

New financial management system becomes the catalyst for change at ACF

Australian
Childhood
Foundation



The Australian Childhood Foundation (ACF) is a national organisation with a central purpose to bring love and safety to children affected by trauma of child abuse and family violence through counselling and trauma services. They also provide training for professionals working in childhood trauma. In recent years, ACF has experienced rapid growth putting a strain on its financial management platform and holding them back from their strategic vision. They chose Evolution Business Systems to implement Microsoft Dynamics 365 Business Central and they now see their potential as limitless.

The challenge:

Systems needed to catchup with a growing organisation

ACF is a force for childhood - supporting children and young people affected by the trauma of child abuse and family violence. With 160 staff and full national reach, with impact in every state and territory, ACF experienced significant growth over the last 5 years. Their financial management system had become too unwieldy and could not cope with the reporting requirements that were necessary to drive the organisation forward. Ms Narelle Lowe, Finance Manager Corporate Services at ACF explained that their financial management platform had been in place for almost 12 years. "We were using MYOB, but it had become too small for us. There was just too much data to manage within the system. We were using spreadsheets to track everything, which is prone to error. We had outgrown MYOB and needed to move things off Excel and into a new finance system."

It was a huge amount of time and effort by the finance team to manage paper-based processes and get the data they needed from the different departments to report for the Board. "Our processes were very paper based, especially in accounts payable. We had a lot of paper and were still using stamps: the old style with the date and the code, and having managers signing the paper as approved," said Ms Lowe.

Board reporting was also posing issues. Ms Lowe said, "It was taking two weeks after month-end to close and put the report together. It was very time consuming. We didn't have time to work on anything else, as the next month was coming up upon us. So the reports were very basic and uninformed. We couldn't keep up with the workload."

“It's been seamless. Business Central will allow us to apply more flexibility into the future –It doesn't matter where you are, you can use it anywhere. One day at the office, then the next day at home and there's no change.”

Narelle Lowe,
Finance Manager
Corporate Services



"Preparing reports from the data in MYOB was impossible. We didn't know if departments were making a profit which was a major concern. The issue was we needed a proper structure, so we could allocate to departments and start running reports that didn't require us to download 15 reports from MYOB and then try and add them all together. Time and the organisation of our data was the major challenge."

By 2018, the National Executive were pushing for a new system due to the lack of reporting and made it part of the organisation's strategic plan. Financial management was highlighted as one of the top five areas for improvement. "It was a top priority for the Board and National Executive because the reports they wanted and needed to make timely decision; we just couldn't put together in time and then maintain consistently month to month."

The journey:

Focused intent for a quick implementation

In April 2019, ACF began looking for a new system. Joe Tucci, CEO at ACF involved Ernst & Young to help the organisation source the system, with Evolution Business Systems being invited to tender.

The selection process was not based solely on the functional requirements of the system, but in having a partner that ACF could work well with. It became clear that the values held by EBS, resonated with ACF.

"We choose our partners wisely," said Ms Lowe, "whilst our values (at ACF) easily identify with how we value and hold the children and young people we support, they also flow through into our corporate arm, in how we hold partnerships and integrity at our core. Our intention is to be a catalyst for change through meaningful innovation and partnerships so it was critical we selected the organisation we could see coming on this journey with us."

The time it took to go from demonstrations of products in Q4, 2019 through to choosing EBS and the 'go live' was very quick. EBS worked with ACF to be up and running in February 2020. Ms Lowe said of the process, "It all happened really quickly. From my point of view, I think it was the right amount of time. My team were hesitant of course, but we agreed, 'Let's just get the system in, and then deal with the change, as we use the functions.'"

You're never going to know everything about a system until you start using it."

When asked to describe the implementation process, Ms Lowe replied, " 'FUN' which is bit weird," she mused, "because when you're putting in a new system, it's not supposed to be fun, right? But the whole process was very stress free. It was one of the most stress-free systems I had been involved in implementing. In early March, I met with the CEO and he commented, 'I really can't believe we just put that system in. There was no stress, there were no issues. Nothing happened that was out of the ordinary.' I still can't quite comprehend it, but it was the partnership we had with EBS, it just worked so well."

Ms Lowe highlighted, "The weekly project meetings were organised, and informative. The amount of training and support EBS gave us from go live was excellent. The consultants would get back to us so quickly and we really appreciated the patience they had for our 'rookie mistakes' as we were navigating the new system. It was such a smooth process and the support we received was amazing."

The outcome:

Decision making and reporting success

In the short time that ACF have been using Dynamics 365 Business Central, they have seen some terrific time savings. "The accountants love it. Month-end is very easy. We're now completing month end in three to four days. Then we run a Jet report on day five and the CEO has it straight away. The P&L and balance sheet come out in five seconds. The time saving is definitely a major benefit." Ms Lowe says that the reporting has been greatly improved with the Dimensions functionality in Business Central.

"The reports we can prepare now are so diverse, and it's around how we built the dimensions. The consultants at EBS spent a lot of time during the scoping phase making sure we had the right structure to ensure we could generate the reports we required. We've been trying to get reports by State for some time, now we just run a report and we know how the state's financial position. Program reports, per department were quite difficult before, as we had to combine a lot of Excel documents to get those together. We can run these reports now within seconds."

The team are also enjoying the new Business

Central dashboard, "Having the visibility, to see the dashboard as soon as you enter the home screen of Business Central. You can see the Total Sales, and what Invoices are overdue. I also know how many invoices we've got to pay, so in an instant you can get a mental picture of your cash requirements which is so critical for a not for profit.' We could never see that before."

On the accounts receivable side, sending out the invoices has been a lot quicker. Ms Lowe highlights, "They just automatically go out, it has saved us a massive amount of time. It takes us about two hours in the morning. You can just run the invoicing schedule which picks up what needs to be issued and after quick review the invoices are sent. It's great. Interestingly our accounts receivable turnaround is also much quicker now, people are paying us faster."

The future:

Sustainable growth for long term impact

ACF had just implemented their financial management system when the COVID-19 pandemic placed restrictions on working in the office. The transition to working from home has been seamless. "It doesn't matter where you are, you can use it anywhere. Business Central will allow us to apply more flexibility into the future – one day at the office, then the next day at home and there's no change."

When asked what advice she would give to other organisations currently dealing with similar challenges that ACF were with their financial management system Ms Lowe says, "It's a no brainer for a not-for-profit setup like ours. Business Central is so versatile you can setup the dimensions how you want them or need them to replicate the reporting structure of your business. EBS helped us get this right. It's a flexible system with increased visibility for management. There's so many possibilities with the potential links to other Microsoft products and apps including Power BI – we're only just tipping the surface of what we achieve with Business Central. I think the potential of the system once we have the finances embedded - where we can go - will be infinite." It certainly seems that ACF are on the right path to meet their strategic vision: 'Grow in a sustainable way while being positioned to achieve long term impact.'

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p 1300 303 973
e info@ebs.com.au
w www.ebs.com.au

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