

Case Study; The power of Technology at Longfield Care Home

In November 2019, Excelcare and creative arts company Magic Me started a partnership to bring modern forms of art into care homes and study the benefits this could have on mental and physical health, working alongside Anglia Ruskin University and funded by Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

Matthew Bourne's New Adventures, Fevered Sleep, Gecko and curious directive partnered with four of Excelcare's Essex-based care homes to deliver these sessions throughout 2020.



The early formats of these sessions focussed around members of the arts companies meeting the residents and getting to know their likes, dislikes and interests. Responses to different activities would then form a basis for the remainder of the project, which each group would deliver in their own unique medium. Curious directive were partnered with Longfield Care Home, with plans to deliver their sessions using the power of technology.

Their first sessions were very successful, and they had many ideas about how they could introduce new technology into the care setting. One of these ideas was to create a 'FaceTime Corner' for the residents, shaped and decorated like a phone booth, where they could chat to loved ones in a traditional setting to encourage reminiscence.

Another was to display sensory videos and sounds on to the ceiling of bedrooms using a projector, so that those spending time in their rooms could benefit from a change of sounds and scenery.

One idea that was incredibly well-received was the introduction on VR (Virtual Reality). For the first few sessions, the team from curious directive were supporting people as they got comfortable with wearing the headsets at their own pace. Some of the residents were apprehensive to try the headset, however after seeing their friends express so much joy after taking it off, they all soon wanted a turn.

The introduction of VR began before the COVID-19 lockdown placed limitations on who could visit people living in care homes, so the presence of family members and familiar faces also helped to ease feelings of anxiety.

After everyone was comfortable with wearing the headsets, curious directive began to personalise their experiences by asking for places people had previously visited, or places they would like to go. Using these suggestions, they uploaded videos of the locations to the headsets, allowing the residents to be transported to their favourite places.

The headsets react to movement, so as they turned their heads, they could see different sights and hear the commentary on the headsets. They were blown away and thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

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One of the residents at Longfield requested her VR experience to be animal-related as she loved watching nature documentaries. So the team uploaded a video with monkeys.

“I’m really interested in animals and loved the fact it felt like the monkeys were coming up to me”, explained LB (resident). She had never been able to experience this before from the TV, and expressed how much of a positive impact this had during her VR experience.

Another resident requested an air show experience and while wearing the headset, she found herself looking into the sky at all the planes that seemed to be flying above her. It was a wonderful moment that she will always remember. “It was fantastic, just like being there”, she said.

Relatives also took part and really enjoyed being a part of the loved ones’ experiences too. Many turned up to every session and enjoyed it just as much as those living at the home, showing no matter your age or background, VR could be enjoyed by all.

Unfortunately, a few months into the scheme, the COVID-19 restrictions came into place, restricting visits to the home. This put the project on pause and meant the VR sessions couldn’t continue.

This was explained to the residents who understood, with many saying at least they had the memories, sights and sounds from the previous sessions they could hold on to. This also gave people time to think of other places around the world in which they wanted to explore and remember some of the other impressive places they would like to revisit.

Technology is still very important during this COVID-19 pandemic. iPads and portable video devices have been used daily to keep residents in touch with their loved ones. These devices also provide a powerful tool for entertainment purposes, as live-streamed videos have been played for groups and individuals.

These experiences will continue to form part of daily life at the care home, even when visiting reopens, as it helps to educate them on the benefits and methods of using technology. Many also enjoy the variety it adds to schedule and ability to watch so many different videos and view pictures from around the world.

When restrictions are eased and normal life at the homes resume, the project with curious directive will continue and bring many other virtual environments and experiences to the people living at Longfield.