

## **James 1:27 Trust successfully scales care using Azure**

Established with the goal of scaling the quality and reach of care for the orphans and vulnerable children and youth (OVYC) sector, the [James 1:27 Trust](#) was founded in 2004.

The idea for the Trust came about when founder and CEO, Robert Botha, found himself interacting with a number of HIV activists in Europe while serving as a diplomat in France. "This was at the height of the AIDS epidemic when the HIV virus was leaving many child-headed households, orphans and broken families in its wake," says Rudi von Staden, Technical Development Co-ordinator at the Trust.

Botha recognised that the scale of the problem was greater than any single organisation could manage. He realised that a way of scaling a response to improve the quality and reach of care services available to the OVYC sector was needed. "This is why the Trust has always had a strong focus on using technologies with a lasting impact that can scale," explains von Staden.

Currently the organisation's systems run on server infrastructure provided by Microsoft's Azure platform, which makes it possible for the Trust to scale its services to the care industry.

The organisation chose Azure because it addressed their specific needs in a differentiated way. Microsoft's unique approach to the cloud spans three areas that, combined, give the organisation the choice and flexibility to provide the best service possible. This approach includes enterprise capabilities that support a wide selection of operating systems, programming languages, databases and devices; hyper-scale cloud infrastructure, and comprehensive hybrid solutions.

Across these three areas, Microsoft provides the organisation with the most complete, intelligent cloud to transform their operations.

### **Three core components of care - Supporting other NGOs**

The organisation's systems support three particular services which all form part of the care process. The first is agency services - a professional service offered to NGOs which takes care of admin, financial management, HR administration and other tasks that don't form part of an NGO's core focus.

Schools of Hope is one NGO that benefits from this service. The organisation began as a small group of volunteers who wanted to bring change to their community, but didn't know how. With the James 1:27 Trust's assistance, it was able to open its own crèche, from which it feeds 70 children per day. The Trust provides Schools of Hope with a bank account into which sponsors can donate money. These sponsors are then provided with the necessary documentation for tax-deductible receipts and BEE certificates.

“Without the assistance of the Trust, we would simply not have been able to acquire the funding necessary to open our school,” says founder Alida Fourie. “The Trust provided us with everything necessary to make it happen.”

### **Facilitating care sponsorship**

The James Social Market, which is at the proof-of-concept stage, is the second service provided by the Trust. Essentially it provides potential sponsors with a channel through which they can sponsor care. It has been configured to integrate directly with the Trust’s financial management system.

At the moment the Social Market runs on a virtual machine but will eventually be migrated to a more scalable app service, all of which is possible because the service runs on Azure. What’s more, the Trust uses Microsoft Visual Studio to do its development work. “Visual Studio team services allow us to co-ordinate a distributed team of developers with whom we provide a common set of resources to track and manage the development process,” says von Staden.

### **Caring for vulnerable families**

The third service, James Care, is a holistic care model for taking care of vulnerable families. “Through this service the Trust has worked with several families directly, however, its goal is to help other organisations look after these families,” comments von Staden.

Management of care is handled via an information system called the Soweto Care System – a case management system which co-ordinates the care work provided but also offers a reporting mechanism to assess progress and help identify red flags.

The James Care service makes use of Microsoft’s business intelligence and analytics tools to extract data out of the Soweto Care System and integrate it with data from the financial management and agency services systems. Combined, the data from these three systems provides a strong platform from which the Trust can keep track of service delivery and impact.

### **Reducing costs, improving up-time**

Apart from assisting with the scalability of the Trust’s services, Azure has also helped it to manage its costs more effectively. This is because Azure allows the Trust to budget on a month-to-month basis, reducing budget fluctuations significantly. “Staff costs have also been reduced because the organisation no longer needs someone to manage the infrastructure,” adds von Staden.

Before switching to Azure, a major risk for the Trust was that its systems would go down when it had customers who needed reports to be generated or information to be tracked. Because the organisation’s servers were running in a data centre half an hour from where it was based, there was always considerable stress around conducting maintenance or dealing with emergency situations. However, since running its systems in Azure, the Trust has been able to improve its up-time for customers.

### **Harnessing big data**

Once the Trust manages to scale according to its objectives, von Staden says it hopes to use Azure’s big data capabilities to harness the data from its social market and financial management systems to report on international policy. For example, [the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) requires that participating countries guarantee certain rights, and there’s an obligation to report on these. So, the Trust is building its systems to be able to answer complex questions around these rights.

*Azure offers an integrated suite of cloud services – analytics, computing, web and mobile apps, networking, storage, and more – to empower your nonprofit organisation to achieve more – more insight, more efficiency and more impact.*

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