

Case Study: Reaching New Residents: Technology as a Culture Tool



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Categories:

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

About the Organization

Organization Name:

Presbyterian Village Athens (part of Presbyterian Homes of Georgia)

Main Contributor:

Cameron Honeycutt, Executive Director

Organization Type:

Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRC)

Organization Description:

Presbyterian Village Athens, located just outside downtown Athens, GA, seamlessly combines a flair for contemporary living with deep Southern roots. The 70-acre community is a greenfield project from Presbyterian Homes of Georgia, a Christian ministry that has enhanced senior adults' quality of life since 1949. It is the first life plan community in Athens and opened in early 2021.

Project Description

Presbyterian Village of Athens implemented the Wellzesta Life platform in spring 2021 to approximately 400 independent living residents and 50 staff members. The primary goals were improving the community's overall wellness programming, increasing participation in events, and building a greater knowledge of multidimensional wellness. A secondary goal was moving the community from paper communication to two-way messaging with real-time resident feedback.

Vendor Partner Description

Wellzesta is a health-tech software company providing resident and employee engagement solutions in senior living and home care. Organizations who partner with Wellzesta value our industry-leading engagement rates, focus on holistic wellness, and detailed data analytics.

Socialization Modality

Community App, Event/Activity Sharing, Video Chat, E-Mail, Text Chat, Digital Signage, Community Blog, E-Reader/Electronic Books, Art, Games, Exercise, Music, Facilitated Communications and Conversations

System Embodiment

Tablet, desktop computer, laptop, smartphone, smartwatch, digital signage

Business Model

Private pay, private insurance

Implementation Approach

Residents were onboarded to the Wellzesta Life software in a series of small group Zoom sessions in spring of 2021. Individuals or couples all joined the calls on their own devices and were guided step-by-step through the platform. In a virtual setting, onboarding specialists were able to gauge comprehension of software and residents to share their insights and questions in real-time. Additionally, holding training sessions prior to move-in and on-campus activities offered the opportunity for residents to get to know each other and gain early access to community resources.

Training sessions were recorded for residents to review the information at later times, and PVA staff collaborated with Wellzesta to create ongoing help desk opportunities, as continued practice and use is key to learning a new platform.

Outcomes

In the 6 months following the launch, 90% of residents used Wellzesta Life. Almost half of residents (46%) used the app daily in the six months following the launch.

During this same six-month period, events received an average 4.7 out of 5 star ratings, both with respect to overall event rating as well as the events' impact on residents' health and well-being.

Increased Social Networks and Reduced Social Isolation & Feelings of Loneliness

In the first six months, 3,922 friendships were recognized through the Wellzesta Life app, providing PVA employees tremendous visibility into the social network on-campus. There was a slow start—just 65 friendships claimed in the first month—which reflected both the new technology as well as the brand-new campus. As campus opened up and the new technology spread, this then increased by an order of magnitude: an average of over 770 friendships were claimed each of the next five months. This increased social network density is particularly noteworthy given where we were in the pandemic throughout 2021.

During the same six-month period, the number of residents with fewer than 10 followers increased steadily. This is typical and expected, as it takes a few months for residents to map their friendships from the real world to their digital world. Since the initial six-month period, there's been a downward trend, particularly since the start of 2022. This means that the number of residents who are at risk of social isolation is declining steadily. Employees can also monitor which residents are least (and most) socially connected, so they can intervene where needed.

Increased Staff Efficiencies

With a new community, many questions take the form of “Where do I go for this” or “How do I find that?” The Wellzesta Life platform created bi-directional communication across departments and saved time by pushing out notifications to all residents quickly and sharing resources like menus and amenity openings with ease. Residents can easily find all community information, such as event details, social club information, and community policies right at their fingertips.

One important way Presbyterian Village of Athens shares information is through Wellzesta Life's Messaging feature. Examples of messages sent during the initial six months include the monthly newsletter (containing activities and events), updated CDC mask guidance, and more. During the first month, messages were viewed by an average of 88 residents. By the sixth month, this nearly doubled to 146 residents viewing the average message. Each message can

be sent to the entire campus, one person, one building, etc. so this indicates a high degree of engagement. By moving the majority of messages into the digital world, staff save time since updates to the schedule take seconds to make (not hours).

Another way that Wellzesta Life increased staff efficiency was through Documents and Services. Within the app, documents like our monthly update from our executive director can be viewed, and service requests or questions related to housekeeping, mail, maintenance, etc., can be routed to the appropriate recipient. In the first six months, 47 service requests were submitted (7.8 submissions per month on average). Documents were viewed a total of 537 times (89.5 views per month on average). Residents feel empowered knowing that when they need assistance, they can usually find answers or request help through the Life app. This frees up staff, increasing their productivity.

Challenges and Pitfalls to Avoid

One challenge faced was related to time. Since COVID, staff and teams have been stretched due to increased demands on their jobs, as well as issues related to staff retention and staff turnover. Staff already feel stressed, so learning something new increases those stressors. As with any new change in operations, it is more work up front, but then offers scalability and operational efficiencies over time. The challenge faced is demonstrating to the staff the benefits of going through the training process during a more challenging time. To avoid this pitfall, clear communication and examples are needed to “coach and demonstrate” the benefits now and in the future for the staff. Client success approaches that are both empathetic and operationally efficient will support staff. Wellzesta's client success team offered additional hours of support and new tools (like marketing materials, videos, knowledge base articles, and video calls) to the community staff.

Lessons Learned/ Advice to Share with Others

Having a clear content strategy (what to publish and when) makes it easier on the staff's time. Wellzesta's team now offers both content strategy templates, timelines, and examples. A lesson associated with the content strategy plan is the designation of one to two individual team members to execute the tactical components. Leaving the strategy “open-ended,” assuming that all staff will do their part, is too abstract during times that have staff time limitations or constraints. Therefore, clearly designating team members to lead the implementation on a weekly basis is key.