

Challenges

- The network, pieced together over the years with various vendors, went down once or twice a month
- Staff members spent too much time troubleshooting the network
- Each location struggled with outdated, incompatible phone systems
- With three sites within a few blocks of each other, Breakthrough had a campus feel, but staff felt anything but connected
- The nonprofit lacked modern capabilities such as mobile twinning and voicemail-to-email integration

Value Created

- The nonprofit increased its network and voice capabilities while cutting costs by \$10,000.
- Network traffic dynamically takes the shortest, most efficient path from source to destination, guaranteeing optimal performance and failover
- The network generates zero trouble tickets, compared to 1-2 per month before
- Staff members spend more time on care activities, rather than on transferring and troubleshooting

Breakthrough Urban Ministries: Breaking Economic – and Technology – Barriers in West Side of Chicago



Nonprofit Realizes Decade-Long Dream in Opening of FamilyPlex

In Chicago's west side neighborhood of East Garfield Park, the statistics are stark: 42 percent of residents live in poverty and 40 percent have not completed high school. And 99 percent of the children at the local elementary school live in low-income households.

Many find hope and help right in their neighborhood at Breakthrough Urban Ministries, a nonprofit that takes on the complex challenges of homelessness and poverty from multiple angles. Breakthrough surrounds youth and adults with a network that supports their growth and expands their opportunities through transitional housing, mental health care, employment training, housing search assistance and placement, healthy meals, childcare, medical care, and educational and recreational opportunities for all ages.

Every year, Breakthrough serves 70,000 meals to the homeless, and mentors more than 500 youth.

The roots of Breakthrough began more than 25 years ago when founder Arloa Sutter started serving hot coffee and warm lunches for the homeless in a church meeting room in her Chicago neighborhood. Though she didn't know it then, her outreach would grow to serve thousands over the years.



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— John Smith, Chief Administrative Officer, Breakthrough Urban Ministries

Sutter’s nonprofit now employs over 60 individuals and has expanded to four locations in one of the city’s most disadvantaged areas. After 15 years of planning, the FamilyPlex recently opened, with more than 500 community members in attendance, including Mayor Rahm Emanuel, Senator Dick Durbin, and Governor Bruce Rauner.

The opening of the nonprofit’s FamilyPlex brought Breakthrough to the next phase of its growth. The 42,500-square-foot, \$14 million facility includes a medical clinic, classrooms, early childhood education, a gym, fitness center, café, art studio and playground.

“We’ve been planning and dreaming of creating space for our youth and family programs,” Sutter says. “The FamilyPlex enables us to bring our programs and our relational network to a scale that will have a huge impact on the community.”

Missed Connections

The opening of the long-awaited FamilyPlex also gave Breakthrough’s leaders a chance to revisit the nonprofit’s technology infrastructure. The two existing locations

experienced more than their fair share of technical issues, degrading staff productivity and communications.

The network, pieced together over the years with various vendors, went down once or twice a month, interrupting staff productivity and affecting clients trying to use computers for job hunts and other needs.

“We spent a lot of time troubleshooting our network infrastructure instead of on more important work,” says John Smith, Chief Administrative Officer at Breakthrough Urban Ministries. “We’d walk into a room that was functioning on Friday, and on Monday half the computers would have no network connection.”

Adding to the frustration, each location struggled with outdated, incompatible phone systems. With three sites within a few blocks of each other, Breakthrough had a campus feel, but staff felt anything but connected.

Employees couldn’t call each other directly, or transfer in-coming callers to another location. Instead, they had to give callers the number of the facility they needed. Callers also had to navigate the auto-attendant to reach staff members, rather than call a direct number. With the opening of the FamilyPlex, Breakthrough wanted to move to one integrated phone system.

“As we grow as a team, we’re looking at ways to keep our staff connected,” says Smith. “We needed a more reliable network and modern phone system.”

More Capabilities, Lower Cost

Breakthrough chose to implement a new network from the ground up, as well as deploy an integrated voice system. In exploring the market, Avaya stood out for its ability to grow with the organization and for cost efficiency. The Avaya voice solution allowed Breakthrough to reduce costs by eliminating at least one PRI (primary rate interface).

“Avaya offered the fullest range of capabilities for the price point, as well as a lot of options for scalability as we grow,” Smith says. *“With other systems, if you wanted twinning or voice mail to email, it was an add-on. With Avaya, there was nothing that we could foresee doing in the future that we couldn’t do. We have a system that’s centrally managed, feature-rich and very scalable as we grow. Plus, it’s one contract and one point of contact for the network and the phone system, which makes it easier for us to manage.”*

Avaya Fabric Connect, a proprietary network design, builds in reliability. On the multi-path Ethernet network, traffic dynamically takes the shortest, most efficient path from source to destination, guaranteeing optimal performance and failover. The network also gives Breakthrough a simplified and resilient infrastructure that makes network configuration and deployment of new services faster and easier.

On that backbone, Breakthrough runs Avaya IP Office™ for its voice communications across all locations, giving the nonprofit much-needed modern communications capabilities on any device.

With direct extension numbers, callers now get to desired staff members faster. If someone needs to transfer a call to another location, it’s just the push of a couple of buttons, instead of asking the caller to hang up and dial another number – making a more professional impression on clients, donors and partners.

Employees can easily choose to route calls to their cell phones with mobile “twinning,” ensuring they don’t miss anything when they’re not in the office. This can be important in time-sensitive situations, such as when a community member is waiting for a callback regarding their next social security payment.

Avaya’s Voice mail-to-email integration saves time by relieving staff from the need to call in to retrieve voice mails. Instead, messages come directly into their email inboxes for ‘easy/anywhere’ listening. In fact, it’s become so popular that Breakthrough has configured the feature as the default set-up for all employees.

“Before, I would come back to the office to find maybe 15 missed calls and 10 emails, and one might have been a key client need or funding source that was time sensitive,” says Smith. *“Now if I’m out and get an urgent voice mail that needs to be addressed, I have it on my phone. I can see the need and respond faster. When we opened the new facility, I was sharing time between a few different locations. Being able to use the combination of mobile twinning, voice mail to email, and logging onto the phone whenever helped me make sure things were not falling between cracks.”*

Freeing \$10,000 for Core Program Needs

Even as Breakthrough upgraded and expanded its technology, the nonprofit has seen notable savings, cutting voice and network costs almost in half – freeing nearly \$10,000 annually that it can now direct to other core program needs. Staff members additionally save countless hours across the organization not having to dial direct extensions or transfer calls.

Smith, with IT part of his job responsibilities, appreciates the network reliability. *“I can honestly say since getting the Avaya solution in place, we have not had a single trouble ticket related to switching,”* he says. *“Before, it was once or twice a month.”*

But what it really means is business continuity. *“Maintaining quality uptime for our network is critical,”* Smith adds. *“Clients need to access resources online – whether they’re applying for jobs or completing homework after school. Not having to worry about the backbone increases our ability to give clients the resources they need when they need them.”*

Next, the nonprofit plans to add Wi-Fi and video. Wi-Fi will expand connectivity for clients and staff beyond just desktop locations, while video will open up the possibility of long-distance meetings with donors and partners.

“At Breakthrough it is important that people can reach us, those who desperately need our services as well as those who want to help us do our work,” Sutter says. “The Avaya technology provides tools that make our employees more efficient. Avaya is helping us at Breakthrough to partner with those affected by poverty to build connections, develop skills and open doors of opportunity.”

Solutions

- Avaya IP Office™ Platform
- Avaya Fabric Connect
- Avaya Virtual Services Platform 4000 Series
- Avaya Ethernet Routing Switches 4000 Series

ABOUT BREAKTHROUGH URBAN MINISTRIES

Breakthrough fosters the development of the community by building healthy relationship networks, growing the skills of the men, women and children, and promoting the transfer of wisdom to the younger generation. The nonprofit serves thousands annually at four locations on Chicago’s west side through homeless intervention, youth development and neighborhood transformation. For more information, visit www.breakthrough.org.

About Avaya

Avaya is a leading, global provider of customer and team engagement solutions and services available in a variety of flexible on-premise and cloud deployment options. Avaya’s fabric-based networking solutions help simplify and accelerate the deployment of business critical applications and services. For more information, please visit www.avaya.com.

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