Combating Social Isolation: Staying Connected

Kristen Griffis, Elder Options
Kristina Jalazo, Gulf Coast Jewish Family & Community Services
Kerry Kimball Marsalek, City of Clearwater
Ann Marie Winter, Area Agency on Aging of Pasco-Pinellas
Social Isolation

1 in 4 seniors lives alone

1 in 5 feels lonely

and social isolation among older adults is associated with an extra $6.7 billion in Medicare spending each year

Area Agency on Aging
of Verona - Pinckney, Inc.
Social Isolation

43% of seniors feel lonely on a regular basis.

There is a 45% increased risk of mortality in seniors who report feeling lonely.

Loneliness is more dangerous than obesity and as damaging to health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.
How did we get here?

SOCIAl DISTANCING
What does it mean?

Social distancing is the practice of reducing close contact between people to slow the spread of infections or diseases. Social distancing measures include limiting large groups of people coming together, closing buildings and canceling events.

AVOID

Group gatherings
Sleepovers
Playdates
Concerts
Theater outings
Traveling
Athletic events
Crowded retail stores
Malls
Workouts in gyms
Church Services
Visitors in your house
Non-essential workers in your house
Mass transit systems

KEEP YOUR DISTANCE

Visit a local restaurant to get take out
Visit grocery store
Pick up medications
Play tennis in a park
Keep at least 6 - 8 ft between yourself and others

SAFE TO DO

Take a walk
Go for a hike
Yard work
Play in your yard
Clean out a closet
Read a good book
Listen to music
Cook a meal
Family game night
Go for a drive
Stream a favorite show
Call or email a friend or elderly neighbor to check in
Group video chats
Multiple Approaches to decrease social isolation

DOEA, AAAs and aging network providers have adapted innovative programs to combat social isolation and help seniors stay connected using:

- Public Health Messaging
  - Using technology
  - TeleHealth
- Virtual Programs
  - Telephone Reassurance Programs
  - Shopping Assistance
- Mental Health
Telephone Reassurance Initiative
A Collaboration of Partners

The Area Agency on Aging of Pasco Pinellas is working with its network of traditional and non-traditional partners to reach out to all active and waitlisted clients and other partner identified older adults through the duration of the COVID-19 outbreak and identify and address unmet needs.
Telephone Reassurance Initiative
A Collaboration of Caring Partners

- In April, the Area Agency on Aging of Pasco Pinellas and its partner network launched the initiative.
- The calls provide seniors with:
  - a friendly check-in while they are socially isolating
  - a safety link
  - a trusted referral source for existing and emerging supportive programs and services
- More than 1,300 older adults have been reached through this initiative.
Telephone Reassurance
Methods & Partners

- **Program Components**
  - Defined Call Script
  - Caller responses entered into secured Google form & database
  - Community Resource Database
  - When to refer to AAA

- **Volunteer Requirements**
  - Confidentiality Agreement
  - Volunteer Application
  - Level II Background Check
  - 1 hour Virtual Training

- **Partners**
  - Area Agency on Aging of Pasco Pinellas
  - City of Clearwater
  - University of South Florida Students
  - KRB Move Management
  - Lealman & Asian Family Center
  - Independent Volunteers
Topics discussed in the Script

- COVID
- Food/Basic Necessities
- Medicare Counseling
- Transportation
- Isolation/Loneliness
- Scams/Fraud/Victimization
- Any other Helpline Related needs
Trends Identified

- The older adults reported growing issues of loneliness due to social isolation.
- Many requested to be called back just to talk or check in.
- Many expressed greater needs for mental health support and they were referred to relevant organizations.
- Information on resources for basic necessities was provided yet large percentage reported no unmet basic necessities needs.
- Some older adults reported significant changes and were referred to the Helpline.
Call Scenarios

- “Jim” age 79, recently lost a leg, lives alone, has mobility challenges and difficulty getting basic necessities. His need for in-home services has significantly increased.

- “John” age 87, has dementia, his wife died in June, his daughter is now living with him. He is in urgent need for in-home services to prevent moving to a long term care setting prematurely.

- “Bill” age 83, his son is his caregiver and is currently unemployed due to the economic shut down. His son no longer has health insurance and Bill feels his son needs mental health supportive services.
Telephone Reassurance Initiative Review

The Telephone Reassurance Program has successfully connected to isolated older adults and provided a safety link and trusted referral source for supportive programs and services.

The program is easily replicable and requires minimal costs.

The program provided a critical connection (via telephone) to isolated older adults.
Mental Health Services at Gulf Coast JFCS
TeleHealth Program and Robotic Pet Program
Robotic Pet Program
NEED FOR TELEHEALTH SERVICES

During the Covid-19 pandemic, “Older adults have been most frequently isolated in their residence, cut-off from physical contact with friends and families. Social engagements and community gatherings—the most important source of integration of the older adults in the community—have been suspended. Physical contact—an important component of intimacy and reassurance in old age—has been discouraged.”
**TELEHEALTH IMPLEMENTATION**

- Use of HIPPA-compliant telehealth platforms for face-to-face virtual counseling sessions, like SimplePractice.
- 24 out of 60 clients participate in counseling sessions through telehealth platform.
- Virtual interactions through phone calls.
- 36 clients participate in counseling sessions telephone.
BENEFITS OF THE TELEHEALTH PROGRAM

• Effectiveness is comparable to in-person services across disorders including depression, PTSD, and anxiety disorders.
• Reduced windshield time and travel expenses.
• Increased staff productivity.
• Ability to expand services to greater number of clients.
• Accommodating clients with special needs like Agoraphobia or Germophobia.
GrandPad Technology

- **Voice or video calls**: This is where you’ll make calls to all of your contacts. It’s just like a telephone. You can also see who you’re speaking with by making a video call.
- **Send/receive email**: This is just like a mailbox, only in an electronic form. You can send emails to your contacts.
- **View/add photos**: Imagine this as a large photo album that your family and friends are making, just for you! You can add photos to your favorites album, or delete unwanted photos.
- **Take/save pictures**: Take and save photos. You can also share these photos with your loved ones.
- **Read interesting articles**: A daily curation of new articles from a wide variety of sources. Check back every day for new content!
- **Weather**: Take a look at all of your contacts and see instantly what the current weather is doing in their location. It also shows their 5-day forecast and local time.
- **Listen and add new music**: This is music library. You can listen to your favorite songs here.
- **Games**: Choose from many different games to play. See which one you like best!

**GrandPad**
A simple, closed-loop, secure connection to your loved one.

**A Family Administrator manages access, creating a private circle of family and friends contacts.**

**Family and friends added to Contacts can easily share photos, send messages, or video chat through the free GrandPad app.**

**Dictionary and encyclopedia**
Search topics or words using the senior friendly encyclopedia or dictionary. It’s knowledge at your fingertips!

**Flashlight & magnifying glass**
Here you’ll find some helpful tools including a magnifying glass and flashlight to assist you in your daily activities.

**24/7 Tech Support/Help**
Having trouble using your GrandPad? Watch Video Tutorials or call the GrandPad support team to get help.


• Moved the following programs to a virtual environment
  • SAVVY Caregiver – 13 classes
  • Tai Chi for Arthritis for Fall Prevention – 4 classes
  • Diabetes Empowerment Education Program (DEEP) – 5 classes
  • The Program to Encourage Active, Rewarding Lives (PEARLS) – 38 clients
  • SHINE Medicare Counseling
  • Take Charge – A Care Transitions Program – 208 clients
  • Better Choices, Better Health® Online Chronic Disease Self-Management Program – 1 class (in progress)
• **Virtual Caregiver Support Groups on Weekends and Evenings**
  • The pandemic has changed how we provider service but the needs of caregivers cannot be put on hold. Our virtual support groups enable us to provide necessary information and offer an opportunity for caregivers to connect and get the support they need amid the current crisis outside of regular business hours.

• **Implementing Bingocize via Zoom**
  • An evidence-based 10-week program that combines a bingo-like game with exercise and health education. The unique addition of bingo addresses many of the barriers to older adults’ participation because the game is fun, familiar, and done in a group setting which allow clients to socially engage with others.
• **Tablet Loaner Program**
  - Funding provided by a local foundation ($10,000)
  - Fifteen tablets were purchased are equipped with WIFI connectivity and the home page is set up for easy access to our programs and trainings
  - Clients who are identified as socially isolated and lack a device and/or WIFI to engage virtually will be able to check out a tablet for the duration of their participation in our programs and trainings

• **Zoom Resources – Creating a client-friendly experience in the new virtual world**
  - Offer group Zoom training sessions
  - Utilizing UF Interns to complete one-on-one tutorials for those that need extra help
  - Rolled out a guide for clients on how to use Zoom and other basic technology tips
The Aging Network’s response to social isolation

• With the support of DOEA, nearly all Planning & Services Areas (PSA) pivoted to provide Health & Wellness programs virtually. 47 counties now have access to these programs.
• Several PSAs launched activity kit/brain buster supply drives and distributions. Large format Puzzles, crossword and search a word books were just some of the items included. PSAs 2 and 5 were recognized for their work in this area.
• On Line and TeleHealth Mental Health groups have been established with PSA 11 creating a weekly schedule of facilitated conversations via Zoom. PSA 8 created a support group specifically for LGBTQ seniors.
• Several PSAs purchased tablets to assist seniors to be able to reach out and talk/see family and friends and surf online. PSAs 5 and 6 have GrandPad programs in place.
• Increased collaborations and partnerships have been developed. PSA 4 is partnering with AARP to have monthly Facebook ‘events’ on a variety of topics for older adults and caregivers to tune into.
• DOEA’s Robotic Pet program has distributed robotic cats and dogs to 2083 seniors in 67 counties and Project VITAL has distributed 300 tablets with another 300 scheduled for delivery.
Thank you!

Kristen Griffis
CEO, Elder Options
giffisk@agingresources.org

Kristina Jalazo
Elder Services Director, Gulf Coast JFCS
Kristina.Jalazo@gcjfcs.org

Kerry Kimball Marsalek
Aging Services Manager,
Office on Aging, City of Clearwater
Kerry.Marsalek@myClearwater.com

Ann Marie Winter
Executive Director, AAAPP
annmarie.winter@aaapp.org