

Case Study: Addressing Social Isolation with Staff Augmentation through Digital Technology during COVID-19

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Categories:

- ◆ Reduce Social Isolation
- ◆ Reduce Feelings of Loneliness
- ◆ Increased Quality of Life
- ◆ Increased Staff Efficiencies

About the Organization

Organization Name:

Kendal at Oberlin (part of
Kendal Corporation Affiliate)

Main Contributor:

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Organization Type(s):

Long-term Care Rehab Providers,
Skilled Nursing Facilities,
Intermediate Care Providers,
Memory Care Providers,
Intellectual Disabilities/Mental,
Retardation/Developmental
Disabilities Providers, Life
Plan Community (formerly
known as CCRC)

Organization Description:

Kendal at Oberlin is a vibrant
life plan community, located
in northeast Ohio, just one
mile from Oberlin College. The
community is one where older
adults can thrive and grow.

Project Description

Addressing social isolation with staff augmentation through digital technology during COVID-19. During the past year, Kendal at Oberlin went from having personalized engagement for each resident every day to a lockdown situation where it was difficult to even provide a few “touches” per day per resident. The community’s engagement efforts had to pivot and find new ways to reach older adult residents and augment their existing team efforts by leveraging the power of technology.

Socialization Modality

Preference based programming including live events, event/activity sharing, music, spiritual, social, and physical activities.

System Embodiment

Tablet, Desktop Computer, Laptop, All-in-one Computer, Smart TV

Business Model

Private Pay and Short-Term Rehab

Implementation Approach

As COVID-19 unfolded, it became clear that our existing strategy would not help us in supporting our mission of engaging older adult residents in a person-centered manner. Beyond the health and safety guidelines regarding social distance and how that increased social isolation, the biggest impact was on our staffing. We were going to need 200+ hours of additional staff time to reach our engagement goals — without the ability to hire.

The major reason for the increase in demand for staff was the limitation in terms of group programs and access to outside help, such as volunteers, music performers, or members of the clergy. As a result, the community had to get back to doing more one-on-one “touches” for residents and more personalized programs. The first step to address this issue was to partner with Linked Senior, which already had engagement resources packaged digitally in an accessible way. Our community then utilized student volunteers remotely to use Linked Senior by allowing them to access it on their own computers and engage with residents using it through phone calls.

Students also helped create new courses that could be shared and uploaded using the Linked Senior platform. Some of these new classes included Spanish classes, yoga, and cooking lessons. Students were trained to use Linked Senior on a weekly Zoom call during which they learned about secure video uploads, HIPAA compliance, and how to use YouTube as a content resource for Linked Senior.

There wasn't much resistance from residents to using digital technology to engage because they were confined to their rooms and wanted the interaction since they had been used to going to programming 3–4 times each day. Residents were feeling isolated and discouraged because they were confined to their room for all meals and activities and did not have roommates.

During the 2020 holiday season, the Linked Senior platform also added daily live holiday specific activities that helped further prevent isolation and despair and boost resident happiness and satisfaction.

Outcomes

Technology implementation supported the community by:

- ◆ Attaining 165+ hours of staff efficiency per month.
- ◆ Deploying 250+ hours of volunteer time, remotely and safely, despite the lockdown.
- ◆ Increasing the number of 1:1 interactions with residents by 4.2X during lockdown with Linked Senior compared to pre-COVID times.
- ◆ Going from 2/3 of residents reporting feelings of isolation to 1/3 of residents reporting feelings of isolation over five months (50% reduction).
- ◆ Observing the average engagement of residents from March to August 2020 increase 272%, and the year over year engagement increase by 240%.

Reduce Social Isolation, Reduce Feelings of Loneliness, Increased Resident Engagement and Satisfaction, Increased Quality of Life, Increased Staff Efficiencies

Challenges and Pitfalls to Avoid

Our community found that exercise was not as useful to residents for digital programming. Without an in-person exercise instructor and without people to exercise with in-person, residents did not work as hard because of less accountability when they were alone in their room and because of the absence of the in-person camaraderie and encouragement.

Another challenge was that many of the residents were not technologically savvy and did not have access to digital technology in the past; instead relying on landline phones for communication and connection. These residents were reached directly by staff and were part of a 1:1 focus effort.

Lessons Learned/Advice to Share with Others

When using digital technology for staff augmentation it is important to think about your resources and to work smarter not harder. Ask yourself, where are your staff hours going and what do you as a leader do each day?

Higher skilled interactions are required to keep residents meaningfully engaged and staff members with those skillsets should be matched to that job.

Remote staff could be tasked with doing tasks that do not immediately relate to preventing isolation or promoting good mental health and resiliency.

It is also important to check in consistently with residents to see how they are feeling. The Kendal at Oberlin community started collecting this feedback in May 2020, and each week asked residents to share how they were feeling. "Check-ins" were done at our weekly council meetings. In the beginning (May 2020), of the 30 residents in attendance there would be over half stating they were feeling isolated. By our October 2020 meeting, about 2/3 of the 30 in attendance started indicating that they were "doing well, all things considering." This was a marked improvement in mood. Residents stated that having the additional programming gave them feelings of connectedness. At this time, residents indicated that they didn't feel the need for weekly council meetings and moved to a twice a month meeting. At the beginning of the pandemic, they were consistently saying they needed help. Now that digital technology is being used to augment staffing, residents are reporting they are feeling better and more hopeful.