

Case Study: Outsourcing Resident Technology Support and Training During COVID-19



AT LA JOLLA VILLAGE

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Categories:

- ◆ Technical Support
- ◆ Education and Training

About the Organization

Organization Name:

Vi at La Jolla Village

Main Contributor:

Mellany Hanson,
Lifestyle Director

Organization Type:

Continuing Care Retirement
Communities (CCRC)

Organization Description:

Vi is committed to helping older adults live independent lives on their terms in a nurturing environment, and for our employees to build fulfilling careers of service and care.

We have 10 communities across the United States, with more than 4,000 residents and 3,000 employees in our corporate and community offices. 500 residents live at Vi at La Jolla Village and 300 employees work at our community.

Project Description

The emergence of digital technology as an integral component of independent living has surpassed Vi at La Jolla staff's ability to support critical resident needs. Recently surveyed, 67% of our residents expressed the need for additional help — or a lot of help with training on technology devices. Vi contracted with Candoo Tech to offer a 90-day pilot program to provide virtual tech support to residents. Initially, Vi wanted a short-term tech support solution for residents during COVID-19, but we also wanted to explore if this service was valuable enough to consider on a longer-term basis.

Business Model

The pilot program was billed directly to the Lifestyle Department at Vi at La Jolla Village. However, part of the pilot was to determine if, after the pilot was over, residents would consider paying part or all of the fees charged by Candoo Tech.

Implementation Approach

An initial letter was sent to all 500 residents to introduce 1) the importance of technology to stay connected during COVID-19, 2) the Candoo Tech Support pilot, and 3) a resident technology survey.

The Resident Technology Survey was our first survey related to technology. The goal was to explore what kind of tech support and training our residents would find most beneficial, especially while residents were sheltering in place. Specifically, our survey inquired about:

- ◆ How Vi residents use technology.
- ◆ What kind of technology they own.
- ◆ How proficient they are at using their technology.
- ◆ What they'd like to learn, if anything.
- ◆ And of primary importance, if they have Wi-Fi access in their apartment home.

There were three ways that residents could complete the survey:

1. Hard copy (created for low-tech users but, surprisingly, most residents completed hard copy).
2. Link on the online resident portal accessible through web browser or mobile app (Touchtown Resident Apps).
3. Survey Monkey (Online).

One week after the initial communication was sent, a second letter was sent to all residents inviting them to participate in the pilot, along with instructions to call the Lifestyle Director to sign up. Once a resident was signed up, another letter was sent directly to the participants explaining the program in more depth and the registration process. Services offered included:

- ◆ One 90-minute remote session (to be used for tech support or lesson).
- ◆ Unlimited quick-support sessions (up to 30 minutes).
- ◆ Four remote group classes — 1 per month.

A little more than half of the participants were proactive in registering and securing an initial 90-minute session appointment and the subsequent 30-minute tech support calls. The other half needed another letter reminding them to register. Lastly, we called a handful of residents who did not register and asked if they needed help registering. We registered these last participants, who needed help registering due to low tech skills.

Outcomes

Response rate:

- ◆ 371, or 74%, of residents responded to our pre-pilot survey, likely reflecting the high interest level of residents.

Age Demographics:

- ◆ Results of our pre-pilot survey revealed that 70% of the respondents were over the age of 80.

Computer/Device Ownership:

- ◆ 88% owned a computer, almost evenly split between Macs and PCs, with Macs edging out PCs by 10%. 68% owned a tablet or e-reader, with 82% being an iPad. 81% own a smartphone with 80% being an iPhone.
- ◆ Of the 35% who own Voice Assistant technology, 88% were Alexa. The top three requests were to learn more about: Zoom (60%); Facetime (52%); Transportation (40%); and Shop for Groceries, Other Online Shopping, and Interact with My Physician, all tying at 35%.

While we initially offered the pilot to 50 residents, due to popularity and need, 60 residents signed up for the pilot. A Comment Card was developed to capture the resident's

satisfaction with Candoo Tech. As well, Candoo managed their own post-call satisfaction rate. Satisfaction results were for the Vi Comment Card:

- ◆ 89% would refer Candoo to a friend.
- ◆ 95% rated their satisfaction overall as 8–10 (on a scale of 1–10 with 10 being excellent), and 90% rating it as a 10.

The Lifestyle Director received numerous expressions of appreciation from residents for providing this much-needed service. This was particularly important from our community satisfaction perspective, given:

1. The isolation that many residents were experiencing.
2. The numerous programs that had been curtailed due to COVID-19.
3. The number of Zoom programs being offered in our Vi community and from other sources.

Keeping residents satisfied during this period was critical to our organization as we measure our success through resident satisfaction.

Before the pilot, the Lifestyle staff had been struggling to accommodate all the requests for help on smartphones, tablets, Zoom, Facetime, etc. Even given our Vi Resident Tech Ambassadors and the local high school tech club, which all volunteered to help residents, staff had been unable to keep up with the demand. There is also an independent contractor who works with Vi residents but is only allowed to go to one apartment per day during COVID-19. Staff has breathed a “collective sigh of relief” to have a process in place to refer residents to, given our staff are not tech experts and resident tech issues are often not a quick fix.

“In the midst of chaos, there is also opportunity.” Vi has provided residents with the basic computing support needed to remain independent. Acting strategically and urgently during the COVID-19 pandemic, Vi has created a marketing advantage that we can leverage alongside fitness, dining, and other programs we now offer during normal times. Even ignoring the marketing advantages that have accrued from offering robust IT support, the value-added to residents made this pilot a sound investment. Our philosophy is that “We can thrive during this challenging period with technology, not just survive.” And we will be better prepared for any future crisis.

Challenges and Pitfalls to Avoid

1. One challenge we overcame was that of some very low-tech residents enrolling on the Candoo Tech registration webpage. While we sent them the link electronically and initially thought that all residents would find this very easy, for some it was not. We found it easier and more efficient just to enroll those residents who could not figure it out. There was some handholding for 10 or so residents, which did take some time, but it was less time than helping them with their tech issues.
2. Four residents dropped out. Two due to an inability to process new information, one due to personal health challenges, and one due to access to a grandson's assistance.
3. In the initial letter sent to pilot participants, we did not explain the 30-minute tech support calls sufficiently. These calls were meant for quick questions, e.g., can't get email to work, Zoom audio not working, or can't attach a picture to email, rather than a longer pre-scheduled learning or support session. Residents enjoyed the 90-minute session so much they wanted to continue with the learning and were eager to schedule additional sessions. And, they have also taken advantage of having someone on call to answer quick questions.
4. Originally, we had planned four remote group classes. Topics were selected based on the survey. The first lesson was "How to Shop for Groceries using Instacart," upcoming classes include: Watching Movies Online and Transportation. But based on demand, an additional session on how to use Zoom was added.

Lessons Learned/Advice to Share with Others

1. It is important to have a community staff champion(s). In our case, it was the Lifestyle Director. Whomever it is, there needs to be one person who introduces the idea, gets approval, moves the pilot forward, works directly with the vendor and residents, and acts as the community command post to field questions, and follow-up with residents and vendor. This pilot rose to that priority.
2. Comment Cards: Our comment card was a collaboration between Vi at La Jolla Village and Candoo Tech. This simple card allowed the Lifestyle Director to receive comments directly from the resident, expressing their own experience and satisfaction rate. For future Comment Cards, I would differentiate between group classes and individual sessions. Also, we had plenty of extra comment cards on hand because residents lost them and were often calling up for more.

3. Since the pilot was complimentary to residents, we needed to set the right tone/message for future payment expectations. We wanted residents to participate in the pilot to gather data, determine vendor quality, and get as many residents as possible up to speed on the technology learning curve, but in the communications we needed to emphasize the importance of why it's free now and that there might be a charge later on. As we look to transitioning beyond the pilot, we are considering a variety of payment/fee structure scenarios. These include a resident-community cost share scenario and a scenario where a resident would pay entirely for the support membership. We are also debating the length of subscription period for a given resident membership, but are gravitating towards quarterly.

The pandemic aside, we've been very aware of the need to address technology support for our residents. While this pilot program has proven to be effective, we understand that it's only one aspect of what we know to be a multi-faceted approach to providing comprehensive technology support services for our residents.

While this intervention focused on independent living, we understand the need to address technology support needs for all care settings within our senior living community. We also want to ensure we further quantify the impact that programs, such as Candoo Tech, along with other resident tech support interventions, has on the following areas:

- ◆ Staff efficiency/cost savings
- ◆ Staff satisfaction
- ◆ Influence on decision to move in
- ◆ Ongoing resident satisfaction
- ◆ Family satisfaction

While we've seen the increase of technology adoption and seniors enhancing their tech-based habits, we know that the influence that technology has on older adults, and ultimately our residents, will only increase and be more impactful. Therefore, we look forward to having technology offerings (hardware devices, resident engagement software, communication platforms, and service/healthcare delivery) being positioned as core components of what it means to live at one of our communities. As a part of these offerings, we also look forward to rounding out the support services that will help residents maximize the benefit of these solutions. Partners and programs such as Candoo Tech will undoubtedly play a part in being successful with this type of strategy and direction.