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HELPING THE DRAKE HOUSE AID ATLANTA FAMILIES THROUGH BETTER TECHNOLOGY
A Carmichael Consulting Solutions Case Study

When The Drake House first engaged with Carmichael Consulting Solutions in 2012, the non-profit organization's technology systems were "patched together piecemeal through donated materials," as Executive Director Kathy Swahn readily admits. Carmichael helped them migrate and standardize their hodgepodge of systems, saving them thousands of dollars in the process.

Since that time, The Drake House has undergone an expansion and accompanying move, and Carmichael has been with them, every step of the way. "I would recommend [Carmichael President] Tyler Jones and his company at the highest level," says Swahn. "I know if I need help, I can always go to them for assistance."

SETTING THE STANDARD

For the initial upgrade, Jones and his team recommended migration from a mixed set of Windows XP systems to standardized Dell hardware running Windows 7 Professional and Office 2010. (Carmichael helped The Drake House acquire Office 2010 at a discount by non-profit technology supplier TechSoup.)

As part of the project, Carmichael also upgraded The Drake House's network to a faster, more reliable connection and deployed managed anti-virus, proactive system health monitoring, and managed backup, the last of which Swahn says has proven its worth, several times.

"We joked that there was a ghost in the building," she says. "Our staff is not technology focused, and Carmichael has helped us restore files that were lost. Since Tyler and his team have access to our systems remotely, Carmichael can troubleshoot our issues from its offices. They are always Johnny-on-the-spot."

Finally, Carmichael implemented a NAS (network-attached storage) solution that would enable team members to share and secure documents without the expense of a new server. "The NAS is fabulous," Swahn says. "All the staff can access our files, making it really easy for everyone to find forms and other documents they need. We also cleaned up about six years of obsolete files, consolidating the data and giving us a lot more expansion capability. "
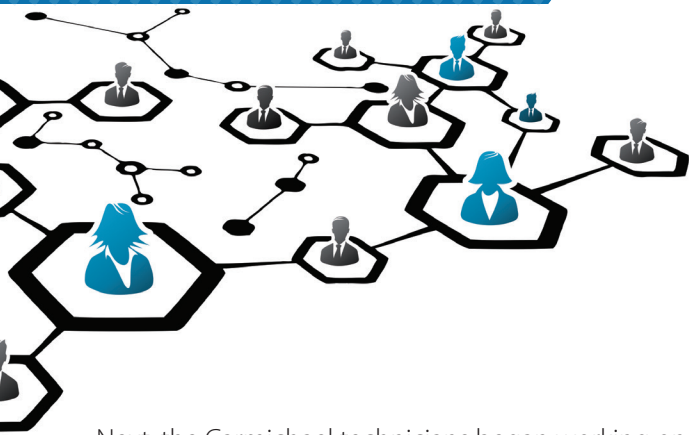

MOVING UP… AND OUT

In 2014, The Drake House applied for and received a major grant to enable the non-profit's facility to become ADA compliant. Since the organization was also growing, management decided to purchase and renovate a larger (5,300 square-foot) building. "We had to make the building ADA compliant," says Swahn. "That meant widening every doorway and hallway."

In preparation for the transition, Carmichael built out cabling and infrastructure for a temporary facility that The Drake House would occupy during the renovations. The team relocated all of The Drake House's IT assets in December 2014, with no unplanned downtime during the move.

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Next, the Carmichael technicians began working on the new facility, itself. "The building had nine offices and every one had been occupied by a different small business," says Swahn. "It was a train wreck. Carmichael removed all the wiring that wasn't relevant or useful and replaced it with new wiring that would suit our needs."

In addition to the new network cabling, Carmichael added audio-visual cabling for new media systems, installed a ceiling-mounted projector and flush-mounted speakers for the new "teen room," installed a wall-mounted TV for the training room, and installed and configured all in-wall connections, plus two security cameras, a monitoring system and a weather radio.

A PRODUCTIVE NEW ENVIRONMENT, AND MORE

The Drake House moved into its new home in May 2015 and began enjoying the added space—and its refreshed and expanded technology systems. One of the changes that Swahn says has been most beneficial in the new space is the migration to Office 365. "Moving to Office 365 enables the family services team to share and coordinate calendars, which lets us better service our clients," Swahn says. "If a mom needs to see both a career coach and our social workers, we can book the appointments back to back so no one has to come in twice on one day."

Swahn also praises Carmichael for the Internet solution it devised for The Drake House's apartment buildings. "These are concrete buildings, making wireless connectivity an issue. Carmichael built a wireless network with a wired network as backup, so the residents never lose Internet if there is a wireless connectivity issue."

Her greatest praise, however, Swahn reserves for the move, itself. "Carmichael took every piece of equipment out, and then reversed the process when we moved back in," says Swahn. "It was a huge worry for me—how we would get it all scheduled; whether we would be out of service. We literally had no downtime, at all. I am still amazed at that."

Looking toward the future, Swahn says The Drake House has been accepted for two technology grants—one for a new data system and Salesforce; the other for additional training on Office 365. No matter what the future holds, she knows that Carmichael will be part of it.

"Carmichael has gone way beyond the call of duty to help us. I let Tyler know everything that is going on, and he blesses every project. He sets the standard for his staff, and it shows."

"[For our office move], we literally had no downtime, at all. I am still amazed at that."
–Kathy Swahn

ABOUT THE DRAKE HOUSE

The Drake House provides short-term crisis housing, education and empowerment programs for homeless single mothers and their children in North Fulton. Immediate housing combined with an empowerment program are designed to provide stability for the children and assist the family in working toward housing self-sufficiency. The Drake House offers housing and in-depth assessments to approximately 40-50 families a year, with each family staying approximately 125 days. To date The Drake House has assisted more than 320 families and 600 children. For more information, visit **www.thedrakehouse.org**.

Carmichael Consulting Solutions, LLC I 319 N Main St., Suite 200, Alpharetta, GA 30009 I 678-719-9671