

Case study

Pioneer Center for Human Services



Sprout by HP means new possibilities for people with developmental disabilities

Industry

Non-profit human services

Objective

Provide training and education through classroom and community based opportunities to enhance life, social, independent living, vocational, and recreational skills for those with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

Approach

Pioneer Center for Human Services deployed HP Sprout all-in-one computers to enhance learning for both life skills and work-related opportunities

IT matters

- HP Sprout runs standard touch-enabled Windows, ensuring seamless network integration
- Intel® Core™ i7 processor, NVIDIA graphics and solid state hybrid drive combine enable high performance desktop computing

Business matters

- Versatility to run standard PC applications as well as unique, graphical application suite in Sprout Workspace
- An HP Touch Mat as the computer interface allows a more natural, head down position for desktop work
- A large, 20-inch diagonal HP Touch Mat empowers those struggling with fine motor skills to utilize the computer without a keyboard and mouse
- A built-in Sprout Workspace creative suite provides an alternate hands-on approach to computing that may be easier to embrace for those on the Autism spectrum



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– Jackie Wells, President and Chief Executive Officer, Pioneer Center for Human Services



For more than 50 years, Pioneer Center for Human Services (Pioneer Center) has been helping people with challenges—including intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), mental health issues, homelessness and more. Using technology to help clients achieve their full potential has long been a goal of the organization, and technology advances help push those efforts forward. Now a new kind of computer—the all-in-one Sprout by HP—is reaching many of Pioneer Center’s clients like never before, opening up a new world of creativity.

Helping achieve potential

What started as a day school for children with developmental disabilities in McHenry County, Illinois, Pioneer Center has grown and prospered greatly since 1958. Today, Pioneer Center services approximately 4,800 annually by offering programs and services in three key areas:

- Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities
- Behavioral Health Services
- Homeless Services including community-based group homes

“Pioneer Center’s mission has always been to empower individuals to achieve their full potential, and today, learning to use technology goes hand-in-hand with that,” says President and Chief Executive Officer Jackie Wells.

For adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, Pioneer Center often picks up where traditional public schools end: helping clients to set and achieve personal goals, whether they’re focused on the simple activities of daily living, having a career, or volunteering in the community.

“In the past, services provided by agencies like ours focused on routine tasks. Too often, technology wasn’t utilized,” says DJ Newport, director of Vocational and IDD Day Services. “We’re using every available tool to make the transition to adult life after school smoother and our clients more productive.”

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Sometimes clients are happy to play on a computer. But Pioneer Center’s trained staff seizes on opportunities to make every moment a teachable moment. They challenge clients to use whatever computer-based tools they can — from video calling applications like Skype, to creative programs and even productivity tools including Microsoft® Office.

“By building technical skills, we hope to open the employment doors for many of our folks, in order for them to play a more active role in the community,” says Wells.

Unfortunately, technology itself also presents barriers. Some clients are unable to master a keyboard and mouse due to difficulties with fine motor skills. Pioneer Center has tried using touch-based consumer tablets, but find they’re often too small for the clients’ use.

“It just struck me that there’s something for everyone in Sprout. I couldn’t wait to show it to people here.”

– Vance Christy, IT Manager

“When considering the number of people we serve and the differences in their needs,” Wells explains, “we needed a device that was really versatile. It also needed the ability to run both very common, as well as very specialized, software applications.”

Sprout by HP offers new promise

Then one day, IT Manager Vance Christy saw the HP Sprout. He remembers it well.

“I had a sleepless night and was up late when I saw information about the HP Sprout,” he says. “It just struck me that there’s something for everyone in Sprout. Then thinking about how it seemed to overcome so many of the barriers we faced, I couldn’t wait to show it to people here.”

Pioneer Center soon contacted their partner CDW to review the details. The HP Sprout is an all-in-one computer equipped with the HP Illuminator, which incorporates an Intel RealSense 3D camera and projection engine; a 20” HP Touch Mat; and a suite of creative applications. Together, these elements offer users the opportunity to unleash their creativity. Users can quickly scan and capture both 2D and 3D objects, and use the touch-sensitive mat—which is essentially a secondary monitor—as a touch screen to manipulate, edit and transform the captured image.

In addition, the mat can be used as a giant touch screen interface to work with any touch-enabled PC application.



“The first thing I wanted to do when I saw Sprout was to touch it,” says Wells. “And we’re seeing the same reaction in many of our clients. It’s less intimidating to them than a keyboard and mouse. It actually draws them in. It provides confidence.”

For Pioneer Center, Sprout is a new opportunity to effectively integrate a computer into the life skills training and vocational programs of its clients.

A better fit for those with special needs

“For some clients, just being able to work with a computer in a natural position, with their head down, is helpful for them. Using the Touch Mat gives them the ability to exercise their motor skills,” explains Christy. For clients who are on the Autism spectrum, the built-in apps help them explore new ways to communicate. “And they’re able to effectively manipulate a computer that’s new and mainstream, rather than traditional, and sometimes cumbersome, assistive technology.”

He notes that there are essentially two ways to use Sprout. One is to use the unique Sprout workspace, which integrates image capture, editing and manipulation. The other is to use a Windows environment to run touch-enabled applications, including Microsoft Office.

Christy says that while Sprout offers more options in the user interface, users at Pioneer Center who have had difficulty with a keyboard

and mouse in the past seem to find Sprout easy to use. “What really bridges the gap for our users is utilizing the mat as a touchscreen to manipulate the desktop. The applications really seem to jump off the page for them.”

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Sprout is also fast, he notes, even when working with complex, scanned 3D objects. That speed comes from the combination of a 4th generation Intel Core i7 processor, NVIDIA GeForce graphic card, and solid state hybrid storage drive.

PC Versatility and more

Newport, who is more focused on Pioneer Center’s employment and training programs for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, likes the versatility Sprout offers. People who need to run standard PC applications can work in them. People who need to work on other skills can do that, too.

Customer at a glance

Hardware

- HP Sprout

Software

- HP Sprout Workspace
- Microsoft Office

“There is a coloring app that’s really good for working on fine motor skills and control. In another program, users can take an image, break it into puzzle pieces, then manipulate it on the Touch Mat to re-assemble it,” he says. “What we’re seeing is that the tactile experience of working with the HP Touch Mat is helping clients achieve new things with the computer.”

Pioneer Center is just beginning to explore many potential uses and applications with the HP Sprout. “We know our clients will have new opportunities with some of the many applications available for art and creativity,” Christy says. “And the more we use the HP Sprout, the more we’ll see new ways to let our clients explore. It’s an exciting process.”

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– DJ Newport, Director of Vocational and IDD Day Services

Wells also notes that Sprout is providing therapeutic opportunities for many of our clients with barriers including those on the Autism Spectrum. Sprout helps develop hand-eye coordination skills.

“One of our goals in therapy and education is getting clients used to using their hand to manipulate what they see on the screen. This can help them develop the connection between hand movement and control of onscreen results,” he says. Pioneer Center initially received a grant to fund the purchase of 18 HP Sprout all-in-one computers to be used for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Sprouts are proving so useful, Wells says, that Pioneer Center hopes to get additional funding so that it can expand the use to other programs, and also equip eight of the organization’s group homes with a Sprout.

“Whenever you’re working on developing new skills, it’s important to practice and get frequent reinforcement so there is no learning loss,” says Newport, “So being able to transfer what they learn in our day program and repeat those skills at home is very helpful.”

More than assistive technology

One of the things that excites Pioneer Center staff is that it’s not just “assistive” technology that becomes quickly obsolete. Sprout helps make the power of computers more accessible to clients as the latest advance in mainstream computer technology — with the ability to run the same applications, to access the same networks, and enable its users to interact with other computers and other computer users.

“Today, everybody uses technology— whether it’s a desktop computer, a tablet or a smartphone,” Wells says. “Our clients haven’t always been able to access or use the same technology as everyone else. So the ability to use Sprout is a new opportunity to help clients achieve their personal, and perhaps even professional, goals. In that sense, it’s pretty inspiring.”

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