

Securing a brighter future for women and children in need.

Lifespring Ministry reduces vandalism and fosters family growth with the help of a network surveillance system.



Organization:
Lifespring Ministry

Location:
Aurora, Illinois, USA

Application:
Safety and security

Axis partner:
John Kone Consulting

Lifespring Ministry, a division of Wayside Cross Ministries, is a faith-centered recovery and long-term transitional living program that offers women the support and reaffirming care they need after losing their housing due to addiction, abuse or financial crisis. Housed inside a refurbished convent, Lifespring provides a safe environment where women are encouraged to face their obstacles, plan for their future, and work toward self-sufficiency. Children find a nurturing place to play and grow while moms get the help they need.

With 15 rooms (nine for families and six for singles), the ministry has the capacity to house up to 50 people. In addition to providing shelter, Lifespring also helps women learn about finances, cooking and nutrition, computer skills and provides GED tutoring. Women are also connected with individual mentors and local churches to build new support systems and healthy friendships as they work to transform their lives. Food, clothing, and a physical fitness facility are also provided free of charge while women seek full-time employment to support themselves and their children.



Physical security is the foundation for progress

Like many non-profit support organizations, Lifespring faces the challenge of striking a healthy balance between being welcoming to those seeking help and maintaining a safe and secure environment for residents. Until 2015, this meant that the front door was frequently left unlocked - a situation that changed when an intoxicated man wandered in to get warm on a cold winter day. The ministry building also features a large number of windows, many of which have been broken at least once in recent years, including an incident when a scooter was thrown through the window of the community room while children were playing inside.

Lifespring's previous security system consisted of pull-string alarms located inside each of the apartments, which allowed residents to alert others that something was wrong. Those who had cell phones could then call for help. This version of an early-detection system was not only prone to human error, but was also a highly reactive approach that didn't necessarily lend itself to prevention.

"The problem was that if someone were to get into the door to one of the floors, they would have access to the whole dormitory, so by the time someone sounded the alarm, it could have been too little, too late," Cantey says.

Working with John Konc of Konc Consulting in Aurora, Lifespring installed 12 AXIS M30 Network Cameras throughout the interior and exterior of the building. The chapel and common room received particular attention as they are the two most-used areas within the ministry. The cameras are set to record on motion and transmit video to an on-site server, which retains video for 90 days.

Peace of mind

The intuitive, easy-to-use AXIS Camera Station video management software allows Cantey and other employees to view live video remotely and to quickly review video of incidents, either from an on-site PC or via her smartphone.

The ability to monitor the facility 24/7 has been tremendously positive. During the period when Lifespring was having problems with broken windows, Cantey says she had a hard time leaving the facility each night.

"I was struggling because I got to go home to the suburbs and sleep in my house that I know is protected," she says. "I want to make sure we have everything possible to keep the women and children safe and secure."

Cantey says she doesn't check in on live video often out of privacy concerns, but the ability to follow up on certain things has been valuable.

"When we do have an issue, even if it's just someone making a mess in the kitchen during the night, I can go in and check. We want to make sure there's nothing happening that shouldn't be happening," she says. "For me, it's peace of mind, it's the ability to go back and check on concerns residents might have, and it's also the confidence that I can back up my staff if necessary."

Fostering family relationships

Because Lifespring has cameras in the building, particularly in the early learning center, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) has granted permission for fathers to come in and spend time with their children for supervised visits, which has been incredibly beneficial.





"This is huge for us because we think children are better off with their fathers present, and now the fathers are maintaining a relationship with their kids. The cameras allow us to have that happen because we have the ability to monitor everything without being intrusive," Cantey says.

Catching culprits

Since the cameras were installed, they have been instrumental in helping police identify vandals.

"Thankfully, we only had two windows broken since they were installed, and we were able to give video to the police to identify the kids who were doing it," Cantey says. "Even though no charges were filed, police were able to contact the individuals to let them know they'd been identified and could face charges if they continued to vandalize the ministry."

Gentle reminders

Lifespring was also having issues with food being stolen from its pantry area. With the cameras in place, Cantey was able to identify the individual and remind her of the house rules.

"I knew who was coming down in the middle of the night and taking food that didn't belong to her and was able to let her know that she needed to stop if she wanted to stay here," she says.

Providing a complete picture

One of the best examples of the benefits the cameras have delivered can be seen in an altercation that occurred between a mother and her teenage daughter.

The mother took her daughter's phone from her for using it inappropriately and walked downstairs to give it to a staff member in the office. That staff member heard a commotion and came out of the office just in time to see the mother push the girl away from her, which could have led to a report to DCFS, followed by an investigation. The video, however, provided a much more complete picture of what had happened.

"We could see that it was the daughter who launched at her mother, and her mother pushed her away in an appropriate manner, which wasn't physically violent, until the staff member could intervene," Cantey says. "It could have been much worse but thanks to the video, we were able to close down any investigation and keep the teenager with her mother."

Securing the future

Lifespring has further plans for the video system, including additional Axis cameras on the exterior of the building. Once that happens, the organization hopes to deploy AXIS Perimeter Defender on some of these cameras for early detection, providing yet another layer of protection for the complex and its residents.

"That will further solidify our ability to provide the most secure environment possible to help our residents get back on their feet," says Cantey.

"Our goal is to provide a place where women feel safe and get back on their feet, and my greatest fear was that we would be vulnerable from a security standpoint."

Jody Cantey, Director of Lifespring Ministry.



"It frightens me to think how different things could be without these cameras. I'm not exaggerating when I say the system has been a huge benefit for us."

Jody Cantey, Director of Lifespring Ministry.



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