
Seniors Project –

Mobile Technology Implementation Guide in Assisted Living

May 2016



Pilot Project



Beginning in 2014, BridgingApps, a program of Easter Seals Greater Houston, collaborated on a pilot project with Memorial Hermann's adult living community of University Place in Houston, Texas. The focus of the project was to provide in person support using mobile device technology and to

identify appropriate apps to improve the lives of seniors.

In 7 months, nearly 60 residents were seen individually to teach them a skill of their choice at their request. These were primarily seniors with an average age of 88, many of whom were living independently. Most of these seniors, about 79%, had more than one meeting to learn a skill. In a small sample of residents at the outset of the project, the **most desired skill was learning to interact with others using technology**. Requests for assistance to learn how to operate items span the range of technological devices including: a watch, blood pressure cuff, cordless phone, iPod, tablets, e-reader, and computers both laptop and desktop. Consistent with previous research (Education, Audiovisual, & Culture Executive Agency, 2008) a primary request from residents was for email and Internet skills. Internet use has been found to reduce the probability of depression among seniors by 33% (Cotten, Ford, Ford & Hale, 2014). Written instructions on how to accomplish tasks were beneficial in facilitating learning and almost always requested.

A benefit voiced by a resident was an improvement in her mood due to having discussed her use of technology. Fifty five percent of those who received assistance to learn a skill of their choice were satisfied and 30% were mixed given the frustration involved in learning, though they perceived a benefit. Interactions with the family members of seniors were universally positive as they expressed gratitude for the assistance

provided to their parent like "Thanks for taking an interest in our loved ones here" and "You have opened up a whole new world for me." Year two of the project has evolved from twice weekly support to monthly. Interest is higher than ever. Most requests for support with devices fall into 3 broad categories – setting up and using new devices, how-to skills, and troubleshooting. The most requested how-to skills involve using email, web browsing, and all things photo related.

As the project continues to evolve and to further support seniors, their families and support teams across the country, we have created a seniors section on the BridgingApps.org website. <http://bridgingapps.org/seniors/>

Resources include favorite apps for older adults and seniors, captioned how-to videos for the basics, and printable pdfs of instructions. Content will continue to be developed and added.

You will hear and see the gratitude in those you teach... It's priceless!

Implementation Guide

The numbers of older adults is growing quickly and by 2030 this segment is expected to be 20% of the U.S. Population (US Census Bureau, 2014). As adults age, many will require assistance with life's daily activities, often precipitating a move into a facility. In a survey of assisted living facilities in 2009 (Acclaro Growth Partners, 2009), the average age of seniors in assisted living facilities was 86 and largely female (74%). The demand for assisted living facilities given the growth in older adults wanting or needing care will surpass the supply, magnifying the

challenges of aging for the individual and their loved ones. Technology can be used to bridge the gap between the needs and wants of older adults and their physical and environmental circumstances.

Importance

Bringing technology to residents can be a cost effective way to demonstrate concern for their well being and reduce resident requests for assistance from staff.

Happy residents bring more residents

Seniors want to **socialize** with others. They can do that as they learn about the technology and by learning ways to socialize with technology, using everything from email to video calls. As residents become more



independent with socializing, fewer demands are placed on the staff or others for these tasks.

Seniors want to do things that **interest** them. Games, art, travel, and everything you can imagine is on demand, at their fingertips. Such access is an added benefit for those who have trouble sleeping and need recreational activities through the night.

Seniors want to maintain their **independence**. Technology can help with organizing medical history, medications, and fostering medication adherence. With these supports, they are prepared for doctor visits. They can complete their banking tasks, make things for others and buy items, including gifts, from the comfort of their home. This is a critical benefit

which promotes well-being and can accommodate the physical and mental changes that seniors experience.

When looking at assisted living facilities, resident happiness is one of the most important factors in choosing the perfect facility. Technology is a great way to promote resident happiness.

Preparation

Timeframe: 1-2 weeks if familiar with residents and facility; 1-2 months if not though can start before this is complete

Know Your Residents

Consider female to male ratio, level of independence, typical attendance at activities to start. Once you understand the culture, you can determine the teaching method that best suits the residents. In this phase, patience and encouragement are critical for the person implementing the technology and the individual who is learning. Not only will there be logistical problems like the technology not working as intended, but there will be emotional challenges. Seniors have typically fallen into the late majority in terms of adoption of technology. As a result, their familiarity with technology may be low, making it uncomfortable to learn and leading to negative self statements. Be prepared for dealing with this. I often heard how "stupid" someone felt and the person often felt like he/she was the only person who struggled. Empathy and encouragement can go a long way in addressing these concerns. Remind the senior that it takes about 20 hours of practice to learn a new skill (Kaufman, 2013).

Format

Group: If you present to a group, consider speaking loudly, have written handouts, build practice into the meeting time and present in a way so that the audience has multiple ways of engaging with the information (seeing, listening, doing).

Individual: Teaching to individuals allows you to tailor the material to the needs of the individual. The training can be directed by the individual who is learning to cover topics of interest. One-on-one training also lends to spreading the word of the benefit of the technology and builds potential mentors/coaches for others.

Overall, speak slowly and loudly, meet for no more than an hour per session without a break, convey your enthusiasm about the topic and acknowledge challenges of learning while fostering hope, using phrases like "We're going to have some fun!" and "It is frustrating when that happens but we will figure it out together" are helpful. Go slow while presenting the information and remember repetition, repetition, repetition!

Time

Scheduling a time for your class or individual meeting involves consideration of individual and group schedules. When are most of the residents awake and alert while not competing with meals and other popular activities? Consistency goes a long way in developing a presence and building familiarity. We feel comfortable with things that are familiar (familiarity principle), and that familiarity will create interest.

Materials

Binder

Provide a binder to organize all the handouts of the material. Allow the individual set up the binder, which helps to facilitate independence and commitment to learning something new.

Handouts

Use a font size of 14-16. Use pictures to illustrate ideas. Be concise. Have enough for the class. Give the handouts out at the beginning of the session.

PC and Projector

If you are going to use audiovisual equipment, practice and then practice again. Did I mention practice? Something will go wrong eventually with the

equipment, which is a perfect time to provide a framework for solving problems. It also shows how technology problems happen to everyone.

Pens/ Pencils

Allows for note taking.

Advertising

Word of Mouth

Using terminology from Malcom Gladwell's book, *The Tipping Point* (2000), find the connectors and the mavens. **Connectors** are the people who know everyone or it seems like they do. You want them spreading the word about your class or service and you can find out from them who might be interested. **Mavens** are the experts on something. Ask the technology maven for feedback about your plan and the content. Ask the maven if they would be interested in giving you feedback when you teach. Ask the maven about other technology mavens as this can be the start of building your network of instructors.

Tell people. All the time.

Written

How does information get disseminated? Mirror the facility's method for distributing information. Create flyers, put the information in the newsletter and send emails to people. Make sure to include a contact person and phone number for questions.

Implementation

Time frame: Ongoing

Succession Planning

Senior Tech Support

The Corporation for National and Community Service compiled some health benefits of volunteering (2007). Benefits noted in their review of the research include: living longer, having a social network, providing life satisfaction, and having a purpose. According to this review, those who volunteer report better health and functioning than those who do not participate in volunteer activities.

Find the technology mavens (see advertising section for details) as well as those who are proficient with one technological skill. Approach them about serving as tech support for those at the facility. Look for the educators who can lead a class on a skill. This may be a maven who has the same skill. Then you will have a peer run activity and a network of people who can give and get support and receive all the benefits from doing so.

Those who volunteer report better health and functioning than those who do not...

On Site

Room

Find a room that is centrally located in a high traffic area. Some questions to ask yourself: Does it have AV equipment? How are the acoustics in the room? What is the temperature in the room? Do you need tables? Is there space at the table to take notes and to place the device? Try to use the same room each time for consistency and familiarity.

Technology

Will you need to bring a projector/laptop? A microphone? Set it up and practice.

Seating

Will you need to limit class size given the seating? Will you need it to be set up ahead of time? Do you have a back-up location to meet if needed?

Feedback

Format

Formal

Create a survey or other instrument for feedback from participants. Areas to focus could include satisfaction with using the technology, confidence with skills, understanding of the technology, ideas for improvement and strengths of the training. Decide the frequency with which to measure. The measures could be taken after each class or after teaching a certain skill.

Informal

Ask the participants what they like/dislike about the experience. Ask their loved ones, caregivers and staff for feedback about the teaching and learning process. Research suggests that paying attention to feedback helps supports the program and the process. Carefully consider feedback and make changes based on positive and negative feedback.

Anonymous Responses

Allowing anonymous feedback promotes honesty.

Certificates

Participants enjoy receiving recognition for having done something difficult. This positive emotion increases the likelihood people will keep practicing the new skill.

Gathering data from the start

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Resources

For instructional videos and printable handouts regarding technology skills go to www.bridgingapps.org/seniors



Dr. Cristy Gamez-Galka joined Easter Seals to promote their mission of recovery by providing skills and supports to assist people of various abilities to enjoy their lives in the communities of their choice. Cristy graduated from the University of Houston with a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology. After completing her internship at the University of Miami/Jackson Memorial Hospital, she took a wonderful position in Denver, Colorado offering mental health

services in a residential setting to Native Americans before re-locating back to Houston to work with Veterans at the VA hospital. She has provided mental health care to nursing home residents, has a private practice, and is excited to be part of Easter Seals Greater Houston's BridgingApps program assisting older adults with accessing technology to meet various needs. She lives with her son and daughter in Houston.

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