

Case Study: Law Enforcement Use of Technology to Proactively Respond to Wandering



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Categories:

- ◆ Reduced Response Time and Incidences
- ◆ Increased Family Safety and Satisfaction and Peace of Mind
- ◆ Improved Outcomes
- ◆ Reduced Costs

About the Organization

Organization Name:

Sumter County Sheriff's Office (SCSO)

Main Contributor:

Sharon Howard, Victim Services Manager

Organization Type:

Law enforcement

Organization Description:

SCSO serves a wide range of constituents. The men and women of the Sumter County Sheriff's Office are pledged and dedicated to protecting the lives, property, and quality of life of the citizens of Sumter County with integrity, professionalism, and compassion. We are accountable to our citizens to carry out our mission impartially and courteously, protecting everyone's civil liberties in partnership with the citizens of Sumter County to serve and enrich our community.

Project Description

Sumter County Sheriff's Office serves the largest retirement community in the world, The Villages in Florida. With the rapidly expanding community, and growing number of residents who are living with Alzheimer's and dementia, Sumter County found an increasing number of search and rescues to find those who had wandered. The average cost of a search and rescue is over \$13,500, not to mention the emotional cost to the family and risk of injury or death to their loved one.

SCSO wanted to use technology to be able to quickly find and locate people who had wandered before they were in peril. Sumter County applied for a grant from the Department of Justice to use new technology to track, locate, and communicate with wanderers.

Safety Technology Categories

Emergency Notification/Communication/Response System, Location Tracking, Elopement Prevention, Family Monitoring/Communication

System Embodiment

Wristwatch/Smart Watch, Smartphone App, and Monitoring Dashboard

Business Model

Other Payment Source – Department of Justice grant, and private pay by families.

Implementation Approach

Sumter County Sheriff's Office serves the largest retirement community in the world, The Villages in Florida. With the rapidly expanding community and growing number of residents who are living with Alzheimer's and dementia, Sumter County found an increasing number of search and rescues to find those who had wandered. The average cost of a search and rescue is over \$13,500, not to mention the emotional cost to the family, and risk of injury or death to their loved one.

The Villages has many water features and busy roads that can make wandering even more dangerous for residents living with dementia. SCSO wanted to use technology to be able to quickly find and locate dementia residents who had wandered before they were in peril. Sumter County applied for a grant from the Department of Justice to use new technology to track, locate, and communicate with wanderers.

Families can contact the Sheriff's Office and receive a GPS enabled watch, Theora Connect™, for their loved one living with Alzheimer's/dementia. The watches are provided free of charge to families and the Sheriff's Office is reimbursed through grant funding for the purchase and monthly service charge of the device. The Sheriff's Office helps each family caregiver download and set up the Theora Link™ smartphone app, which they use to track their loved ones, and sets up each family in the Sheriff's monitoring dashboard, Theora ESP™.

Theora ESP allows the sheriff's office to know location, when last updated, and contact information for the primary caregiver, in case of a search and rescue. The Theora Link smartphone app is downloaded on the primary caregiver's phone and gives them the ability to track location, activity, movement, entering and exiting safe zone geofences, and most importantly, the ability to instantly communicate with their loved one wearing a Theora Connect. With Theora Link, the family caregiver can call the smartwatch and it will automatically answer for the wearer so that the caregiver and wearer can speak without the wearer having to do anything. This function is very useful when the family caregiver gets an alert that a loved one has wandered—the family caregiver can call them and find out what they are doing, and also reassure the wanderer they are on their way to them.

This initiative also concentrates on training for law enforcement in responding to people living with dementia and their caregivers. Additionally, they work with families to link them to support groups, services, and education for caregivers. Staff follow up with families once a month to get information on how often it is used.

Outcomes

Sumter County Sheriff's Office has experienced a 50% decrease in calls for service for a missing person with Alzheimer's/dementia because family caregivers are able to proactively use the technology to locate their loved one before reaching out to law enforcement for help. They have found that a family caregiver can locate and retrieve their loved one in an average six minutes, vs. an average three-hour recovery if the Sheriff's Office needs to mount a search and rescue.

With this program, SCSO has not only improved community satisfaction with its service, but also reduced the costs of recovering persons who has wandered. With the education and support programs included in this endeavor, SCSO is elevating the level of safety, satisfaction, and peace of mind for not only the residents of The Villages retirement community, but also the residents of the county.

Challenges and Pitfalls to Avoid

While there are tracking alternatives available to any organization dealing with large communities of older adults and those living with Alzheimer's/dementia, many do not provide the family caregivers with the ability to locate their loved ones and communicate with them directly, quickly, and easily. Many PERS devices will only be monitored with professional call centers, and do not include the family caregiver until after an incident. Creating a partnership with the family caregivers and law enforcement has significantly improved outcomes.

Law enforcement also has GPS tracking alternatives for search and rescue, but these solutions require mounting a full search and rescue, and more intense use of law enforcement resources to keep the programs running. These tracking alternatives also do not involve the family caregivers as part of the solution.

Lessons Learned/ Advice to Share with Others

The implementation of this program has helped families keep their loved ones safe at home. We know that the longer someone living with Alzheimer's or dementia is missing, the greater the risk that they will be seriously injured or worse. The families that are provided with the GPS device report a peace of mind they weren't able to enjoy before the program. This program helps keep loved ones at home with their caregivers longer and gives some autonomy to individuals living with Alzheimer's and dementia. New advancements in technology such as this are improving the lives of caregivers and their loved ones.