

Case Study: Using Technology to Socially Connect and Engage Meals on Wheels with Clients



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Categories:

- ◆ Reduced Social Isolation, Depression, and Feelings of Loneliness
- ◆ Increased Resident Engagement & Satisfaction, Social Networks, Quality of Life, and Staff Efficiencies

About the Organization

Organization Name:
[Meals on Wheels of Rowan](http://www.mowrowan.org)

Main Contributor:
Cindy B. Fink,
Executive Director

Organization Type:
Adult Day Care / Senior Centers

Organization Description:
Meals on Wheels (MOW) Rowan, founded in 1976, is a volunteer-based senior services organization. MOW delivers nearly 1,300 meals weekly across 511 square miles of Rowan County, NC. MOW provides nutritious meals to seniors so that they can safely age in place, and volunteers offer a friendly face and much-needed social interaction for seniors living in isolation. Learn more at www.mowrowan.org.

Project Description

The staff at Meals on Wheels Rowan knew, from the very beginning of the pandemic, that social isolation was going to be a big challenge. Most of their homebound senior clients were self-isolating, and many weren't seeing their loved ones because of COVID-19.

When MOW made the difficult decision to limit deliveries of its frozen meals to only once a week, some clients suddenly had almost no contact with the outside world. Clients were telling care coordinators they were lonely, and MOW staff knew from surveys that rates of social isolation and symptoms of depression were high.

As a result, the MOW staff started looking for a new, scalable way to help many of their clients stuck at home. Staff began looking for solutions to help clients connect remotely with their loved ones, improve their mental health, and provide a way for them to keep an eye on their clients' wellbeing.

Socialization Modality

Social Network, Video Chat, Audio Chat, Photo Sharing, Event/Activity Sharing, E-Mail, Text Chat, Picture Chat, Community App, Activity Calendar, E-Reader/Electronic Books, Art, Games, Exercise, Music, Facilitated Communications and Conversations, Companion App.

System Embodiment

Tablet

Business Model

Grant funded nonprofit (with support from CARES Act)

Implementation Approach

After testing a variety of platforms, Meals on Wheels selected Claris Companion[®], an easy-to-use tablet and software solution specifically designed for older seniors. The device's senior-friendly interface, personalization capabilities, and security features made it ideal for the agency's clients, many of whom had little experience with technology.

CARES Act funding paid for the tablets, which were delivered directly to clients.

In addition to preloaded apps and websites—which included the local senior center activities and the Libby library app—staffers personalized each device to reflect the client's interests. In some cases, that meant setting it up for online services at the client's church or faith home. For others, it meant bookmarking the website of a favorite sports team so they could easily check the scores.

Importantly, each senior's personal contact list was added to their device, so they could easily send messages or have video chat with their loved ones, while also staying safe from phishing and online scams.

Finally, the tablets were configured to survey the clients with automated wellness checks. These ranged from simple check-ins and health questionnaires to weekly cognitive tests, and social isolation surveys, including the Lubben Social Isolation Scale (LSIS) and Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS).

If any of the clients responded in a way that raised concern, customized alerts prompted staff to follow up directly with the user to ensure everything was okay.

Outcomes

- ◆ Reduce Social Isolation
- ◆ Reduce Feelings of Loneliness
- ◆ Reduce Depression
- ◆ Increased Resident Engagement and Satisfaction
- ◆ Increased Social Networks
- ◆ Increased Quality of Life
- ◆ Increased Staff Efficiencies

While onboarding assistance was provided by both Claris and MOW Rowan, seniors as old as 90 said they were able to start using their Claris Companion tablets right out of the box. Clients told care coordinators they liked interacting with the devices, with one woman saying it made her feel like someone was checking in on her.

Surveys showed that clients' mental health improved after using the tablets. Three months into the pilot program, depression and social isolation surveys found a 40% decrease in depression symptoms, and a significant increase in social interactions.

Over the first 12 months, notable findings from Claris Insight™ built-in data analytics included more than:

- ◆ 11,400 total interactions on the tablet
- ◆ 47,000 minutes of content viewed
- ◆ 6,500 total wellness and mental health surveys
- ◆ 1,700 medication reminders
- ◆ 1,000 messages sent and received

Challenges and Pitfalls to Avoid

- ◆ Not all seniors have access to a secure Wi-Fi network, so a tablet solution that supports both Wi-Fi and cellular internet is critical.
- ◆ Seniors have varying abilities when it comes to using technology, so a configurable solution that can be personalized for each senior's needs is key.

Lessons Learned/ Advice to Share with Others

- ◆ To leverage the in-home communication technology as much as possible, staff must be dedicated to continually providing content, messaging, and new virtual programming through the platform for the program to be truly successful.
- ◆ Detailed reporting on the seniors' engagement levels and usage is critical to continually improving the program. Without real-time engagement data, the program will likely fail.

Links to Other Case Studies

- ◆ [Interfaith Uses Claris Companion to Double Seniors' Social Connectedness](#)
- ◆ [Arthritis Services Helps Clients Manage Pain and Improve Mobility with Claris Companion](#)
- ◆ [How Area Agencies on Aging are using Claris Companion to address Social Isolation](#)
- ◆ [MOW Rowan Reduces Senior Social Isolation and Boosts Mental Health with Tablet Tech in the Home](#)