



CUSTOMER PROFILE

Next Stage Ltd are one of the North West's leading care and support services providers. Founded in 2002, they operate from six locations spread across the North West of England, with their head office based near Manchester. With over 25 years of experience, they are widely recognised as an Employer of Choice, with a current headcount of over 230 staff – and still growing. They facilitate a wide range of services, including mental health support, children's homes and learning disability bridging units, providing care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

Operating in numerous locations across the North West, with over 230 staff, one HR Manager and wide range of employee management requirements to fulfil, Next Stage needed a comprehensive HR system that would allow their team to self-manage their holidays and absences alongside integrating with their existing payroll and T&A systems.

SOLUTION USED

IRIS HR

As one of the North West's leading care and support services provider, Next Stage needed the support of an appropriate HR system that could support their growing status as a recognised 'Employer of Choice' within the social care industry.

Who are Next Stage Ltd?

Next Stage specialise in the provision of care and support services to vulnerable teenagers and adults. Founded in 2002, they operate from six locations spread across the North West of England, with their head office based in Westhoughton near Manchester. These locations are split into three separate groups under the Next Stage brand – Next Stage, Next Stage 4Life and Youth.

With over 25 years of experience in the care industry, they are widely recognised as an 'Employer of Choice', with over 93% of their employees rating them as a 'recommended employer'. Next Stage facilitates a wide range of services, including children's homes, leaving care, mental health support, learning disability bridging units, and support with fostering. Care is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Their organisation is continually growing, with their original headcount of 80 support workers now evolved to 230 and counting.

Before IRIS HR...

Prior to Next Stage's introduction to IRIS HR, they used manual processes for holiday and absence reporting. This meant that managers had very limited access to their employees' records, and problems with holiday entitlements and absences were commonplace as a result.

The HR Manager had devised the original system, and as she single-handedly dealt with Next Stage's entire HR function, this often meant carrying out much time-consuming admin.

The new starter process in particular was lengthy and required the filling in of much documentation, which were then stored as hard copies in files, as well as manually scanned.

Staff did not have the visibility of their own records, and as a result sent daily requests to HR for a variety of simple queries, including holiday entitlement, the changing of personal information, and private salary data.

The Challenge.

When Next Stage decided to sign with IRIS HR in April 2015, they primarily desired a system that formed the basis on which to hold employee records and calculate holidays and absences.

Whilst undergoing a period of significant change, with the responsibility of day-to-day people management shifting away from HR and onto managers as teams and divisions grew, Next Stage required a complementary HR system that primarily supported ease of use to all employees

Next Stage also required a system that could adequately manage their ongoing training, recruitment and staffing needs. The Support Sector is known for having a high staff attrition rate, and Next Stage needed a tool that could track key recruitment and retention components within one central area.

“IRIS HR has brought us into the technical age”.

— Next Stage Ltd

Why IRIS HR?

SME's, particularly those within the care industry, can be short on business process expertise – especially when implementing and embedding new software systems within their companies. The care industry is quite immature in terms of harnessing and utilising technology to its best advantage, and the technical guidance and support provided by IRIS HR proved to be a deciding factor in their ultimate decision.

Chris Gascoigne, an independent IT consultant brought in to advise Next Stage believes that an HR system should have three key components to be considered as ‘good’ – “good software, good support services, and most importantly, a consistently high level of innovations. I have full confidence in IRIS HR to deliver in all three of these areas”.

He continues: “One of IRIS HR's main plus points is that they pride themselves on continuously taking a ‘best practice’ approach as a software provider, providing added value content and guidance wherever they can, alongside using their stance as a leading HR tech company to educate and inform SME's on topical issues within the industry. For example, their coverage on GDPR has been both informative and helpful, whilst their campaigns centering on Performance Management have provided us with highly useful information. You can really tell that they maintain a big focus on their innovation cycle”.

Due to the complex nature of rotoring shifts within the care industry, Next Stage uses a separate system to manage their Time and Attendance (T&A) needs, as well as a bespoke training solution. A deciding factor in their choosing of IRIS HR centred on its ability to work seamlessly with these other systems.

How does IRIS help Next Stage Ltd?

Having electronic employee records means that Next Stage managers can now have a full 360-degree view of their staff, with the system successfully storing all relevant documentation for each employee. Managers also now have a raft of department-level reporting just the click of a button away, with access to intuitive software enabling hassle-free report generation.

Next Stage's entire new starter process has been enhanced by the IRIS HR system, Chris said: “We now let new starters take ownership of their online employee accounts and profiles from the off, with many now filling in essential details before they have even started at Next Stage. We send them our information guidelines and let them manage their own information upkeep, which has drastically cut the HR admin time required”.

He continued: “The access to intuitive software, such as IRIS HR, has marked a big change in our handling of system's integration – for example, without the system, we would have struggled greatly with digitising our new starter process. Instead, our employees are now much more acquainted with their own records, and understand why it is so important that they are kept up to date. Holidays and absences have also become an entirely automated process, and the records for these areas integrate well with our separate payroll product. IRIS HR also supports serious training and appraisal structures, which is a key focus point for us as a business within the care industry”.

Another huge plus point for IRIS HR is, in Next Stage's eyes, the strength of the IT Support Team behind the operation.

Chris says: “SME's often struggle with the maintenance and upgrades that multiple separate systems need – that's why the IRIS HR IT Team are so crucial to the ongoing success of our business. Their service provision is second to none, and we love the fact that we can speak to real experts about any queries we may have. The helpdesk itself always responds rapidly, and has helped us greatly in areas including the structural set up of the system, the master data set up, and establishing system permissions”.

Chris Gascoigne also believes that IRIS HR represents great value for money in the small business marketplace – so much so, that Next Stage's next big project is to invest in a training solution to sit alongside and complement IRIS HR.

“We are in a period of significant growth, and IRIS HR has saved us many hours across the HR team by streamlining our existing processes”.

— Next Stage Ltd

He says, “IRIS HR provides us with an auditable documentation paper trail that has various alerts along the way – helping us hugely with issues such as retaining CQC compliancy. The care industry is very highly legislated, and we must abide by our key values of transparency, auditability and traceability. IRIS HR is a fantastic aid in all of these areas, especially when it comes to recording and showing due diligence for recruitment purposes”.

Overall, Next Stage’s employee base has grown from 60 to 230 FTE’s in just two years. It is sufficient to say that this growth would have been largely hindered without the support of the IRIS HR system, as there would have been undue pressure placed upon manual systems. The additional work required to manage on-boarding and absence processes may well have required an extra three FTE’s, and also likely have resulted in many errors.

Additionally, Next Stage have also integrated holiday and absence bookings with their existing payroll process – this has also saved employing another FTE.

Would you recommend IRIS Software and IRIS HR?

We would recommend IRIS as we have full confidence that they are able to consistently deliver good software, good support services and a high level of innovations. Alongside this, they are an organisation that prides themselves on taking a ‘best practice’ approach as a software provider, continually providing value added content and guidance wherever possible.

Not only is IRIS HR great value for money, the strength of the IT Support Team behind the operation makes a big difference. They’re crucial to the ongoing success of our business, as their service provision is second to none, and we’re able to speak to experts about any queries we have. Furthermore, the helpdesk itself always responds rapidly and has already helped us greatly.