Centrepoint
Creating better futures for homeless young people

Through a collaborative Managed Services contract, Cutter Group is helping the charity Centrepoint to provide a lifeline for homeless young people in the UK. Cutter maintains, supports and modernises the IT systems that Centrepoint's employees depend upon to guide some of the most vulnerable people in society back into education, training and employment.

Challenges Faced

Technology plays a critical role in helping Centrepoint to respond to the needs of young people who are homeless, alone and in crisis. It underpins everything the charity does, from its national helpline, to providing services that enable young people to secure a job and a home, to fundraising to deliver its crucial services. Yet, staff confidence in IT was at an all-time low. In a survey of employees, IT scored an average of just three out of ten, and almost all of the in-house IT team's time was spent responding to problems.

A new approach was imperative. The charity therefore developed a far-sighted IT strategy centred on the desire to give employees easier access to the applications and data they need, at any time, using any device. It appointed Cutter to help it deliver this strategy, improve the reliability of its core IT platform and completely transform users' experiences.

Cutter made all the difference by:

✓ Treating users as individuals and taking the time to understand their IT frustrations

✓ Introducing IT change in a well managed and phased way to avoid business disruption

✓ Providing a friendly IT helpdesk service with fast responses and 100% achievement of service SLAs

✓ Responding quickly to help the charity maintain its vital services throughout the COVID-19 pandemic

Services Provided

The first priority for Cutter was to make the organisation's existing IT systems more stable and usable for 1,000 members of staff, working across over 45 service areas. It helped Centrepoint to specify and source the most suitable cloud platform and upgrade the charity's network connectivity between sites. At the same time, Cutter resolved pressing issues with the charity's existing systems to improve their reliability and make it easier for employees to deliver life-changing services for young people.

Next, Cutter began modernising Centrepoint's existing IT hardware and software, as cost effectively as possible, to replace aging equipment and give staff the new applications they needed. The Cutter solution architects used questionnaire responses from employees and young people to identify the biggest IT concerns and to prioritise IT spending. All of the IT improvements were delivered by Cutter in a phased and well managed way, to minimise any disruption to the day-to-day operation of the charity and avoid overwhelming users.

Through this incremental process of modernisation, Cutter upgraded the charity's legacy email system and enhanced its integration with Microsoft Office 365, allowing new collaboration tools to be introduced. Cutter also worked in close collaboration with the IT team and designated 'data champions' at Centrepoint to help restructure the file storage and create a hierarchy of data access permissions. This data reorganisation touched all service areas within the charity, improving data access, while ensuring data confidentiality.

Significantly, Cutter created a virtualised desktop infrastructure using Citrix Virtual Apps and Desktops, delivering flexible remote access to applications for staff, as well as hundreds of young people living in the charity's temporary accommodation. This project not only delivered on the charity's IT strategy, but also gave young people improved, secure access to IT services, helping them to feel less isolated and enabling them to access online training and education.

From day one, Cutter provided an IT Support Desk service, giving all IT users a single point of contact for IT issues, from 8am to 8pm, 7 days a week. Cutter took the time to understand the business and how people worked, so that it could relate to users' IT frustrations and their needs. Treating each user as an individual, not a ticket number, helped Cutter to improve the perception of IT support within Centrepoint.

On a regular basis, Cutter proactively reviews support tickets to identify ways to make improvements for users. For example, after receiving a high number of calls regarding forgotten passwords, Cutter implemented a secure self-service portal for resetting passwords. This solution led to an immediate reduction in the number of calls to the IT Support Desk and meant staff could get back into their applications more quickly.

According to Robert Cade, Centrepoint's Director of Strategy and Performance, Centrepoint has developed a "trusted partnership" with Cutter over the last three years. He says, "Cutter provides the technical support and IT architecture we need to deliver the best possible outcomes for homeless young people. It understands what we need as a charity and works with us in a very flexible way to help us achieve our goals."

- 1,000 members of staff
- 45 service areas
- Microsoft Office 365 integration
- Citrix Virtual Apps & Desktop
- Remote access
- Calls to support down by 23%
- IT fault calls reduced by 72%
- 100% support issues resolved within SLA

Results Achieved

Through its collaborative partnership with Cutter, Centrepoint now benefits from:

More time to support homeless young people
Employees at Centrepoint now save a significant amount of time as a result of improved application availability, faster resolution of IT issues and new IT capabilities such as single sign-on. Consequently, they have more time available to work with vulnerable young people. "We no longer need to worry about technology on a daily basis, which means we can instead focus on meeting the needs of homeless young people and delivering services to help them have a better future," Cade says.

Service continuity during COVID-19
When the first national lockdown was announced, Cutter was able to accelerate the planned delivery of Microsoft Teams and support staff in using this application from home. The charity was able to keep all of its services open whilst keeping staff and young people safe. "The new IT platform enabled members of staff to work from home throughout the pandemic, with no interruption to usual business activities whatsoever," reports Andy Sefton, Head of Technology at Centrepoint.

Reliable IT infrastructure and systems
Since Cutter took over the management of Centrepoint's IT environment, the overall reliability of the IT infrastructure and systems has improved dramatically. Calls to the IT Support Desk have reduced by 23% per month over the last three years. Furthermore, calls relating to IT faults have fallen by 72% in the same period, and a large proportion of calls today relate to requests for new functionality. "I get emails at least once a week from colleagues, telling me that our IT is awesome!" Sefton says.

Rapid, friendly responses to IT issues
Cutter consistently responds to user requests for help very promptly, which has transformed users' perceptions of IT services. In the last year, the average response time was just 19 minutes, and 100% of issues were resolved within the Service Level Agreement. "I'm used to working in organisations where everyone moans about IT support," muses Cade. "At Centrepoint, members of staff are unanimously pleased with the friendly and professional support they receive from Cutter."

Well managed programmes of IT change
Through the introduction of several new IT solutions, Cutter has demonstrated its ability to not only deliver new technology, but also support users through what can be a daunting period of change. According to Sefton, "Cutter possesses the right blend of technical knowledge and the soft skills necessary to make change happen. The Cutter team brings our staff with them on the IT change journey."

Cost effective IT investments
Cutter is very aware of Centrepoint's status as a charity and works hard to ensure that its client gets the best value from IT investments. It also helps the organisation to access non-profit licensing deals that save money. "Cutter can be relied on to recommend cost effective ways of doing things," Cade says. "They understand that every penny we save on IT is a penny that can be spent directly on a young person."

New digital services that improve lives
Centrepoint now has the reliable, stable platform that it needs to deliver more digital services, such as online mental health awareness counselling and online training. "With Cutter's support, we have reached a point of maturity with our IT where we can deliver exciting new digital services to help improve health, education, training and employment opportunities for young people," Sefton says.

www.cuttergrp.com   +44 20 8133 8180