



Developing an Innovative Portal for the Jerusalem Municipality Welfare Department

To allow the Jerusalem Municipality's Welfare Department to provide welfare services to the residents effectively, while improving contact with them, Ness has developed a special portal for the department. The portal was built in Microsoft Azure Cloud and is currently going live. It heralds a new era in the provision of welfare services by the Jerusalem municipality.

Jerusalem is the capital of Israel, as well as the country's largest city. As of December 2019, the city numbered 936,000 residents.

The Jerusalem Municipality's Welfare Department serves the general population: retirees, new immigrants, special populations, bereaved families, children at risk and more. Welfare services are designed to strengthen the individual, family and diverse communities in the city – to improve the quality of life in the areas of personal and social life, through the welfare offices spread throughout the city.

The Challenge: Developing an Advanced Welfare Portal

Welfare departments in Israel's local authorities are obliged to provide services to clients. The quality of these services is measured over time, while creating a monitoring and controlling mechanism for the clients who apply to the welfare offices. The local authorities are required to maintain confidentiality and information security in accordance with their rules and tools.

Until recently, Jerusalem residents who needed welfare services had to call or physically go to the welfare offices for information and services, including completing forms and submitting them, along with the required documents. The workflows were lengthy and complex, accessibility online was almost non-existent, and some tasks were performed manually, which heightened the chance of increased errors.

Social workers were unable to correspond with clients via email due to information security restrictions. This created a heavy burden on the social workers, who had to explain things repeatedly, which delayed handling requests. Follow-up of the treatment plan necessitated a lot of overhead and collaboration from many related parties.

Employing Focus Groups

Ness was asked to develop a dedicated portal for the Jerusalem Municipality's Welfare Department that would serve both clients (residents) and the department's employees and service providers. To gain an in-depth understanding of both of these populations' expectations and interests, Ness formed focus groups and study teams.

Following the feedback received from the focus groups and study teams, Ness developed the portal, which is a major leap forward in terms of the connection between residents and the city's Welfare Department. Residents can do almost anything through the portal, and department employees use it as a first-rate tool that maximizes efficiency, as well as a main means of communication with those who need their services. In addition, the focus groups examined the extent to which users were able to use the portal, and accordingly the portal was designed for easy and user-friendly work.

The portal was developed in the Jerusalem Municipality's Azure cloud. The innovative portal, which is currently going live, is integrated into the municipality's efforts to improve service to residents.

Online Communication and Maximum Access to Information for Residents

The innovative portal provides access to Welfare Department services and creates a secure environment for transferring information. At the same time, the portal interfaces with the client's file at the municipality and accesses information relevant to the client from the municipal system. The portal greatly improves communication and availability of services, while shortening the time to provide optimal, current and online response to the client. Furthermore, the portal boosts the quality of service and appointments through pre-meeting preparation, and through secure correspondence between the client and the social worker.

Clients receive up-to-date information on welfare services, register for various services and calculate eligibility through a special calculator. They receive appointment confirmations, can submit documents and statements online, and correspond with welfare agencies.

This is a real revolution, in which the need to come to the welfare offices is declining drastically, and almost anything can be done through the portal.

The portal will also be translated into Arabic, which will make it easier for the city's Arab population to use it.

Process Transparency and Meeting SLA Objectives

Another of the portal's tasks is to manage the work process in a computerized way, while creating process transparency by presenting the status of requests to clients and other internal parties. The portal minimizes errors in workflows and measures the improvement in SLA (Service Level Agreement) goals, with all portal activities being performed within an SLA framework set for actual workdays and managed by the department.

The portal allows Welfare Department employees to receive online queries and emails, send requests to clients, receive documents and statements, and coordinate appointments via computerized

calendar. It also allows department employees to request appointments, send targeted messages to specific population groups, and perform analytics on clients' use of the system.

Welfare Department employees, such as the social workers, benefit greatly from the portal. They can manage their contacts and appointment logs through the portal, and schedule appointments with residents as the system builds an appointment history for each client. In addition, the social worker can construct his/her own online form and send it to the populations for which he or she is caring.

Integration with the Welfare System and Municipal Systems

The Welfare Department portal exists alongside the welfare system. Therefore, it is important to set the service provider up with the best possible integration for his/her work. Integration is expressed through the display of alerts from the welfare portal on the service provider's desktop, even if the portal is not opened. Clicking the alert will move the user to the incoming item at the portal mailbox.

The portal enables the addition of a code for the client from the welfare system via a button, synchronization of incoming files from the welfare client to the client's file, and synchronization of inquiries to the client's file.

The portal also integrates with other systems, including Outlook, for synchronization of the service provider's Outlook calendar with the portal's professional log, as well as integration with the municipal mini site for viewing municipal events and adapting them to the welfare format.

Using a Variety of Tools for Microsoft Azure

The welfare portal was built in the Jerusalem Municipality's Azure cloud, using various Azure-related tools.

The main tools included Cosmos DB, which enables building highly responsive and highly available applications; Azure Data Factory, which allows developers to integrate disparate data sources; Azure Application Gateway, a web traffic load balancer that enables managing traffic to web applications; and Azure Blob storage, Microsoft's object storage solution for the cloud.

Other tools included Azure Web Apps-Isolated Tier, which help create and deploy mission-critical web applications; Azure AD B2C, allowing the welfare clients to register and enabling social workers to manage their directories with clients; Azure ML Studio, a collaborative, drag-and-drop tool that can be used to build, test and deploy predictive analytics solutions on the data; Azure Service Bus - a messaging service on the cloud used to connect any applications, devices, and services running in the cloud to any other applications or services; Azure API Management (APIM); and Azure Application Insights, an application performance management (APM) service for developers.