

Case Study:

Senior Centers Without Walls Using Social Connectedness Technology



leadingage.org/cast

Categories:

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

About the Organization

Organization Name:

Sowega Council on Aging (SCOA)

Main Contributor:

Izzie Sadler, Executive Director

Organization Type:

Council on Aging

Organization Description:

The Sowega Council on Aging has been a trusted nonprofit organization since 1966. We provide unbiased information, programs, and services to more than 60,000 seniors and disabled adults annually in 14 counties across southwest Georgia. We promote the independence, health, and dignity of older adults in need through compassion, education, and advocacy.

Project Description

In 2020, the Sowega Council on Aging was facing declining participation at its senior centers and attendance continued to decrease with the onset of the pandemic. At this point, the agency decided to close all traditional senior center facilities and switched to the senior center without walls model due to declining overall participation over the past 10 years (pre-COVID) and rising expenses. This led them to work with [Claris Companion](#), an easy-to-use tablet and software solution specifically designed for older seniors, that allowed them to conduct virtual activities and pioneer this model in the aging space.

Socialization Modality

Social network, video chat, audio chat, photo sharing, event/activity sharing, e-mail, text chat, picture chat, life stories, digital signage, community app, community blog, activity calendar, in-house television channel, e-reader/electronic books, art, games, exercise, rehabilitation, music, facilitated communications and conversations, companion app.

System Embodiment

Tablet

Business Model

Area Agency on Aging

Implementation Approach

SCOA immediately started looking for a solution that could effectively complement its senior centers while continuing to offer some of the services it used to provide. The novel approach named "Senior Centers Without Walls" included two components: meals in a community setting, and virtual and in-person activities.

Restaurants were chosen to provide the meals because they had the capacity to serve clients in a community setting, and could meet the required dietary guidelines; meanwhile, the virtual programs were developed to serve seniors who were socially isolated. The goal was to keep them engaged and connected at home through programs and services delivered virtually via internet-connected tablets.

After a careful evaluation period, SCOA selected Claris Companion, which has several key features:

- ◆ Care Management Console, a web-based dashboard that allows care staff and select family members to remotely manage the tablets and monitor the progress of the tablet users.
- ◆ Integrated messaging, video calling, photo sharing, internet browsing, games, alerts, and more.
- ◆ One-click customization for staff to remotely personalize each tablet.
- ◆ Claris Insights™ reporting and data visualization of the Claris Companion platform, which helps staff report how clients are interacting with their tablets at home.

To keep seniors as engaged as possible while isolating at home, SCOA deployed an array of virtual events ranging from Tai Chi and Virtual Bingo to Virtual Coffee Hour and Aging Mastery Programs.

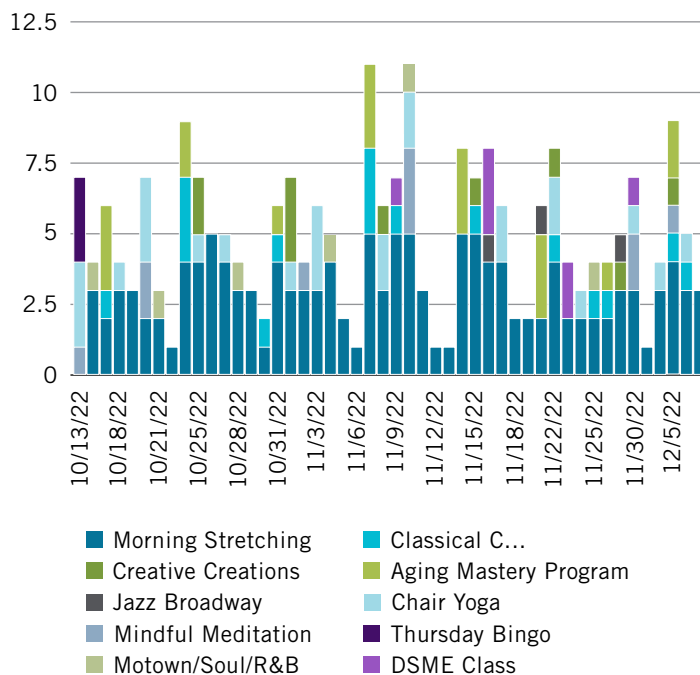
These programs provided the much-needed engagement that seniors were receiving previously at their senior centers.

Outcomes

The Senior Centers Without Walls strategy and model was implemented in April 2020 and within a few months, participation rose from 500 clients receiving meals to 1,500, and the number of virtual programming options on the tablets increased from 25 to 100.

The following graph from SCOA's Claris Insights analytics demonstrates virtual events like the Morning Stretch, Chair Yoga and Aging Mastery Program from Senior Planet were some of the most popular events for SCOA's seniors.

Attendance Trends



Lessons Learned/Advice to Share with Others

- ◆ Virtual programs can provide a channel of communication to seniors that are socially isolated.
- ◆ The “Senior Centers Without Walls” model can be replicated across rural populations.
- ◆ When it comes to connecting with seniors, it's not about training them on how to use technology but providing them with a solution that is easy and intuitive to use. This eliminates the need for any “training.”