



City council improves social inclusion of vulnerable children with BlackBerry solution

Situated on the northeast coast of England, Sunderland has a population of just under 300,000. Sunderland City Council, which is responsible for providing public services to the city's communities, has a strong commitment to using digital technologies to promote social inclusion, community cohesion and improve the quality of life for all the residents.

In 2007 the UK government's Department for Communities and Local Government organised a Digital Challenge competition, which saw cities, towns and regions outline their visions for a digitally enabled society, designed to better meet the needs of local communities and citizens. Sunderland City Council won the Challenge and was awarded £3 million to deliver its plans. To read more about the competition please go to www.sunderland.gov.uk/digitalchallenge

The Challenge

Sunderland's Digital Challenge entry was comprised of nearly 20 projects aimed at bridging the social and digital divide affecting many of the city's residents. One of the schemes involved using mobile devices to provide a safety net to families with highly dependent children, who suffer from a variety of conditions that prevent them from knowing where they are or finding their way around. Raising highly dependent children can be very stressful for both the child and the parents. Everyday activities like going to school or the playing field suddenly become fraught with anxiety, and parents often have to reduce their social and professional activities to become stay-at-home carers.

Upon winning the Digital Challenge, Ray Sherrington, one of the Digital Challenge project managers, began looking for a mobile solution that would increase the independence and freedom of highly vulnerable children and provide parents with the ability to track the child's location. Sherrington wanted a cost effective, off-the-shelf-device that would be as easy to use as a mobile phone.

Benefits

Improved social inclusion for dependent children

Accurate GPS tracking of at-risk children

Increased mobility for family members

Provide peace of mind

Secure solution with strict consent processes



The Solution

After reviewing the available solutions Sherrington and his team selected BlackBerry® smartphones, together with People Locator, Mobile Finder and Alert Client from TrackaPhone™, a member of the BlackBerry® Alliance Program. There were two main reasons behind their decision: the first was the ease of use. To test this, Sherrington presented candidates with different devices. "We wanted people to overcome their fear of technology. When they started playing with the BlackBerry smartphones, some of them were prepared to give the technology a try," he explains. This first wave of adopters then gave anecdotal feedback to more reluctant candidates who in turn changed their mind and decided to try them too.

The quality of the GPS performance on the BlackBerry smartphones was the second reason for choosing the solution. "I talked to various companies that do device tracking and everyone said: BlackBerry, BlackBerry, BlackBerry. The smartphones have a great reputation in the market for GPS reception and precision," says Sherrington. To be sure they were making the right decision, the project team trialled several GPS-enabled mobiles and smartphones. "We found that we were losing sight of the devices, they would disappear off the screen. But the solution that maintained contact with the satellite and network connection back to the system was the BlackBerry smartphone with the TrackaPhone Alert client."

Today, the project team makes BlackBerry smartphones available to families in need through the Sunderland Carers' Centre. Currently a dozen are in service. Typically, each family is given two smartphones: one for the child and one for the parents. The solution enables the parents to track the location of their child, with the child's consent, from their BlackBerry smartphone using TrackaPhone's Mobile Finder and/or People Locator via a secure internet connection. It also lets the child see the location of his or her parents and track their movements via Mobile Finder. In addition they use the smartphones to call and text each other, and in some cases communicate by email using BlackBerry® Internet Service.

The Benefits

The project has resulted in increased autonomy for the children and less stress for the parents. In one family, for example, it has transformed the life of a teenager with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and Asperger Syndrome. Prior to using the solution, the boy's leisure activities were restricted to his back garden as he would quickly become disorientated and lost when away from home. Now, with the BlackBerry smartphone, his location can be easily tracked, and with the unique reporting mechanism of the TrackaPhone alert client, TrackaPhone is able to get excellent battery life while GPS is active.

Within a couple of months of using the BlackBerry solution, the boy's character began to change. "He became more confident and self-assured. His performance and behaviour at school improved significantly," says Sherrington. "Before using the BlackBerry solution, his mother and father would never go out together because they had to care for their son. This year, for the first time in 15 years, they've started going out, just the two of them."

www.blackberry.co.uk/casestudies

"With BlackBerry smartphones and TrackaPhone we're able to help re-integrate digitally and socially excluded members of the community at a very reasonable cost using an incredibly secure, reliable and easy to use device."

Ray Sherrington
Digital Challenge Project Manager
Sunderland City Council

TrackaPhone is an Independent Location Service Provider, enabling all market sectors to access location based applications through a variety of platforms, using any location technology, on any network with any device.

The People Locator, TrackaPhone's award winning flagship platform, is designed for the easy management and protection of people although it can also be used for Asset management and protection.