north east autism society

The North East Autism Society (NEAS) supports autistic and/or neurodivergent individuals and their families across the entire North East region.

Founded in 1980 by a group of parents seeking appropriate support and education for their autistic children, the Society now employs almost 1,000 people and services including a further education college, four schools and a vocational training farm, as well as employment services, toddler groups, family workshops, a range of residential homes and luxury short break lodges.

Headquartered in Drum Industrial Estate, Chester-le-Street, NEAS continues to expand rapidly and is one of the primary providers of specialist support and care for autistic and/or neurodivergent individuals in the North East of England.

The Challenge

With almost 1,000 employees supporting around 2,500 individuals across 42 remote sites, NEAS is dependent on its WAN (wide area network) in order to deliver vital front-line services.

In recent years the relationship with the company's previous IT provider had fragmented which meant that their IT systems were not getting the necessary attention. Their infrastructure was outdated and in need of an urgent refresh.

Before partnering with Aspire, hackers exploited NEAS' poor digital security and lack of network patching, resulting in the company suffering ransomware attacks on four separate occasions within a five-month period. Known as 'CryptoLocker', the strain of ransomware was so dangerous that it took a dedicated global government task force to bring it down.

NEAS had experienced a decline in service level from their previous IT provider; support ticket requests were increasing with limited support. The charity was lacking a strategic technical partner to help them plan their IT projects and budgets more accurately. This meant that costs were spiralling in tandem with a reduction in both service performance and system functionality.

Customer Benefits

> **A fit for purpose solution**

> **Increased confidence in IT**

> **Reduced workload for IT staff, allowing them to have a more strategic focus**

> **Increased visibility and reporting of IT performance**

> **Enhanced security including patch management and end point security**

> **Quarterly meetings to discuss pain points and review IT roadmap**

> **"We are projected to save around 50% on our technology spend in the next 5 years."**
>
> **John Phillipson,** CEO at NEAS

Aspire's Solution

Aspire initially partnered with NEAS to resolve their ongoing issues with network security. Issues were rapidly resolved with extensive network patching, followed by a thorough review of vulnerabilities.

NEAS were looking for a responsive technology partner who could update their communications and network infrastructure and make it fit for purpose. They quickly realised that Aspire could support their future growth and awarded them a 5-year managed IT support contract.

The first step of the project was to transfer the company's existing on-site, virtualised environment to Aspire's own data centre. The project included a complete WAN refresh. Aspire implemented a best-in-class security solution including end point anti-malware and intrusion detection to ensure their network was fully protected. All staff immediately benefited from access to Aspire's 24/7 IT service desk which provides 24/7 monitoring and proactive support, ensuring maximum productivity.

Aspire then quickly set about working closely with NEAS to understand their technology challenges and requirements, this included dedicated account management days to support the team and ensure the best on-boarding experience possible. During assessment, a number of devices were identified as needing to be upgraded to boost performance and productivity. Rather than replacements, Aspire provided a considerable saving by upgrading devices with larger hard drives and increased RAM.

Aspire's technical director worked closely with the NEAS board to develop a technology road map for the business to support financial planning. This has ensured their technical solution is aligned to their business plan and budget, with in-built flexibility for future growth.

Working with Aspire

John Phillipson, CEO at NEAS, said: "Over the past few years we've had a range of issues with our IT infrastructure and, as a result, our staff were left feeling frustrated and untrusting of IT in general. We recognised the need to reduce the risks around ransomware and from day one, Aspire worked very closely with our staff to address these issues.

"Alongside the new build, Aspire also provides ongoing 24/7 technical support for users across all our sites, with remote working facilities enabled across our WAN. Coupled with the improvement in performance of the network and service, we are projected to save around 50% on our technology spend in the next 5 years. I am very pleased with the progress that has been made."

Solution

> **Access to 24/7/365 service desk with proactive monitoring & support**

> **Complete new infrastructure in Aspire's data centre**

> **Complete WAN refresh to maximise hosted infrastructure**

> **Best in class security solution**

> **Full IT roadmap to aid financial planning**

Delivering technology like no other.

Aspire Technology Solutions is an award-winning IT Managed Service Provider and Internet Service Provider. We deliver leading technology solutions across cloud, connectivity, telephony, technical support, cyber security and consultancy to help our customers drive real business benefits.

Our mission is to deliver technology like no other; we are dedicated to putting technology to work to help our customers innovate, become more efficient and grow quicker. We help our customers accelerate their ambitions through inspirational technology and to achieve this, we have a passion for delivering a sensational data-driven customer experience. This is best exemplified by our Net Promoter Score (NPS) of +82, which is deemed world-class.

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