websites, today there are only 4 female and 13 males on that same listing, and those offenders are being disciplined for their unwillingness to remove their names as directed.

It has also been verified that the number of fraud conduct violations issued between January 1, 2004 and October 15, 2005, only 301 conduct violations for fraud were issued, less than 1 percent of all violations issued. Between January 1 and July 10, 2007, a total of 99 conduct violations for fraud had already been issued, almost double of that issued during the same time period prior to the Committee's work.

2. Are the benefits derived from this project: (Check only one.)

X Recurring ☐ One-time

3. Please explain in 300 to 500 words.

Long-range benefits continue through averted cases of offender fraud. Missourians and other can now verify information provided by offenders through the Department's web search site and Department officials. Offenders are no longer authorized to post their names and other information on offender pen-pal websites, again reducing the opportunity for fraudulent activities. Incarceration reimbursement monies are being obtained from those who receive large sums of money. In addition, offenders are being held accountable for their misrepresentation and criminal behavior.

V. RECOGNITION/AWARDS

1. Has this project ever been nominated for the Governor's Award for Quality and Productivity? If yes, when?

No.

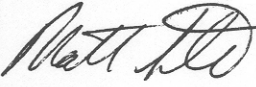
2. If yes, for which category was it nominated?

N/A.


3. Has this project received any other awards or recognition in the past? If yes, describe.

No.

VI. NOMINATOR'S INFORMATION

NOMINATING DEPARTMENT			
Corrections			
Name	Signature	Telephone Number	E-Mail Address
Matt Sturm		(573) 526-6499	Matt.sturm@doc.mo.gov

VII. DEPARTMENT COORDINATOR INFORMATION

DEPARTMENT			
Corrections			
Name	Signature	Telephone Number	E-Mail Address
Mary Ann Reeter		573-526-6553	MaryAnn.Reeter@doc.mo.gov

VIII. DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR APPROVAL

DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR'S NAME	DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR'S SIGNATURE*
Larry Crawford	