



CASE STUDY

INCREASING RESIDENT SECURITY WITH TECHNOLOGY

THE CUSTOMER

People Serving People

INDUSTRY

Emergency Community Services

THE SOLUTIONS

IT consulting, server build, SQL installation, software integration, RFID card reader system implementation

BENEFITS

- Increased physical security and access controls
- Reduced operational friction
- Empowered families and individuals
- Efficient reporting structure and data management

THE SITUATION

People Serving People is the largest and most comprehensive emergency shelter for Minnesotan families and is a leader in homelessness prevention. On average, the shelter provides meals, a home, and safe space for over 300 guests every night. For this ten-story emergency shelter in downtown Minneapolis, that means many individuals consistently entering and exiting the building.

Operationally, the continual traffic made it difficult for security staff to assess whether those entering were authorized to be there. As Jake Gale, Senior Director of Operations for People Serving People explains, "Historically, access controls have been a challenge for us. We knew for a long time that we wanted a more sophisticated solution than printed out lists of people who were authorized to be in the building and those who weren't, but because of financial reasons, that proved difficult to do. We also lacked the internal capacity to identify solutions and drive the project forward."

But using a printed list was neither efficient nor practical. Security officers weren't guaranteed to verify people's credentials each

time, and guests who were no longer authorized to be in the shelter would occasionally pass security. For guests, this process also became a source of frustration and disempowerment. "Losing control over your surroundings is a huge trigger," explained Jake. "And per our protocol, guests would be asked for their name and room number repeatedly throughout the day. Unfortunately, it was a reminder of the lack of control they felt they had over their space."

People Serving People also gets financial support from funders and sponsors who need to know the number of beds filled and meals served every day. To address this, management initially implemented an evening roll call. "The requirement to ask people to leave their rooms every night and come down to the lobby and sign in was challenging, especially for parents with young kids who might be asleep," said Jake. "No parent wants to make their kid get up and come down to the lobby."

Additionally, nobody foresaw a global COVID pandemic, which in People Serving People's case added complexity for their roll call and access control processes. COVID made the nightly check-in

impracticable due to transmission concerns. Requiring people to congregate in the lobby for check-in would have created a significant transmission risk, and a solution had to be found that would allow guests and staff to reliably physically distance while still ensuring they had a full accounting of who was in the shelter.

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THE SOLUTION

Leadership at People Serving People knew they could rely on Atomic Data for thought partnership around potential solutions. Beyond the basic infrastructure hardening and CPU replacement, People Serving People wanted an access control solution that could make meaningful impact in the lives of their families.

Justin Keller, Software Solutions Manager for Atomic Data described the process of thought partnership. "We started with an analysis and design phase and dug through a variety of tools that met the capabilities of what they were looking for," he said. "We landed on a Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) solution called DNA Fusion where guests could scan in and out upon entering the building. The RFID solution is tied into a door control system, which we can then use to run reports." This solution was optimal because each ID card is associated with a name and picture, allowing security staff to accurately verify identity, and it eliminates the need to question guests on each occasion. But without the budget to implement this solution, People Serving People would have to wait.

Being a non-profit organization, leadership could seek funding to establish transmission mitigation steps and make the setting safer for families. The RFID solution proposed by Atomic Data helped secure this funding because it would significantly reduce opportunity for transmission. People Serving People reported

that there was a direct connection between the card reader system and keeping people safe. "There are fewer people moving around the building and in close proximity to each other," explained Jake. "If it weren't for the Atomic Data team and the thought partnership you all provided, this would not have happened."

The funding became available for People Serving People at the end of 2020, and Atomic Data swiftly implemented the card reader system. Implementation involved a server build out, SQL installation, and DNA Fusion software configuration. Atomic Data engineers even wrote People Serving People a custom reporting structure. The existing software fit most of their needs but lacked robust reports to give them data they needed to enforce policy. Engineers worked with stakeholders to build actionable reports that removed the need for laborious manual lookups in the software and provided restricted access based on existing permissions. People Serving People didn't have the required expertise around access control systems, the architecture of those systems, how they work with SQL, and how to handle reporting. "Your team was able to educate us and help us make the right decisions," explained Jake.

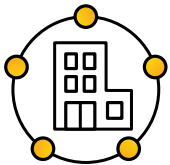


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THE BENEFITS

People Serving People strives to be a trauma-responsive organization, and the card reader system has proven to support that goal. The new card reader system gives power back into the hands of families experiencing homelessness, allowing them to exercise greater control over their environment.



The new card reader system also increases physical security. The potential for unauthorized persons to enter the building was much greater before RFID implementation. If someone has a lost or stolen card, security personnel can reference a person’s digital image and immediately validate entry. The system also allows for notes and flags to be included for each badge, making staff aware of any previous policy infractions or protocols to be enforced.

From an operations standpoint, access control was among People Serving People’s biggest points of friction. Now that it’s removed, staff can focus on better serving their families and engaging with them on a more personal level. Logistics now operate quietly in the background, providing a better overall experience for everyone involved.

“When I started here, I said that if I could do one thing before I leave People Serving People, it would be to implement a card access system,” said Jake. “This was a huge aspirational goal for us, and we’ve done it! And we were only able to do it because of the support we got from Atomic Data. No question. Not a day goes by that I’m not grateful for the relationship we have with Atomic Data and the impact you have on the families who are staying with us.”



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