

Case Study

Enhancing digital communications for high impact youth programs



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Michael Saigeon
Co-Founder & COO of Project Lifelong

Project Lifelong Charter

Project Lifelong is a nonprofit organization in Sacramento, California that empowers youth through experiential-based programming. It was founded by Michael Saigeon, a former youth officer for the Sacramento County Sheriff's department, and Sean LaTour-Jarquin, whose vision formed the foundation of the program.

The organization's mission is to connect kids to positive adult role models, schools, and peers, and change the trajectory of their lives. It is dedicated to instilling leadership skills in middle and high school-aged students and to creating greater opportunities for lifelong success, good health and well-being.

Its primary program is called Skate Night, which brings a full skatepark experience to middle school campuses. "We drop 20 to 40-foot containers filled with ramps onto school grounds. The idea is to give students who are otherwise disenfranchised and disconnected a way to reconnect with school," Michael explained.

In conjunction with the skatepark experiences, Project Lifelong offers a high school leadership program, where selected high school students volunteer to work alongside staff to facilitate events and mentor the younger kids in the Skate Night program. Their volunteer contribution is rewarded with outdoor adventure trips like surfing, whitewater rafting, snowboarding, and wilderness hiking.

As its programs and member base expanded, Project Lifelong quickly outgrew its membership database capabilities.

The Need for a Robust and Scalable Member Database Solution

Project Lifelong's original member database, built on Microsoft Access, caused ongoing operational challenges. First, the database could only be accessed from one location and by one user at a time. With a distributed user base that ranges from parents submitting applications to staff and volunteers managing programs from various school locations, it resulted in binders full of inefficient paper-based forms and hours of manual data entry. This consumed already limited staff resources and made the database vulnerable to introducing errors.

Also, there was no way to assign role-based access. "I needed different access levels through login credentials. From the parent or account creator to a database administrator, like myself, to a data input role for site-level staff and coordinators," Michael said.

Making matters worse, every Microsoft update broke the database, causing downtime and requiring more resources to get back up and running. To address these issues and streamline future growth, Project Lifelong needed a robust, scalable solution with a rich set of tools and capabilities.

Knack's No-code Builder Enables Seamless Data Access and Management

After considering several cloud-based solutions, Michael quickly narrowed the field to Knack and a couple other options. One system offered a flexible spreadsheet tool, but didn't allow different users to log in with their own data access credentials, necessary to ensure data security of the portal. After deeper evaluation, Knack proved the clear winner. It offered significantly better value for the price and the most robust App Builder and toolset for customization.

To handle some of the more technical workflow requirements, Michael partnered with Dave Parrish, a low-code cloud database app expert at KnackBuilders. Following the initial build, the ease of use and intuitive nature of Knack's no-code solution enabled Michael to become a "citizen developer" and play a significant role in creating and customizing a membership database to match his existing processes and workflows. "The key reason I love working with Knack is we can totally customize it to fit our needs. It can be just as unique as your business is," Michael said.

Knack also delivered on role-based credentials for data security and access controls. And leveraging the active Knack community, Michael could seek help and ideas along the way. Ultimately, the new solution eliminated paper documents and manual data entry, allowing parents to submit applications, input and update emergency contact information and even sign forms like a medical release. Staff and volunteers could input and access the database from any location.

Project Lifelong's Member Data Management Today

"Now it's much more than a place where parents sign up for a program. We've got a referral intake, a case management component, recording for accident or info reports, and now a communication component," Michael explained. "And they all work together." The referral intake system specifically offered a powerful community level diversion program for parents who are in crisis mode. Parents, social workers, mental health professionals and law enforcement can each access the system and input information to refer kids who need help.

With access to Knack's API, Michael could hire a Knack partner, Andy O'Neil, a no-code developer at Weblytica. Andy helped integrate Twilio to add texting functionality to the communication capabilities. Make.com, a third-party SaaS platform, was used to automate the SMS workflows with Twilio.

Make made it possible to build hardened workflows in the event any of the supported APIs were unavailable. This prevented the sending of duplicate messages to parents. Make was also used to create a dynamic filtering system that ensured each parent only received one message, even if they have multiple children enrolled in the program. The complementary capabilities of Make and Knack were needed to create this workflow.

The personalized, two-way communication bridges the gap that was left when the face-to-face interaction of handling paper forms was eliminated. "What's really important to us is the personal aspect, the relationships we build with our parents, with our partners, with everybody," Michael said.

The new texting capability enables both individual and group messaging to cover emergency response notifications, program updates or general questions. Without Knack's API, Michael would have had to use multiple tools, which would have been both costly and time-consuming to manage.



What's Next for Project Lifelong and Knack?

Ensuring a positive customer experience is crucial to Project Lifelong's success. Michael tracks user feedback and plans to use the latest Knack capabilities to create and optimize new forms and the overall member portal experience."

Working with Knack, Project Lifelong has built a secure and scalable solution for managing member data, streamlining processes, and improving communication. All are key to delivering on its mission.

A smooth operation gives Michael and his team more time to focus on what matters most—building strong relationships, providing positive role models and creating one-of-a-kind experiences that are truly changing the life trajectories of the students served.



About Knack

Knack eliminates business blindspots and improves operational excellence by connecting your data, teams, and customers. Knack is trusted by thousands of small businesses and Fortune 500 companies to increase visibility of data and manage operational processes seamlessly all with no code.

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Our surveys show that 100% of the students in our programs say giving back to their community is more important to them than it was before entering the program. And I can't tell you how many parents and kids have literally said, 'this program saved my life'.

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