

Case study

A partnership between YourLink and VMCH creates digital confidence for seniors living at home



“It keeps you in touch with the world. I feel like I have been very lucky, it’s the best thing to happen to me all year. How much data do we get?”

– Doreen, VMCH client

How VMCH challenged their own assumptions of seniors to provide new digital solutions

VMCH is a Catholic not-for-profit organisation providing high quality disability, specialist education, aged care and retirement living services. VMCH’s 2,550 staff members are dedicated to supporting 9,000 people across metropolitan Melbourne, regional Victoria and southern New South Wales.



The issue

Faced with the urgency to respond to the growing impacts of COVID-19, VMCH quickly set to work on redesigning the services they offer. With heightened awareness on face-to-face service delivery, VMCH were concerned that the social isolation that many clients were already experiencing was exacerbated. This included tighter restrictions on attendance at their usual social events, reducing care worker visits, or seeing others within their family or social groups.

To develop the right approach for the seniors in their care, VMCH challenged themselves on what they thought they knew about their clients. That they were:

- Happy to slow down and generally did not want to try new things
- Fearful of technology and that would stop them living a bigger life
- Always going to prefer face-to-face experiences
- That the popularity of technology initiatives was not as high; and
- It couldn't be funded anyway.



VMCH needed to find a partner who could help them structure an approach to connect with their clients 'digitally'.

Having already begun working with YourLink to provide a program to connect their residents in aged care residences with their loved ones, VMCH and YourLink worked together on a solution for their clients within in-home aged care services.



“We had to reinterpret how we view the concept of ageing, and what generalisations we make about older people, especially when it comes to something as complex as technology. It was shown that our assumptions were mostly incorrect.”

– Chris Coughlan, Strategy and Innovation Advisor, VMCH

The solution

Given the unfolding nature of the pandemic, VMCH were not sure if they needed a short-term response or something for the longer-term. VMCH and YourLink created the 'Technology at Home' program for their Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) clients. Technology at Home is a structured solution that gives clients confidence to get online through social learning, support and smart devices. The impact of this is the reduction of their social isolation.

VMCH identified which of their clients were most vulnerable, either due to isolation, anxiety, depression, dementia or a health issue and engaged with those clients first. Over 100 clients from their CHSP program registered to be part of the service.

The flexibility provided in the Government's COVID-19 emergency CHSP funding created the opportunity to fund new iPads for 100 clients who were previously receiving face-to-face social support.

To give their clients the knowledge and confidence to use their new devices, VMCH and YourLink designed a learning journey. YourLink configured new devices to remove any barriers when a client first received them. VMCH began face-to-face 'onboarding', working with the combination of a care worker and YourLink team member to show the client and their family member the basics of using an iPad, and how to use Zoom.

'Tea and Technology' training sessions over Zoom were then run by YourLink, creating a social learning experience with up to 10 other clients combining fun and group socialisation with learning.



"This program is the most wonderful thing. You feel a bit left out these days... I don't understand a lot of the modern things that are going on and I think this is going to open up so many different avenues for us. It's an incredible program and I'm so grateful, I can't tell you."

– Billie, full-time carer to Laurie

"Mum is always asking for her iPad now. She is a real doer, and she will physically involve herself. She is able to see people, and listen to music every day, it gives her something to do. She is excited whenever she has an email, and while I don't know how much the concept clicks, she loves to receive them."

– Anna, daughter of Antoinetta, a VMCH client living with dementia.

The impact

The Technology at Home program has allowed VMCH residents to stay safe, and engaged while feeling more connected during periods of isolation. It also provides a sense of relief for family members, who know they have another form of communication with their loved one and that their loved one has another method of keeping themselves entertained while in the home.

The program has given a sense of empowerment to clients. Age is not a barrier to what can be learned and it's an opportunity to be a part of their community, virtually. The 'Tea and Technology' sessions have energised clients in having a social chat and cup of tea while learning something new, together.

"We can now look at new ways of delivering our services, which are of a huge benefit to our clients, and their families."

– *Chris Coughlan, Strategy and Innovation Advisor, VMCH*

97%

of participants feel more confident using technology

100%

would recommend the program

100%

value VMCH for providing the service



The partnership between YourLink and VMCH has shown what can be achieved when you set aside your assumptions about a cohort of people and bring the right combination of insight and expertise to the table. We worked through our concerns and tested our assumptions, and found a way to make technology work for a group of people that can be difficult to reach, difficult to communicate with and potentially difficult to teach.

What we have seen is an amazing uptake in participation rates, and some exceptional feedback from the clients, and their families and carers around how the program has benefited them. VMCH will continue to expand, continue to look at what can be learned, what hasn't worked, and how to provide a unique service for their clients.

"The real power in the success of this program was the way we have worked hand in glove with the VMCH team. We listened to them and they to us and the result is the amazing success we've achieved. 100% of participants said they were more confident to use their device as a result of the program."

– *Richard Scenna, Co-Founder and Director, YourLink*

3 things to do now

Chris Coughlan of VMCH shares his tips on what you can do now to start developing a digital inclusion program as an aged care provider.

Be curious

- Ask questions of yourself and the broader system
- Challenge your own assumptions of seniors
- Imagine how things could be and what the possibilities are
- Meeting maximum standards doesn't mean you can't explore new things.

Experiment

- We can only really challenge our own assumptions by testing them
- Design tests or mini experiments that are small and low risk
- Learn from the results and build slowly.

Expect discomfort

- Be okay with the process feeling uncomfortable at first and commit to working through this
- Choose a like-minded partner who is as curious and open to problem-solving as you are
- Recognise that this is a continuous process
- Be flexible.



Start with YourLink

YourLink recognises that aged care providers work in a dynamic environment faced with many challenges. Embedding a digital inclusion program might seem like a large and challenging task, especially when you don't know where to start, how to fund it, resource it, or manage the delivery so that the program is truly a success.

We have trained over 4,500 seniors and care workers and bring this unique experience to co-design the right solution for you. Our approach is to simplify things through an integrated offering. We partner with you and provide a unique managed solution enabling your program through strategy, program design, training, coupled with devices and data connecting seniors living in aged care and independently at home.

We also assist in guiding you in what Government funding might be available to achieve a cost-neutral solution.

We partner with other organisations to complement your program and we are the leading Apple Consultants Network member for the Australian Aged and Community Care sector.

To achieve our mission of opening up the digital world for seniors, we'd love to talk to you about how we can achieve that together.

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