



JIFF helps juvenile offenders change their lives via AT&T mobile connectivity

- **Business needs** - An affordable way to keep teenagers in a juvenile justice intervention program connected with their counselors and case managers during the coronavirus pandemic.
- **Networking solution** - Tablet computers powered with robust AT&T mobile connectivity support daily group sessions and one-on-one interventions with case managers.
- **Business value** - Connecting regularly with youths—despite the pandemic—keeps the youthful participants interested and engaged.
- **Industry focus** - Social services
- **Size** - \$1.36 million annual budget

About Juvenile Intervention and Faith-based Follow-up

The Juvenile Intervention and Faith-based Follow-up (JIFF) is a youth intervention program. It's designed to break the destructive cycle of juvenile crime through Christ-centered interventions. It offers an alternative to detention by providing early intervention, intensive case management, and ongoing mentoring to teenagers in the juvenile justice system. The organization is funded by government support, foundation grants, and gifts from churches, corporations, and individuals.

The situation

When COVID-19 made it impossible for JIFF staff to continue to deliver services in person, the organization needed a new way to work with its youth to help them break the cycle of juvenile crime.

Solution

AT&T Business arranged for one of its technology suppliers to provide refurbished tablet computers. This enables JIFF participants to stay connected with their case managers and counselors. Youth can also participate in group sessions designed to keep them motivated and committed to making good decisions. Because many in the program have no Wi-Fi® connectivity at home, AT&T supplies mobile connectivity at rates the nonprofit organization can afford.

Breaking the cycle of juvenile crime

More than 11,000 youths in Memphis and Shelby County, Tennessee, enter the juvenile justice system each year. More than half of them are charged with multiple offences. Without adequate intervention, 75% of multiple-time offenders are at high risk to continue into the adult justice system.

JIFF is an innovative program that works to redirect youth who have gotten in trouble with the law. It's designed to replace detention with programs that give participants the skills, support, and direction they need to change their lives.

JIFF serves as a detainment alternative intervention program, said Ron Frazier, Program Director of JIFF's Juvenile Case Mentoring Program. "We saw a need for youth to be in a more productive place," he said. "A place that actually invests in them by providing the tools they need so they don't continue to make mistakes like the ones that landed them in juvenile justice system in the first place."

The program began in 1970 as a local chapter of Youth for Christ. In 2005 the organization became JIFF, narrowing its mission to focus on providing interventions for youths in the juvenile justice system.

Helping children in desperate need

JIFF serves an average of 340 juvenile justice-involved youth per year. Its Early Intervention Program replaces detention for youths charged with 3 or fewer nonviolent offenses. The program consists of restorative justice practices like community service, restitution, mediation, and character development. The early intervention program has a 90% success rate.

Another JIFF initiative, the Case Mentoring Program, is partially funded by the State of Tennessee, and helps youthful offenders with an average of 3 or more arrests and their families by providing the skills, support, and direction necessary to break the destructive cycle of juvenile crime. This program averages a 65% success rate. Youth who do not successfully complete this program are at high risk for continuing deeper into the adult system.

"The Early Intervention Program's 90% success rate is wonderful, and we're very appreciative of that," Frazier said. "But we're just as appreciative of the 65% success rate that we have with youth in the more intensive Case Mentoring Program. In a lot of cases, they come in with a hardened shell and a longer track record. The juvenile justice system hasn't deterred them."

He acknowledged that the intensive Case Mentoring participants present a greater challenge than those in

the Early Intervention Program. “But we appreciate the challenges with JIFF Case Mentoring and the Early Intervention Program equally because the common denominator is that they are all children who desperately need our support and services,” he said.

Participants who successfully graduate from any JIFF program can be matched with a community volunteer for one year of mentoring. JIFF also offers its graduates workplace training through a partnership with Sweet LaLa’s Bakery.

“We know that AT&T will be there with us as we move forward in giving youth an opportunity to live better, meaningful, and productive lives.”

Ron Frazier
Program Director,
Juvenile Case Mentoring Program, JIFF

“My skeletons will help someone”

Frazier is a Chicago native who followed in the footsteps of an uncle who left Chicago under a cloud and ended up homeless on the streets of Memphis. “A local ministry approached him, shared the gospel with him, and gave him a business card,” Frazier said. “Long story short, he became the executive director of that ministry and went on to be responsible for introducing homeless people in Memphis to Christ. His walk inspired me to come to Memphis for a fresh start.”

While his own story was not as dramatic as that of his uncle, Frazier says, he also overcame personal challenges, and uses his story to let JIFF participants know that they can conquer their own demons. “One of the former managers here used to say, ‘My skeletons will help someone,’ and I inherited that song. I’m very transparent with our youth.”

For the past 14 years, Frazier has served others in multiple capacities in Memphis. He started at JIFF about six years ago as a case mentor, was promoted to lead case mentor and eventually became program director of JIFF Case Mentoring. “My duties are to cultivate, motivate, inspire, and encourage the team in both a personal and programmatic way,” he said. “Of course, all the efforts are for the sake of being a contributing force in the lives of underprivileged and underserved youth.”

COVID-19 ends in-person services

The organization has produced many success stories. It is especially proud of one young man who made a series of bad decisions, graduated from JIFF, and became a Memphis police officer. Another young man had been arrested 26 times by the age of 14 before turning his life around with the help of JIFF.

“That youth went on and did not reoffend and now is a successful long-distance driver for a large national trucking company,” Frazier said. “Stories like these are so inspiring and rejuvenating to us and just give us the affirmation that what we’re doing is needed and actually counts.”

JIFF's efforts to help current participants were severely challenged when COVID-19 forced the organization to curtail in-person services. "The COVID-19 pandemic stopped all face-to-face engagement including after-school programs in our facility," Frazier said.

"We knew we had to stay in contact or crime could potentially increase and more lives could be lost literally or lost by further detention or jail time," he said. "Those were the challenges that led us to contact AT&T and see what type of bright ideas they had to help us continue our services and supports."

Virtual meetings and mentoring

AT&T Business suggested supplying the youth in JIFF's programs with tablet computers. "We liked the idea because the tablets could be easily transported and we could easily set up virtual meetings and mentoring sessions," Frazier said. "AT&T also enabled us to track the usage and location at all times, which is a very valuable security feature."

JIFF case managers deliver tablets to program participants daily, enabling them to meet online with case managers and with JIFF community partners. Staff pick up the tablets at the end of each day. "We want to keep the tablets in good shape and keep them ready for the upcoming youth that are going to be referred to our program," Frazier said. "We also want to do right by all of the funders who support JIFF so we can have these tablets for our youth."

He added: "The youth have responded very well to the tablets. They are very inclined to use the technology, and we're grateful for that."

Support for isolated youth

JIFF staff are also grateful for the assistance from AT&T in keeping costs down. The AT&T Business account team worked with an AT&T vendor to supply 50 refurbished tablet computers and arranged for affordable data plans.

"The tablets and the data plans that AT&T provided enabled JIFF to continue much-needed services and support to our youth who are now more isolated within their communities due to the pandemic," Frazier said. "Since going into virtual programming, we are serving 65 youth per week."

It's not just participants and JIFF staff who are impressed with the virtual mentoring. "Juvenile court representatives actually sat in on one of our sessions recently, and they were very excited about our response and continued delivery of services," Frazier said.

A platform for growth

Virtual group sessions, with multiple cohorts participating together, have been very effective, Frazier noted. JIFF's virtual programming consists of character development, life skills, relational skills, gang intervention, alcohol and gang awareness, and spiritual enrichment.

"We also partner with other organizations such as the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, which provides a virtual art therapy program," Frazier said. "And the great thing about the platform that's powered by the AT&T tablets and data plans is that we have afforded all of our community partners a platform by which they can offer their services virtually."

JIFF officials are excited about the programs that continue to evolve. “We’re very optimistic about the growth and potential. We’re very satisfied,” Frazier said.

Best alternative to face-to-face contact

Frazier credits the tablets with helping to keep youth interested in JIFF’s program, which also uses worksheets and other printed material. “We’ve had joyful reaction from the program participants, and their attendance has been good,” he said. “They seem to have been absorbing the information very well.”

The technology been exceptionally reliable. “We are grateful for the initial response from our first cohorts that have been able to experience JIFF case mentoring virtually,” he said. “In my opinion, this is the best alternative to face-to-face contact. I thank God for the technologies.”

Being able to continue JIFF’s intervention with students during the pandemic is the biggest benefit of the AT&T solution, according to Frazier. “This has the potential to lower the risk of COVID-19 transmission while allowing JIFF the opportunity to continue providing much-needed programming to our youth.”

JIFF is able to have socially distant contact with the youth weekly, which greatly helps in building trusting relationships. Finally, he said, the technology has also narrowed the digital divide that often exists in populations living in extreme poverty.

Meaningful and productive lives

JIFF is planning to expand its service coverage by adding two or three satellite locations within Metro Memphis. “With the confidence that we’ve gained in AT&T, we know that AT&T will be there with us as we move forward in giving youth an opportunity to live better, meaningful, and productive lives, contributing to their families and communities,” Frazier said.

He continued: “AT&T has been a great resource and supporter of our mission. The AT&T reps consulted with JIFF on the application and technology and then convened the service providers to implement the system delivery in the most efficient and cost-effective approach.”

JIFF’s AT&T account team was helpful from day one, he said, and continues to check in on a regular basis. “We have great confidence that their support is always there. We couldn’t be happier.”