



The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

Final Copy of Case Study

LOCATION:
New York, NY, US

ORGANIZATION:
The Aimar Foundation

YEAR:
2011

ORGANIZATION URL:
<http://www.aimarfoundation.org/>

STATUS:
Laureate

PROJECT NAME:
Crisis at Christmas

CATEGORY:
Human Services

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Crisis is a UK charity focused on providing support and assistance to single homeless people, dedicated to ending homelessness by delivering life-changing services and campaigning for change. Their innovative education, employment, housing and well-being services address individual needs and help people to transform their lives. For the past 39 years, the Crisis at Christmas (CFC) project has offered Christmas Centres across London from 23-30 December that offer vital companionship, hot meals and warmth, and a wide range of essential services that homeless people often miss out on. The Aimar Foundation is a UK charitable organisation entirely composed of volunteers who specialise in providing state of the art technology solutions to other charities. For the past three years the Aimar Foundation has provided all the technology to support the CFC project. Last year the Foundation installed over 200 thin client devices, 90 VoIP phones and the required internet & networking infrastructure in nine locations across Greater London. The environment was operated 24/7 with a 24 hour support model for the entire Crisis at Christmas period. In each of the locations, the Aimar Foundation configured three solutions in each location; tech to support the one-to-one counselling programme between Crisis Volunteers and guests, technology to support Crisis staff ability to deliver the overall programme during the period, 24x7 internet cafés to enable the Crisis guests (the homeless in London) to learn about looking for jobs, build basic tech skills, access self help tools and connect with loved ones. The core tech offering utilised a Citrix hosted desktop provided by Intercept-IT, thin client devices loaned to the Aimar Foundation from iGel, keyboards, monitors and peripherals loaned to the Aimar Foundation by SCC, internet connectivity & VoIP solution provided by SNS Networks and Level 1 support provided by Intercept-IT, with the Foundation volunteers providing deeper technical coverage. Configuration, installation and decommission provided by Aimar Foundation volunteers. The greatest tech challenge associated with supporting the CFC project is the last minute knowledge of detailed requirements and time constraints of imp/deco, as the associated locations are donated to Crisis for the required period, often at short notice, meaning

that the Foundation will not know the specifics of a site until weeks before deployment. To mitigate this challenge the Foundation has designed a 3G network solution for locations where the lead times are insufficient to work with local telecoms carriers to provide site specific connectivity. Due to the short lead time in the locations, the Foundation only has a short number of days to provide a tested & fully working environment in each location. The core technical team involved in architecting/planning the solution are available for tier 3 support calls throughout the Christmas period, especially in the initial production period prior to Christmas when the majority of issues are expected.

SOCIETAL BENEFITS

This project is uniquely positioned to help the UK's most needy citizens, the homeless, by providing them with facilities to assist them with integrating back into mainstream society. The learning/communication opportunities that Aimar/Crisis provide are key to giving disadvantaged individuals the means to work their way out of homelessness.

PREVIOUS PROJECT UPDATED/EXPANDED?

The Crisis At Christmas project has not been nominated for the Computerworld Awards before. This is an annual project and has taken place each Christmas holiday season during 2008, 2009 & 2010. The key phases involve, planning for rollout of a computing/voice network to nine temporary locations, the implementation (physical assembly) of this network, followed by operation and decommission. The implementation/operation/decommission of this project all take place in non-IT-prepared disused buildings and all within the short timeframes, providing significant challenges in terms of staging a fully functioning IT infrastructure. All work is undertaken by volunteer IT professionals, who come from a wide range of technology/business organisations.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION COMPLETE?

Yes

PROJECT BENEFIT EXAMPLE

This project has benefited countless individuals, who turned to Crisis for food/shelter over the Christmas season, by giving them the opportunity to undertake training new computer based skills (lead by Aimar volunteers), put together resume materials and contact loved ones – all using the network and computing provided in the Crisis temporary hostel locations by the Aimar Foundation and it's volunteers. "The logistics of operating Crisis at Christmas Centres in nine different locations around London, working with up to 8,000 volunteers would be impossible without the IT hardware and practical support the Aimar Foundation gives us. It is crucial support that enables Crisis to work smoothly across this multisite 24 hour operation over Christmas. " Making contact with friends and family is hard to do when you are homeless, the provision of excellent computer facilities in all of our Crisis at Christmas Centres means that some 3,000 homeless and vulnerable people can start to make these c The benefits to our guests are immeasurable, we know that hundreds of people spend hundreds of hours in the computer rooms making connections that will help them turn their lives around. " - Gillian Enlund, Spokesperson, Crisis

IS THIS PROJECT AN INNOVATION, BEST PRACTICE? Yes



ADDITIONAL PROJECT INFORMATION

All IT professionals who work on this project do so on a purely voluntary basis – volunteers come from a broad range of companies, including Siemens, Specialist Computer Corporation (SCC), iGel, Intercept-IT, Morgan Stanley and SNS Networks. Compute infrastructure donations came from iGel, Siemens and SNS Networks. " Making contact with friends and family is hard to do when you are homeless, the provision of excellent computer facilities in all of our Crisis at Christmas Centres means that some 3,000 homeless and vulnerable people can start to make these connections. These are vital facilities that also allow guests to start looking for work, accommodation and advice." - Gillian Enlund, Spokesperson, Crisis Both Crisis and the Aimar Foundation are registered charities (not for profit organisations) in the UK.