



Claranet partners with leading UK children’s charity to support its outreach efforts

Action for Children

For more than 140 years, Action for Children has been helping disadvantaged children and young adults through a number of innovative services and initiatives. In total, the charity works with around 300,000 children, young people and carers to tackle serious issues like child neglect and abuse. The charity is run out of six core offices that co-ordinate and support approximately 600 services, offering support and care across the UK. These services include adoption and fostering, family support, helping children with disabilities and specialist schools. The ability to access information securely online is essential in the provision of these services.

Services taken:

- Managed Networks and MPLS
- Internet Connectivity
- Colocation
- Web Security



The challenge

At any one time, approximately 500 sites up and down the UK sit on Action for Children’s central network, through which the charity coordinates its various initiatives from head office and centrally provides access to children’s databases, files, office and corporate systems. Their old network, which had developed and grown organically over time, was becoming slow, inefficient, costly to maintain, while lacking the flexibility that the charity needed to function effectively.

Alan Crawford, CIO at Action for Children, explained: “As a charity, we owe it to our supporters to ensure that we are maximising our time, expenditure and resources. So when we assessed our network costs, in relation to the service we were receiving, it became clear that the issue needed to be addressed. Downtime was becoming a real issue, and as we don’t have the financial capacity to employ IT technicians to each remote site, we needed centralised management and support from our provider.

“Our network is something of a movable beast. Although the base number of sites connected to the network sits at around 500, we tend to experience a churn rate of approximately 20 per cent per annum; many of our initiatives are conducted on a project basis and when one project finishes, another will start in a different part of the country. This had severe implications for our network, which wasn’t flexible enough to cope with near-constant change,” he continued.

Security was another key consideration for the charity. With children accessing the internet via their network, Action for Children needed an efficient way to control which pages were accessible, and which ones were not, to guarantee the children’s safety. Rather than managing this on each device, the charity wanted to control these settings with a network-wide firewall.



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By any measure, our network requirements are incredibly complicated. Moving so many sites to a new network had huge scope for disruption, which was something we were acutely aware of when selecting a new provider. Claranet's infrastructure fitted the bill, but they also demonstrated a willingness to go the extra mile to help us meet our requirements."

Alan Crawford, CIO at Action for Children

The solution

After a thorough evaluation of the market, and a competitive tender, Action for Children chose Claranet to implement and manage its new network. As part of the solution, Claranet worked with Action for Children to migrate their 500 sites to its own core MPLS network and, with project management support, the process was quick with minimal disruption.

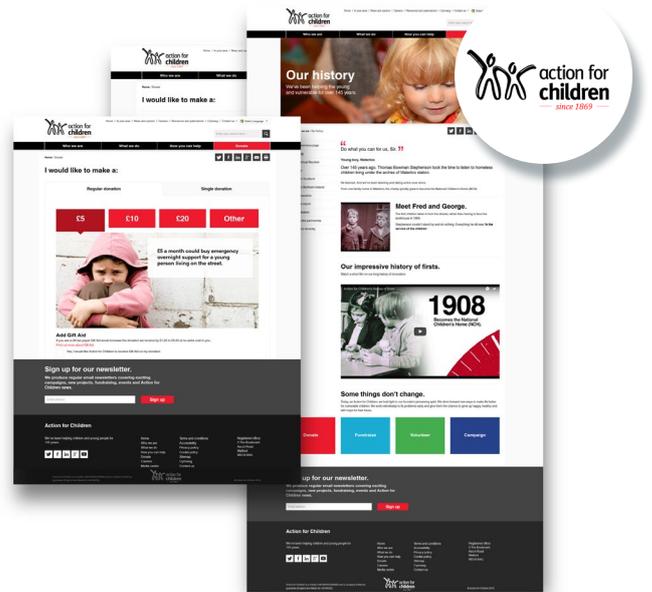
One of the key requirements of the solution was to find a fast and efficient way to commission and decommission sites on the network, as this had proved a real headache with the incumbent supplier. With this in mind, Claranet developed a bespoke, automated process, designed to fast-track these changes to network and remove the burden of management from Action for Children.

By using Claranet's private WAN, Claranet manages the firewall settings from the servers to ensure safety and security is maintained. This means Action for Children doesn't have to change any settings per device as the settings are installed at the network level. As Claranet manages all firewalls centrally, it removes the burden from site staff, and provides the charity peace of mind that all devices are protected.

The results

By outsourcing their network requirements to Claranet, Action for Children has seen significant time and cost savings, as well as improvements to network efficiency and IT support. With improved network connectivity, it has freed up its staff and volunteers so that they can focus on their primary roles – helping to care for and support children and young adults.

Alan explains: "We have been in constant contact with Claranet through the design, build, support and evolve phases, and we couldn't be happier with their proactive approach. From day one, Claranet has delivered outstanding customer service. The network had to overcome a number of challenges, for example providing connectivity to all of our off-site locations, and these were understood from the start. We needed a Wide-Area Network that felt like we were using a Local-Area Network in terms of speed, efficiency and connectivity. Claranet listened to our requirements and provided us with a tailored solution to suit our needs.



"Migrating 500 sites on to a new network was a big undertaking, with a great deal of potential for things to go wrong, but the transition has been incredibly smooth. This no doubt owes much to Claranet's strong project management skills and intricate planning. Claranet often advise us on how to get the most out of our network, and, as a result, we have been able to increase our productivity," he continued.

As Claranet is big enough to drive supplier cost down, and small enough to build personal relationships, they understand each client's individual requirements to offer bespoke solutions. The partnership between Action for Children and Claranet is strong.

Alan concluded: "The relationship we have with Claranet owes much to their service. Whenever we've got a problem, or need to speak to someone, we are able to jump on the phone and speak to a solution expert who knows us, and knows what we are talking about immediately. As a result, any issues are resolved much more quickly. We're really looking forward to the future with Claranet."

For more information about Claranet's services, and the benefits these deliver, go to: www.claranet.co.uk