THE CENTRE FOR VOLUNTEERING
Peak body volunteers for broader role thanks to increased capacity provided by new infrastructure

OVERVIEW
The Centre for Volunteering is the peak body for volunteering in New South Wales, Australia, and a registered training organization. The Centre aims to support, educate, and inform the state’s 2.5 million volunteers and those who engage them. The Centre provides distance learning services to qualify people in volunteer management and training, and operates a call center that fields thousands of enquiries per year from people who want to volunteer. It also has a large number of corporate members that want their employees to participate in occasional volunteering opportunities.

“We work to educate people that volunteering is not charity; it’s important work and should be viewed that way,” says Gemma Rygate, Chief Executive Officer, The Centre for Volunteering. "It should be managed in the same way as paid employment."

To fulfil its objectives, The Centre supplements its permanent workers with a large pool of specialized volunteers.

BUSINESS CHALLENGES
To administer its business, The Centre for Volunteering had been running Microsoft Windows Small Business Server 2011 on Dell equipment with SCSI drives. However, this environment had limited redundancy and was not meeting The Centre’s speed and capacity requirements. With the organization planning to expand its role and functions, it needed to migrate to a new infrastructure.

With help from EMC distributor, Ingram Micro, and partner Always UP, The Centre for Volunteering started deploying an EMC® VSPEX® Proven Infrastructure. The VSPEX comprised two Cisco Unified Computing System C200 M2 servers, VMware® vSphere™ server virtualization, EMC Unisphere® storage management and an EMC VNXe® unified storage system.

Always UP started by optimizing The Centre for Volunteering’s network bandwidth to ensure applications and data could be moved quickly and consistently, and centralized much of the organization’s network infrastructure.

Always UP then installed the VSPEX Proven Infrastructure, and completed the customization and development work needed to meet The Centre for Volunteering’s unique requirements.
Results
• Boosted the performance of critical applications and systems by up to 400 percent
• Facilitated a plan to develop an application to help incorporated associations obtain government funding
• Supported a proposed project enabling the Federal Government and other bodies to access volunteer resources on a national basis

The next step involved implementing virtualization to improve the reliability of key applications and services such as Microsoft Active Directory and Microsoft Exchange.

"Always UP took a holistic view of our infrastructure, identifying the points of failure and ensuring the redesigned environment could support our roadmap," says Rygate.

"Ingram Micro supported us by supplying the hardware and giving the partner advice on how it should be deployed."

The Centre for Volunteering has completed the project, and the environment is expected to meet the Centre’s requirements for at least the next five years.

FASTER APPLICATION SPEEDS
The new infrastructure has enabled The Centre’s workers to negotiate a remote connection 200 percent faster than previously and to open Microsoft software such as Outlook, Word, and PowerPoint up to 400 percent faster. They can also transfer and share information from a collaboration endpoint using Microsoft SharePoint 400 percent more quickly.

In addition, once they log off, the system completes secure updates 225 percent faster.

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Gemma Rygate
Chief Executive Officer, The Centre for Volunteering

These outcomes have enabled employees to work more productively, and spend more time on strategic planning than they could in the previous environment.

Despite these significant early improvements, the real value of the VSPEX Proven Infrastructure lies in the longer-term opportunities it creates. The Centre for Volunteering plans to leverage the platform to take a much larger role in volunteer management.

A BROADER APPROACH TO MANAGING VOLUNTEERS
The Centre for Volunteering’s board has established an IT subcommittee to review its technology capabilities and deliver a system that, with help from the Federal Government, can be replicated across Australia.

"The government wants to find out more about volunteers in Australia," says Wendy Chin, Membership Manager, The Centre for Volunteering. "This includes who is volunteering, what tasks they are performing, where they live and where they participate in volunteering, how old they are, and what skills they have. At the moment, every time there is an emergency, we need to gather all that information again."

"If we can use the infrastructure to build a system that allows us to know at any time how many volunteers are available, there has to be a benefit to the community when there are extreme weather events or other threats."
The VSPEX Proven Infrastructure is expected to support an upgrade of The Centre for Volunteering’s training capabilities.

“Our system is now reliable enough that we are able to consider stepping up our existing partnership with Clubs New South Wales to deliver training courses through the systems available in individual clubs,” says Chin. “There’s a huge opportunity to do this in rural and remote areas.”

In addition, the Centre for Volunteering plans to explore ways it can help similar organizations obtain government funding. Chin believes the infrastructure can be used to develop and run an application that allows these groups to record activities and outcomes against criteria set by state and federal governments to determine funding allocations.

By making this application available as a service, The Centre for Volunteering could help the sector collect more accurate information and apply the analytics necessary to identify trends.

**TAKING A LEADERSHIP ROLE**

The Centre for Volunteering is keen to take a leadership role in helping similar organizations reap the benefits of virtualization.

“We want to allow other organizations—particularly the 40,000 incorporated associations in New South Wales—to use us as a ‘corridor’ or to let us guide them down the virtualization path,” Rygate adds.

Rygate says she is very pleased with the Centre’s choice of technologies and the outcome of the project.

“The EMC VSPEX Proven Infrastructure deployed by Ingram Micro and Always UP has already considerably improved our ability to support volunteers and volunteer-engaging organizations in New South Wales, and we see it as vital to our program of work in the future,” she says.