2021 ConnectHomeUSA Virtual Summit

Strategies for Engaging Hard-to-Reach Residents

Monday, October 4, 2021

Ashley Vo: Okay. Good morning. Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome back from your break. My name is Ashley Vo, and I will be the moderator for our session today on engaging -- on Strategies for Engaging Hard-to-Reach Residents.

Before we begin, we'll go over some housekeeping items. Attendees, they have been muted upon entry. And for any technical questions, we ask that you please submit them via the chat box.

For any content related questions, you can submit them via the Q&A box. On the right-hand side, if you look at the images, you'll know which box you're in by reading the title. It will say either chat or Q&A. And, again, it is encouraged that you all submit questions. Dina [ph] and I will be monitoring the Q&A box for all your questions.

This webinar is being recorded and will be on post -- and will be posted on HUD Exchange later.

And here's our agenda today. We started it off with welcome and introductions, and, again, at the end of the session, similar to our first session, we will have a section designated for Q&A. And with that, it is my pleasure to introduce our speakers for today.

So, first off, we'll have Ryan Elza. He is the vice president for innovation and technology at Volunteers of America National Services. He has an extensive background in the social determinants of health, design thinking, and civic engagement. He is a nationally recognized subject matter expert on social isolation and has been at the frontier of developing voice first solutions for low-income older adults.

Ryan is a trained anthropologist and has a master's degree in technology entrepreneurship from the University of Maryland. And prior to joining Volunteers of America, Brian has led AARP Foundation social isolation and digital inclusion work. Brian developed and launched several initiatives during his tenure at AARP Foundation, including the Connect to Effect Connected Communities Program, the Connect to Effect My Activity Center, and a public-private initiative with the Administration for Community Living and other federal agencies to launch the National Coordinating Center for Social Isolation.

Next in line, we have from Franchel Mendoza, who is a licensed master social worker and field instructor for Columbia University School of Social Work. Currently, Franchel is Fairstead's social services coordinator, where he is responsible for maintaining and strengthening relationships with the residents and community partners of all Fairstead's New York City based affordable housing communities.

Mr. Mendoza is an innovative leader with over 12 years of expertise in building programs focused on education, social services, and community development.

Ana Trejo who has 10 years of experience in the Public Housing Authority setting, specifically in these tenant services area, and holds a master's degree in public policy and management. She started as a Family Self-Sufficiency a.k.a. FSS coordinator, but still considers herself one at heart. She writes grants for the Housing Authority City of Brownsville and assists with tax credit/RAD deals.

As the interim supportive services director, she oversees the ConnectHomeUSA initiative with rich environments, the ROSS SC, and FSS programs, the Buena Vita and Vision Center [ph], BiblioTech Brownsville, Youth Programing, and Road to College Program and the social service coordinator for several multifamily developments.

And next, we have Julius Norman, who is currently the youth services manager with Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority with more than 25 years of experience in the field of human services, with an emphasis on youth health and wellness, employment opportunities, life skills, education, and development. Throughout his professional career, he has been successful recruiting program participants, assessing their strengths, challenges, and needs.

And lastly, we have to Tashonna Hallums-Thorne, who is currently the youth programs coordinator with Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority. Mrs. Hallums is a supervisee in social work with experience in the field of human services with an emphasis on mental health. She truly believes in empowering and meeting the needs of clients from a person-centered approach.

And with that, I'll go ahead and pass on our session to our first speaker, Ryan Elza.

Ryan Elza: Thank you much, Ashley. Very excited to be here today. Next slide.

So, as mentioned, I am Ryan Elza, I'm the vice president of innovation and technology at Volunteers of America National Services. Next slide, please.

So, Volunteers of America is a large national nonprofit that serves over 1.5 million individuals in over 400 communities in 46 states as -- in -- as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. So, as you can see here, we offer programs every -- from the entire spectrum of children and youth, all the way to specific senior services and senior living. Next slide.

So, I sit within Volunteers of America National Services. So, we're a wholly owned subsidiary of Volunteers of America, and within our portfolio we have 230 affordable senior housing communities across the country. And in addition, we operate over 46 senior health care programs, including skilled nursing facilities, assisted living, home health care, adult day, and three PACE sites serving around 2400 to 2500 people every single day.

And so, when we think about reaching our residents and digital inclusion and digital equity, we really think about it from the lens of helping our residents and the people we serve age both within our properties and age within community. So, digital inclusion and equity are important social determinants of health that allow our residents to access critical services and everyday applications that really allow them to maintain their independence and thrive in our communities in a way that they want and choose to do so. Next slide, please.

So, I want to show a brief video from a program developed at AARP Foundation. Volunteers of America was one of the earliest adopters and original pilot program participants in AARP

Foundation's program that implemented voice first technology in a train the trainer model within affordable housing.

And so, just to kind of give a sense of how you can engage residents within your communities that may be -- you may have a hard time reaching, I really want you to hear first from some residents in Baltimore about how they were able to empower their community through technology and that technology was a facilitator for connection and a catalyst for action within a property at the Weinberg Senior Living Facility.

Video: You can ask the A lady almost anything you can think of.

You can talk to her or you can talk about her and she doesn't get offended.

People are a little afraid of it, and I have to admit when I first saw it, I just didn't know what to do with it.

She doesn't know everything, but almost everything.

Sorry. I don't know that.

Okay. Something exciting.

I see that you are at the Weinberg place; is that correct?

Yes.

The residents were given the Amazon Alexa.

80 percent of our resident client base are living alone. This voice-activated technology has helped to bring people out of their apartments and connect them with the world.

A lot of times you see your neighbors. You don't necessarily know them. You can't really call them friends. You give them a hi and bye. Because of the conversations about Alexa, we're becoming friends.

Being a facilitator, I get the resonance together. Everybody joins in. What did you learn? What did you learn? Oh, it made me take my medicine. No. It didn't. But it reminded you. So, that's a good thing.

Plays music for me.

Music.

Wakes me up.

Wakes him up.

I listen to talk radio.

Talk radio.

I have found one event and it's called Movie Night and is on March 27th, 2019. What would you like to do?

Register.

Done.

I love to laugh. So, she tells me jokes often. I've gotten a little older. You get up in the middle of the night to go to bathroom. Alexa, tell me a joke.

Watching people who were once sedentary, not communicating become more animated or active in their own lives, making decisions about their own lives, and, more importantly, being willing to learn. It doesn't matter how old you are. You can still learn. You still have purpose.

We need to utilize not only in this building but for all senior buildings around this country.

Okay. So, isn't that a wonderful thing?

Yes. That is beautiful.

Amen.

How else can I help?

Ryan Elza: So, every time I watch that short clip, I just can't help but be filled with such joy at seeing how technology impacted the lives of those residents, and it really was from this person-centered perspective that we worked with the residents at that community and also across a number of different communities to do a co-creation process to understand what were the motivations of the residents within these properties in order to adopt technology. How could technology help facilitate them to be able to access critical services, information, and resources that were important to them?

And so, one thing that we'll talk about and provide some strategies to do as a part of this conversation is really to look at your residents as whole beings. And I think often, when we think about serving residents through either resident services or in health care, there is this concept of person-centered delivery of services.

And I would advocate that we also need to take that same approach to digital inclusion when we're thinking about implementing technology within our properties and within our communities, that you really need to think about the residents that you're serving. What are their goals that they may have related to technology?

So, for one person, it could be that they want to watch their granddaughter graduate, and having the ability to see their graduation ceremony from halfway across the country through video conferencing is something that will motivate and help that person adopt technology and join you in that journey.

Or for another resident, it may be that they really want to be able to better manage their own health conditions, and that through an Alexa or -- oh, sorry. I should have muted my device. Alexa, stop -- either through a reminder on their device that they might be able to set in order to remember to take their medications or the ability to access their own personal health records through a tablet or a web portal is something that is really important to them.

Then thinking about what are their abilities. So, no two individuals are the same, and our abilities really need to be aligned and matched with the types of technologies that we're rolling out within communities.

So, for someone who may be hard of hearing, a Smart speaker may not be the optimal solution, and you want to -- a Smart speaker alone, but a device that has the ability to have a screen and close captioning may be a piece of technology that is better suited to that individual.

So, making sure that you're taking into consideration the full abilities of residents in the selection or matching of technology is critical. Thinking about where they are today in their skills related to technology and how you can help meet them where they are in their journey.

Their interests. So, one of the most common things that I've heard in my tenure of working across a lot of different organizations and communities is that music is a really powerful item for residents to be able to access within their home that can provide comfort and really helps them access parts of their own selves that they might not have the ability to access, given limited current technologies within their unit.

So, maybe for one resident, the prospect of listening to music that they love and enjoy is something that can be that catalyst to allow them to become excited in technology.

Thinking about their own personal style of learning. Not all of us are well apt to participate in virtual recorded training sessions. Some folks really need that hands-on learning style. So, thinking about the folks, what their personal styles may be and how you may need to work with them when engaging in technology.

What are the supports that person has? So, within our communities, 70 percent of our properties have resident services -- service coordinators, but service coordinators, as we all know, have a lot on their plates. And so, thinking about who are the other supports within a resident's life that you can activate in order to help them so it doesn't fall just on property staff. Or what are those community-based organizations supports that you may have, your local library.

Thinking about the values and then the attitudes and beliefs. So, really thinking through technology and digital inclusion from a culturally competent perspective. Different cultures and

different communities have different attitudes and beliefs related to technology, and you really need to think about those as you're designing your programs and doing outreach.

And so, overall, there are a lot of common beliefs related to older adults' use and adoption of technology. And so, I wanted to provide a framework for you to be able to think about technology acceptance and all the different components that may go into helping residents both perceive the usefulness of technology but also can help shape their attitudes going forward to allow them to continue beyond just a few couple examples that we talked about here but really continue to learn and leverage technology in new ways that can enrich their lives.

So, the first domain is self-efficacy, so confidence in using technology. And this really aligns with usage and behavior and the perceived ease of use. So, that's going to be one of the very first barriers that you're going to encounter, potentially, is residents don't feel confident or they're anxious around using technology.

And so, having the ability to demonstrate technology, allow them to try it before purchasing or acquiring devices can really help build their confidence as they're going down that journey of technology acceptance.

And then, as I mentioned before, when you're thinking about their abilities, thinking about their health conditions, the cognitive ability, and how you might select different types of technologies or show residents different features related to those that can help them better be able to manage their health conditions or use something in spite of different limitations that may be in place.

And then how their social supports align with their ability to use technology and the perceived usefulness. And we already talked about attitude to life and satisfaction and physical functioning, how these all connect. So, next slide.

And I know we're getting close on time. So, I'm just going to go through these quickly. But I kind of walked through these approaches on this slide. So, I won't go in depth, but really start from that person-centered holistic assessment of health. That is the foundation for then thinking about how to engage in outreach to residents.

Tech demonstrations, recruiting and training resident ambassadors. As you saw, Ms. Shirley was an incredibly powerful advocate for technology in her community, and she would work with residents and knew them very well across her community. She would work with them one on one individually or connect them to the appropriate support in order to make sure that they had everything that they need, and as problems were identified, being better able to target resources there.

But that contagion around excitement around technology from peer to peer, it's much more powerful, and I think we all know this sometimes than us trying to communicate the excitement around technology. But it also lowers those barriers related to attitudes and belief around technology because, if you can show that someone who is the same age or same level of ability as them are able to do it, that can inspire folks to believe that they are able to as well.

And then, how can you make it really, really fun is a way that helps inspire engagement? So, gamification. So, one thing that I know has been successful in a lot of communities is creating tech passports; right? So, having a bingo book of different activities people can use, technology for having those, complete those, turn those in, and winning a reward for it. Residents really love competition and excitement, and that is one way that can really help to engage people continuously as you're helping to allow them use technology and empower them.

And then also, thinking about how you can leverage your state assistive technology program. So, these are in all 50 states. They have offices that are really meant to help older adults and people with disabilities be matched with the appropriate types of technologies that work for them.

So, if you're trying to think about how you can be inclusive of your digital inclusion efforts and you don't know where to start related to accessibility needs, I would highly encourage you to reach out to your state assistive technology program. Next slide.

And so, in our communities, we're using a lot of different types of hardwares and modalities to engage residents. We're leveraging Smart speakers. So, simple Amazon Echo Dots all the way up to Google Nest Hub Max devices, which are your screen Smart speakers, to data enabled tablets through virtual reality, in which, in some of our assisted living and skilled nursing facilities, we're leveraging VR, which is early emerging in helping residents of cognitive impairment be better engaged and help them thrive. Next slide.

And I just wanted to close out with a couple stories to talk about how technology is helping residents across different communities.

So, these are stories from one of our peers, Mercy Housing, who implemented a small -- or a large tablet lending library program across 100 properties in which they deployed about 10 tablets that had data plans attached to them to communities and then trained their service coordinators to be able to allow residents to use those and have basic education on how they can use tablets.

So, we have examples of folks who are connecting to faith to be able to participate in their church services through Zoom, connecting to neighbors, so, doing small crafts and activities through small Zooms or Teams meetings, connecting globally. One resident who was able to the first time in many years connect with his family in India through video calling. Next slide.

And then connecting to services, so one resident who had a major abdominal surgery and was able to complete all of her driver's license Real ID paperwork online before having to go into the DMV to make that an easier process for her.

Connecting to brain health. So, allowing folks to be able to read books, access library programs, email friends, play games to help challenge themselves, and then connecting to wellness. So, having residents be able to participate in wellness programs, yoga classes virtually when they were unable to do so in person safely.

And with that, I'm going to pass it along to my colleague Franchel Mendoza to talk a little bit more about what they're doing in Fairstead.

Franchel Mendoza: Great. Thank you so much, Ryan. And I definitely would say that a lot of it has to do with being able to meet the residents where they are and cordial conferencing is definitely a way that you can strive to connect with your residents and community. So, next slide, please.

My name is Franchel Mendoza. I'm a social services coordinator as well as a licensed master social worker for Fairstead Management. Next slide. Thank you.

And I wanted to specifically speak to everyone about the engagement strategies that you should look into when working with residents, and this is going to be about wraparound services as a process.

So, wraparound service delivery is very team-based collaborative in terms of case management and also very community oriented. So, when we look at it, we want to be able to see it from a strength-based approach or strength-based perspective. So, we want to be able to meet the resident or the client where they are. It's a very famous approach that a lot of social workers, as well as caseworkers, do.

At times you have to be able to see and look at the individual for who they are and where they are in that moment in time to get them to the next stage for them or be able to guide them to make a very informed decision that they feel empowered. So, very much listening and observing to some of their needs is definitely going to be able to help you along the way to getting them to be connected as well as connected to themselves with internet in many ways but also being able to connect with their community as a whole. And then you can implement some of the strategies to help them move forward along that.

So, this is a process that is not always a one-size-fits-all. It's a transformative process. You want to be able to focus on the change over time. There will be individuals that will come and may not be ready for the services, and I'll get a little bit more into that in a couple of slides moving forward. So, you want to be able to bring them on with you and just engage them as best as possible in many different ways.

Also, you should look at the needs. What are some of the needs that the residents have? We know that they have issues in connectivity. We do know that they have other needs besides connectivity, whether it could be mental health, whether it could be nutrition, assistance with rent. It has been a big need in the last two years. So, how can we bring that together and actually connect it all as one?

So, we want to be able to fuse their needs and be able to also build a rapport with each individual, whether as a group or just one individual resident, to improve their overall well-being. And we need to be able to speak on how each of our involvement as a team, as a community comes into play.

And the changes emerge as a result over time. So, you might see some individuals that might be resistant, or they might not be understanding of being connected. They might not see a need, especially with the senior population. It might be a little bit more difficult for them to navigate, and it's always good to kind of bring them together to their comfort zone and kind of be able to slowly engage them in ways that would, step-by-step, get them to make an informed decision as to how they can best use it in their life.

Also, being able to improve the services coordination and what are the right fit for the community. As Ryan said, a lot of it has to do with what is the cultural competency that engages residents better in your own community. Not every community is the same, but there are similarities in the ways that you could approach them. So, remember that residents who can associate with you in a way that they build a rapport and communicate with your overall community will also help self promote that to other individuals that might also be hesitant to lead on that change.

So, when we talk about the engagement of residents and engagement of the community, look at it from a strength-based approach and what are some of the needs that, although in that moment, they might need it, that can help them make more of an informed decision moving forward in their communities? Next slide.

So, I'm going to speak a little bit about some of the examples that will definitely help. Especially now in the last two years, we have seen a lot of COVID-19 screenings and vaccinations happening. We want to be able to have these events and these types of dialogs always be connected with what is the connectivity and education space currently, whether it is programs out there that you're seeing to connect individuals where there is high speed internet access or low-cost laptop purchases. We want to be able to intertwine these other services into one.

So, if you do have an event and you do have a screening, kind of be able to also look at it from an education standpoint and also what other things you can bring into the mix that will get more people involved. So, kind of infusing all these different events, especially now that we have to think more about spacing and also about time, we want to be able to see how much more we can do in a span of time that's going to make a big impact.

I cannot stress enough that infusing the family into the equation is very important. Residents see their neighbors as families. They have families that might be out of state. They might have families that might be within a couple of blocks from each other.

It's something that it's very easily able to be done, if you build that connection and rapport. And as service coordinators, when we do their assessment and we get to know them and we've probably know our residents for years, some of them do want to actually learn from their nephew or want to be able to communicate with their family and kind of bringing them in and how that support is there and then actually having the actual hardware in the actual community and bringing it towards their usage.

And, also, one important thing sometimes that we see is, of course, individual connectivity is important, but also, going with the notion of family and community, you definitely want to

consider a hub and a way that you could bring individuals to learn as a form of potential outreach, as a form of information. So, a lot of sensors where you can make it a technology space but make it a safe space will definitely help in your endeavor.

Having a community technology center implemented within your office or your building definitely goes a long way, and we have seen that as a success as well internally. And we also see that it is a need, and it's always been a need, now more than ever, and a hybrid way of -- for children and families when they have to go to work or go to school.

So, when you look at it from a senior perspective or you look at it in a multifamily, you will see that there might be some fundamental differences in how individuals might use the technology. There might be some particular need for individuals that is simple, and there might be some complex need for individuals that might be older.

It's not an easy task. There's a lot of ways that we could potentially increase the awareness, and one of those is definitely giving that one-on-one support. So, if you're able to link to programs or you're able to link to other staff to kind of check in and even help them just to scroll or access their email, those little things do matter. Although it seems very small, eventually, it becomes part of their daily routine.

And being able to see how can you connect more individuals with the people that you are trying to outreach that might be hard to reach. I'll give an example. At one of our properties, we have one of our coordinators pretty much help [inaudible] Chromebooks for students and also for parents, and they work with the local high school social worker to serve the children and families at an event.

So, they were able to distribute computers to the whole property, be able to also have a system of support where individuals can call, and, in a way, it's working very successful because it's not just one individual but it's like a family model. So, everyone is in on this connectivity.

We do know that the seniors are a little bit more harder to reach. We do know certain people might be a little bit difficult to kind of get trained and get with the program, as much as we want them. It's a building process. We also have to look into that as well. And how can we provide that education? Next slide, please.

So, we want to be able to put these theories of change into practice. So, look at your team or you community of care, what they can offer. You want to be able to provide a welcoming environment, atmosphere. Be warm. I know we have a lot to do in our day-to-day jobs, but there's always so much that you could go and make an impact by just being there present for individuals that need you.

Identify what are some of the group or affinity groups, whether it's your resident assistance programs or maybe you might have a resident association or there might be a group that they want to do yoga and there's so much you can also do with different types of affinity groups.

On the individual level, just be yourself. Be personable. If you meet with them and you're able to do so, just show them some hospitality. Have a snack with them. Have a casual conversation. It doesn't have to be always going down to business and task and let's teach her this. Just kind of have a conversation and focus on their strengths.

Sometimes we feel like we might need to go and fix something, and we might have a resource to fix something. But we also sometimes need to kind of go into this journey and let the residents also go through it because that's what's going to make a longer impact.

I know I speak for myself. If someone wanted to give me a piece of candy when I was a child, I probably would think twice about it because my parents told me, don't take candy from a stranger. But at first, you might feel, oh, a candy. I might want to take it. It's a process. There's different groups. There's different ways to engage individuals at every level, and even individuals that might be hesitant, they eventually do come around with a lot of the wraparound supportive services you could provide in your community.

So, make sure to explore also, what are the client's interests past, present, and future? They might say today that they don't like, let's say, the food quality at a food pantry, for example. They might not say that in the future, or they might say, I like Meals on Wheels. They might actually see that they prefer food pantry. It is always changes in what the needs are.

Sometimes they might just be little wishes that they internally would like to speak about. But eventually, they're just waiting on someone to just speak to them about it and engage in that conversation. And some of them will find their own answers. We can't just say, you should take this and that, you should do this and that. We have this opportunity. If you don't understand it, we can definitely go that route. But let's have more of a dialog as to why you might see it be difficult or maybe other ways that we could help you get through it.

And who is someone that maybe you go to that is important to you, that you feel like you might want to bring on this journey? There might be a neighbor. It might be a family member. There might be a nephew or a younger child that might actually be able to come in and do something like parent night or help individuals kind of get together. So, there's always going to be many different ideas, but it always starts with building that one-on-one relationship. Next slide.

So, kind of like as a takeaway, we have to look at it from a way that we have hard-to-reach services, and we necessarily might not have hard-to-reach residents, although it might seem that way. A lot of the times, there are certain residents that might be difficult to reach. A lot of it is just about the engagement and kind of like what is their motivation.

So, when you look at the digital inclusion, the way that we feel that it will work best and we incorporate it, especially for the hard-to-reach resident is, first of all, that one-on-one connection, but also centralizing the way that you make these devices and internet accessible; right? Because you in the future can work out ways and events that will always keep the space as the common denominator, and then you could do certain things around that. So, centralized connectivity, whether it is at a community room, events, informational gatherings, whatever you could find and bring those resources.

Also, use of internal computers for resident use is something that we are also looking into. So, we have vendors that pretty much services our computers internally. What of those can we refurbish or provide to our residents and actually put back into the community? Or which opportunities do we have for our residents to also purchase their own and get a discount through our agency; right? And pretty much kind of be able to have the items for people to connect and hotspots is all part of the equation.

You might do it one resident at a time, but to be sustainable in the long-term, we want to be able to think about how we can keep it centralized for everyone to use. And I think more agencies and vendors are coming up with the ways to make it more wide than just for a selected few.

And last but not least, always look at what's working and what's not working. What I can say to you today, you might find that it might work, it might not work to you. You have to try it out. You have to be able to get feedback from the residents. Try it out. Put it out there. See what works. See what's different from your community, or see if you are missing that little piece of the puzzle of engaging something with that. So, it's not just the main thing you want to provide. Some people can actually get the whole wraparound support around that.

So, provide ongoing usage and promote connections with families and friends and staff is very important. Look at it from a short-term and look at it from a long-term. If we're doing it from a short-term, how are we going to accomplish that? But if we want it from a long-term, education is a big component, and accessibility is key.

Explore what interests, benefits, and concerns individuals and affinity groups have and connect with them to support and engage them through so many different avenues sometimes we might not even look into. So, for our seniors, they are really, really connected to either family, certain staff. They can speak to you for days, hours on end. They're very excited about you. They might even look at you as one of their kids or one of their families.

So, they also have services, home attendant services. They also have health services in many different ways. These are all points of entry or access that can get you to engage the resident. So, hey, do you know how to even make an appointment, if you have this app. You can actually make a call. You can do this. Oh, I didn't know that. I'm actually very close to my home attendant.

There's some individuals also that work with our residents that would be happy to engage with them in this way and kind of practice it. Okay. If I'm going to go and do laundry, call me from downstairs, or let's try this out. Let's Facetime this. It's all pretty much kind of engaging different ways to do it, and you can implement also specific rewards programs around it and kind of create a sheet, most resident that has used their Facetime for the week or their month. Kind of make it a little game. Resident that has been able to use certain apps and actually feel that they -- they're well equipped to handle it.

So, there's so many different things that you could consider, and always kind of go back to basics. So, the device itself, it's very important; right, because that's why we're trying to do is

connect individuals, provide that connectivity? And the way that we can do that, of course, is through education. But you cannot pretty much let go of the one-on-one feel because there are some residents that might have some assumptions about what programs work for them, or they might not believe in certain things that, for them, they feel they haven't been served in the past and they might be a little bit skeptical about it.

So, definitely looking into these different considerations and ways of engaging your residents, and that will help you along the way to building a stronger community. So, I want to end my presentation today and hand it off to Ana Trejo. [inaudible].

Ana Trejo: Good afternoon. Thank you, Franchel. Thank you, Ryan, for showing you have awesome information. That's why I like the ConnectHome Summit.

My name is Ana Trejo. I'm the interim director of Supportive Services for the Housing Authority of the City of Brownsville. And next slide.

I would like to share some of the things -- or some of our outreach strategies that work for us. This is stuff that we have learned as time goes by. Communication is key. That is the number one thing that we have learned when doing outreach to our residents.

We try to employ whatever tools we have available, and some of those tools are fliers, posters, letters, mass mail outs. Our Facebook page is the big one. Phone calls and text messages and emails were excellent for during the pandemic. Home visits are usually done for our elderly and our youth, and how we find out what our residents need is usually done through surveys. Who better to let us know what we can do for them other than our residents; right?

Virtual programing that we use during -- or we continue to use is the Zoom for our monthly resident meetings and for other things, specific events, some of them, including -- geared towards specifically our elderly population and our youth. We also use our Facebook Live for workshops, and we record most of our programing and we do upload it to our YouTube channel. Next slide.

Resident outreach, again. Some of the resources that we have are our residents, our resident ambassador, which Ryan mentioned. We do have resident association board officers, which are also very helpful to us when putting the word out on the different programing that we have.

For our staff, we do have opportunity centers or family learning centers. We have four of them. Our tutors are the ones -- I put they were real heroes during the pandemic because there were the ones doing the house visits. They were the ones delivering our our food box to our residents going home to home. They're the ones that provided one-on-one training to our residents on how to log into our resident meetings.

One of the things that we noticed worked really good was providing step-by-step instructions on how to connect to the Zooms. All our material, of course, is both English and Spanish. This is some -- just some of the strategies that we use. And, again, like I mentioned, this is a learning process. Our residents are not always the same residents. So, we have to adapt. Next slide.

Providing assistance. So, through helping our residents connect, we had to do it one on one. That was the best thing for us that worked out. We did let our residents know of the different opportunities in connectivity in regards to who has the low-cost high-speed internet connections, who has the low-cost or discounts available to them. All this information is distributed to them through our -- the tools that we previously saw. And of course, you have the residents that are going to call you because they do need more assistance, and that's where we come in, the staff here and our tutors.

We do make it a point to see it through. We have to let them know, either you explain to them how to do it or you actually walk them step by step while having the ISP provider on the line with them as well.

For those residents that can do it themselves, we always let them know, please call us back. Let us know you're connected because, if not, we have to follow through and see what was the issue, why they're not connected yet. And for the ones that we do provide that one-on-one assistance, we always know they're already connected, and that's one number to our list. Next slide.

Some of the virtual programing that we held, we were very fortunate. Our offices were always open for staff. We were always here in the office. Our residents were able to get ahold of us when they needed. So, we were -- during all that time, we were providing services, and we had programing going on. The only difference was that it was virtual.

Some of the things that we did do through -- and we continue to do is the food bag distribution. We do have after school meals at several of our sites. We do host virtual coding camps with [inaudible] kids. Those are really good. We were lucky enough to get a grant for a virtual summer reading camp. We continue to host our monthly resident meetings.

We have something called Art from the Heart, which is done with one of our partners, and that's a virtual painting class. We do provide all the materials, and if the resident is unable to connect, we also provide a device. And if they don't have internet connection, we also provide the hotspots for these type of activities.

We do have something called the Road to College, which is a youth programing. This is just a program for seniors. We do have somebody that is able to assist them do their FAFSA, do scholarships applications, register for college, and do the actual application to go into college.

And then we also have our tutoring, our -- like I mentioned earlier, our tutors and our learning centers. They -- we provide them with a Zoom link that they're able to have open certain hours. And students all know that, if they were to need help, that they're able to log in at that time. And we just recently started with drive-through events which are pretty successful. Next slide.

Again, some of the things are HACB's always families first. Another thing that we do is embrace and evolve with change. Always follow through. That's a big one, like I mentioned. And fostering your relationship with the residents is constant, no matter how you are engaging them. And the number one thing that we never, ever do is overpromise on anything.

If you have any questions, we'll be happy to answer during Q&A, and then I would like to pass along to Tashonna and Julius. Thank you.

Tashonna Hallums: Thank you, Ana. I'm Tashonna Hallums. I'm the youth programs coordinator, and I have Mr. Julius Norman. He's the youth programs manager. If you have any questions, that's my contact information. You can contact me. Next slide, please.

Our objectives. We wanted to develop intervention strategies to help resolve gaps in the delivery and implementation of youth programs, identify significant social and environmental influences impacting health, living -- healthy living -- I'm sorry -- promote healthy lifestyle changes and educate residents on the benefits of positive mental health, assist residents with gaining access to resources and services. And so, we truly believe building healthy neighborhoods to create safer communities. Next slide, please.

Community health and wellness. We want to continue to provide our residents with direct services that will promote positive changes and impact access to essential resources. So, during the pandemic, some of the things we did was Earth Day, women's leadership development, and workshop -- and vaccination events.

So, we partnered with Hampton University because we saw that it was a need in our communities for vaccination. Our residents were not going to get vaccinated. So, we provided that service on site where our residents were able to go get vaccinated.

We had soccer camps, boxing camps, mental health support groups, youth recreational connect, community gardens, and youth feeding programs. So, in some of our communities, we did experience food desert, and so, we provided food, with the help of the food bank, to our residents, and we went door to door during the pandemic delivering food to our residents. Next slide, please.

Supportive services. So, we provide our families with resources that will lead to improving educational and employment opportunities leading towards our residents becoming self-sufficient. So, we have college exploration, scholarship awards. So, in our HA, we provide our residents with a $1,000 scholarship, and we also help our residents throughout the process of going to school and just linking them to different resources that they may need.

Youth leadership groups and advisory councils, we have youth literature and poster contests. So, we actually walk through our communities, and we have poster contests that had offered our residents gift cards if they had won. So, we just wanted to keep our residents engaged during the pandemic.

We offer summer employment, community service opportunities, youth work experience, vocational training, and GED. So, we have some of our 12- to 15-year-olds that are interested in working, but they're not quite old enough to work a regular job. So, we provide them with a stipend that gives them -- a stipend through community beautification projects so they may work in our community garden. Next slide, please. Next slide, please.

So, our restorative activities. We structure our mental health support groups on various topics that were a need in our community. Our goal for our initiative of doing the support groups for our youth to understand that mental health should be taken serious, and we are still here providing services. So, some of our various topics was coping and relaxing, empowerment walk, anger stress management, letting go, coping with grief and loss, and who are you, where do you fit in?

We felt like our topics were very relatable with a lot of our youth was going through during COVID. And so, we would do the webinar on Zoom, and then in response to that, we would go and do an activity such as yoga on the beach, the [inaudible] swamp, canal trial -- trail -- sorry -- destruction room, ladder release on the beach or the planetarium.

And so, our webinars provided our youth with support. We still -- we just wanted to note throughout the pandemic that we were still here. We wanted our youth to have an outlet so they could let -- just let each other know they're -- you're in this together. Someone else is experiencing the same thing you are experiencing. And this helped us address the needs of our residents, and then we were able to refer residents out for services that were beyond the services we provided. Next slide, please.

So, tips for creating mental health support groups. So, with our mental health support groups, host small groups. You want to host small groups because you want your residents to feel comfortable to share their own experience, and you want them to be comfortable talking.

Establish and sustain strong partnerships in the community. Involve parents and guardians. Parents often share their concerns about their child with us. Parent involvement shows support, and sometimes parents may need to be provided with services to better understand their child's needs.

Interdepartmental collaboration. We're youth programs collaborated with FSS and workforce development to bag and deliver food to our residents weekly. We want our residents to still be receiving nutritious meals during the pandemic. I'm sorry.

Listen to the needs of the youth. We -- so, you want to have topics that the youth are interested in because you want them to participate. And during our support, we noticed our youth shared their personal stories, and they were able to help each other out and give advice. And our Youth Executive Council led this initiative. Our Youth Executive Council is composed of youth that live in the community that we service, and they are the voice of their community.

You want to encourage participation. Allow youth to share their thoughts. Sometimes this may take the group in a different direction than what you planned for, but keep in mind that the group truly runs itself. You may have participants that do not feel comfortable talking to the group. That's okay. Sometimes some participants may feel too -- they may feel shy and later warm up, or you may have some participants that just want to talk one on one.

Provide resources and incentives. We provided work experience opportunities and, to attend the support group, we provided our residents with tablets, some with gift cards, and computers. And the one point that I did leave off was with recruitment. And so, we were able to recruit our participants because we were present in the community delivering food. Next slide, please.

Here's a list of our partners. So, we truly want to thank the food bank because this is what led to us with this initiative with having mental health support group because we were able to have a presence in the community and go door to door to find out what our clients' needs were. And we would take that information down, and if it was workforce or FSS, we would refer our clients. And so, this really helped us stay in contact with our clients during the pandemic. Thank you.

Ashley Vo: Thank you. A big thank you to all of our presenters. We've already received comments and questions in the chat requesting for your contact information, as well as where they can find the recording and slides for the session.

And we did answer this in the Q&A. All slides and recordings will be available on HUD Exchange, and in the slides, you will find the contact information.

And then very briefly, during the initial session with Ryan, also we had a question come in. "How do I find out who my state assistive technology is?" And Ryan Elza, he did include a link in the chat, which I will also resend, and that link is to the program directory where you can find your state program.

And, unfortunately, we only have time for one Q&A, and it's directed at Ryan Elza from Volunteers of America National Services. "How did you engage residents to start with to find out what their values and interests and goals were?"

Ryan Elza: Thanks, Ashley. I think this question was answered across all the presentations, and it's really starting by having those direct conversations with the residents both at the individual level but also within groups.

And so, one thing that we do in our communities is really have information sessions and allow residents to have the opportunity to talk about their perception related to technology, their values. And then we also work across the different community-based organizations that are serving the residents that are within our property.

So, in one property in New Jersey, we have a really strong presence of Filipino residents within that community, and we engaged organizations within the community that serve Filipino individuals and really brought them into that conversation as well to make sure that we were being culturally competent both from the outset and the design and execution but also the support throughout the length of our programing.

Ashley Vo: Thank you, Ryan. And we are coming to time right now.

Again, I would like to thank everyone for attending our session today. We look forward to your attendance at the facilitated ideas exchange beginning at 4:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time. This

is an opportunity for attendees to engage with each other and presenters. So, come prepared to join in the conversation. Have a good afternoon, everyone.

(END)