

2016 Report

St. Vincent de Paul & CharityTracker



Keeping track of your good work while collaborating with others

From its inception over 10 years ago, CharityTracker has worked alongside St. Vincent de Paul conferences to help them keep track of their good work through data collection and reporting. SVdP conferences have also used CharityTracker to collaborate and communicate with other conferences and organizations. In fact, there were Vincentians from Florence, AL that were a part of providing feedback into CharityTracker's very first network. It was formed out of community agencies and faith groups desiring to communicate and collaborate alongside one another. This report shares:

- The history of CharityTracker with St Vincent DePaul
- The tools available within the system to help Vincentians serve collaboratively
- How an entire SVdP Council uses CharityTracker for data collection, communication and reporting



Neighbors Helping Neighbors: the development of CharityTracker

When Hurricane Katrina hit a stretch of Alabama coast in 2005, it devastated small coastal shrimping towns. While the storm had an immediate and visible effect coastally, there was a ripple affect into other neighboring communities. Southern Alabama families and entire neighborhoods migrated north, settling in northwestern Alabama area called the Shoals, where David Davis of St. Vincent de Paul serves as a part of a community collaborative network.

These northwestern Alabama agencies and churches provided a continuum of care, response, and recovery for the displaced families. As they continued to work together after the immediate disaster was over, the group realized the need for a technology tool that would provide better coordination and communication in real time. After checking into several system options and finding them either ineffective or too costly, the group, began working with local software and web developers at Simon Solutions to create a system that would meet their needs.



Alabama post Hurricane Katrina. Photo by FEMA, via commons.wikimedia.org

Having been an employee of IBM for 37 years, David Davis of SVdP Florence was asked to test the system just before implementation. He was to see how it functioned in tracking information for people he served as well as communicate with other organizations. Davis recalled his feedback being short and simple: "They never had to fix anything! It was so easy to use and it still is. This network is still a community collaborative network and I was glad to be there in the initial start-up days of the system."

While they did not realize it at the time, the community and developers had created a tool that could be utilized for every community and city in America. Today, CharityTracker is an affordable, easy-to-use, web-based system by which agencies and churches have the ability to share their assistance records and information with one another. It is used in over 1,000 cities.

Technology that brings people together

Davis explained why he continues to be a part of this network and use CharityTracker: "Having a community network across different faith and community groups has brought people closer together. We get to experience how other people and organizations do their work."

One of the most useful tools CharityTracker has provided community networks is the bulletin feature. "We get messages, for instance, that someone needs a stove. We can share that information and any of the organizations can be a part of helping each other to meet that need. CharityTracker really helps to get information out," said Davis, who has eight people in his SVdP conference that input information into the network.

"We use the system to keep track of our own clients that we serve and to see if other's in our community have served them as well," he continued. Knowing how someone has been served in the past helps to inform and enhance a volunteer's ability to talk to the family and work with them to solve problems as well as provide for their needs.

Everett, WA: Using a CharityTracker network as a SVdP Council

One SVdP Council using CharityTracker very robustly is in Everett, Washington. Carla Laird, executive assistant, says they have 15 parishes within their council and about 200 volunteers. Currently, 13 of the parishes are using CharityTracker.

The executive board of the SVdP Everett council knew they were in need of a software solution, especially for keeping track of their work and creating accurate reports. They found CharityTracker through a web search and Carla explained why the board went forward with implementation:

"We saw that CharityTracker worked with Government agencies and the American Red Cross. We felt that this system operated at the security level we needed. Our volunteers are not always super savvy on the internet or online security so it was a concern of our volunteers. Knowing CharityTracker was working with national organizations across the country helped eased any concerns."

Laird serves as the CharityTracker network administrator with each parish (or conference) being their own "agency" within the network. This allows for Laird to see and report on the overall work of the council as well as sort information by each conference. Conferences can also see and run reports on their own data as well.

Benefits of more accurate SVdP council reporting

The conferences record everything from time spent and miles driven by volunteers, to money paid for food and rent, and in-kind donations given away. Before using CharityTracker, Laird says that each conference created their own database, sometimes in Access or Excel, and there would be one person within that conference that would usually access it. She described how moving to a centralized system has improved reporting:

"Previously, a lot of the in-kind donations given out weren't being recorded as accurately. We keep the records of donations received in QuickBooks, but the service time and things we gave away would sometimes get lost because they would put it down with pen and paper. It was all separate. Every conference had their own little pool of data. At the end of the year, we are to report to our national group and every year it was a challenge. Some conferences would bring me pages of handwritten information and I would frantically be putting into some kind of spreadsheet, trying to come up with the statistics. What is great about CharityTracker is that it is this on-going recording system that is centralized."

The benefits of improved reporting are many. Not only does the local council feel more secure in their annual reports to the St. Vincent de Paul Society National Council, Laird said they have expanded their services as a result. She shared about one of their council's newest projects:

"We recently became the administrators of Project PRIDE. This is where people can make a donation when they pay their electric bill to help someone else who is struggling to pay theirs. We work alongside with the Public Utility Department and we do the administration of Project PRIDE with them. We couldn't have even thought of doing that until we had CharityTracker and could accurately record everything that we pledged out to people who are in need. We are definitely able to serve a lot more people and have our name out there."

In addition to taking on new projects, Laird sees that improved data collection and reporting can position the council to receive more grants.

"There is a lot of grant money out there and more and more, grantors are very specific on reporting how you used the funds. Through CharityTracker, I feel confident that as we receive these grants we are able to come up with the statistics they are asking for, which just secures more grant money for us in the future."

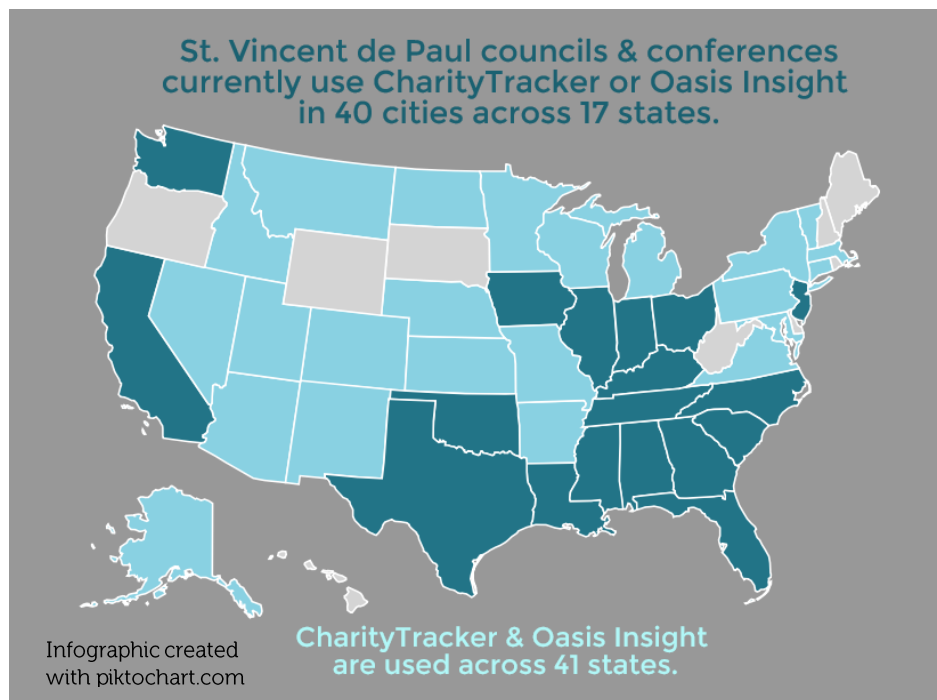
Through improved reporting, this SVdP council has also learned more about their volunteers. "They are spending a lot more time with our clients than we ever knew. Our volunteers, spiritually-speaking, don't brag about what they do. Putting it into CharityTracker is actually capturing much more of their efforts than we even realized," shared Laird. Last year the SVdP council in Everett, WA helped approximately 93,000 people, including people through their four thrift stores as well as those recorded in CharityTracker.

Increased communication among conferences leads to greater collaboration...and goats!

When requests come in, no matter how big, small or unique, the CharityTracker bulletin feature helps bring the conferences in Everett together to meet many needs. Laird explained:

"We find the bulletin board so handy. We often come across a need that is higher than the parish or conference might have the resources to fulfill. So the CharityTracker bulletin board can explain the situation, for instance a rental payment is needed. They can do sharing, or we call it twinning, so that the need can be met by multiple conferences. There was a need for a handicap van for a child in one of our conferences. They were able to work together to provide that."

Primarily, Laird sees requests for rental assistance and utilities but they also get very unique opportunities as well. SVdP is known for their innovation and there is no form of charity foreign to this society. Laird shared this story: "Two years ago we had a family that made a request for a goat. They were using the sale of goat milk to supplement their income. When the goats passed away, we were able to replace the goat as well as give them a second one!"



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the leading client in-take and reporting solution for **food banks** and their **partner agencies**.