# Rehabilitative Technology in Corrections: Problem, Solution and Roadmap

Ameelio

Iowa Department of Corrections

Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA)

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Rehabilitative Technology in Corrections

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# 1. Introducing Today's Speakers



# John Needelman

# Is the **Chief Information Officer** at the **Iowa Department of Corrections**.

John oversees the integration and strategy of IT systems across nine of lowa's prison institutions. With a **career spanning over 18 years at the Department**, John has a deep expertise in IT strategy, technology architecture, and system administration.

Throughout his career, he has been committed to enhancing technology infrastructure to improve department operations and efficiency.

# **April Feng**

Is the **CEO of Ameelio**, a non-profit technology provider that connects incarcerated individuals and their families through low-cost and cutting-edge technology.

Prior to Ameelio, April worked with **Steven Levitt**, author of **Freakonomics**, at the **University of Chicago** and also worked in the **United Kingdom's Parliament** during Brexit.

She received a Master's in Philosophy and Public Policy from the London School of Economics, and a Bachelor's in Economics and Political Science from the University of Notre Dame.

# ameelio



# Rehabilitative Technology in Corrections: Problem, Solution & Implementation

Tuesday, August 13, 2024

## Ameelio's Mission

We're on a mission to provide correctional agencies and staff the most **innovative**, **efficient**, and **lowest-cost** communication and education technology available.

And to **empower** the incarcerated with vital tools to rebuild their lives.

## Who We Are

We are the **only nonprofit** IPCS provider in the industry.

We offer video calls, e-messaging, voice calls and visitation scheduling, and leverage this infrastructure to expand educational and reentry programming.

# **Our Story**

Ameelio was first launched at the height of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Family separation and isolation had a devastating impact on incarcerated individuals and their families.

In-person visitations were blocked across the country, and we wanted to reunite incarcerated people through technology.

Ameelio was envisioned as an ecosystem of technology that enables family & friends to communicate with their incarcerated loved ones – for free. Our vision is to take on the billion–dollar IPCS industry that is dominated by just two exploitative companies.





82% of people that are incarcerated are rearrested within 10 years post-release

https://bja.ojp.gov/news/justice-matters/desk-bja-november-2023



Successful reentry programming begins from the first day of incarceration

https://www.themarshallproject.org/2024/01/10/prison-correctional-officer-shortage-overtime-data



Key Components of Effective Reentry Programs

## Career Readiness

Supportive Services

Education and Training

Partnerships and Collaborations



But correctional facilities across the country are struggling to provide effective reentry programs



Due to critical staffing shortage correctional workforces have declined by 29% within 3 years

https://www.themarshallproject.org/2024/01/10/prison-correctionalofficer-shortage-overtime-data

# 2. Challenges in Correctional Technology

#### POLICY / US & WORLD

#### **Prison phone service breach exposes** attorney-client call recording



By Russell Brandom Source The Intercent Nov 11, 2015, 2:05 PM EST 0 Comments (0 New)

Max Moreau / Flickr

## Concerns

- Potential security ulletvulnerabilities that may emerge with outdated technology
- Increased risks to the people ulletthat are incarcerated and correctional staff
- Potential negative media ullet

#### SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

GOVERNMENT ENVIRONMENT ECONOMY HEALTH JUSTICE EDUCATION ELECTION 2024

#### JUSTICE

#### Investigation shuts down texting, email, tabletbased phone calls for inmates and families

BY: JOHN HULT - MARCH 21, 2024 6:00 PM





## Consequences

- Technology rollouts may be slow
- Use of outdated technology means not actually addressing technology knowledge-deficits among people that are incarcerated
- Interruption or shut down of rehabilitative services

Programs are cancelled, the public loses trust, staff and residents lose access to vital resources This jeopardizes rehabilitation progress

# 3. Implementation Principles

# Key focus areas

- Prioritize Security
- Ease Staff Burden
- Customize For Daily Workflows

## **Prioritize Security**

The number one priority in corrections is **security** 

There are many ways to fail and cause serious security breaches, especially with outdated technology – new vulnerabilities appear often.

Correctional technology must prioritize security and be **adaptable** to new challenges.

## **Ease Staff Burden**

Correctional agencies everywhere are facing a critical **staffing shortage** 

Processes and technologies should focus on reducing staff burden and aiding daily operations

# **Customize For Staff Workflows**

**Customizing technology** for each staff member's workflow and ensuring **ease of use** in high-stress environments is crucial. Overly complicated tasks and poor technology can burden staff and lead to critical mistakes.



However, staff are not the only users. People who are incarcerated, their families, attorneys, and healthcare providers also use technology.

All stakeholders must be considered when streamlining technology design and implementation.

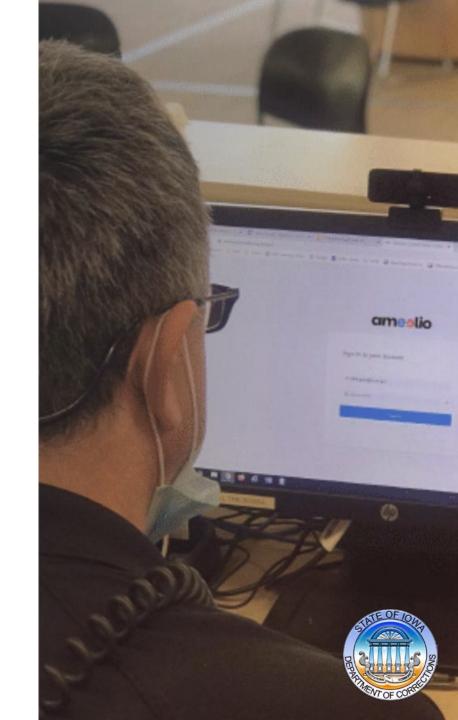
# **Ameelio's Applied Principles**

**Prioritized Security**: Collaborate with facility staff to understand daily challenges and tailor our system to each facility.

**Increased efficiency**: Develop easy-to-use systems for DOC staff with adaptable designs..

**Transparency in impact**: Measure how new technology affects infractions, prioritizing the safety of staff and residents.

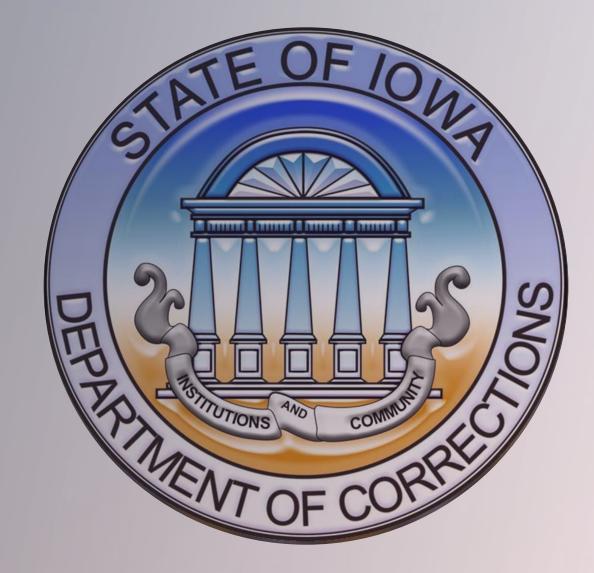
Mitigated staff burden: Introduce features that combine multiple processes into one step, saving time and reducing burnout.



# 4. Case Study

## **Iowa Department of Corrections**

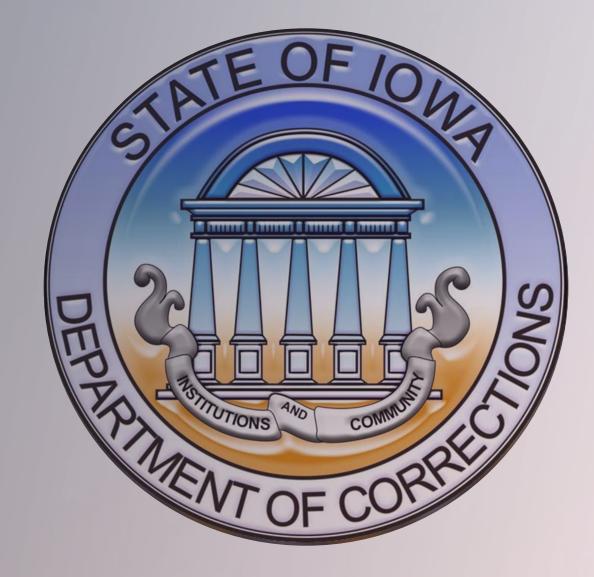
- Beth Skinner, PhD is the Director of Iowa DOC
- Nine correctional institutions with varying security levels across eight judicial districts
- 4,182 FY2O23 prison admissions
- 8,175 prison population at end of FY2O23



# **<u>Case</u>: Iowa Department of Corrections**

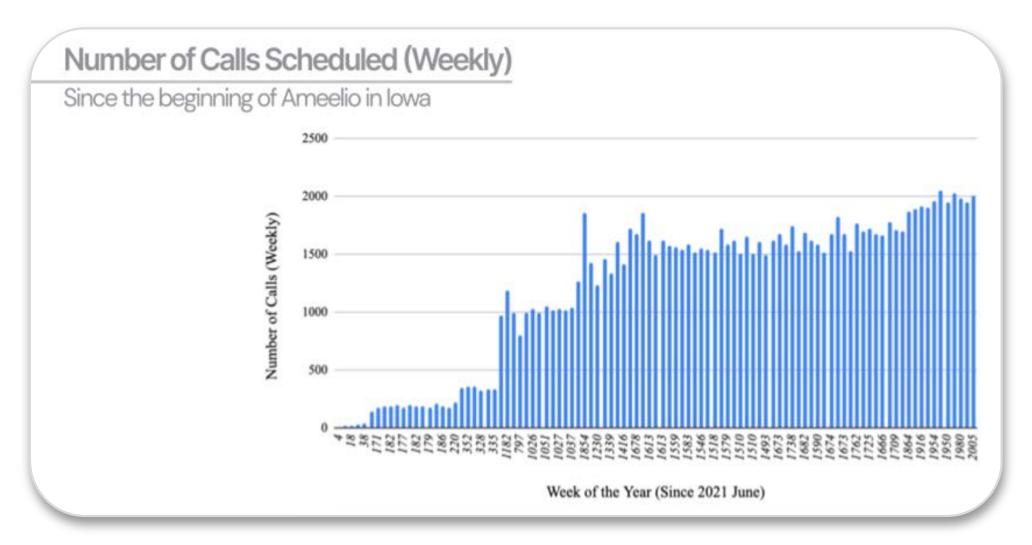
Iowa was the **first state** to adopt Ameelio's video visitation solution for incarcerated individuals.

Independent researchers at the University of Chicago, UC Berkeley, and Vanderbilt University found that Ameelio's free video calls directly led to reduced infractions and increased inperson visitation.



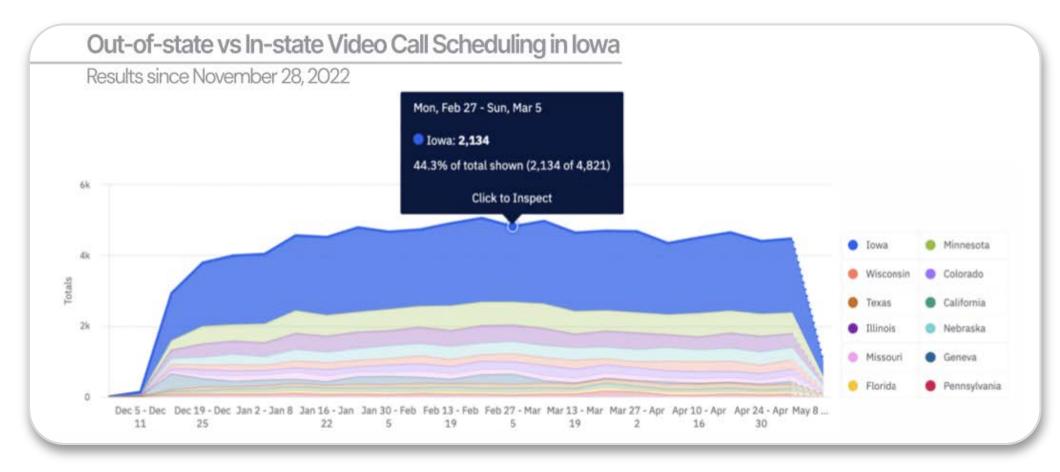
#### **<u>Case</u>**: Iowa Department of Corrections

Since our launch in June 2021, video calls increased by 103%.



#### **<u>Case</u>**: Iowa Department of Corrections

Ameelio presented an accessible enhancement to in-person visits. Video calls make it easier for out-of-state individuals to stay in touch with their loved ones inside.



# **99**

The technology is not just for in-state visitors but for out of state visitors. And that impacts the safe operations of our prisons.

We really wanted to find a platform that would create that **extra layer of security**. We've had video visits from 44 states and 12 different countries. Incarcerated people have something to look forward to with these video visits. I can even see it helping with disciplinary issues internally and potentially shifting our culture.



Beth Skinner, Director of Iowa Department of Corrections



# 99

Ameelio's video calling platform is so easy to use — it's going to **save us COs an abundance of time**, make our work more efficient, and get our prison population reconnected with their families at no cost.

Mike Gass, Correctional Officer IA Department of Corrections How did these factors influence our approach to implementing new technologies? Correctional staff People who are incarcerated Families & Friends Legal & Health providers Education providers **Stakeholders** 

# Considerations

High Security Easing Staff Burden Customizable

# Panelist Conversation





John Needelman Chief Information Officer Iowa Department of Corrections

April Feng Chief Executive Officer Ameelio

# QUESTIONS for our Presenters

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