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Cisco helps send calls out to lonely elderly people in need

Internet Protocol technology network leader Cisco® helps keep millions of people in touch around the world each day – but thanks to a handful of its North Sydney employees, the company is now keeping in touch with a number of lonely elderly people in the community who are most in need of daily contact.

Around 40 Cisco employees at its North Sydney office are volunteering for Catholic Healthcare Community Services' 'Community Links', a program which involves volunteers telephoning a designated isolated older person at a set time each day, to help make sure they are safe and well.

Community Services is a Catholic Healthcare service provider which works with the elderly, financially disadvantaged, people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness, people with a disability, people with a mental illness, carers and children and young people with special needs or who are at risk of harm.

Catholic Healthcare Community Services' Volunteers and Corporate Partnerships Manager and Community Links Co-ordinator Kerry Lovell started Community Links as a pilot program following the spate of seven lonely deaths reported in Sydney in early 2006. Community Links has now been launched as a full program, following another series of lonely death reports at the start of this year.

"We are enormously appreciative of the generosity being shown by Cisco and its employees," Mrs Lovell said. "It shows great community spirit from everyone involved. We have so many people living alone in the community, and the simple act of receiving a phone call each day can make all the difference to the wellbeing of so many. Being involved in a program such as this is equally enriching for the volunteers."

The Cisco volunteers work in pairs, sharing the daily telephoning duties with a client with whom the volunteers have been 'matched'.

"We see this service as more than one of monitoring a person's wellbeing," Mrs Lovell explained. "By matching volunteers and clients, we put people in touch with one another who have similar interests or personalities. A music-loving client, for example, will gain a great deal from receiving a call each day from a volunteer who is equally as passionate about music."

Cisco distribution channel Account Manager and local Cromer Heights resident Sarah Emmerson is one of the employees volunteering for Community Links. Mrs Emmerson has been with Cisco for eight years.

“Part of the reason I’ve enjoyed being with Cisco for so long is the involvement it has in the community,” Mrs Emmerson said. “I’ve done some volunteering in the past, but it is hard to give time when working five days a week. It’s so much easier to make the commitment by being able to do this in our work time.”

Mrs Emmerson said she was hoping to make a meaningful connection with Community Links’ client she has been matched with.

“Most of my grandparents are gone now. I miss that interaction, especially the talks I used to have with my grandmother on the phone,” she said. “I hope to build a strong relationship with the person I’m calling.”

Mrs Lovell invited members of the community interested in being a volunteer for, or client of, Community Links to contact her on Ph: (02) 8876 2159.

Pic caption: Holding the line...Cisco employee and Community Links volunteer, Sarah Emmerson.

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About Catholic Healthcare

Established in 1994, Catholic Healthcare is an experienced, not-for-profit provider of aged, healthcare and community services across NSW and south east Queensland. Catholic Healthcare employs more than 3,000 staff and operates 40 residential aged care communities, 10 seniors living communities, three hospitals and provides community services to more than 5,000 people in their homes and communities.

About Community Services

A part of Catholic Healthcare, Community Services with a diverse range of people and communities to enable and maintain sustainable and vibrant lives. Community Services works with the elderly, financially disadvantaged, people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness, people with a disability, people with a mental illness, carers and children and young people with special needs or who are at risk of harm.

About Cisco

CISCO Systems Inc. is the worldwide leader in networking for the Internet with more than 35,000 employees in more than 115 countries. Today, Cisco solutions are the networking foundations for service providers, small to medium business and enterprise customers which includes corporations, government agencies, utilities and educational institutions. Part of CISCO’s philanthropic charter is to educate communities and provide them with resources that empower them, through a variety of programmes, to reach their potential. CISCO also aims to develop its employees into successful volunteers and informed philanthropists who ‘give while they live’.