

# Case Study: Combating Social Isolation & Enriching Activities Through Virtual Reality Technology



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## Categories:

- ◆ Reduce Social Isolation and Feelings of Loneliness
- ◆ Increased Resident Engagement & Satisfaction and Social Networks

### About the Organization

#### Organization Name:

Ohio Living Breckenridge Village

#### Main Contributor:

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Activities Coordinator

#### Organization Type:

Independent living, assisted living, rehabilitation, long-term care, skilled nursing, home health, hospice, physician services, palliative care

#### Organization Description:

Founded in 1922, Ohio Living is one of the nation's largest nonprofit, multi-site aging services organizations, operating 12 life plan communities, Ohio Living Home Health & Hospice, Ohio Living Physician Services, Ohio Living Palliative Care, and the Ohio Living Foundation. We are proud that residents enjoy the support they need for every season of life.

## Project Description

Through the deployment at Breckenridge Village, a life plan community, Ohio Living sought a technology-driven solution that would empower our residents to make social connections, counter the impact of loneliness and isolation arising from COVID-19, establish differentiation in the marketplace, and inspire additional communities to embrace the power of technology to improve the lives of older adults across Ohio.

## Socialization Modality

Audio chat, photo sharing, life stories, games, facilitated communications and conversations, virtual reality

## System Embodiment

Tablet, virtual reality headset

## Business Model

Ohio Living Breckenridge Village is a life plan community that is designed to provide residents the freedom to live life that fully complements their lifestyle, starting with the ability to choose an environment that meets each individual's needs. Our business model provides residents with customized on-site amenities, features, and services that provide freedom from chores, and the security of knowing care and services are close at hand.

We believe in serving the whole person and offer a myriad of services and activities to enhance the individual's physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. These activities include traditional approaches such as exercise classes, arts and crafts, or good books in the library. For some residents, it might mean nurturing their spiritual life through worship services and inspirational programs.

Traditional activities for our residents were enhanced in early 2020, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, when we deployed Rendeever's resident engagement system to Breckenridge Village. This decision, which was supported through a grant application, was a reflection of our organization's desire to leverage the power of technology to enhance the aging experience for our residents, offer staff members an additional tool to support their increasing workload, and demonstrate our willingness to embrace new approaches to care. Overall, our staff and residents have been rewarded handsomely due to this investment.

At the conclusion of the initial two-year investment, Breckenridge Village has renewed its subscription to Rendeever, and has also begun its VR expansion activities. Two more

communities, Dorothy Love and Swan Creek, have signed on and acquired Rendeвер systems; we forecast additional growth throughout 2022 and beyond.

Moreover, taking full advantage of the excitement and buzz Rendeвер has delivered across our organization, we have taken it on the road as part of our legacy tour, which is traveling to multiple Ohio Living communities to engage staff, residents, and family members in a marketing campaign to demonstrate our distinct position in the marketplace. This tour, which has prompted considerable interest in VR from other communities, has allowed Breckenridge Village to be positioned as a leader amongst our communities, who are looking for the latest and greatest in technology to help position themselves as the go-to communities in their region.

The outcomes of this marketing effort have led to VR's expansion into new Ohio Living communities and supported fundraising activities through our gifts planning team. The latter positively impacted our ability to increase fundraising. This has been a delightful surprise for us—leveraging the power of technology, and its ability to differentiate our group in the market, to support fundraising outcomes.

## **Implementation Approach**

The first step was ensuring that those charged with leading the delivery of Rendeвер at Breckenridge Village were committed to the success of the initiative and comfortable using the technology. In particular, identifying point-of-delivery staff who were comfortable with technology proved to be very successful. Early on, it was clear that an approach that included accountability and ownership by our staff, as well as people comfortable working with technology, was critical.

Next, an in-depth training session with the Rendeвер team, followed by a robust 90-day deployment plan that focused on how to best use the technology at our community and drive maximum engagement, allowed our group to follow a clear plan for success and “deploy with a focus on adoption,” as our partners at Rendeвер so often reminded us. This second step, which was led by the Community Engagement Team at Rendeвер, proved to be crucial and it offered members of our team the support they needed to get comfortable with all aspects of the program, which meant that step three of our implementation approach would go well.

At the next point of implementation, we took full advantage of the expertise our staff brought to the project. Specifically, their ability to choose the activities that

were the best fit for our residents was key to a successful deployment. The community champions at Breckenridge Village did an excellent job in focusing their activity delivery on the interests of residents, who demonstrated a passion for travel, social connection, and ongoing learning. Given what our staff knew about their residents, digital Activity Guides were the option of choice because they allowed for seemingly unlimited activities that entailed traveling the world and learning about topics such as history, science, animals, and much more. These Activity Guides were used in combination with the other features Rendeвер offers, including immersive video experiences, street view travel to meaningful and personal locations around the world, and applications that encourage motivated movement. In short, implementing with a focus on the interests and desires of the end-users was essential to our success.

Finally, actively participating in the creation of VR experiences that could be enjoyed by our residents was the final stage of our implementation approach. Rendeвер's platform allows for customized personal experiences to be created and shared, thereby providing an opportunity for our residents to create the experiences they wanted to enjoy. Through the expertise of our staff, and the ongoing support of Rendeвер's community engagement team, we were able to fully engage our community in the creation of these experiences and further embed this amazing technology into our community.

Following the implementation approach outlined above (choosing the right staff to lead, proper onboarding and training, delivering based on resident interest, and personalized experiences) created the perfect environment for our team to deliver meaningful shared positive experiences for our residents during a most challenging time, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Outcomes**

### ***Increased social networks***

Through the deployment of Rendeвер's resident engagement platform, we saw an increase in the social networks created at Breckenridge Village amongst residents, and between residents and staff. The nature of Rendeвер's system encourages a shared social experience; staff and residents continue discussion and sharing long after the headsets are moved. Through the delivery of Rendeвер's various features, many of which are highlighted above and include the RendeверLive™ programming, we saw social networks grow within this community. One example of these increased social networks was reflected in the average sessions

delivered in 2020 versus 2021. In 2020, we averaged 11 sessions per month while in 2021, we averaged over 45 sessions per month: a very significant sign of growth and increased social connections within our community.

### ***Increased Resident Engagement and Satisfaction***

A key facet for our deployment strategy was to focus on the interests of the residents to help guide the types of experiences delivered within the community. Given this approach, residents remained engaged in VR consistently through our initial two-year deployment. Moreover, resident satisfaction surrounding VR has remained high and our regularly scheduled Rendeвер activity sessions remain very well attended.

### ***Reduced Social Isolation and Feelings of Loneliness***

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about a number of immense challenges for the senior living industry, many of which were tied to social isolation and loneliness. However, Rendeвер provided a tool for our group to counter many of those potential consequences by providing a technologically enabled way for our residents to come together and virtually leave the four walls of their community. Virtual travel all around the world, videos that engage with animals and nature, and live programming that brought our community together with older adults from all over North America helped stem the tide of social isolation and loneliness. Rendeвер's platform created a new way to connect people and allow them to share meaningful experiences that enhanced their quality of life and relationships. This, in particular, was amongst the most impactful outcomes of our deployment.

## **Challenges and Pitfalls to Avoid**

- ◆ Don't assume you know the experiences that your residents are going to enjoy. Instead, engage with your community members in finding those activities within VR that are most interesting to them. Build a program that best suits your community and your community's interest, not the interest of your staff or management—the residents will tell you what they want to experience. Follow their lead.
- ◆ Lack of scheduling will hamper your ability to adopt this technology. It can be easy for delivery of Rendeвер to miss a couple of weeks if you leave it up to people to "pick it up when the time is right." Instead, have Rendeвер placed on your activity calendars at regular intervals each month so you can guarantee it is as much a part of your activity programming as traditional activities like bingo, arts and crafts, and music.

- ◆ Ignoring the detailed and strategically developed deployment plan created by the team at Rendeвер would be a significant pitfall, and one everybody should avoid. Rendeвер's team of community engagement experts have spent years developing an approach to the delivery of VR in a senior care setting that allows for successful adoption. Taking a pass on their expertise is not recommended.

## **Lessons Learned/ Advice to Share with Others**

- ◆ Picking the right community champions is one of the most important aspects of a deployment plan and can considerably increase your organization's likelihood of a quick and frictionless adoption. Select individuals who are excited about the use of virtual reality, have an interest in the technology, and are committed to its successful adoption.
- ◆ Listen to the voices of your residents and build programming delivery based on their shared interests. Rendeвер's resident engagement platform is designed to deliver positive shared experiences to your residents, but that is largely dependent on delivering those experiences that resonate with them. Engage them in the process of experience selection and allow them to enjoy how Rendeвер can help them check off items from their personal bucket list.
- ◆ Rendeвер can be a valuable tool to market your community and differentiate you in the marketplace. Do not hesitate to partner with Rendeвер's team to build marketing and public relations opportunities that help set your group apart from your competitors.