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Building IT project skills is key to digital age efficiency

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Jessica Macpherson expected to spend thousands on software development when she wanted to create an online ordering form for not-for-profit organisation St Kilda Mums. But thanks to Salesforce's gamified online learning platform Trailhead, she was able to build this functionality herself, saving a huge amount of money that can go towards helping families in need.



Jessica Macpherson, CEO of not-for-profit organisation St Kilda Mums.

St Kilda Mums gives pre-loved nursery goods, clothes, books, toys and baby car seats to social workers to pass on. It uses Salesforce to organise donors and financial supporters, volunteers and orders from social workers.

“We wanted an online ordering form for social workers to collect very specific information,” founder and CEO Macpherson says.

“For instance, rather than just seeking information about whether a family needs a car seat, we wanted them to be able to specify whether the seat was for a child aged zero to 12 months or for a child aged 12 months to four years old.

“I knew we could use Salesforce to do this for us, but assumed it would cost a lot of money to get the work done by an implementation tech partner. One rainy weekend I started to explore how I could develop the functionality I wanted.

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“I completed one learning unit through Trailhead. By the end, I realised that not only could I use Salesforce, I could build it myself.

“By Monday I had developed a proof of concept I could show the team, who were blown away,” she says.

Macpherson has subsequently taken the same DIY approach to a number of other IT projects, such as introducing chat functionality on the website. “We’re experimenting with bots. We’ve connected Amazon Connect to Salesforce to centralise customer contact details and phone calls. And we’ve done all this by doing Trailhead modules.”

The platform has helped St Kilda Mums save money, allowed it to better service its constituents and helped the team build new skills.

This is important given new research by RMIT Online shows Australia needs a digital workforce that is proficient in skills such as web design, software engineering and cloud computing across a variety of disciplines and occupations, such as marketing, health and operations.

The report, *Ready, Set, Upskill*, explores the critical digital skills that are imperative for a post COVID-19 economic recovery.

“Digital skills will account for 87 per cent of all jobs, and yet one in four people we surveyed as part of this research reported they didn’t have the skills they needed for their day-to-day job,” says RMIT Online CEO Helen Souness.

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on my mobile phone in a day. I wouldn't have been confident doing that if I hadn't have had experience with Trailhead."

Building its digital capabilities has also allowed St Kilda Mums to expand its impact. Before the new site was launched, it helped around 13,000 kids each year. Today, that figure has grown to 20,000 kids it helps each year.

"Before the new site was built we distributed about \$2.2 million worth of goods each year. This year, we'll distribute about \$8 million in goods," she says.

Macpherson notes users can develop a huge range of skills with Trailhead beyond learning about Salesforce functionality.



Employers must shift their perspective on training so that it's valued as a core business activity and not simply a nice-to-have, says RMIT Online CEO Helen Souness.

"You can use it to learn interview strategies or digital marketing. You can do a module on the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. You can learn about how Google Analytics works. You can learn about how to run a presentation, how to manage change, how to put a project team together. It's incredible."

RMIT's Souness says training has never been more important in the workplace.

"Employers must shift their perspective on training so that it's valued as a core business activity and not simply a nice-to-have," she says.

"Individuals must also rethink their approach to upskilling. A degree completed at 22 is no longer going to adequately prepare you for the skills demanded by the technological revolution. Everyone should consider whether their current role allows them to develop new and relevant skillsets and ask their employer to support their growth – be it through formal training or work projects."

She says COVID-19 is a wake-up call that we can't become complacent in how we work and learn. "Through our research, it was encouraging to see the number of people who said they have extended skills like leadership and critical thinking as

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