



BUILDING COMMUNICATION & COMMUNITY

STAYING CONNECTED

As a university operated non-profit organization dedicated to helping inmates receive an education, the Education of Justice Program faced some very unique communication and collaboration needs.

MangoApps was able to provide a platform to share important and time-sensitive information, help the program stay interconnected and build a supportive online community.

“The challenge for us since we started nine years ago has always been how do we stay

ORGANIZATION:

University of Illinois

HEADQUARTERS:

Champaign, Illinois

EMPLOYEES:

Over 13,000 faculty and staff

OVERVIEW:

The Education Justice Project is a college-in-prison program operated by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. This non-profit helps inmates receive an education and benefit their community.

connected? We don't occupy the same building. We don't come together at a general meeting once a month. How is it that we can stay connected and share information with one another," asked Rebecca Ginsburg, Education Justice Project (EJP) Associate Professor and Director.

The organization knew that it needed a way to communicate important information in real time but hadn't found an effective solution yet. "It wasn't proving successful or effective to develop phone trees or even email," Ginsburg shared. "For some occasions, of course, it makes sense to pick up the phone, but in other occasions, you want to be able to quickly and effectively know that you are reaching the people that you need to be in touch with."

As Ginsburg and her team set out to find a better answer, they did a lot of research to find the right fit for their organization. After careful comparison, it was clear that MangoApp's easy to use and accessible platform was just what they needed. "Before we chose MangoApps, we looked at a lot of different companies that offered similar sorts of services... And after a lot of looking, that's when we decided that MangoApps was the best service for us," Ginsburg said. "[MangoApps has become] the most important and the primary medium through which our instructors, our workshop facilitators, the tutors, and others who are offering academic programming at the prison communicate."

INSTANT INFORMATION

For EJP, incorporating MangoApps provided immediate peace of mind. Because of their unique role and mission, having instant access to important information is more than just a business advantage, it is absolutely essential

for safety and success. "[For us] it's not just a matter of convenience. Sometimes we have to convey very time-sensitive and urgent information," Ginsburg said. "Maybe there's a lockdown. Maybe a class or an event has been canceled ...You'd be surprised to know that hosting a program in a prison there are many, many things that could go wrong. Often, these things are time-sensitive, and we need to know sooner rather than later if there's anything that we need to be aware of."

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- Rebecca Ginsburg, Associate Professor and Director

And even in less sensitive or crucial situations, EJP members still regularly work around fluid and inconsistent information like traffic and travel conditions. "Because we're traveling back and forth a lot between campus and the Danville Correctional Center, which is about 45 minutes away on a freeway, we often have to convey information about weather conditions or traffic or accidents on the freeway," Ginsburg shared.

For Jamie Hines, EJP Operations Manager, MangoApps's instant sharing allows her to quickly react to setbacks and reach out to members in real time. "A lot of times we use it for troubleshooting. At least, I do personally, where if I need somebody to be an escort for someone at the prison that night, then that's where I put out the call to all of our members, and it's just so much easier," Hines said.

"But whenever we do run into challenges that we haven't encountered before, we get responses right away and we're very grateful for the great help we get."

- Rebecca Ginsburg, Associate Professor and Director

ACCESSIBLE TO ANYONE

EJP employees and volunteers are also quite different from typical intranet and collaboration tool users. "Ease of use for our Intranet system [is important] because many of the people that come to EJP are retired teachers," explained Ginsburg. "They care a lot about teaching, but they may not be super-savvy about technology. So, we wanted to implement a system that was going to be easy for everybody to use, very low bar to entry and wouldn't discourage people from logging on." With MangoApps' easy to understand and user-friendly platform, EJP is able to effectively utilize the best teaching and tutoring talents without participants having to worry about meeting certain tech standards.

"I actually can't even recall a time where I've

had to sit down with someone and say, 'This is how you use this.' So, it's been very easy for our members to figure out," Hines said.

"Very intuitive, very usable," Steve Sherman, an EJP writing and math professor agreed. "I created a profile really quickly. I put my picture on it. I signed up for alerts, and it's easy peasy."

MangoApps' dedication to customer service and tech support has been incredibly important to EJP, and has ensured that users at every level can always access the program effectively. "The MangoApps team has been really responsive whenever we have issues or concerns.... I know that when I pick up the phone and ask for help, we get help right away," Ginsburg said. "I have to say that we don't do it very often. We haven't run into a lot of glitches...But whenever we do run into challenges that we haven't encountered before, we get responses right away and we're very grateful for the great help we get."

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- Jamie Hines, Operations Manager

CONNECTION AND COMMUNITY

EJP mostly coordinates online with workers and volunteers spread out across the Champaign area. Members don't often physically meet or work together, but that doesn't mean that there can't be a successful and supportive community. "Because we don't all work together in the same building or in the same office, we think of [MangoApps] as the place where we meet," Ginsburg said. "You can go to Mango to see who the members are. Read their profiles, see their photographs, and understand better the people with whom you're forming the community that is EJP."

"We can use MangoApps for everything, we don't have to use [it] just for messaging and then Dropbox for file sharing. We can just put everything within the Mango universe."

- Steve Sherman, Writing and Math Professor



"MangoApps actually serves an extremely important purpose within EJP... it brings EJP together," noted Stan Yanchus, an EJP writing partner. "We're a large number of volunteers primarily and we're busy people all doing different things. [Through MangoApps] you know what other people are doing and there's that shared purpose of mission. It really gives you a sense of the depth and

the scope of our organization and the work we do."

Ginsburg has also appreciated MangoApp's ability to help her work more effectively and for members to provide each other with support and uplifting feedback. "I really value... the ability to like comments," Ginsburg explained. "I'm on Mango a lot [but] I don't have the time to write a comment each time I read a post. But I can like [it], and it's a quick way of letting people know that I appreciate them, that I like and appreciate their work and acknowledge the work that they do."

Yanchus agreed that sharing and commenting was an important part of MangoApps and the EJP community. "When I read other posts, I will give some feedback on other people," he said. "Whether it's an emoji or whether it's a short comment that thanks them for sharing."

AN AREA FOR EVERYTHING

For EJP, MangoApps has been instrumental in organization as well. "I really like that we can have different groups because we have so many members that are spread so far apart, not even just in Champaign-Urbana or on campus, but even in neighboring states," Hines remarked. "I can send specific messages to specific groups. I really love that... You're able to get all of the people that you need to get [right way], which is wonderful."

Ginsburg has seen increased organization through the wide variety of resources and tools available in MangoApps to share files, documents, and information. "[Another] use is to be in touch with one another and to share information with one another," Ginsburg said. "So, it's also the depository of documents and resources that our members are likely to find useful."

“We can use MangoApps for everything,” Sherman commented. “We don’t have to use [it] just for messaging and then Dropbox for file sharing. We can just put everything within the Mango universe.”

AN INCREDIBLE PARTNERSHIP

MangoApps’ customized, personalized, and easy to use services were exactly what EJP needed to create a centralized community around their organization. From real-time and relevant updates to file-sharing and community feedback, MangoApps helps EJP focus on education and

success. “I’m very grateful for it,” Hines said. “I love how easy and how quick it is for me to reach all of our members. When I have so much to do saving any kind of time is a bonus for me.”

“I would encourage, and I have encouraged other nonprofits to use MangoApps. The support has been great. It’s been a wonderful way for us to connect with one another. There’s no downside,” Ginsburg agreed. “I don’t know what we would do without it. We would not be able to effectively do the work we do. MangoApps is a place where we go to connect with one another and support one another.”