

CASESTUDY

Using IT to Improve Support Services

READING SINGLE HOMELESS PROJECT

READING SINGLE HOMELESS PROJECT (RSHP) is a charitable organisation playing a significant role in fighting the social exclusion caused by homelessness. RSHP continually strives to improve performance and build on their considerable record of success. Louise Lucio-Palk, Support Service Manager, explains how a new software application has led to even better results.

For nearly 30 years, RSHP has been providing housing and support to some of Reading's most vulnerable individuals. Each year they work with more than 100 people who are at risk of, or already have a history of, homelessness. Many also have alcohol and drug issues, mental health needs or an offending background. Frequently they lack the confidence, self-esteem and motivation to break their cycle of homelessness.

RSHP's supported housing programme aims to get them out of this vicious circle. It has transformed the lives of countless people, establishing a reputation for excellence, quality of care and high standards of reporting.

It was inevitable; however, that success would generate increased levels of paperwork and reporting. In recent years, staff found these office-based demands increasingly distracted them from their primary role: providing the face-to-face

support their clients need to make the most of the local authority's services and their own talents and abilities.

Anyone working in the Supporting People environment will be familiar with this situation. When I talk to colleagues at other charities and organisations, we all agree about the biggest challenges we face:

- Monitoring work load and staff hours
 - Planning support
 - Risk assessment
 - Producing Supporting People returns and outcome forms
- and, underpinning it all, tracking our clients' progress.

Recognising that existing paper-based systems were holding back efforts to expand support, RSHP decided in 2007 to explore potential software solutions. The primary goal was to allow us to manage a growing caseload whilst reducing the burden of growing paperwork.

After a series of internal meetings, it became clear what the staff and charity wanted from a new application. Key features included:

- Coordinated management of client caseloads
- Streamlined client-support planning
- Detailed evidence of support delivery
- Improved outcomes measurement
- Simplified submissions and reduced administration
- Effective exchange of information with local authorities

Having identified the needs, it was now a case of identifying the software. There are, of course, many competing applications out there. We explored many of them and several were very good indeed.

After a review of the products and meetings with potential suppliers, assessing both them and their product, RSHP gladly chose to work with Oxford Computer Consultants and their Supporting People application, PSOCC.

PSOCC is designed specifically for the care and support environment; it is not an add-on to another package. It provided the key features we had specified and its flexible configuration meant OCC could adapt it to meet our ways of working.

READING

Single Homeless

PROJECT

HOW DID IT WORK?

When the project was first started, it was obvious there would be a number of challenges along the way. The implementation of PSOCC came after many months of collaborative work with OCC. PSOCC, after all, is a sophisticated application meeting a wide range of requirements.

For RSHP, the challenge was to understand what PSOCC can do. Turning to PSOCC required us to reconsider our own methods of working. The application moved us away from a reliance on paper to a computer-based model. The shift away from long-established methods was helped by OCC's long experience in producing social care software. They understood our business, smoothly configured the system to meet our specific requirements and helped us work our way through the challenges.

The transition was also helped by the evident benefits PSOCC provided:

1. THE SOFTWARE WAS EASY TO USE

PSOCC is a web-based application. There is no software to load, so no drain on the time and resources of RSHP's IT support. OCC even host the application on their servers; this meant no additional strain on our own over-stretched servers or the need to invest in new ones. Furthermore, because PSOCC is a "thin client", our existing computers had more than enough processing power and didn't need upgrading. All of which meant financial savings.

When it comes to day-to-day use, the interface is clear and intuitive. It looks and works like many of the applications with which all staff are already familiar. It can even be accessed away from the office, including through mobile broadband.

2. THE STAFF LIKED THE APPLICATION

There is always certain wariness when employees are asked to change established work patterns, but in this instance the

benefits of the application were obvious to the staff.

For years, they had struggled under the weight of increasing paperwork, complaining about how it reduced the amount of time they were spending with the people they most wanted to help. With the arrival of PSOCC came proof that their comments had been listened to and acted on.

Another key plus was evident when it came to staff training, a benefit that hadn't been anticipated when first embarking on the project. As we know, this is an industry with a high turnover of staff; training new employees is time-consuming and an ongoing drain on resources. New, often younger, staff, already more familiar with computer-based work rather than paper-based methods, are trained in their job roles and RSHP's processes by learning how to use PSOCC.

As a result, they become productive much quicker than used to be the case. All client information is readily available in a single place, rather than having to be dug out from numerous filing cabinets. It means new staff can get a rounded understanding of their clients and their needs more rapidly than ever before.

3. OCC'S KNOWLEDGE OF SUPPORTING PEOPLE

OCC have a long history of developing social care applications, which meant they genuinely understood our needs and working practices. It also meant the training they provided was well-targeted and appropriately delivered.

In PSOCC we have a product that is

continually updated, often in response to statutory changes. With OCC, we have an ongoing relationship and support from a supplier at the forefront of SP. Both factors help us continually develop the way we provide support and manage our business.

HOW IS LIFE BETTER?

As with all the best technological advances, it is now difficult to imagine how we coped in the days before PSOCC.

- All RSHP's information is now stored in one place. We have eliminated duplication and maximised the re-use of our information in PI Workbooks, CRF Returns and CLG Outcome Returns.
- Preparation and processing of CRFs and CLG Outcomes take seconds to generate, compared to the many days previously required. They are completely managed by the system so we don't need to keep records elsewhere.
- Tortuous statistical analysis, such as calculating weekly support hours delivered to individual clients, is now a thing of the past.
- Reports on our clients and business [such as ethnicity breakdown] are immediate and always up-to-date in time for meetings of the board and with our other sponsors.

For further information on this case study or details of OCC's LG Products and Services please contact:

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