



## A CASE STUDY BY BONTERRA PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

*The leading cloud software provider for the social good sector*

# Covenant house uses data to help build a bridge from homelessness to hope.

Bonterra Program Management (formerly Social Solutions) helps the international organization reach a new level of performance management maturity, advance its outcome measurement capabilities and standardize programming across its 33 sites.

## CLIENT

Covenant House  
International

## VERTICAL

*You services, violence,  
survivor services,  
housing help*

For 50 years, Covenant House has helped transform the lives of more than 1.5 million young people experiencing homelessness and human trafficking. It provides youth facing homelessness with basic needs and support services to help them achieve stable housing, build a solid education foundation and find sustained employment. Covenant House operates housing facilities and delivers programming in 33 cities across six countries, currently reaching about 20,000 youth every year. Its continuum of services spans from healthcare, educational support and job readiness to legal services, mental health treatment, substance use services, life skills training and community prevention.

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), in 2021, about one-quarter of individuals experiencing sheltered homelessness were under 18, and a third were under the age of 24. The young people who Covenant House serves are usually disconnected from their families and other social support. Most of them have endured traumatic and adverse childhood experiences that have led them to homelessness.

Many are survivors of abusive homes, juvenile justice facilities, human trafficking and exploitation, or have spent time in the foster care system.



Covenant House's comprehensive programs "build a bridge from homelessness to hope" for young people via three core models:

exceeded goal by **167%**

**400** beds planned

**693** new beds actual

## STREET OUTREACH AND DROP-IN SERVICES

Outreach specialists provide youth facing homelessness with food, hygiene kits, and other essential supports, as well as vital information about Covenant House's youth shelters and on-the-spot assistance. This model gains young people's trust and, when ready, connects them with the shelter, where they are given unconditional love and support to build productive, independent and sustainable lives. The drop-in centers provide another layer of supportive service, including meals, showers, lockers and more, as young people consider options for residential programming.

## IMMEDIATE CARE

Short-term stay shelters focus on immediately meeting the youth's most pressing needs, including a safe place to sleep and emergency medical care, three nourishing meals a day, a shower, etc. Trained staff then assess the youth's situation so they can identify their highest priority goals and coordinate the best support plan.

## TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

Longer-term transitional housing assists those who are ready for more independent living. Once a youth's circumstances have stabilized through Covenant House's shelter services, the journey toward independence and a life free from homelessness can begin.

# Growth journey

In 2012, the leadership team at Covenant House began to explore new strategies to develop a stronger, data-driven culture. While its sites tracked basic program metrics (e.g., number of participants served), they did so without a common reporting platform, and agency-wide reporting required laborious manual processes. In addition, it had no insight into agency-wide outcomes, not to mention no way to track and compare data year-over-year. As a result, each Covenant House site was doing something different in terms of data management, reporting, outcome measurement and more. This limited their ability to uncover new opportunities, identify best practices across its sites and provide standardization in terms of programming, data management and aftercare.

Having the foresight to see how important data and digital connection would be for the organization in the coming decade, Covenant House sought to adopt a standard, flexible data management system that could provide outcome measurement and reporting capabilities across all of its programs and site locations. They knew that having a common for



The processes, procedures and protocols to make sure we are collecting quality data and that we're able to further develop strong outcome measurements and start looking at performance across all of our sites were pretty much impossible before we had our agency-wide data management software.”

—David Howard | Senior Vice President  
of Research, Evaluation & Learning,  
Covenant House International

its large, geographically diverse operation would help identify opportunities for growth and learning, develop a robust performance management system, and so much more.

Covenant House turned to Bonterra Program Management to provide comprehensive outcomes tracking across their international network. Beginning in 2013, Covenant House began what became a two-year implementation of the software across all of its sites in six countries.



By 2016, Covenant House had adopted a common data management platform for the first time in its history, setting the stage for the next phase of its data journey.



## Reaching new heights

With all sites using a common platform, Covenant House built and instilled stronger processes, procedures, and protocols to improve data quality, develop agency-wide outcome measurements, and fully leverage the power of their data. Since its initial deployment of data management software, Covenant House has grown its residential capacity and also expanded into new geographies. It's also weathered a global pandemic and navigated immense social and political change over the last decade. Its journey to data management maturity is inspiring and educational and is one worth studying for extracting best practices.

## TRULY DATA-DRIVEN

Among other things, Bonterra Program Management allows the team to examine key performance indicators like occupancy and stable exit rates across all of its sites. The solution generates daily occupancy reports that go out to all of its sites as well as quarterly reports that break down site-specific and program-specific data, including demographic profiles, service engagement, and outcomes – with the ability to compare those insights over specified time periods. Having this information at their fingertips allows Covenant House staff to ask the right questions, prompt important discussions and make effective changes when needed.

For example, Bonterra Program Management's solution empowers Covenant House to meaningfully use data to support its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives regarding factors like race, ethnicity, gender identity and sexual orientation. Covenant House's internal data demonstrates that nearly 90% of youth served in the U.S. and Canada are young people of color and that more than a quarter of youth identify as LGBTQ+ (based on self-reporting at intake). This data is consistent with statistics from the broader population of youth facing homelessness in the U.S. and Canada. Data management software empowers Covenant House to narrow in on metrics, like length of stay, reasons someone left a program, milestones such as stable housing and employment, and then dissect those metrics based on personal factors and demographics to ensure the organization is achieving equitable outcomes. These are just a few examples of how the organization has used Bonterra Program Management to assume a truly data-driven culture to create and scale lasting impact.

## TELLING A DEEPER STORY

Rather than simply having its sites report on basic demographics of the young people served, Bonterra Program Management enables the leadership team at Covenant House to view a robust profile of its participants, including context on their backstory and unique needs.

For Covenant House to fully understand what it takes to achieve a positive outcome for a young person, they must have more than the outcome measurement. They must also be able to look at the individual's programmatic journey, such as the services they've utilized and for how long. Having access to this type of information—particularly to help compare programs across countries and geographic regions—allows their teams to better understand the population it is serving, improve its care continuum and elevate the sophistication of its programming and reporting.

## INFLUENCING PUBLIC POLICY

Data also plays a role in supporting advocacy work at Covenant House. For example, the data Covenant House collects on its participants' employment and income history through the data and case management software is helping to identify the most common occupations, average earnings and income disparities. With these data points, Covenant House can help advocate for the creation of public initiatives that would help young people enter higher-paying fields like healthcare or information technology.

Human trafficking also impacts many of Covenant House's participants and has been a focal area for the organization for more than a decade. As human trafficking becomes a more prevalent and pressing issue, Covenant House has worked with policymakers to ensure that upcoming legislation includes increased funding for anti-human trafficking programs. It is currently working to implement robust screening protocols at all of its sites to systematically





*Bonterra Program Management's solution enables*

# 1200 STAFF MEMBERS

*to drive a data-driven culture*

That screening information provides valuable information to both service providers and policymakers in terms of effective identification strategies and ways to support survivors.

David Howard, Covenant House International's senior vice president of research, evaluation & learning, adds that one of the organization's strategic plan priorities is to scale these efforts to all of its sites so that everyone has the ability to effectively screen for human trafficking. In addition, he says it will help better define the connection between youth homelessness and human trafficking.

## CREATING STRONGER ALIGNMENT

Howard shared that his team has enhanced their ability to share and reflect data back to site leadership and frontline staff to improve alignment on the utilization and importance of data management software throughout the organization. When staff are able to see the impact of their work visualized through data there is naturally a stronger alignment and greater buy-in.





# A look at future impact

Having a standard data management platform has allowed Covenant House to measure outputs and outcomes more easily and effectively, establish demographic profiles for the groups they serve and tell a compelling story about the young people who come to them. However, their work is never done. Many of Covenant House's strategic priorities for the years ahead involve going even deeper in their standardization and program alignment, making way for even stronger and more impactful outcome measurement that will drive the organization further along on its journey to becoming a fully data-driven culture.

## IMPROVING THE AFTERCARE APPROACH

Through its growth journey, Covenant House has made several improvements to how it measures and reports on participants when they leave their sites. However, the organization wants to do more to capture follow-up outcomes and insights on individuals after they exit the program. Howard notes that implementing an even greater level of standardization using the Bonterra Program Management's solution will be key in improving its aftercare approach.

## GOING DEEPER WITH DATA

Howard notes that the organization has long wanted to dig into the measurement of social and emotional well-being outcomes and the permanent connections young people can make while involved with Covenant House. He notes that this information will help the organization tell a deeper story and lead to greater impacts for young people moving forward. In addition, Covenant House will be piloting some new measurement tools that the organization aims to scale in order to reach more comprehensive and robust outcomes.



We're developing a standard approach to how we can follow up and how we can track [participants when they leave], and data management software will play a big role in that."

—David Howard | Senior Vice President  
of Research, Evaluation & Learning,  
Covenant House International

## GREATER PROGRAM ALIGNMENT

Howard also notes that the organization is seeking ways to become more sophisticated in terms of the way it tracks things like youth engagement and case planning. He recognizes the need to create greater alignment in terms of tracking these metrics, which are currently tracked in different ways across sites. Achieving greater alignment on how key metrics like these are gathered and reported would allow the organization to match that information with broader data to tell a deeper story.

## Solutions

Bonterra Program Management's solution acts as the primary data management system for Covenant House's organizational learning efforts. Here are a few key highlights of how it has helped Covenant House demonstrate its impact, commitment and dedication to learning over the past few years:

### GROWTH GOAL EXCEEDED BY 167%

During its five-year strategic plan (2015 – 2020), Covenant House set out to add 400 new beds across the organization. Instead, the agency exceeded its goal by adding 639 beds during the timeframe.

## TRANSITIONAL HOUSING PROGRAMS CREATE IMPACT

### THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

In 2021, Covenant House partnered with the National Network for Youth and SchoolHouse Connection to release a white paper on the effectiveness of transitional housing for youth experiencing homelessness. Using data tracked in their Bonterra Program Management's solution, the white paper demonstrated that among youth exiting a Covenant House transitional housing program in the U.S., 73% exited the program into stable housing, and 69% were employed or enrolled in school when they left.

**73% STABLY HOUSED**

*after exiting program*

**69% EMPLOYED**

*or enrolled in afterschool program*

### 690,000 NIGHTS OF HOUSING DESPITE PANDEMIC CHALLENGES

When COVID-19 began to affect Covenant House sites and programs in March 2020, the organization quickly pivoted to start analyzing data more frequently to better understand the pandemic's impact, as well as the agency's response. During the first full year of COVID, Covenant House sites provided 690,000 nights of housing.

### LEADERS IN DRIVING A DATA-DRIVEN CULTURE

As Covenant House has expanded its use of Bonterra Program Management's Case Management solution over time, the unique number of Covenant House staff who record information in the system has grown to about 1,200 in a given month. The organization recognizes that the individual efforts of those 1,200 staff—largely frontline direct care staff—provide the foundation for the agency's ability to use data as a learning tool. Not only are the staff directly carrying out the organization's mission, but they are driving its efforts to learn, grow, and, ultimately, enhance lasting social impact.

To learn more and explore what is possible with Bonterra, visit [bonterratech.com](https://bonterratech.com).