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Managing 50% expansion year on year would be a challenge for any organisation. But for a homelessness charity with more than 800 individuals relying on its services, getting growth right is more critical than for most. Effective systems are essential. Without them, there might be no overall picture of how the business as a whole is working and no means of monitoring its effect on individuals' lives.

Until recently, The Cyrenians, based in Tyneside, used an unconnected range of databases. It was difficult to produce reports, such as those for Supporting People and CORE, and to ensure people entered data correctly. A single system was needed to see them through the expansion and beyond.

The Cyrenians offers three main service phases to individuals: emergency intervention for individuals in crisis situations, such as rough sleeping and substance misuse; stabilisation services for those who are on the road to independence; and progression services for those who are almost ready to support themselves. The ideal system would record work with individuals through all three key stages.

Having considered several alternative client recording systems, The Cyrenians commissioned Homeless Link's In-Form. A new system built on the Force.com platform, In-Form offered the benefit of being managed through a well-established system, but with enough flexibility that The Cyrenians could see the system developed as they wanted it.

Some services migrated to the system in October 2010, and records have now been created for the majority of their clients. All staff will be online by Christmas 2010.

John Falkland, Performance Manager at The Cyrenians, says: “The pilot is going extremely well. We’re getting plenty of good feedback from staff, as well as ideas for future developments. Floating Support staff are particularly impressed and a big residential service is about to come into the pilot, so we’re all keen to see how they get on.”

Any major system roll out presents challenges. So far, most issues can be addressed in further training to help integrate the system with existing practices. For instance, staff need to be sure that a manager will check forms submitted for sign-off and respond quickly. Similarly, some staff prefer not to use a computer while talking to clients, so there is a need to ensure that no detail is missed when notes are taken manually.

“It’s very adaptable and intuitive,” says John. “It pulls everything together - support plans, Supporting People forms, Outcomes Star. Our needs assessment form was added quickly. It has made my job much easier.”

Over the coming months, The Cyrenians plans to explore the functionality further. More training for managers and full roll out should trigger the use of bedspace monitoring, multi-actions, client alerts and statistical functionality, all of which are already available within the system.

Ultimately, In-Form will follow clients’ journeys through all stages of their involvement with The Cyrenians, making it just one of many essential tools used by the charity in their holistic approach to support their vulnerable client base.