

Housing Connect Program

A CASE STUDY



A pair of hands is shown from the side, gently cupping a small, blue paper cutout of a house. The house has a gabled roof and four square windows arranged in a 2x2 grid. The background is a soft-focus, light-colored fabric.

Two apps make it easier for vulnerable customers to access social housing services

The issue

Customers experienced long administration times and difficult processes to access housing assistance services provided by the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ).

For example, housing applicants had to attend an office to collect a 45-page application form, take it home, fill it in by hand, before returning it to the office. Office staff would then perform data-entry of the form into a computer system. It could take up to several months for customers to hear back about their application.

Who is the customer?

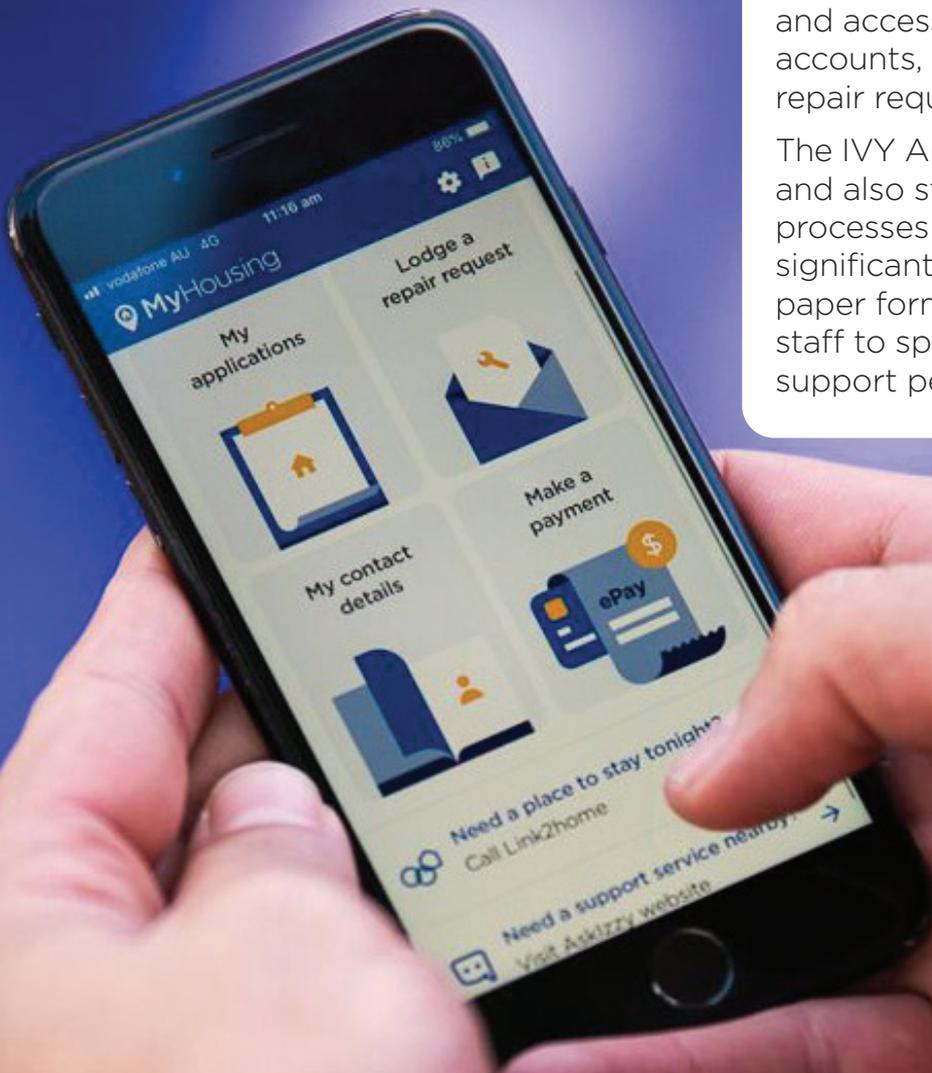
Customers are often vulnerable people and may be sleeping rough, experiencing chronic mental health conditions, or drug or alcohol addiction. They are of diverse ages, ethnicities, religions and include single parents, refugees and the elderly with serious health issues.

The solution

DCJ launched the I Visit You (IVY) app for staff in March 2018 and the MyHousing app for customers in October 2019.

The MyHousing App provides social housing tenants and applicants with a digital tool to apply for housing, monitor their application and access other housing services such as accounts, household details and property repair requests.

The IVY App replaced the lengthy paperwork and also streamlined the administrative processes for staff involved in field work. The significant reduction in manual processing of paper forms has given time back to housing staff to spend in the community to better support people who need help.



The results



Digital access
to services.



Easier application
processes.



Reduced processing
times.



The MyHousing App has had **22,000 downloads** across both Apple and Android devices since its launch.



The IVY App has **reduced administrative tasks** associated with visiting tenants by **50%**.



House visits by staff have **increased from 30% to 80%** (due to less time spent on administrative tasks).



100% of the 650 staff use the IVY app.



No complaints have been received from staff about technical issues or system failures.



There have been **no customer complaints** regarding the use of the IVY app.

1 Research to know how your customers use services



Insights

Seek opportunities to leverage off other organisations to better understand your customer. This is especially useful if you lack the resources or knowledge to conduct research yourself.



DCJ participated in and supported a University of Sydney study to research how rough sleepers used digital services and smart technology.



The research found 85% of rough sleepers had a smartphone, that it was regularly fully charged, and it was used to access services.



DCJ used those findings as an evidence base to support the need for the Housing Connect program. The data justified the value of developing a fit-for-purpose app through an external provider.

2 Design with your customers



Put your customers at the centre of the product design process. This ensures the end product meets their needs and their expectations.



DCJ formally engaged about 50 social housing tenants of different ages, genders and ethnicities to workshop and then test the app design.

Stakeholders such as Women's Refuge and Disability Network, also participated as part of the User eXperience (UX) and User Acceptance Testing (UAT) testing.

DCJ used an Expression of Interest (EOI) process inviting previously surveyed customers to attend workshop sessions.



A Housing Connect reference group participated in a series of 30-minute workshops to determine:

- the design of the MyHousing app
- the number and types of features, and the flow process between pages.
- details such as the size, type and colour of the different icons.



Participants received regular reports to show how their input was used in the design. They were also contacted and thanked for their involvement via email.

Overall, DCJ engaged more than 200 customers to help develop and test the apps over 15 months.

3 Test and re-test to make the product 'fit-for-purpose'

A login form for NSW Communities & Justice. It includes a 'Welcome' message with placeholder text, fields for 'User ID' and 'Password', a 'Remember me' checkbox, a 'Forgot Password?' link, and a green 'Login' button.

Test with customers to improve the chance of success. This includes capturing customer feedback through multiple channels. Using your own staff in the testing process can also save time during the rollout phase.



DCJ staff of varied skill levels across NSW tested and refined the IVY app. This process was duplicated with the reference group and experienced frontline staff to test and refine the MyHousing app.



Customers regularly provide feedback via the app store, and DCJ's feedback channels. The feedback includes suggestions for more features and other improvements to the apps. DCJ responds to all feedback, whenever contact details are provided.



DCJ trained their own staff to run the training workshops for staff to learn the IVY app, rather than an external provider. The staff could use their experience to answer more complex questions directly.

This enabled training workshops to be reduced from 5 1/2hrs to less than two hours.

To learn more contact:

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