Delivering better outcomes for families, with Children 1st

Children 1st's ambition is for every child in Scotland to be safe, loved and well, together with their family.

The charity offers emotional, practical, and financial support to help families to put children first and campaign to uphold the rights of every child.

Children 1st supports the whole family when they need it, for as long as they need it. It offers help to prevent families reaching crisis point, to keep children safe and to support children and families to recover from trauma and harm.

The Challenge:

Before engaging Kerv Digital, Children 1st was using a proprietary, heavily customised end of life SQL database to run its organisation and deliver critical services to families. Technical restrictions and high overheads for modifying the system meant the technology had not kept pace with the changing needs of the charity, or its ways of working.

Not only did Children 1st struggle to update the system to improve processes, the terminology and language used by the system felt out of date and unrepresentative of the 'human' side of what it does. The system did not refer to families and children as individuals; but instead described them as more transactional service users. This was not representative of the values and approach of Children 1st; it had become clear that it needed to evolve all areas of how it recorded important information about families.

The charity wanted to develop a new approach, supporting the incredible work undertaken with children and families whilst respecting the rights of those whose data it holds. It needed to able to evidence the quality and impact of its work through an intuitive system, which is accessible and simple to use. Children 1st agreed that Microsoft Dynamics 365 represented the best platform, due to the extendable nature of the system, the ability to tweak and evolve it, ensuring the charity never stands still with technology again.

Children 1st performed a thorough review of potential providers and selected Kerv Digital due to its innovative approach to building long-term solutions in partnership with charities and solving problems together

The Solution:

Once Kerv was engaged to help, the first part of the process was to undertake a thorough discovery piece of work to plan out what was needed. Then to ensure collective understanding of what the end result would look like across the development team as well as non-technical stakeholders such as senior leaders at Children 1st (and of course the families whose data would be recorded in the system).

To make certain the new solution would be successful, Children 1st performed first-party user research to ensure that children and families were involved in every stage of the thinking, design, and implementation of how it recorded the impact of its work and the language used across the system. This meant numerous rounds of iteration to the design, to give the best possible experience for both colleagues and families interacting with the system. Through this series of in-depth design workshops and an agile, iterative approach to development, we collectively delivered three separate apps that would capture information, produce reports and fulfil the ongoing requirements from a range of services across the organisation. Most importantly, these apps used a common set of terms and language that were simple, easy to understand and made sure families felt like respected individuals, and not a number within a database.
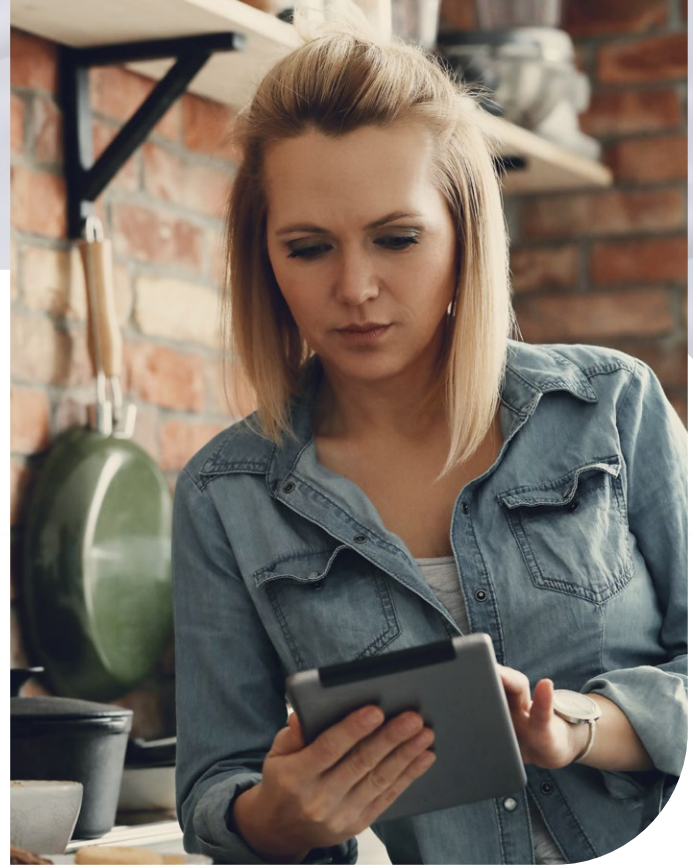
The Result:

Dynamics has been in use for a few short months but already the charity is seeing a difference in the recording and the visibility of contextual relationships between families and individuals. Various dashboards and views give everyday value to staff, who can now see instantly what support is being provided and where, in real-time, along with being able to view open and ongoing activities.

Access to this data enables Children 1st to make faster decisions, and back up its decisions with data quickly, meaning it can see and track where action needs to be taken. Simple things such as tracking emails in from Outlook means the charity no longer needs to copy and paste records across systems, and colleagues can focus much more on the insights from the data, rather than data-entry.

There is still work to do to build more Power BI reports, already the consistent and simplified data structures are going to help the charity evidence the impact of its work in more human and understandable terms. For example, Children 1st has moved from over 240 outcomes to just seven, cutting down on recording time and making its reports more meaningful and understandable. What is important for Kerv, is that the charity now has the tools to build and develop more reports and insights, without being reliant on Kerv for changes and additional services. This means Children 1st will continue to receive more value from the system over time, as it builds dashboards and reports to evidence the difference made for children and families.

The technology has helped transform how Children 1st approaches recording information about children and families. It enables the charity to be much more outcome-focused, and in line with the individual-focused approach that colleagues have always delivered. The process now starts with recording what families think will make a difference for them, captures the child and family's journey as they work with the charity and measures what difference this work has made.

By more effectively gathering the hopes, progress, stories and feedback of children and families, Children 1st is amplifying the voices of children and young people, so that it can learn and evidence what really makes a clear and positive difference for children and families. What's more, having a system that 'talks their language' reinforces the importance of involving children and families in the creation of their own records. Children and families are able to review and connect with their own story as they have recorded it in partnership with the charity.
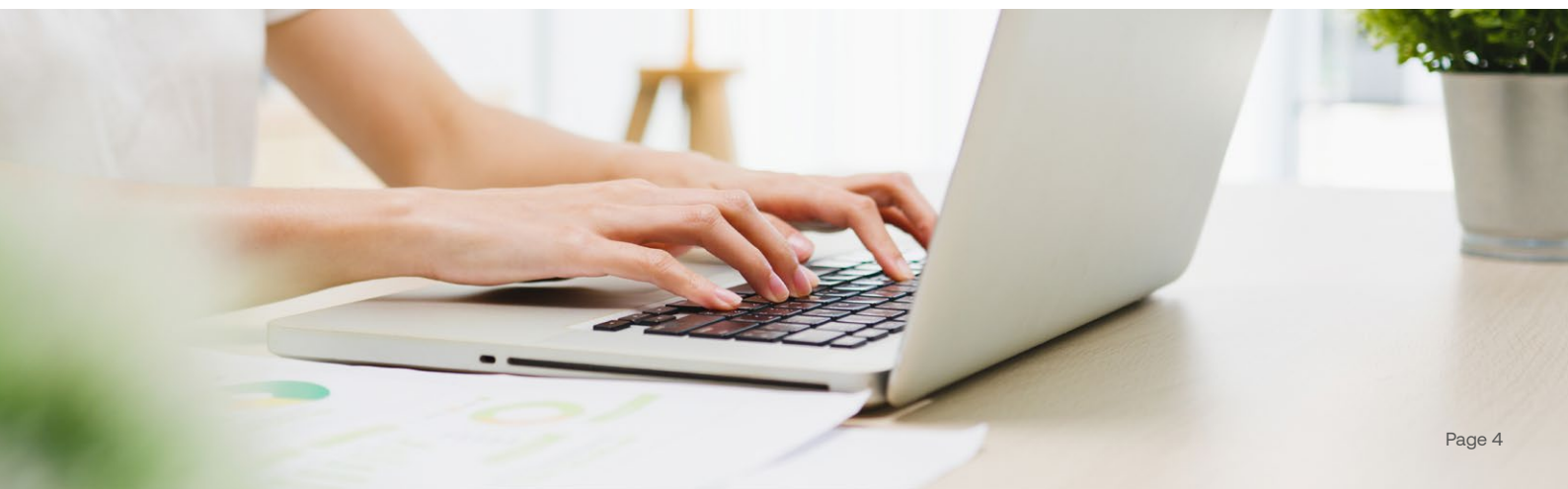
Final Word

We at Kerv are incredibly proud and humbled by the opportunity to work on this project with Children 1st and thank all of the team involved. Delivering a project like this that makes a difference to families is hugely rewarding and why many of us choose to work in technology. To have feedback from staff at Children 1st who said, *"I would now be proud to show a family their record"*, is great evidence that technology can move from a bottleneck to an enabler of change when designed and implemented correctly.

Get in touch with us

For general enquiries please contact
hello@kervgroup.com

Kerv Group, Unit 1B, 1 Finsbury Avenue, London, EC2M 2PP

kerv