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The LeadingAge Center for Aging Services Technologies (CAST) is focused on accelerating the development, evaluation and adoption of emerging technologies that will transform the aging experience. As an international coalition of more than 400 technology companies, aging-services organizations, businesses, research universities and government representatives, CAST works under the auspices of LeadingAge, an association of 6,000 not-for-profit organizations dedicated to expanding the world of possibilities for aging.

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Creating a Real-Life Video Experience for Individuals Facing Memory Loss

Categories

Quality of Life/Satisfaction with Care and Services

Organization Name

Evangelical Homes of Michigan Senior Solutions (“EHM”)

Organization Type

Diverse Long Term and Post-Acute Provider; offering an array of home based services and technology solutions via four (4) subsidiaries to over 6000 older adults annually.

It's Never 2 Late (iN2L) is a national technology provider focused on client engagement and life enriching experiences for persons with dementia, Alzheimer's disease, and generalized memory impairment through the use of multiple technologies designed with the end-user in mind, including, but not limited to care providers dealing with individuals with memory loss, family and friends who are seeking meaningful interaction and relationships, and most importantly, the client who is seeking meaningful interactions as their own disease progresses.

Other Partner

Saline Area Schools

Organization Description

EHM is known for its innovative and technology-advanced programs targeted to serve individuals with memory loss or memory impairment. EHM's Memory Support Center at Brecon Village, its Cottage Homes, as well as its Dottie Crim Adult Day Center in Saline, Michigan, strive to normalize the aging process and the impact of declining memory for the one in eight Washtenaw County individuals over the age of 65 that are faced with dementia or Alzheimer's disease. Since 2010, these programs have remained at full capacity, caring for nearly 800 individuals affected by memory impairment. The individuals served since the memory support opened in 2010 are primarily residents of Washtenaw County and, in particular, the city of Saline. With its full array of services and solutions, EHM serves 6000 seniors and their families on an annual basis.

Project Description

Saline Area Schools, through its community outreach curriculum requirement for high school level students and through its STEAM Program (Science Technology Engineering Arts and Manufacturing), desired to engage with EHM and iN2L by utilizing its robotics and arts students enrolled in STEAM to help test the functionality of iN2L's new hand held tablet for memory loss, called the FOCUS. iN2L and EHM embarked on a project with the students in order to create a real-life personalized video experience to use with their newly launched hand-held tablets over the course of four months during the summer and into the beginning of the students' fall semester. The iN2L handheld device offers the same array of programs available through its large screen stationary product but also uniquely creates the opportunity for an individual to take their own "notebook" wherever they are and even into the home environment. The handheld device is wireless and can connect while on a front porch swing or even in the car during a short road trip. iN2L's FOCUS, can go anywhere a mobile device can go. The iN2L mobile device provides brain fitness and memory "games" and, most importantly, personal photos and video contents to prompt reminiscence and memory therapy, elicit responses from a non-responsive dementia client, and even encourage simple conversation or nonverbal interactions such as laughter and smiles.

This technology solution and joint project described above was designed to "bridge the gap" in a relationship between a fast paced millennial high school student and an older adult with memory impairment. The relationships formed were designed to cross generational and intellectual barriers. The project was designed to create sensitive encounters and lasting memories that would prepare students for a real world experience after high school. EHM hoped that the above project would replicate experiences the students may have in the future with loved ones, neighbors, and clients as they continue to grow, enter college, and choose their own careers.

Implementation Approach

STEAM students, primarily those focused in the areas of technology, robotics and the arts, worked closely with an iN2L project manager and videography leader, as well as team members of the Memory Support Center and Adult Day Program, to create memory-rich videos of local landmarks and experiences for individuals with memory loss, their family members, and friends. Local memories

included churches, schools, farms and local stores in the neighborhood and in the town in which they raised their own families before developing memory impairment. Students, instructors, EHM employees, family members, and the clients themselves created the "memories" to store in the web based platform that was then loaded onto the handheld device or notebook, called the FOCUS.

Business Model

The videos created through this project by our students were downloaded to the new iN2L tablets so that each participating senior would have immediate access. The students then met with their seniors once more and shared the final videos, showing each senior how to manipulate the tablet in order to view their recorded stories. The students enjoyed seeing the happy and surprised looks on their seniors' faces when the video was shown. It was a good opportunity for iN2L to really define its value proposition and business goals for their latest product, FOCUS. For EHM the value remained its connections to the greater community through area students and EHM clients.

Many of the students we meet and interact with through our partnership with Saline Area Schools aren't aware of the career opportunities in the Aging Services field other than the standard nurse or doctor occupation. Through this experience, our student project participants were able to see that they can apply a wide range of occupations to Aging Services, including technology-based roles. They met staff who work as caregivers, cooks, activities specialists, administrative support and IT specialists. These interactions show that there are numerous ways to apply interest and passion to careers in caring for older adults.

One of the most difficult aspects of this project for the students was the volume of work. Each student commented as to not realizing the amount of effort and detail that is required in a project like this. They were responsible for each phase of the project from start to finish. This included biweekly calls with the videographer to discuss progress and goals, coordinating the exchange of equipment between each filming team, preparing for the interviews and reviewing and editing their footage, all of which was to be completed in just over two months during their summer vacation. Much of this project was self-driven by the students, with support from members of the EHM and iN2L teams.

Outcomes Developed at the Beginning of the Project

STEAM high school students through the help of iN2L and EHM will gain the following skills during this quality of life project and experience:

- Develop relationships with individuals with memory loss and their loved ones and family members. Saline Area Schools youth will be sensitized to the human aspects of the disease and discover that joy can be found in the simple memories of life.
- Youth will develop interview skills with individuals of differing functional levels and relate to family members in different and unique ways.
- Participants will enjoy a positive experience and define purpose for individuals facing memory impairment and their family members who remain on the journey with them as their memory declines.
- STEAM students will gain a better understanding how *technology solutions* and the arts can enhance care for elders.
- STEAM students will understand the breath of career opportunities in the Aging Services field.
- STEAM students will learn how to take a project from start to finish in preparation for future career goals.
- The team of EHM, STEAM students, iN2L and of course EHM clients and their families will define success for all; working cooperatively to deliver a meaningful experience that can be replicated year after year and in other schools within Washtenaw County.

Student Participation Experience Summary

EHM partnered with Saline Area Schools to identify three STEAM students (Sabrina, Davis, and Cam) interested in volunteering during their summer break for a collaborative Real-Life Video Experience project in conjunction with iN2L. The project was led by a videographer and the program manager of EHM's Memory Support Center Adult Day Program in Saline, MI. The overarching goal of the project was to use technology to bridge the gap between tech driven millennial students and older adults with memory impairment, fostering intergenerational relationships and using technology to aid in memory recall.

When the students were first assembled it became clear that they had little to no experience interacting with seniors suffering from forms of dementia. One student commented that he thought having dementia

meant "they weren't really people anymore, they just... forgot everything and didn't really like doing much". Understanding that dementia can seem like a scary disease to those unfamiliar with it, our first objective was to teach the students about the disease and its associated behaviors, giving them tips and tools for interacting with these individuals in a way that respects the rights of our residents while putting both residents and students at ease.

EHM began by educating the students via a pared down training of Virginia Bell and David Troxel's [*Best Friends™ approach to Alzheimer's and Dementia Care*](#). The *Best Friends™* approach centers around the concept that what those with dementia need most of all is a friend, a "Best Friend." We chose to train the students on this approach as it starts with seven basic 'building blocks' that can help you learn to "see" persons with dementia differently. The building blocks are as follows:

1. Recognizing the basic rights of a person with dementia or memory loss.
2. Understanding what it's like to have memory loss.
3. Knowing and using the person's Life Story. (The FOCUS!)
4. Knowing just what to say when communication is breaking down.
5. Developing the 'Knack' of great dementia care.
6. Experiencing meaningful engagement throughout the day.
7. Recasting the relationship and your language from employee or family member to "Best Friend".

The students then chose the senior that he/she would work with, and to their surprise they each found they had something in common. For Sabrina and Arlene it was involvement with the Girl Scouts of America and a love for community involvement. For Davis and Ted it was sports; Davis plays on high school sports teams and Ted was a teacher and a coach. Cam and Phil share a love of music. While they are separated by many years and experiences, these students were able to find common bonds with their seniors on which to develop a relationship. Learning the *Best Friends™* approach set the stage for these students to approach the project with open-mindedness and empathy and begin exploring each senior's Life Story.

Once the students were equipped with knowledge of memory loss and tips on interacting with those afflicted, they were instructed in the art of interviewing. The students learned how to set the stage for an interview, put their interviewees at ease, ask open-ended questions and learn what to do should communication start to break down. Each student was tasked with conducting three separate interviews of their partnered senior; an initial interview with just the senior, a second interview with the addition of the senior's family member if available, and a third interview recording their seniors' reactions to the completed video. Once those three interviews were completed, the camera was turned on the students, capturing their reactions to the project. They were given a list of interview questions to use as a guide in order to draw out Life Story details.

The students had varying degrees of comfort in speaking not only on camera, but in meeting and communicating with someone unknown and perceived as being very different from themselves. By the end of the project, all three students had gained confidence in speaking and interacting with others. One student, Cam, was very reserved and shy and was nervous to interview his senior "partner" with dementia, Phil. At the end of the project Cam shared that the interviewing process was much easier than he expected because Phil was so easy to talk to. The final phase of interview education centered on the technical process: how to choose a location, preparing audio recording and preparing support equipment. Each student was also filmed engaging in a mock interview with the videographer. They then watched their interviews on video and received critiques and feedback on how to improve. The sharpening of communication skills will serve these students throughout their lives, especially as they transition from school into adulthood and must interact with all generations.

It was important throughout the project that all participants, students and seniors alike, enjoy a positive experience. Sabrina was able to spend time with Arlene's daughter, Barbara, and learn about the experience through a family member's eyes. She was able to interview Barbara and Arlene together and saw firsthand how they shared personality traits and characteristics. Barbara was able to fill in details for Arlene that were left out because of her dementia, thereby providing another perspective. Having family members volunteer to participate in this project was very valuable and allowed them to tell their story. A piece of Arlene's story involved videotaping the house where she lived with her

family. Having grown up in Saline, Sabrina had passed that house multiple times in her life, and to her it was just another house. Being able to go back and film it was both "motivating and capturing" to Sabrina once she knew the story. She shared that the experience actually made her "emotional because it captured a meaning. It wasn't just a house, it wasn't just a garden; it was a story and a timeline of everything in her (Arlene) life that was leading up to it".

In addition to teaching and spreading awareness about dementia, EHM and iN2L also wanted the students to learn tangible, technical skills. Our partner in this project, iN2L, offers handheld, customizable touchscreen technology designed for residents with dementia. The STEAM student volunteers were introduced to the iN2L platform and its components and saw where their finished product would be "housed". They were then taught *Media Management 101* that involved media copying and transferring, and digital footage backup and organization. They also learned the basics of virtual reality (VR) camera training including operation, placement and the use of a 360 camera. One of the students enrolled in a digital photography class as a school elective after the project completion and was able to apply the technical training she received to her coursework.

Outcomes Achieved

1. Upon conclusion, Sabrina stated she was surprised regarding how long it took to build the finished product. She initially thought it would be "quick and easy, ask the residents some questions, talk to them for a few minutes and be gone." What she discovered was that the project was "more about building relationships and learning about the deeper things".
2. Through these relationships they also learned the importance of making memories. One student remarked that while he normally resisted going to family gatherings he would now make more of an effort because he has a better understanding of the importance of family and family memories. The students shared some final comments, included below:
 - Cam: "I think it's clearer to me now that people with dementia remember most important things from their life really well. I like EHM's Brecon Village because the community seemed very cool and everyone knew each other and could communicate

easily, but also seemed like a home to all the residents and their families.”

- Davis: “I think it was just a great project. There should be more projects like this and more places like Brecon Village. I’m really happy I had the opportunity to participate in it. My message to someone who has no experience with dementia would be to learn more about it. Find someone you can talk to because there are so many (ideas people have) about it (dementia) that aren’t true”.
- Sabrina: “Through filming and through the whole experience, interacting with Arlene became easier because I started to understand her habits and things that she struggles with and things that maybe jogged her memory a little bit easier. I was able to film in a certain way that kind of reflected how she really is, not just a generic filming standpoint, but something that I felt was interconnected with her. It was really cool to be able to relate filming and her personality and intertwine it to hopefully create a better project.”