

# TESTIMONIALS

## Thorner's Homes



### Thorner's Homes have been providing almshouse accommodation to women in need in Southampton since 1793

Thorner's was founded through a bequest of Robert Thorner in 1690. It has been providing almshouse accommodation to women in need in Southampton since 1793. The charity now owns and manages two almshouse sheltered housing type schemes, dedicated single ladies over the age of 55 and in financial need. As the organisation evolved Thorner's adopted new solutions that managed different facets of the Charity. This resulted business practices being built upon a multi-system foundation, with simple tasks taking much more time than required, such as recalling an invoice or generating rent statements.

After a system review in 2017, Thorner's identified that a much more integrated approach would be required, and have since addressed this using Pyramid Essentials, a hosted solution that manages Rents, Arrears, Repairs and Financial Accounting.

**Nicola Crook, Finance and Admin Officer at Thorner's Homes, said:** "At Thorner's, we have a rich history of providing a safe home where residents can live independently. Our two Almshouse schemes, Thorner's Court and Robert Thorner Court, both based in Southampton, are dedicated to housing poor widows of good character and single ladies aged over 55 who are in need. The two schemes offer over 100 self-contained modern flats, and each building includes a communal area. They're located close to the city high streets, and we find this helps to promote independent living with our residents, since all necessities are easily accessible. Our Scheme Managers are also on hand to offer support to residents and to ensure that each flat is well maintained.

Historically, Thorner's utilised a combination of spreadsheets, paper records and financial accounting software to manage different aspects of the charity's operations. However, as time went on, the administration with this multi-system approach became more labour intensive. After a review in 2017, it was identified that the problem lay with having multiple data sources, making collating information a time intensive task, for example, residents only received a rent statement once every 13 weeks.

We also discovered a lot of data duplication, which led to confusion to which system had the most up-to-date information. A trustee who operated a financial practice with a fully integrated digital system understood the benefits of a unified database, which prompted Thorner's to pursue a similar approach.

It was around then that OmniLedger came recommended by another social housing provider, who were operating their business with the Pyramid Housing Management system. During OmniLedger's on-site demonstration, we were pleased to find that the system met all our requirements, a fully integrated housing management package that quickly generated reports and statements.

Shortly after, we received approval from our trustees to implement Pyramid Essentials, a hosted system that comes with all the features required to manage our Rents, Arrears, Maintenance and Financials. One of the biggest factors for this decision was the cost justification versus the administrative time savings and improvements to efficient working. Pyramid Essentials required no additional networking hardware commitments by the charity, and the quarterly subscription model made the system highly affordable for an organisation of our size.

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Due to the multiple systems that were in place, we had some concerns regarding how smooth transitioning from the old multiple databases to Pyramid would be, as well as the amount of human resources required to verify our data. Fortunately, OmniLedger's project managers were on hand throughout the entire implementation and the extraction process proved relatively simple thanks to their straightforward import templates.

Within 12 weeks, our data was uploaded, and we were able to go live. The system's easy-to-use interface meant that training was minimal, and we were able to start using it immediately. Pyramid's centralised database and automated notifications meant that information is far more accessible.

Where tasks such as retrieving an invoice from physical storage and generating statements previously took a substantial amount of time, these are now achieved at a click of a button. Other key benefits we've seen include:

- Regular reporting for trend analysis, such as identifying doubtful debt and preventing arrears.
- Identifying those truly in need with the waiting list. Our flats are often seen as desirable accommodation for applicants who aren't in need, thanks to the low rent and modern renovations. We're now able to review applicants based on our own set of criteria such as personal assets, bankruptcy and other circumstances.
- We now have a true understanding of each resident including their next of kin. Pyramid's reporting tools have enabled us to efficiently audit our data and identify any missing information.

Looking ahead, Thorner's is expanding one of the sites with additional flats and carrying out a comprehensive £3m+ refurbishment of the remaining 39 flats. We work alongside other almshouses in the Wessex Region with the Wessex Almshouse Group and Scheme Managers Group, to share good practice and will continue to provide high quality homes for the almshouse residents.

A larger stock will require more maintenance to ensure high standards, and we have addressed this by recently implementing Pyramid's mobile working solution. Pyramid Mobile, powered by ProntoForms, provides our team with all the information and facilities needed to process maintenance tasks, whilst remaining on-site, all from a tablet. This ensures that Thorner's has a solid foundation that will futureproof our expansion goals."

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