

INDUSTRY AWARDS CASE STUDY SERIES: CONNECTING & PROTECTING THE HOMELESS AT OURCALLING SHELTER, DALLAS

GLOBAL REACH

YOUR STORY

Background: OurCalling Shelter, in Dallas County, USA is a Christian project, providing facilities for thousands of the area's rough sleepers. In early 2018, OurCalling began talking to GlobalReach Technology about the installation of a public Wi-Fi network to be used by the center's patrons.

Description: The free public Wi-Fi service, designed following these discussions, was launched in May 2018. It has both achieved more, and added more value, in terms of social inclusion, enfranchisement and safeguarding, than initial conversations could have anticipated.

Learnings: The deployment is now a best practice use case for other large cities, looking to 'Connect the Unconnected'. Connecting Our Calling patrons has provided valuable learnings about how a Wi-Fi network can be used to track and safeguard vulnerable groups. It has kept them connected to specific support services, to wider Wireless Cities services, and to important information that protects their health and wellbeing, using Wi-Fi.

THE SOLUTION

OurCalling approached GlobalReach through its IT provider Kenetic. The resulting free Wi-Fi service was installed in May 2018, with the service comprising four Wi-Fi access points

allowing OurCalling patrons to access social media, contact loved ones, apply for jobs, Skype, email and apply for government services, ensuring vital enfranchisement and reducing isolation and loneliness.

The OurCalling network is an active Wi-Fi deployment, achieving social inclusion and safeguarding at scale, to a degree that the thousands of potential homeless users would not have been able to access through other services.

Although initially connected to support and online public services through the cost effective on-premise public network, there is further potential for users to connect to Wireless Cities services as Dallas County and other large cities expand their interconnected public networks. For cities already with active networks, there is the potential to connect apps and information for the vulnerable direct from the Wi-Fi service.

Moreover, roaming operators could also support the service, allowing homeless individuals to be tracked and protected from threats, once they leave shelters. For homeless with additional physical and mental health needs, wearable IoT devices, such as diabetes monitors and dementia trackers could connect to municipal networks, places and services.

NETWORK PROVIDERS, ENTERPRISE & CITY OFFICIALS

The Wi-Fi network is now a permanent service at OurCalling, with hundreds of daily users. OurCalling provides an app which delivers a single channel to access over 200 homeless aiding tasks in Dallas, such as information about addiction, medical care, food and shelter. The list includes all the vital contacts for the city's poor.

There is high potential to connect both other services and other vulnerable groups in the area, in fact any number of public and enterprise Wi-Fi services can be connected and managed through a single, common console for ease, efficiency and improving public services.

BUSINESS/SOCIAL IMPACT

The OurCalling network was specifically put in place to 'connect the unconnected', giving the homeless of Dallas County easier access to services that we take for granted.

Alongside inclusion and enfranchisement, the protection of the community during the hot summer months, demonstrates a much wider potential to extend use of the service beyond public Wi-Fi.

Pastor Wayne Walker, the OurCalling lead, said that the personal data and subsequent contact that this enabled, directly resulted in lives being saved. He said: "It was a blessing we have such a great service to help the homeless in Dallas and I believe it helped save lives"