

October 2009
Newsletter

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What is **EMPLOY**?

EMPLOY was started in 2006 and is completely funded by MINNCOR Industries. It was designed to help inmates capitalize on work experiences and skills acquired during their incarceration and to aid them in employment readiness for post-incarceration. It also offers support for one year following an inmate's release. The ultimate goal of EMPLOY is to help ex-offenders locate, gain, and retain employment at a livable wage.

In order to become a participant in EMPLOY, inmates must be within the last five years of their sentence and have either a minimum of six months current or past work experience at MINNCOR Industries **or** have completed a vocational education program. OnTrack students are also eligible. Participants are held accountable for their actions and are expected to have a clean discipline record while enrolled. Remaining discipline-free reflects a willingness on the part of the individual to establish trust and shows that they're thinking ahead about the future.

Shortly before a participant is released, they meet with our Job Training Specialist for two eight-hour sessions. During these meetings, the group discusses skills assessments, resumes, job searching techniques, interviewing skills, and more. The week before a participant's supervised release date, our Job Development Specialist begins searching for job leads in their field of skill and location of release.

Within the first week of release, an appointment is scheduled with our EMPLOY Retention Specialist. At this meeting, participants receive an individualized portfolio that contains copies of their resume, any certification submitted to EMPLOY, job leads, and various other resources and tools to assist them with their job search. The Retention Specialist maintains contact with and provides continuous support to each participant in the form of career advice and resume maintenance. Follow-up meetings are conducted one month after release, then again at 3 months, 6 months, and 12 months. Once the one year anniversary has been reached, they are considered a completed participant of the EMPLOY program.

The EMPLOY staff looks forward to working with offenders and watching them thrive in both their professional and personal lives!

EMPLOY Staff



We've recently added a new member to the EMPLOY Program! Tawnya Gelle began her position as a Project Analyst at the end of June 2009. She is working to develop new methods of enabling participants to

retain and capitalize on job-specific skills acquired during their incarceration. Tawnya also maintains statistical data and is responsible for business processes and organizational practices.

One of the EMPLOY team's goals is to enroll at least 60 new participants per quarter. Every application is reviewed and carefully considered upon receipt by Tawnya. In her first 2 months, she exceeded the quarterly goal and accepted 90 new participants, which is sure to keep the rest of the EM-

PLOY team busy training and supporting participants as they are released from their facilities. In addition, Tawnya attends transition fairs and assists with presentations at facilities throughout the state.

Tawnya graduated from St. Cloud State University in 2005 with her Bachelor's degree in Sociology and Political Science. She then went on to receive her Master's degree in 2009 from the University of St. Thomas in Public Policy and Leadership. She completed an internship at the Metropolitan Council in their Program Evaluation and Audit department shortly before graduating. Currently, she is enrolled at a community college, working towards an Accounting certificate.

Tawnya is very excited and proud to be working on the EMPLOY Program and looks forward to ensuring that our participants have the tools necessary to be successful upon their release.

N.C.I.A. EMPLOY Panel

The National Correctional Industries Association (NCIA), a nonprofit coalition that represents correctional industries across the nation, as well as the companies with which they do business, held its 2009 Central Region Conference in Bloomington, MN. MINNCOR Industries organized the event, where industry professionals gathered to network, share challenges, and recognize successes.

The conference consisted of several breakout sessions, one of which focused on the EMPLOY Program. Staff members had the opportunity to introduce themselves, explain their role, and discuss the requirements and benefits of EMPLOY. More importantly, three released participants were invited to share their story with the audience. These are participants who enrolled in EMPLOY during their incarceration and are now thriving in their new personal and professional lives. Each one faced various roadblocks along the way, but has persevered and succeeded in becoming a contributing and happy member of society.

They spoke about how they became involved with EMPLOY and the impact it had on their incarceration and subsequent release. Panel members graciously answered questions after telling their stories; audience members did not hesitate to commend these individuals on their courage to change and overcome adversity and to thank them for their willingness to talk about their experience.

During his incarceration, one of the panel members built himself a new support network that consisted of staff from the Inner Freedom Initiative, which lead him to his current position at a construction company. Both IFI staff as well as this participant's employer attended the breakout session, offering their support on behalf of the participant as well as to the EMPLOY Program.

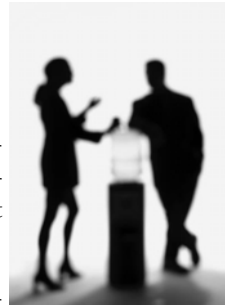
Another one of the panelists was employed at his one month retention visit. By his six month visit, he already had plans to close on a house! He used the skills gained as a forklift operator during his incarceration to obtain his current job making deliveries for a food distribution company.

The third panel participant found a job at a non-profit organization within the first week of his supervised release date. After completing a year of employment, he changed career paths and found a new position at a different non-profit. He lives in an apartment close-by his new employer and has a great relationship with his boss.

A goal of the panel was to show that with hard work and dedication, great things can be achieved. These gentleman are a shining example to current inmates, and anyone else facing challenges. They provide hope and encouragement, and demonstrate what it takes to make it.

What's New at EMPLOY?

- Program Evaluation Time!! The EMPLOY Program is partnering with the Department of Corrections to assess the impact EMPLOY has on its participants and the recidivism rate. The report is only in the beginning phase, but look for project updates.
- The EMPLOY team is putting the finishing touches on its long-awaited, much-anticipated website. Watch for it to go live and see what a MINNCOR Industry job teaches inmates and what employers say about MINNCOR employees.
- EMPLOY presentations are on-going and take place periodically throughout Minnesota Correctional Facilities. To keep abreast on these events, watch for announcements on Sharepoint. Feel free to invite anyone within your facility to attend so that they might learn about and benefit from EMPLOY services. These presentations are open to staff and inmates alike.



Stats

- Despite the economy, during the 4th quarter of 2009, an average of **75%** of all the released EMPLOY participants were working
- In the 4th quarter of 2009, EMPLOY's Job Development Specialist built relationships with **71** new employers
- A total of **117** participants have completed the EMPLOY program to date
- **106** new participants were enrolled from April 2009-June 2009
- As of the end of August 2009, EMPLOY had **507** participant's enrolled



"The EMPLOY program did much to prepare my current employee for the work force, but more than that, it did much to help him gain the confidence to push through difficult situations."

-Employer

"I just wanted to write a quick letter and say thank you to everyone at MINNCOR for the help you've given me with my release and finding work. The EMPLOY Program is a valuable resource that has helped me immeasurably with my job-seeking efforts."

-EMPLOY Participant

"EMPLOY is a great program! Offenders that participate just can't say enough good things about it. They learn so much helpful information. Thank you for your efforts."

-MCF-Rush City Staff