Measuring the impact of loneliness and isolation interventions
Caring Connections:
Research Overview
Agenda

1. Caring Connections: An Overview
2. Selecting the UCLA Loneliness Scale Tool
3. How Caring Connections Works
4. Data and Fundraising
5. Choosing a Research Partner
Quick Summary

• The Council on Aging of Central Oregon was founded in 1974 under the Older Americans Act (OAA) to respond to the needs of Americans 60+ in all local communities across the US

• We provide core Older Americans Act programs and services, the backbone of the nation’s non-Medicaid home and community-based services for older adults

• Our main offices are in Bend, Oregon; and we support Deschutes, Crook, Jefferson and N. Klamath counties

• > $3.0M per annum invested into the communities we serve

• 28 employees and 450+ of volunteers across all our service territories
Caring Connections: An Overview
Caring Connections Snapshot

1. In order to understand and reduce the impacts of social isolation & loneliness in seniors in Central Oregon we conducted a volunteer calling program pilot with $75k in funding from the Cares Act.

2. We partnered with two organizations: Mon Ami and the Oregon Health and Sciences University (OHSU) Clinical & Translational Research Institute’s Community Research Hub in Central Oregon.

3. 38 older adults enrolled in the pilot, 22 older adults were assessed after the first 5 months of the pilot (Nov’20 - March ‘21).
Caring Connections Snapshot

4. During the pilot period 447 calls were completed totaling 10,765 minutes; average call time per participant was 23 minutes.

5. By the end of the pilot period, more older adults experienced reduced feelings of isolation, feelings of being left out and, overall, they had experienced a new form of companionship with another individual.
Pilot Results After 5 Months on the Program

- How often do you feel isolated?
- How often do you feel left out?
- How often do you feel that you lack companionship?

Charts showing the comparison between 'Pre' and 'Post' conditions for each question.
Did older adults have reduced feelings of loneliness at the end of the program?

1. 15 older adults had a positive result, meaning their scores decreased over time.
2. 6 older adults had a neutral result, meaning their score didn’t change over time.
3. 1 older adult had a negative result, meaning their score worsened, or increased over time.
Volunteer Attrition During Pilot Period

None!
Caring Connections: Post Pilot

1. We received an additional $132k from the Central Oregon Health Council to rollout Caring Connections from a pilot to a full program. Additionally the funding will allow us to expand into two rural counties over the next two years.

2. Funding includes continuing our partnerships with Mon Ami and with OSHU Clinical & Translational Research Institute’s Community Research Hub.

3. As of November 19, 2021 we have 40 clients and 42 volunteers; added tracking whether visits were in person or over the phone and if we referred clients to additional services.
Selecting the UCLA Loneliness Scale Tool
Loneliness and Isolation Tools

1. We reviewed four survey tools with the help of our OHSU partners.
2. There are pro’s and con’s to each survey tool.
3. We selected the UCLA Loneliness Scale tool as it had a simple scoring system and had plenty of data to back up its validity in measuring loneliness.
UCLA Loneliness Scale

1. The three questions
   - How often do you feel that you lack companionship?
   - How often do you feel left out?
   - How often do you feel isolated from others?

2. Scoring

   The scores for each individual question can be added together to give you a possible range of scores from 3 to 9. Researchers in the past have grouped people who score 3 – 5 as “not lonely” and people with the score 6 – 9 as “lonely”.¹⁹
Review of Phone Based Calling Programs

1. We looked at research on successful phone based programs to reduce isolation and loneliness as we were setting up our pilot.

2. Characteristic of successful phone programs include regular, scheduled calls with the same person, creating a conversation environment that is “out-of-reach” of participant’s social circle and it is semi-structured and/or informal conversation.

3. The information helped us feel confident that phone only program could work, since we were in the early part of COVID 19 lockdowns.
How Caring Connections Works
Project Plan: Three Phases

**Project Planning**
- Funding awarded
- Call scripts designed
- Internal (volunteers) and external (older adults) marketing & communications
- Evaluation plan, reporting outcomes and data collection efforts developed

**Recruitment**
- Train & recruit volunteers
- Community partner outreach
- Target population outreach

**Implementation**
- Older adult requests participation
- Older adult matched with trained volunteer
- Older adults complete pre-survey to gather baseline data
- Volunteer calls older adult weekly and documents calls
- Older adults complete post-survey
Implementation Steps

Step 1: Find Seniors and Volunteers
Step 2: Match Seniors with Volunteers
Step 3: Program Manager Asks Pre-Survey Questions to all seniors
Step 4: Volunteers call seniors weekly
Step 5: Program Manager Asks Post-Survey Questions to all seniors
Step 6: Analyze the data and report findings
Step 7: At each assessment point (every 6 months) ask Post-Survey questions to seniors to gather longitudinal data on program effectiveness
The Data We Collect

**PRE- (BASELINE) SURVEY (Need for every senior)**
1. How often do you feel that you lack companionship?
2. How often do you feel left out?
3. How often do you feel isolated from others?
4. What are you hoping to get out of participating in the Caring Connections program? (open ended)

**POST- (REASSESSMENT) SURVEY (Need for every Senior)**
1. How often do you feel that you lack companionship?
2. How often do you feel left out?
3. How often do you feel isolated from others?
4. Did the Caring Connections program meet your expectations? (Yes, No, Unsure)
5. Please explain how it did or did not meet your expectations.
6. How did participating impact your feelings of loneliness/social isolation? (open ended)
7. Would you like to stay in this program? (Yes, No, Unsure)
The Data We Collect

OTHER DATA

1. Total number of seniors invited to participate in program, include locations for outreach and how you conducted outreach (fliers, Facebook, newspaper, etc.)
2. Total number of seniors enrolled in program to date
3. Total number of seniors who dropped the program and the reasons why they dropped
4. Total number of contacts made over the course of the program and length of each call (answer for each senior)
5. Senior to volunteer reassignment rate and reasons for reassignment
Data and Fundraising
How data helps with fundraising

1. Demand keeps growing for nonprofits to provide proof that what they are doing accomplishes something.

2. The Types of Data That Are Most Important
   - **Inputs:** The resources the organization commits to a program
   - **Outputs:** The immediate tangible results of the activity or program. Outputs are the most straightforward data to collect. They are apparent and countable.
   - **Outcomes:** The changes you plan to bring about in the short to medium-term
     - This is where we are today with our program.
   - **Impact:** The measurable long-term effect your program seeks to bring about
     - We are now embarking on 2 more years of assessments to see longer term effects of participating in the program
Choosing a Research Partner
Working With A Research Group/Consultant

1. Set your assessment goals
2. Identify potential consultants – LinkedIn? Craigslist?
3. Bid your project
4. Evaluate and score your options
5. Create a contract
6. Moving forward
Client Quotes
Client Quotes

“I get quite a bit out of it, and he has been a good fit. When I hang up the phone, I feel good about our conversations. It has helped a lot.”

“It’s nice because I can’t get out much, so it keeps me busy. It’s nice to talk to someone other than neighbors.”

“Well she helped me get my COVID shot and she helped me with my dogs when they passed away and it’s just nice to talk to someone.”

“It made me feel like I was more part of the world, not just in my little house.”
Thank You
Contact for resources or questions:

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