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## VoIP Transforms Communications at Carers First

**Focus Group empowers a UK charity to transform its operations, so it never misses a call.**

As a charity supporting adult and young carers, Carers FIRST needs to ensure it captures every call so that the people it supports can access the information, advice and guidance they need.



**Carers FIRST**  
in Kent & Medway  
FIRST Choice for Carers

### Challenge

Providing emotional and practical support to over 16,500 carers across Lincolnshire, South and North-West Kent, Medway and the London Borough of Waltham Forest, Carers FIRST provides a wide range of information, advice and support services to people of all ages looking after a relative or friend who could not manage without their help.

Offering everything from access to respite services to welfare benefits advice, emergency planning, and statutory carers assessments – and more – the charity has recently undergone a period of rapid expansion and more than doubled in size.

With call volumes to its non-geographic 0300 number escalating, the charity's existing on-premise telephony and call routing system was simply not coping with the growth in demand.

"We were constantly losing connections or fire-fighting issues with regional hubs and satellite offices suddenly unable to receive incoming calls," explains Michele Leach, IT and Compliance Manager at Carers FIRST. "This was frustrating for callers and for our teams – sometimes the only way we knew there was a problem was when a caller contacted a member of staff on their mobile to say the 0300 phone link wasn't working."

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**Michele Leach,**  
IT and Compliance Manager, Carers FIRST



As a multi-site organisation that needs to be confident it can direct and respond to calls made to its offices or Carers Hub support teams, Carers FIRST needed to be certain it could deliver the best possible experience for everyone it supports. That means being able to talk to someone on the end of the phone – even during peak demand times.

But that wasn't all. The existing telephony platform was highly inflexible, which meant that if the charity wanted to add a new location or personnel to the system, or needed to redirect staff calls to cover holidays, it could take days or weeks to get these changes made.

"We were making at least two or more calls a day to the support desk and were dependent on others to make basic changes to the system – for a fast-moving organisation like ours, that simply wasn't acceptable," continues Michele.

Determined to get a new communications infrastructure in place that would enable it to respond better and faster to the needs of the carers it supports, Carers FIRST turned to Focus Group for a solution that would not restrict or constrain the way the charity wanted to work.

**"Thanks to Focus Group's no-nonsense approach, we've been able to transform how we work together to serve the carers we support."**

**Michele Leach,**  
IT and Compliance Manager, Carers FIRST

#### Why Focus Group

"Focus Group absolutely understood the complexity of our operations and our unique needs," explains Michele. "Alongside reliability, we needed a cost-effective solution that would allow us to work smarter."

The answer was to make the move to Horizon, a VoIP telephony platform that gives Carers FIRST all the dynamic flexibility it needs. Packed full of call management features that Carers FIRST can easily control via a web interface, the cloud-based service scales with ease while giving the charity the freedom to seamlessly move calls between users and offices to ensure callers get the best possible experience.

"The solution offered was pretty compelling and I can't praise enough the Focus Group project team who handheld us through our switchover to the new solution," continues Michelle. "That includes overseeing the set-up of our new Polycom VVX310 handsets so that everything was literally 'plug and play' from Day One."

#### The Solution

Today the charity's 160 staff based at the main office and regional hubs never lose a call, even if they are working off-site. With the click of a mouse, users can simply tell the system where their calls should be sent – to their desk, their mobile or a colleague. What's more, the fully hosted system enables Carers FIRST to centrally manage and orchestrate all its sites as one.

"I can now easily redirect calls if one satellite office is temporarily unmanned or there is a sudden upsurge in call volumes. It's truly transformed the way we work," says Michele.

Alongside being ultra-reliable and making it easy to divert calls to different locations without loss of service or expensive call forwarding costs, the new system also gives Michele finger-tip control of daily moves and changes.

"Thanks to the easy-to-use web management portal I can move or rename phones to enable highly flexible work environments for our people. Quite simply, it's transformed life for me and Focus Group's voice support team are always at the end of the phone if I need any extra help," confirms Michele.

#### The Results

The high-performance VoIP platform has also enabled the charity to work smarter, thanks to impressive reporting that's delivered rich operational intelligence.

"We now have full visibility of how many calls we receive via our 0300 number and when the peak calling times are. Using these insights, we've changed how we direct calls to rebalance call loads. Indeed, our ability to drill deep into the call patterns of individual sites helped us identify where additional resources were needed to cope with demand. As a result, we now empower our admin teams to step in and handle calls relating to information requests and non-technical queries when support workers are busy dealing with specialist enquiries," explains Michele.

This visibility of call statistics means the charity has been able to improve the service it offers to carers, ensuring they can tap into the critical support they need quickly and conveniently. "Making the move to Horizon has enabled us to work in a more streamlined and efficient manner. More importantly, we are now masters of our own communications destiny," concludes Michele.

