



Success Story: Northeast Iowa Area Agency on Aging

Technology tools ease isolation and loneliness

The Northeast Iowa Area Agency on Aging (NEI3A) serves 9,000 clients in 18 counties with services designed to help them continue living independently. Unfortunately, for many, the COVID-19 pandemic turned that independence to isolation, as they were unable to visit with family or friends and struggled with loneliness and feelings of hopelessness.

Addressing a need for connection

NEI3A CEO Donna Harvey noticed the impact on caregivers first. **Some called, in tears, because they felt alone and weren't sure they could continue to care for their loved one.** As the organization closed its senior centers and meal sites to in-person visits, Harvey knew they would need to find a solution. **Only about 20% of the organization's clients have access to internet or computers,** so traditional devices like iPads or Amazon's Fire tablets weren't a good option. Plus, NEI3A had neither the resources nor the expertise to help users set up and maintain home internet connections or teach them how to use such devices.

Harvey knew the organization's solution would have to be simple to use and include its own cellular connectivity. She discovered GrandPad through an employee who knew someone at the company and quickly realized that the device was perfectly suited to her organization's needs. GrandPad's built-in 4G LTE connection was stable in areas where even wired connections can be unreliable, and the company's focus on customer service won Harvey over.

Beyond technical specifications, Harvey appreciated the way GrandPad connects users to a trusted circle of contacts. Because a trusted family administrator controls who has permission to connect with the device, users know that every time their GrandPad rings, it's someone they want to talk to. That approach builds trust for users, and it dovetails neatly with AAA's organization-wide efforts to protect clients from scams and spam calls. Especially in the midst of a contentious election season, Harvey said clients have appreciated that their GrandPad filters out unwanted communication.

It took about two weeks from NEI3A's initial discussion with GrandPad to get devices out to the first 50 users, and adoption followed quickly. Each GrandPad

[GrandPad.biz](https://www.grandpad.biz)

comes ready to use — right out of the box — giving clients immediate access to a network of friends and family. And because of the support from GrandPad to the consumer, it allowed the agency staff to focus on providing necessary support and services.

Surprisingly, NEI3A's staff took a little more convincing. They worried about whether clients would accept video visits as a replacement for face-to-face interactions, and whether clients, many of whom were unaccustomed to using high-tech devices, would welcome the tablets. But it didn't take long for clients to adapt to the interface and features of GrandPad and soon, staff members were also convinced.

Early adopters embraced the opportunity to reach out to loved ones via GrandPad and the free Family Companion App. For example, a client with Parkinson's disease used his GrandPad to hold a virtual birthday party with his family. He called the device the "best thing that had happened to him in years." In another case, a client who had been calling his NEI3A center as many as 10 times a day just for conversation, was able to use his GrandPad to connect with family and an old military buddy. That expanded social circle means he no longer has to rely on calls to the agency for companionship.

"Once staff started hearing those stories, they realized this was going to be OK," said Harvey. "They realized that the GrandPads would actually be used and loved by our clients."

By giving clients the ability to connect, NEI3A addressed two important issues: Reducing loneliness for clients, and protecting them from situations that put them at risk for COVID by enabling them to socialize without going to public places.

A plan to come back better than ever

NEI3A targeted its most isolated clients with its initial GrandPad rollout in an effort to improve social connections and ease loneliness. As users became more comfortable with the devices, the agency expanded implementation to include more uses. For example, some NEI3A's healthcare partners now use GrandPads to conduct home visits with their patients, and NEI3A is rolling out nutrition education via GrandPad. Clients can use the built-in GrandPad camera to display what they have in their cupboards, allowing staff to evaluate their options and make suggestions for healthy eating. In addition, the organization has discussed offering tai chi classes via GrandPad, and using GrandPad's collection of connected-health devices to track users' weight and other vital statistics.

"We want to come back from COVID even better than we were, and GrandPad is an important part of that process," Harvey said. "Because our clients have embraced the devices so quickly, it's become their tool as much as it is ours. In some ways, we're just the nice agency that provided them with a resource that has helped them reconnect to their lives."

Harvey sees even more possibilities down the road. **As a result, the organization is preparing to distribute another 20 GrandPads to clients,** and she expects to add more soon. Harvey imagines using GrandPads to store discharge instructions for clients who have to spend time in the hospital. In addition, Harvey expects to organize regular community meals via GrandPad to allow seniors to connect with friends without having to drive to an NEI3A senior center.

Based on her experiences so far, Harvey expects GrandPad to remain an integral part of NEI3A's operations long after COVID concerns have faded. Having the ability to check in with clients via video may reduce driving time for staff in a service area that takes over three hours to cover from end to end. Harvey estimates that the **money they will save on mileage reimbursement could fund half a year of GrandPad service.**

The Northeast Iowa Agency on Aging covers 18 counties and a number of remote rural areas. Even in places where users are connected to the internet via cable or fiber, connections can be unreliable enough that staff will go to the office because they've lost their connection at home. With GrandPad, however, users get a rock-steady, reliable 4G LTE connection that means they are always able to reach out to family and friends or connect with NEI3A staff.



Remote User Locations



4G LTE Data Connections



Safe & Secure Connection



Reliable Access To Family & Friends



What really sold me on GrandPad is the way it allows users to connect with family and friends. Those social connections allow users to get comfortable using GrandPad, which allows us to then use the devices to connect them with other resources.” — Donna Harvey, CEO, NEI3A



I don't think we would have been this successful if we'd tried to use a conventional tablet or an app for our clients. Our partnership with GrandPad works because they handle the technical details and allow us to focus on the things that we do best.”