

Skype Video Chatting -- Atria Crossgate and Atria Shaker

To Whom it May Concern:

Atria Crossgate and Atria Shaker have initiated the Skype video chatting software in order to improve the quality of life of its residents and creatively use technology to address issues of depression and loneliness. The Skype program was originally developed at Atria Crossgate in October of 2010 by two Master's of Social Work students from SUNY Albany. The students will be continuing the program at Atria Shaker in December 2010. The Atria Assisted Living Group has the possibility of collaborating with SUNY Albany to promote the program successfully. Atria Crossgate and Shaker plan on advertising the program to their residents through their website. The website is a great way to gain support for the program from the residents and their family members, which is critical to its success. Also the MSW students will collaborate with the sales director at Shaker to create enrolling cards to promote the program. The enrollment cards will prompt the residents to return the card with information of friends or family they would like to communicate with on Skype. By doing this, we will be better able connect the residents with their family and friends and increase the likelihood of using Skype within their lives.

In order to promote Skype within the Atria community we have been conducting monthly instructional classes for the residents. The classes cover the details of Skype such as, what is Skype, how to set up an account, how to make videos calls, and the benefits of the program. Also during the class we conduct a live demonstration of video chatting between two computers within the community. We also gather information to set up email and Skype accounts for the residents. We inquire about with whom the residents would like to communicate using Skype and then contact those friends or family members. Participation from outside family members and friends is critical to the success of the program. It is necessary for the residents to have someone to communicate with using Skype in order to benefit from the program. We will be contacting the family members through mail, phone and possibly email to encourage them to set up a Skype account and begin communicating with their family member. We will also offer an introductory Skype class for the friends and family members who are interested to help them become more familiar with the program. This program helps facilitate learning and communication between the resident and their friends or family.

The unmet needs of the elderly are important issues to consider within an assisted living community. The change from living in one's home to living in a senior living facility is a major change within the lives of residents. With this change comes a loss of life roles related to aging and loss. Often, the residents once held important and meaningful positions in the workforce or within their community. Also, many have experience the loss of a spouse that has changed the meaning of their lives. Losing the role within a career or lifestyle is a major change. The elderly can experience grief and depression resulting from feelings of lack of importance. The Skype program has the possibility of increasing the feeling of importance of the elderly by opening up a line of communication. The residents will have more of an opportunity to voice their opinions and stay in contact with friends and family. The elderly also show signs of depression resulting from being separated from their friends and family for extended periods of time. The family members may not be local or have time after work and caring for their children to make the trip to visit their

elderly family members. Skype is an easy platform for the elderly to maintain face-to-face relationships with the people they normally may not see for long periods of time.

Many seniors are dealing with new and difficult life changes when they come to Assisted Living. Some of these issues include loss of life roles, loneliness, isolation and their social networks deteriorate. By involving seniors in this program, we are offering them a chance to reconnect with their families using new technology and they learn valuable skills through this. It is an intergenerational program in which grandparents can now connect with their grandchildren on a level that their grandchildren are familiar with. It helps with the feelings of loneliness and isolation by connecting seniors with their family members and friends who may live far away. It also helps rebuild seniors' social networks. Research has proven that seniors with strong social networks lead healthier lives, have higher levels of self-worth and have a more positive self image. By providing our seniors with this service, we are helping many generations connect that may have lost touch, helping our seniors learn new skills, and helping them gain a new sense of self-worth.

The total cost of the program is minimal. Atria communities provide their residents with computers in the living areas that they can utilize to connect to the internet free of charge. The Skype program is free to download and install. The cost of a web-cam can vary but prices range from \$20 to \$60 at your local Best Buy or Wal-Mart stores. The major income source is the Engaged Life budget at Atria Shaker and Atria Crossgate. Marketing on the website and promotional cards will be handled by our Sales Directors. The funds for the promotional mailings will come from the Sales Department budget.

An important aspect of this program is the collaboration between the residents and their loved ones to foster new skills. We do anticipate challenges arising during the operation of the program. One issue with the elderly is vision impairment. They may have difficulty seeing the keyboard or screen to sign onto the program. In order to overcome this we will have staff members who are familiar with the Skype program to assist in logging in. The benefit of Skype is that is very user-friendly once logged on. Essentially the residents just need to sit and chat with their loved ones on Skype as if they were in a face-to-face conversation. Another issue we anticipate is the involvement of the family members. To offset this, we plan on having a signup sheet at the instructional class for families with specific time slots. We will have an evening event, "Skype Night," where staff will be on hand to assist residents in logging on and using the program to communicate with their family members. Another challenge we might come upon is the fact that each Atria community only has one computer for its residents. This computer is located in the living room which may not be conducive for a private conversation that the residents may wish to have. One idea we have to offset this problem is to have two laptops that residents can sign out for a few hours at a time that will come pre-loaded with the necessary software to use Skype. This way they can talk with their loved ones in the privacy of their own apartments.

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