Case Study

nonprofit

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Children's Friend and Family Services

mindSHIFT Elevates IT Infrastructure and Support for Northeast Nonprofit That Serves Children and Families

"While not new to cloud computing, mindSHIFT solved a lot of our problems from day one."

– Anthony Castiglione
IT Director
Children's Friend and
Family Services
Salem, Massachusetts

Children's Friend and Family Services

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ABOUT THE CUSTOMER

It's a typical scenario for a small- to medium-sized nonprofit agency. Resources are limited— and the lion's share of funds needs to be devoted to advancing the primary mission at hand. For Children's Friend and Family Services with four offices in Massachusetts, their mission is working with people who span the socio-economic scope to help them improve their lives and their families.

While the agency has been in existence for 175 years, its role has evolved over time. Today, the primary function of this nonprofit is serving children with behavioral health issues. These services address common and complex family problems in its communities, ranging from children's mental health services and youth mentoring to teen parenting and juvenile court services.

Just as common for nonprofits of this size, they had a classic on-premises IT infrastructure in place for years with a small local IT provider managing the systems and day-to-day service.

But as its workforce grew and technology increased in complexity, so did the agency's IT problems. Seeking more than reactive solutions, Children's Friend and Family Services wanted a new partner to take over day-to-day support and management of the agency's technology infrastructure. The goal—to keep its 200 geographically dispersed employees connected, collaborating and most importantly, caring for the children in the communities they serve.

CHALLENGE

- Establish a trusted working relationship with our IT provider
- Aging desktop environment and network architecture
- Secure access to state records, HIPAA compliance
- Seamless data access for geographically dispersed workforce
- Ensure business continuity in case of disaster

SOLUTION

- mindSHIFT hosted virtual desktop solution
- Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS)
- Sensitive information encrypted, secured behind firewall
- mindSHIFT systems and resources for effective disaster recovery services
- mindSHIFT 24/7 support

RESULTS

- Vastly improved network performance
- Reduced calls for helpdesk support
- World-class IT at an affordable cost
- Replicable model for small- and mid-sized nonprofits

CHALLENGE

In 2011, Children's Friend and Family Services migrated from an on-premises IT infrastructure to a hosted environment managed by its local IT partner. At the time, the agency wasn't quite ready to make a full leap into the cloud. The computer hardware was moved to its IT provider's data center in Massachusetts where the files and network servers were run at that location.

But this architecture didn't effectively serve their needs. The agency's aging desktop environment and network architecture wasn't robust enough to handle the expanding needs of the nonprofit. Workers' desktops and laptops were slow. There was excessive downtime and many calls for service. Overall, the local IT provider didn't demonstrate the commitment, foresight and technological effectiveness to improve the nonprofit's information services and migrate Children's Friend and Family Services to a reliable, stable hosted cloud environment that would resolve these issues.

Further complicating the situation, most of the agency's clients were Medicaid recipients referred from state agencies that required shared information meet HIPAA privacy and security standards. As a result, the agency's workers needed secure access to client data stored on electronic data systems that might need to be accessed in the field.

"We also had a hosted electronic medical records (EMR) service, so our clients' medical records were in a different hosted environment, which created another layer of technical complexity," said Anthony Castiglione, IT Director for Children's Friend and Family Services.

The agency's workforce was also growing in numbers. And these workers aren't in the technology business. They're counseling real people, with real problems, who need therapeutic support to meet the challenges they face.

"Our employees don't want to be mired in system response issues because it takes them away from engaging with clients," said Castiglione.

Then, of course, the agency must comply with HIPAA privacy regulations since its workers are accessing patient medical records. This information needs to be secure at all times and only available to the caseworker working with each client.

"For HIPAA purposes, we have to eliminate the possibility of caseworkers other than the assigned employee gaining inappropriate access to a client's private information," said Castiglione.

Realizing that it needed an IT services provider who could be an effective partner in supporting their mission, the agency issued an RFP to find that organization. They wanted a partner that could take their technology, information security and the overall relationship to the next level.

SOLUTION

One responder to their RFP stood out. mindSHIFT, a Ricoh company, responded with a clear message. It was time for the agency to move to a hosted virtual desktop infrastructure. In other words, the cloud.

mindSHIFT's technical expertise and responsiveness proved to the agency it had found the right partner—and delivered a comfort level in moving to the cloud. mindSHIFT also demonstrated its familiarity with nonprofit organizations' business processes, having delivered successful outcomes in past engagements that made nonprofit employees more productive. Once awarded the RFP, mindSHIFT got down to business transitioning the agency's entire IT environment from an old data center and end-of-life systems to a highly available infrastructure.

First up was closing down the agency's server room and connecting the end users to mindSHIFT's data center. Rather than storing data on an individual desktop computer, the desktop operating system and data were transitioned to a server in mindSHIFT's data center. Agency workers simply log into their Internet-connected computer with a personal ID and password —anytime, anywhere—to connect to the server and use their desktop.

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Whether an employee is working on premises or in the field, the data and files remain on the secured server—no data is stored on the device. If one of the agency's workers loses their laptop, sensitive patient information cannot be retrieved from the device.

"Everything we do is encrypted and handled behind a firewall. No one works with sensitive client information locally," said Castiglione. "They're keyboarding and seeing information on screen that's being managed in a secured data center."

mindSHIFT also tightly managed the process of transitioning to the new hosted virtual environment while taking a management approach that was much more supportive and informed than the previous provider. For instance, integrating the EMR system—essentially a virtual environment within another virtual environment—brings more complexity to printing and scanning applications. mindSHIFT provided a level of transparency throughout the process, enabling the agency to view all the steps being taken through an online customer support portal.

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Not only did mindSHIFT completely reorient the agency's IT environment, it also delivered much-needed reliable, knowledgeable support for the growing agency. mindSHIFT provides 24/7 support for all of the agency's employees—fielding support requests, addressing any issues that arise and connecting new users to the infrastructure.

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RESULTS

The new cloud-based hosted environment at Children's Friend and Family Services has been up and running since 2015. Overall, network performance has been vastly improved from the previous aging infrastructure and hybrid hosted and on-premises solution.

With its new IT environment running smoothly, the agency has logged far fewer support calls from its employees compared to its previous solution. If a problem does arise, the information is funneled through mindSHIFT and resolved quickly.

Additionally, the agency's data is accessible and highly secured, which is particularly important for HIPAA compliance. Agency employees have ready access to the data they need to serve children and families throughout Massachusetts.

"If one of our locations has an issue, all we'd have to do is have staff gain internet access just about anywhere and they would be back up and running quickly," said Castiglione. "It's not like the old days when we we're hosting our own infrastructure. That redundancy is built into our basic service."

Affordable, World-class IT

Castiglione believes their hosted IT environment is a replicable model that other small- and medium-sized nonprofits could follow. Typical nonprofit operating budgets cannot support on-staff IT expertise to create a seamless environment—plus enable disaster recovery, accommodate a remote workforce and securely house information firewalls to meet HIPAA regulations.

"With mindSHIFT, we're able to leverage expertise that you couldn't buy or staff economically within an organization like ours," said Castiglione. "This solution is perfect for a nonprofit organization."

ABOUT mindSHIFT

mindSHIFT, a Ricoh company, is one of the largest IT outsourcing and cloud services providers, serving small and mid-size businesses for more than 16 years. At mindSHIFT, we're about keeping your IT systems up and running, providing personal attention and making you more productive. We're big enough to offer the facilities, services and expertise you expect, but small enough to provide the support and attention you demand. Learn more at www.mindSHIFT.com.

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