

Case Study: ASSISTING A FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATION

The InnerChange Freedom Initiative



BACKGROUND

When Chuck Colson, former counsel to President Nixon, left prison in 1976, he did so with a changed heart and changed priorities. Shortly after his release, Colson launched Prison Fellowship Ministries®, an organization dedicated to bringing the gospel of Christ to prisoners and reforming the administration of justice worldwide. By the year 2000, Prison Fellowship (PF) was a \$45 million organization reaching millions of inmates in more than ninety-five countries around the world.

SITUATION

In contrast to the limited effectiveness of the American correctional system, demonstrated by the high rate of recidivism among ex-offenders, Prison Fellowship offers a solution to the problem of crime –the gospel. However, when PF was publicly challenged to demonstrate its own effectiveness in rehabilitation, it was programmatically unprepared to respond. When the Alabama Department of Corrections offered to give PF a prison to run, the organization did not have the capacity for such an undertaking.

Meanwhile, in Sao Paulo, Brazil, two local lawyers driven by a desire to see true “rehabilitation” among their incarcerated population had developed a restorative prison model called “APAC.” Central to their program was a faith-based curriculum that systematically exposed prisoners to Christian principles and life skills throughout the length of their sentences. Humane treatment, restoration of dignity and pride, and lessons in work skills and responsible citizenship created a genuine rehabilitative environment in the prison. The program had a radical effect on the inmates it served: recidivism rates plummeted from an estimated seventy percent to less than ten percent.

ENTER DARE MIGHTY THINGS

In 1996, Prison Fellowship hired Dare Mighty Things to lead a team of justice experts and PF supporters to Brazil to determine if the revolutionary APAC model could be replicated by Prison Fellowship in the

United States. Careful study revealed that the innovation could be reproduced and with the guidance of DMT, PF leadership decided to proceed with the effort. DMT was tasked with leading the venture and was hired to:

- Explore potential sites in Texas and Alabama;
- Develop and respond to a Request for Proposal for the state of Texas;
- Develop a comprehensive business plan;
- Build donor support;
- Create a viable business model;
- Develop operational materials and deliver training sessions;
- Design the organizational model;
- Hire staff; and
- Manage the program during the start-up phase.

RESULTS

Now called the “InnerChange Freedom Initiative (IFI),” PF’s APAC prison model currently operates in five states - Texas, Iowa, Kansas, Arkansas, and Minnesota. Fiscal year 2005 saw the first such program for female inmates, established in Minnesota. Adding to the original five men’s programs in operation, FY 2005 enrollment reached 1170 prisoners.

An initial evaluation conducted by the Criminal Justice Policy Council released in February 2003 indicates a **recidivism rate of eight percent** for graduates of the Texas program. Compared with the national recidivism rate of sixty-seven percent, these dramatic results demonstrate that faith-based partnerships between the government and the church are possible and effective. Indeed, the success of InnerChange has served to impact President Bush’s vision for faith-based services across the country and has opened up possibilities for true reform of justice and correctional systems in the United States.

“The solid foundation laid by an innovative solution and the expertise of DMT has created for us a program that is flourishing today. Not only is it changing the lives of the men who participate, its effect is felt in their families, communities, and even among the victims. This is a powerful program that I’m proud to be associated with.”

-Tommie Dorsett, IFI Houston Program Director