



Drowning Prevention Auckland engages Target State for a buoyant IT environment.





Drowning Prevention Auckland is a big impact charity that develops water competence and influences behaviour to save lives.

For the last 25 years, Drowning Prevention Auckland (DPA) has helped us become safer around water. Their vision is to have an Auckland free from drowning and they work tirelessly to achieve this through their education, advocacy, and research.

Their education approach is targeted and driven by the demographics that are most at risk of drowning. They have Pasifika, Māori and Asian educators who work specifically with those communities and each approach is culturally appropriate for the most impact. They also have educators who work in schools – from ECE to tertiary – and for professionals who work in, on and around the water.

With advocacy, they champion better decision making and policy so that we can stay safe based on the latest research.

Everywhere there's water – rivers, lakes, beaches, and public and home pools – DPA educates and influences behaviour and attitudes to prevent the devastating impact of drowning.

The challenges: wearing many hats, Covid, and group chats.

As a specified amenity, DPA receive about 85% of their funding from Auckland Council. They make up the shortfall from grants and corporate sponsors, enabling them to further their reach.

We spoke to Chief Executive Nicola Keen-Biggelaar about the challenges of working for a charity of this size and scope.

Unlike large corporates where resourcing is not an issue, she likens her role to a Swiss army pocketknife. On any given day, Nicola needs to quickly understand and move between the different departments to make sound financial decisions on behalf of DPA. She outsources some roles where funding allows.

Unfortunately, Nicola has been burnt by a couple of IT consultants who spoke in jargon, making it difficult to see whether they were telling the truth or over inflating the results.

The Covid environment and the move to remote, digital working was a strong catalyst for Nicola to review DPA's tech. Nicola feels:



“a great sense of responsibility to ensure that the money entrusted in us is delivered in the most effective and efficient way. Covid really highlighted problems in terms of our ways of communicating and sharing our work. Some of the paper-based systems that worked fine when we're all in the office suddenly failed.”

She also knew that some of her staff were using shared documents and group chats. Nicola was concerned that these systems could get unruly without solid rules of engagement.

DPA connects with Target State to review and improve their IT effectiveness in the wake of Covid.

Nicola found me, Ant McMahon, from Target State through LinkedIn and reached out in late 2021.



“I reached out to say I'm interested in looking at how we do IT as an organisation. A lot of the team had different ideas and they all had value. It was time to take a step back and work out where our money's best invested to support our IT growth and to improve effectiveness and efficiency in the way we work.”

Therefore, Nicola engaged me to do an independent audit of DPA's IT and create a digital roadmap.

Diving into the audit process.

I helped DPA review the systems they are using and consider all the different areas their stakeholders and staff engage with IT. During this process, I talked to senior leadership and staff on the ground to gather a range of perspectives.

Some of the questions we explored together included:

- What products and systems are you using?
- How are you using products and systems?
- Is your existing technology past its use-by date and is there a better solution available?
- What are the best questions to ask on an ongoing basis to ensure we're getting the most from our tech spend?
- Do the products and systems integrate – do they talk to each other and point to one source of truth – or are they silos?
- Are the products, systems and processes streamlined? Are there any that are redundant or wasteful?
- What are the tension points among staff? Which areas of IT are painful to deal with?
- What are the rules of engagement – the necessary protocols – for the systems and processes?
- Where are the quick wins to build momentum and increase buy-in?

What this independent audit achieved for DPA.

The outcome of the audit was a detailed digital roadmap which prioritises the different areas to work on, as and when funding arrives. They can also use the results of the review in grant applications to justify additional IT spending.

Through this process, Target State confirmed six key areas to look at. One of these areas was workforce development, for example how DPA can get payroll and leave forms online. Nicola learnt that there are some good off-the-shelf tools that they can use which she hadn't heard of before.

DPA were using the Microsoft Suite – especially Word and Excel. The audit highlighted that there is a system that can make the whole process more streamlined and save time for their finance manager (who used to have to consult 14 people to get all the necessary information).

Thanks to this audit, Nicola can now be confident that DPA is investing in the right areas and systems at the right time. And they can eliminate wastage and save time and resources. While the speed of the rollout will be driven by how quickly they can get funding, DPA now has a clear direction. Target State has removed the guesswork.

The valuable experience of working with Target State.

As Nicola had been burnt by consultants in the past, it was crucial that this time she engaged a trusted, plain talking advisor for DPA's IT decisions. Nicola comments:

“Ant has a lovely balance between being professional, but real. I could unpack all my issues with no fear of judgement. I could trust him with my information and our challenges knowing that he could help me solve those in the best way possible.”

“No question has ever been too silly. Ant's been accommodating and helped me understand. I've valued that he understands the charitable sector really well. He can look through the experience that he has with larger organisations and what's the reality for a small and mighty charity where you don't have teams of people that can come in and project manage an IT project.”

Is your organisation also in the not-for-profit sector?

There's no use sugar-coating it – too many systems, not enough processes, tech jargon, and lack of clarity can hold you back from achieving your vision. If you are a charity and your tech is stuck or you need a clear and concrete roadmap on where to spend your time, money and resources, I'm here to help.

Please book a chat with me today.