

Families Against Mandatory Minimums Prepares to Maximize Contributions

Working with Applied Business Services, FAMM implements Sage Fundraising 50 as part of its new fundraising and development initiative.

Headquartered in Washington DC, Families Against Mandatory Minimums (FAMM) is a non-profit organization advocating for fair and proportionate sentencing laws within both the federal and state justice systems. The organization was founded in 1991 by Julie Stewart, whose brother, a nonviolent first-time drug offender, was sent to federal prison for five years, in accordance with mandatory minimum sentencing guidelines.

Today, FAMM has grown into a national organization, with 10-15 full-time staff members and over 12,000 members that includes prisoners and their families, attorneys, judges, criminal justice experts and concerned citizens.

Choosing a Fund Raising Solution

FAMM obtains its funding primarily from grants, individual philanthropists, and an annual fundraising campaign directed to their members. In 2007, FAMM decided to expand their fundraising and development efforts by hiring Christie Wrightson as Development Director. The first task on her list? Find fundraising software that could help FAMM acquire and develop new donors, as well as streamline gift processing.

“Sage Fundraising 50 was recommended to me by a colleague at another nonprofit organization,” Wrightson explains, “I contacted Applied Business Services to learn more about the software, and after talking with them, I was confident that we would work well together.”

Founded in 1981, Applied Business Services (ABS) specializes in providing nonprofit organizations with accounting and fundraising solutions developed for their unique needs. The company is an Authorized Sage Business Partner and also operates a National Certified Training Center for Sage MIP Fund Accounting and Sage Fundraising 50.

“ABS gave us a web-based demonstration of the software. Sharon was incredibly helpful. She spent a couple of hours highlighting the aspects of the software that she knew would meet the needs of FAMM.”

‘Shockingly’ Easy Data Conversion

“My colleague, who has seen database conversions before, was shocked at how fast our conversion was. It took me only a matter of days,” recalls Wrightson.

“ABS helped me think through all of the set-up items that I wouldn’t have known how to do myself, having not installed a database before,” she continues, “They talked us through the entire process, delving into our needs, including our unique tracking requirements given that many of our members are prisoners. They really understood our challenges and our mission.”

“Sage Fundraising 50 is so user-friendly that I haven’t had to attend any formal training,” Wrightson admits, “The onsite training provided by ABS on the first day was thorough, and I’ve been able to accomplish everything I wanted to on my own.”

Expanding Across the Organization

For a while, FAMM operated with two systems – the staff used the custom-developed legacy database for tracking their membership, while Wrightson used Sage Fundraising 50 for fundraising. But it wasn’t an efficient or accurate way to work.

“We tried to use both databases but we had to enter everything twice,” she explains, “The constant import/export of data took too long and sometimes changes did not get made in both systems. Plus, no one on our staff could program, so we were unable to make changes in the old system. But we can customize Sage Fundraising 50 ourselves.”

After meeting with the staff and presenting a web demonstration of Sage Fundraising 50, Wrightson proposed that FAMM adopt Sage Fundraising 50 across the organization, as a single, centralized system. The staff agreed, and ABS helped FAMM extend access to everyone.

Intuitive Reporting Capabilities

Wrightson passed her knowledge of Sage Fundraising 50 on to other FAMM staff members. She notes that the software’s intuitive interface helped her colleagues learn how to use it quickly.

“We had used our previous system for 10 years. Yet only two people knew how to run reports,” says Wrightson, “Sage Fundraising 50 is so easy to use that people feel confident to explore the system. Now, shortly after expanding access to the entire staff, people are already learning how to run reports and analyze data in new ways.”

Still Growing

Wrightson is excited about her plans for fundraising at FAMM and expanding their use of Sage Fundraising 50.

“When we expanded our user license, I received a personal call from Maureen Williams, President of ABS. She shared new ideas during that conversation about ways we can expand our use of Sage,” she explains.

Throughout the process, Wrightson has been impressed with the continued attention and follow-up she has received from ABS.

“Six months after the implementation, I received another call from Sharon, just to check in on our progress. I am very impressed with their follow-through. They really care about our success. And with ABS’ help, I look forward to using Sage Fundraising 50 to our maximum advantage.”