Innovative technology ensures Australian War Widows keep receiving the support they need

The Australian War Widows Guild of NSW represents an unusual demographic. Some of their oldest members are over 100 years old. And whilst some are as young as their 30s – the majority are aged 80 years and over. This brings a specific set of challenges and needs when the Guild started looking to modernise their supporting information systems.

"The Guild was founded in 1946 by women, for women," says Chief Executive Officer Madeline Dermatossian. "Our mission is to promote and protect the interests of all war widows in our State." Along with advocacy for entitlements, support and advice, this includes social activities, a transport service and the Friendship Line, a phone service staffed by volunteer members.

"The Friendship Line was established to provide members a 'listening ear' rather than advice or counselling," Ms Dermatossian says. "Our volunteers understand how difficult it can be to face birthdays and anniversaries alone, to be housebound or heading to the hospital. They can talk to other members with empathy, respect and compassion."

But outdated technology was making it increasingly difficult for the Guild to achieve its aims.

"Our database hadn't been updated for a number of years, so it was out of date and no longer supported," she says. "We wanted to be able to use data more effectively – to pull out meaningful insights so we could identify opportunities for providing better services for our members."

Ms Dermatossian and her team drew up a longlist of possible systems and technology partners. "We carried out extensive research, and that led us down the path of Clade and CAMS," she says.

Modernised Association & Member Management

Clade's Association Management Solution (CAMS) is fully functional, easy-touse membership management solution powered by Microsoft's Dynamics 365 platform.

"CAMS' helps reduce the time Associations spend on administration and paperwork – and it's Microsoft based so it nicely integrates with Office products like Outlook, Word and Excel," says Clade CEO Duncan Journee.

"We're modernising the way members are managed and interacting with Associations. CAMS' gathers and presents the kinds of insights Associations need to communicate better with their members and the platform is adaptable to meet their changing needs."

CAMS has been built with a modular architectural structure, which is also a major benefit to many associations looking to modernise their technology.

"You can take as many or as few modules as you need," Journee continues. They're 'out-of-the-box' solutions so you can start seeing the benefits right away. You can also address their most pressing problems first then upgrade or add new services at your own pace. Wherever you start, CAMS makes it easy to extend, connect and build applications without ever needing to rebuild the core system."

For the War Widows, creating accurate and relevant reports and insights was a key priority. Whereas other associations might focus on improving their staff productivity or improving their members experience with a selfservice portal.

"This provides members with an easy way to update their profile information, book courses, register for events and make payments," Journee says. "CAMS also offers online and mobile access, so members can do it all from their smart phone."

Working together

Ms Dermatossian stresses the importance of working closely with a technology partner from the outset.

"They need to understand exactly what you want to achieve – and you need to know what you can do to help the transition run smoothly," she says. "For example, you need to ensure your data will arrive in a usable format, which means cleaning it up ahead of the transfer." And, of course, change management should never be overlooked. Staff need to be ready to make the most of the changes and be educated on how a new system will make their lives better.

"It's quite common for some of the people working for not-for-profit organisations to have very basic technology skills," Ms Dermatossian says. "You need to know what will be expected of them and whether they're equipped to manage new tasks. You might need to consider training or upskilling them so you can get the most out of the upgrade."

A solution powered by Microsoft

Clade is perfectly placed to help Associations make the transition to more streamlined, cost-effective and easy-to-use technology.

"We have worked with many member-based organisations so we understand their needs and concerns," says Journee. "We can also apply relevant insights from our work in with commercial organisations. And, with CAMS, we have the flexibility to tailor a solution to Associations of every size."

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