Children’s Hospice South West: “saving time and money to reinvest in essential services”

Children’s Hospice South West (CHSW) (chsw.org.uk) supports children with life-limiting conditions and their families, from South Gloucestershire all the way to the Isles of Scilly. The charity’s three light, bright hospices – in Devon, Cornwall and Bristol – deliver emergency, palliative and end of life care, as well as respite care and short breaks in comfortable living spaces where whole families can relax and spend quality time together.

At the start of 2020 CHSW’s head of IT Matt Argyle was overseeing a digital transformation to enable efficiency improvements and service enhancements across the organisation.

“We were moving to the cloud and adopting software as a service (SaaS) and infrastructure as a service (IaaS) to enhance resilience, optimise security and manage IT spend,” he says. “But we serve a huge area with variable internet connectivity. We couldn’t procure what we needed from standard corporate networks.”

Finding a solution became urgent when managers had to redesign service delivery during the pandemic. More care had to be provided in the community and staff could no longer travel between sites easily for meetings. They needed to adapt quickly to remote working and tools like Teams and Zoom, but the existing infrastructure made it tricky.

The extra mile for an essential cause

At Jisc, we work with eligible non-profits as well as education organisations and Matt knew about us from his time working in higher education.

“I knew Jisc goes the extra mile to provide a good service and former colleagues said I should get in touch. Our organisation has some similarities to universities and colleges. We must have robust, secure connections for our clinical services and management operations and we need lots of bandwidth for families when they stay with us. Gaming, streaming and social media are all essential for young people who can’t meet friends face to face.”

Matt Argyle, head of IT

Jisc began working with CHSW in autumn 2020. We helped to scope out their requirements, plan the project and get other linked tasks, such as the cloud migration, aligned. The charity’s three connections to the Janet Network went live on schedule in September.
2021, despite super-strict pandemic shielding protocols at the hospice sites.

Matt says they found a neat way to keep things on track:

“The server cabinets are in the centres so I was the only one who could access them. I did the work on site, with a network engineer talking me through it from Jisc. It went smoothly, then our third-party provider sorted out the routing overnight and everything went live right on cue the next morning.”

CHSW now has three high availability 100 Mb connections on a gigabit backbone and this enables ‘bursting’. It scales fast to accommodate peaks in demand, for example when there is heavy demand for streaming services, without causing the hospices to overtop their limit. This ability to flex is important because although each centre usually looks after six or seven children at any one time, demand for bandwidth can skyrocket when large families arrive to spend time together. Now, there is none of the ‘lag’ that sometimes previously afflicted streaming.

An added bonus for the families, says Matt, is the Janet Network’s direct peerings to hundreds of content providers, including Netflix, the BBC and Facebook.

CHSW has also delegated responsibility for router maintenance, upgrades and fault monitoring to us, using our managed router service (jisc.ac.uk/managed-router-service). It is freeing up the in-house IT team to focus on other tasks and on supporting new ways of working that are enabled by the enhanced digital infrastructure.

Efficiency improvements

Like every organisation that’s funded by voluntary donations CHSW feels a huge responsibility to spend money well. Its digital transformation is making it possible to save time and money that is being reinvested in essential services.

Staff have migrated to Office 365 and use Teams for meetings so they don’t have to drive around the huge region to get together in person, enabling huge savings. They’re also finding they can recruit from a wider talent pool. With reliable, responsive connectivity the days of needing to recruit a local person to fundraise in an area are gone.

“I knew that Jisc offers a great service and we haven’t been disappointed,” says Matt. “Together, we’ve done a huge amount of work to transform CHSW’s IT during a very difficult period and it’s good to know we can always get ongoing advice and practical support from Jisc, even though we haven’t needed it yet.”

To find out how Jisc can support your organisation please contact:

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