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Crushing COVID

who were home, and nursing staff began conducting televisits.

"Technology has really enhanced our communication with one another," said Carrie. "Doing a video call with someone, I think, is so much richer than doing a phone call."

CI's President and CEO Christopher Saulino sees the importance of leveraging technology now to fight COVID-19 into the future in order to work faster, more efficiently, better communicate and most importantly as he said, "lead to better outcomes for the people we support."

All in all, CI has had 14 cases of COVID, all of which occurred in the first few months of the pandemic. By June, Carrie noted, everyone had fully recovered. She credits this in large part to the amazing work done by DSPs who, she said, really sacrificed their personal time and themselves in caring for CI's individuals. "They did it because they love them and they feel like part of their family."

"We've been very cautious in all of our approaches and cautious about lifting restrictions because we know our individuals are a vulnerable population so we're always going to err on the side of caution when it comes them."

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Crushing COVID



Carrie Carter, CI Managing Director (right) and Emma Doyle, CI Marketing and Admissions Manager, who oversees CI's PPE.

As the U.S. was bracing for the impact of COVID-19 this past January, so too was CI's nursing department as they kept a close eye on the virus' scope and spread.

"We began to follow it and rev up for a bad flu season," said Carrie Carter, CI's Managing Director. "We put a plan in place before anything started happening. I think it was good that we were being overly concerned."

The proverb "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," aptly applies to the steps CI began taking early on to prepare for what were then a few unknowns about the virus and its spread. Acting quickly though, Carrie and her team began stockpiling PPE despite the struggle they and everyone else had acquiring it.

One of the first things Carrie did was to put CI's Marketing and Admissions Manager Emma Doyle in charge of all supplies. As things began to ramp up, Emma made sure CI was well stocked with cleaning supplies and sanitizers. Masks soon followed and Emma was able to tap into local and national resources to acquire them and all the supplies they needed.

"We literally did an essentialized stockpiling of supplies that we continue to have and refresh today," said Carrie. "We also had an amazing response from staff, their families, individuals' families, random groups and people in the community who donated masks that were either purchased or made."

When the lockdown in March sent everyone home and necessitated the suspension of CI's Day Programs and all community activities, Carrie said that they very quickly learned to make technology their friend.

"We went from having a full, thriving office to assigning people one to two days a week of office time to ensure social distancing and safely avoid heavy crowding," Carrie said. "We're still working on that policy today."

In order to maintain CI's essential services while staff began working from home, Director of Operations Christopher Lynn organized and coordinated office schedules so operations could continue to run smoothly with minimal interruption. IT was tasked with helping staff set up their remote workstations as well, where needed.

Making technology a friend has entailed taking advantage of virtual meeting platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams, and phone apps like Facetime and Teams Messenger. CI now conducts all of its agency meetings using Zoom, and Carrie said it has changed how the nonprofit functions.

In addition, CI began creating Zoom groups for Day Program participants and individuals

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Our Mission:

Community Interactions, Inc. (CI) provides quality services for people with intellectual, physical and behavioral health challenges to help them create lifestyles consistent with their communities while respecting individual choice, self determination and culture.



Message from the CEO

Christopher Saulino, Ph.D.
President/CEO

Though COVID-19 is still with us for the foreseeable future, we at CI are prepared to stay the course for the coming months ahead. We have ramped up our safety procedures based on health expert's advice to safeguard our community and utilize information on the best ways to protect people. When faced with adversity you find new and creative ways to do things, and CI has been doing just that.

Our administrative office continues to work on a mostly remote schedule but has still found ways to provide support services to our homes, individuals and staff. And though we will not be celebrating the holidays in our usual fashion, we have an amazing committee coordinating virtual events filled with lots of merriment and good cheer, for all our homes.

Fortunately, technology has been key during this crucial time, and we have used it and learned how to successfully communicate remotely during the pandemic. It is something that we will continue to use in the future, especially for our remote homes and offices. CEO update videos have been recorded and published on our YouTube Channel.

CI has also invested in iPads that will go out to every home for individuals to stay in contact with their family, friends and essential support services. This technology too, will continue into our future.

There have been many silver linings despite this turmoil, and we are optimistic for the future. A new CI office in Central PA has been opened, and our payroll system, HR system, and online recruitment and training systems have been updated. Also, our IT department has upgraded our communication systems such as video conferencing, E-mail, health care system and server to handle the new data demands.

Our dedicated DSPs continue to ensure the safety and care of the individuals we serve. I truly commend them for their excellent work—they are the backbone and heroes of CI. Stay strong CI family!

May you all enjoy safe and happy holidays as we look forward to a bright and hopeful New Year.

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