

Pinnacle Access Control System Provides Solid Foundation for Success of Iowa's Lighthouse Transitional Living Program



Celebrated across the country for its agricultural resources and college football teams, Iowa is also known for generously providing help to those in need. Assistance is available from private, municipal and state agencies and services run the gamut from Meals on Wheels to healthcare to legal aid.

Yet even with the availability of these services, there will always be some individuals who end up outside of the support system. This is where the Lighthouse Transitional Living Program, a division of Iowa Homeless Youth Centers, provides crucial support. The Lighthouse provides housing for homeless parents, pregnant young mothers and others who may have exhausted community resources, family and friends. The youth served are non-system involved, meaning they are not placed or supported by any government assistance or agency. Families can stay, at no charge, for a period of two years – and are able to leave the program whenever they wish.

The program focus is on helping these homeless youth and families learn to live independently and become self-sufficient. A case worker or counselor works with each client to help them set and achieve their educational, vocational and personal living goals.

Recently the Lighthouse purchased and renovated six duplexes that were under-utilized housing owned by the City of Des Moines. The renovation budget also allowed for Lighthouse staff to upgrade the physical security of the new facility from the hard keys that were used at the former facility and which caused frequent tracking and accountability problems. Door locks continually had to be re-keyed and staff was often required to open doors because of a lost or misplaced key. There was also no free access to come and go as needed and residents had to ring a buzzer to be let in. The resulting restriction of freedom hampered the residents' opportunity to learn self-sufficiency and household management.

Lighthouse staff wanted an access system for the new facility that would provide more accountability, be easier to use and maintain and cost less money overall. To meet these goals, they worked with Jeff Sternquist of A TECH Inc., a Sielox access control system integrator, to design and build a new system. Together they came up with a system design that uses technology to enhance safety for the families and also uses the technology as a management tool to assist Lighthouse staff in teaching self-sufficiency to the families.

The Sielox Pinnacle access control system is the hub of the design and is deployed over a wireless network installed by A TECH. Sielox 1700 Series Network Controllers are used to support a card reader at each front door and alarm sensors at each duplex. Alarms include time-zoned door and window alarms as well as 24-hour resident fire alarms, which are monitored by A TECH at their UL fire-listed central station monitoring facility. IP intercoms are installed at each duplex for two-way communication, and IP surveillance cameras are installed on the exterior of the duplexes to provide a good overview of the site by staff.

One of the benefits of the Pinnacle implementation is the way in which its network controller connects to the site's wireless infrastructure, making it more convenient to extend the access control system to the various housing units. Doors can be remotely locked or unlocked as needed and alarms can be managed through the Pinnacle system. For added convenience, alarms are set to pop up on the display screen, bringing them to the attention of staff for faster resolution.

The system's user-friendly interface also makes it easy for the staff to manage the card access system. Now instead of having to re-key doors if a key is lost or not returned when a resident vacates the facility, staff can quickly and easily update the data base to remove access privileges on a particular card. Time restrictions for certain areas such as the laundry facility or community center can also be better enforced as well as ensuring that curfews are adhered to. The system records all transactions; reports are generated for review by staff and, if necessary, residents. According to Toby O'Berry, IHYC Director, Lighthouse Transitional Living Program, the new card access system is a means of helping the young parents become responsible adults.

"Security and controlled access are a very big part of the success of the program," said Mr. O'Berry. "The goal here is to keep an eye out but ultimately to let the residents learn how to manage their households so when they transition to their own apartments they will know how to make their own decisions, while still allowing us to have that general oversight. The Pinnacle system lets us accomplish that."



In addition to these many benefits, by implementing the Pinnacle access control system Lighthouse Transitional Living Program has been able to improve the effectiveness of the staff, enabling them to maintain fewer staff members on site. The savings in financial, security and human resources are applied to the program and in helping the young families.

"The real ROI for us is the outcome for our youth," adds Mr. O'Berry. "With the Pinnacle access system, our staff has the tools to do the best work they can and give our residents the best possible quality of life. Ninety-five percent of the youth that enter our residential program exit to safe housing. We are breaking the cycle of poverty one family at a time and the Sielox Pinnacle System factors into our successful outcomes."

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If you would like to learn more about Iowa Homeless Youth Centers, or make a donation, please contact Toby O'Berry at TOBerry@yss.ames.ia.us. Or you can visit their website at <http://www.iowahomelessyouth.org>