



"Microsoft Teams kept us connected at a critical time. Tech-wise, Covid-19 highlighted what was working and what was not. Thanks to MS Teams, Spark's outstanding service and the right tools, we could continue essential support to our community. Now, we are actually working better and faster as a result."

Age Concern Otago



BUILDING A **DIGITAL FUTURE** AT AGE CONCERN OTAGO

The Covid crisis had many successful businesses scrambling to solve critical IT challenges to ensure business continuity. Imagine the extra stressful scenario faced by Age Concern Otago - a not-for-profit organisation delivering essential care services to our most vulnerable citizens...

From the head office in Dunedin and support offices in Oamaru and Alexandra, Age Concern Otago delivers a diverse range of essential community services to the elderly. Providing these support services (such as social connections through recreation, health and wellbeing, education classes, social change and support) takes great communication and coordination at the best of times.

With the help of Microsoft Teams, HP and Spark, this was a team of carers who used the crisis to change the way they connected - for good.

Despite the mounting pressures of a pandemic, an apprehensive elderly rural customer base and a modest IT budget (achieved mostly via grant funds) Age Concern Otago actually brought their teams closer together during lockdown and advanced their digital transformation. With the help of Microsoft Teams, HP and Spark, this was a team of carers who used the crisis to change the way they connected - for good.

 Windows 10 Pro Microsoft Teams

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Kristen Beardsmore
Health Promotion/Projects Team Leader
Age Concern Otago



The team behind Teams

Meeting the critical challenge of gearing up for remote work was the team of: Health Promotion/Projects Team Leader Kristen Beardsmore, Financial Administrator and Fundraiser Miriam Spronk and CEO Debbie Georgie.

"We're busy. We all love what we do, but to face doing all of it remotely, when we weren't geared for it was daunting to say the least!" explains Kristen.

Luckily, a few months earlier, as part of their ongoing digital transformation journey, CEO Debbie had been awarded (via a grant from Otago Community Trust and the HP Not-for-profit programme) an injection of modern computing power. With support from The IT Team, eight older machines (circa 2014) running Windows 7 were replaced with slick new HP desktops running Windows 10 Pro and Microsoft 365 an HP Dragonfly convertible 2-in-1 laptop. The plan being to add more laptops as funds would allow.

Miriam recalls the build up to lockdown "Kristen led most of the technology coordination, as she was working with our IT team prior to Covid. I was backup really. When we knew lockdown was imminent, we started by assessing staff needs. It was a long list! We had staff without the internet at home, staff without laptops, a mixed bag of private cell devices (and data plans) and a hodgepodge of home connectivity. While we had cloud access, we hadn't moved our files into Sharepoint before lockdown, so we got busy transferring the essentials!" Fortunately, the foundations for migration from on-premise servers had been put in place by The IT Team.

Mike Mackenzie of Spark Business Hub Dunedin was instrumental in setting up reliable remote working connectivity. Mike reviewed the technology, ensured staff were transitioned to Spark's latest mobile plans, set up systems to handle seamless call diversion to cellphones, organised Wi-Fi connections and even managed an urgent high-speed fibre install to Heather in Oamaru on the eve of lockdown. "Heather is sight impaired, so we rallied extra hard to get her fibre sorted, and I talked her through internet set up step-by-step over the phone from my home. All-in-all Spark delivered a solution which provided connectivity surety and calling flexibility. It didn't matter if a client called in on a landline, redirection was seamless." Adds Kristen "Spark sorted it all for us - they were outstanding".

Without time to organise laptops for all staff, Age Concern Otago worked with what they had. Some staff took home their new HP desktops. With the connectivity sorted, it was time to figure out the collaboration. How would Age Concern Otago meet online remotely, divvy up the daily tasks and share files efficiently?



Getting together while apart

"Thankfully, The IT Team had nudged us towards Microsoft Teams when they upgraded our computers. We watched one of their educational webinars on Teams for non-profits, then followed up with some private training (remotely of course) and shared some learning resources. Having the ability to get together virtually was vital for us. We'd set up daily Teams calls each morning and share a whole pile of information and ideas. Our communities were frightened. The calls and questions were flooding in. How do we get food in? Will Meals on Wheels still deliver? It was a chaotic time and teamwork was vital" recalls Kristen.

Not long into lockdown and Age Concern were using Team's chat function (rather than email) and calling via Teams. They'd set up individual teams for different services streams and were sharing files and resources using Team's collaboration power. Those without webcams used the Teams app on their phones for meetings.

"Teams was absolutely invaluable during this time, it allowed us to come together daily as one team very efficiently in extremely challenging circumstances" recalls CEO, Debbie.

Newcomer to the team, Catriona in Oamaru was doubly glad of the face-to-face communication. "I actually joined the team during lockdown, so it was a real advantage to see my colleagues and communicate in a more natural way than on the phone. I'd never used or seen Teams before but I found it intuitive".

The future of technology at Age Concern

As has been the case for many businesses, lockdown has been the catalyst for better, more modern ways of working at Age Concern Otago.

"Lockdown gave us the opportunity to reassess. It's amazing how digitally creative you can get when you need to adapt" reflects Kristen. "Take Margaret on our falls prevention team for example. Margaret recorded and delivered exercise classes online and then used Teams to make contact with peer leaders to get the resources out to the community so people could be active at home. A fantastic result!".

Says Miriam from a Financial Controllers perspective "Teams is a tool that will definitely be part and parcel of how we move forward. It helps us communicate better and saves so much time. Likewise I've found Windows 10 on these new machines is so fast and intuitive. We were grateful for its advanced threat protection too. I'm enjoying a far more streamlined approach to filing accounts since upgrading to cloud with MYOB. During Covid I also helped some other community groups that we assist to modernise their payment processing and accounts systems by going to cloud solutions. Along with Teams, I think this will really free up my time in the future to focus on fundraising for Age Concern".

"We're an organisation that puts our heart and soul into helping people connect. So it is great to go forward now knowing how to harness connectivity solutions to do good work, even better" says Debbie.



Microsoft 365 subscription and internet connection is required.

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Want to see how Spark, Windows 10 Pro and the HP Elite Dragonfly can help your business out?

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