

A large orange semi-circle graphic on the left side of the page, with a vertical lime green line extending downwards from its bottom center. Three horizontal lines (orange, cyan, and lime green) extend from the left edge of the semi-circle.

Case Study
Action
for Children

Helping young people break through injustice, deprivation and inequality; How Microsoft Enterprise Project Management has helped Action for Children focus more effectively on the projects that matter.

Action for Children has been working with the UK's most vulnerable children and young people since 1869. Originally called the National Children's Home after the first children's home that was opened in London by the founder, The Revd Dr Thomas Bowman, the charity now runs nearly 450 projects helping over 170,000 children, young people and their families.

The charity has grown to the organisation it is today, working across the UK to provide services that help children and young people achieve their full potential. Employing nearly 7,000 staff and a similar number of voluntary workers, the charity operates nine management support offices covering the whole of the UK with a central office in north London.

In 2006, Action for Children undertook a comprehensive review of its position in a challenging child care sector. In spite of a successful 140 year history, the charity still felt there were areas in which it needed to modernise as an organisation in order to best meet the requirements of purchasers and of the children in need.

In response to the review and the 'mixed economy' of child care provision that saw statutory and non-statutory responsibilities for the provision of services for vulnerable children being shared more widely amongst local, education and health authorities, Action for Children embarked on an ambitious programme of transformational change.



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This extensive programme of work included organisational restructuring, replacing large corporate information systems, improving and enhancing the IS infrastructure, reviewing the use of office accommodation, moving the corporate headquarters and the support functions, rebranding the charity, launching an advertising campaign and developing and deploying new ways of working to enable the workforce to be more agile and efficient.

Due to the amount of change planned by the organisation, a Programme Office with a Project and Programme Support Office within it was established. The Programme Office now employs approximately 25 staff directly and supports a further collection of employees who have project roles.

It was in this office that the Microsoft Enterprise Project Management (EPM) solution was deployed to support the planning and management of projects in a strategic and comprehensive way. Action for Children had no relevant IT based systems prior to implementing EPM. A number of individuals were using Microsoft Project, but not in an integrated manner.

The objectives of the EPM implementation were to provide the framework and the tools for effective, collaborative planning and also to monitor and manage projects within the complex programme environment.

Chris Spragg, Head of Programme Management explains that the solution choice came after:

'A number of market leading project management technologies were reviewed and the Programme team concluded that compared with the other established products, the Microsoft EPM offered the best balance between price and functionality.'

To help with the roll out of the new tool set, an implementation partner was chosen to assist Action for Children. Chris Spragg justifies the final selection;

'Corporate Project Solutions had a proven record working with other charities and we were able to speak to their previous clients to gain an insight into the process. We decided CPS was the best choice of implementation partner as a result of their extensive experience and expertise.'

The initial implementation was quite small, involving two Project Managers, one Project Planner, one Project Support Officer, one Programme Office Manager and one Programme Manager. Work started towards the implementation in April 2007 with an Envisioning workshop led and facilitated by CPS. A series of workshops with CPS staff helped Action for Children clarify their requirements and consider the appropriate configuration for the implementation.

Adrian Shaw, a Managing Consultant at CPS explains;

'In 2007, Action for Children had a requirement to implement the EPM tool set to support their recently developed project lifecycle. CPS provided a configured Microsoft EPM Solution based upon an evolved standard, which had been developed to provide for best practices over many previous implementations. The adoption of the toolset brought together all of the Action for Children's IS plans into a central repository enabling organisation wide access and visibility of plans and associated project related data.'

The Microsoft products that were installed and configured included Project Professional, Project Server, Project Web Access, Windows Share Point Services, Microsoft SQL Server 2000 and Windows 2003 Server. The system 'went live' in September 2007 with staff being able to start entering data into the EPM system. By December 2007 the Programme Office was able to start generating Programme level reports from the EPM system.

Shaw expands;

'Reporting capabilities were enhanced by bespoke development of a Highlight Report, designed specifically to Action for Children's requirements, whereby plan and other key data (e.g risk, issues) are brought together to populate a pre-formatted MS Word template.'

Once the EPM system was up and running, Action for Children began to see the benefits of the solution. The standardisation of all project documentation and management processes has meant that there is now a benchmark in place to ensure that all projects are planned and administered consistently. The sharing of best practice now guarantees quality, whilst the aggregation of data and the ability to report on individual projects and on the overall programme has proved to be invaluable. Action for Children now has complete visibility of all work that is planned or in progress and can accurately assess risks and issues across the whole programme.

Since the middle of 2008, the Enterprise Project Management Solution has been rolled out more widely and now provides support to:

- 1 Head of Programme Management
- 1 Programme Office Manager
- 10+ Project Managers
- 5 Programme Managers
- 3 Project Support Officers
- 2 Project Planners
- Approx 30 Project Team Members

Commenting on the implementation, Chris Spragg explains that;

'Although we didn't fully appreciate the amount of time and effort it would take to fully integrate the system, we are now fully realising the benefits and recognising the value. CPS proved to be very helpful in terms of the initial configuration and when helping us to resolve teething problems. We are currently discussing with CPS the possibilities of extending the use of the system by reconfiguring it to enable resource management and time capture.'

As the child care sector continues to evolve, it is the hard work of charities like Action for Children that will make a tangible difference, to many vulnerable children and young people across the UK. The Microsoft Enterprise Project Management solution has provided a framework and toolset that has helped the charity drive efficiency and improve visibility through comprehensive programme management allowing staff to focus more effectively on the projects that matter:

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