

Nonprofits are harnessing tech, data to improve social impact

by Sara Janak

Nonprofits are embracing technology and harnessing data to increase operational efficiency and help accomplish their mission.

Project Harmony, an organization aiming to end child abuse and neglect, developed an online platform improving the way it manages forensic interviews.

“For the longest time, we had a closed circuit recording system where the interviews would be stored on DVDs and all of our partner agencies, who are privileged to that information

by state statute, would receive copies as needed to review those interviews for the investigative process,” said Patrick Falke, Project Harmony senior director of operations.

In 2011, Falke worked with graduate students at UNO to develop a prototype to replace that system, called VIDS, or video interview distribution system, “which essentially takes those interviews, puts them on a web-based platform that people from other agencies can sign into and access those interviews without

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needing an actual physical DVD.”

Project Harmony is working with Seattle-based Giving Tech Labs to refine the platform and re-launch it as VidaNyx. “They have completely rebuilt the site with state-of-the-art technology and state-of-art security parameters,” Falke said.

Giving Tech Labs plans to have about 30 child advocacy centers across the country beta test the product. The hope is to eventually release it to market at a low cost, making it accessible to all child advocacy centers, Falke said.

About two years ago, the organization upgraded its client management system to Efforts to Outcomes, Falke said. The system “increases our ability to track cases,” he said, and “move towards more of an outcome-focused dataset rather than an output-focused dataset, which is really important for providing our long-term value to the community.”

Organizations are also adopting a variety of cloud-based solutions to increase mobility, streamline operations and cut costs associated with maintaining server infrastructure.

Habitat for Humanity of Omaha uses construction project management software from Buildertrend to help reach its goal of



Falke

building 42 homes and completing about 100 home repair projects per year, said Ken Mar, chief operations officer at Habitat for Humanity of Omaha.

“We just pay a monthly subscription, and we don’t have to invest in those huge servers,” he said.

Team members aren’t tied to a desktop or even a laptop and can access the software through a mobile app from any location. Users can complete several project management tasks, such as ordering materials and scheduling contractors.

“In the old days, before Buildertrend, everything was either by text, by a phone call or a face-to-face meeting,” Mar said.

Nonprofits, which often have tight budgets, can sometimes be slow to adopt the latest technology.

“Like everyone, but in particular for nonprofit organizations, we have limited resources and the resources that we do have, to be good stewards of those resources, we primarily want to direct those to the clients that we serve and help,” said Greg Ryan, chief strategy officer at Heartland Family Service.

Despite lagging a bit when it comes to adoption, organizations have found ways to leverage technology and data to maximize resources and monitor the performance of programs and services.

Heartland Family Service recently implemented a new electronic health record, Ryan said.

“With this implementation, all of our programs now enter that client data into one system,” he said. “That has enabled us to get a better understanding and picture of the clients that we serve and how we’re serving them.”

The organization also has a data analytics and reporting project in the works that will include dashboards for program managers and their staff “so they can get some insights into all this data that we’re collecting through the electronic health record,” Ryan said.