

The Advocate



Opening opportunities

Technology gives new lease on life to Riverview Home residents

By [Heather Brimicombe](#) - June 15, 2016

Windows of opportunity have been opening at Riverview Home Corporation lately— Internet windows that is.

Some of the residents, with help from the Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library, have begun expanding their worlds by the use of iPads to explore new interests and connect with others.

“It was an idea from one of the members of our volunteer board,” said Cathy Kelley, support planning supervisor for the residents. The project originally began with the goal to get a library set up for the residents to be able to read different types of books that may interest them.

Eventually, Amy Eisan of PARL came to help with the new iPad program which was an idea from those at the library. As residents of Riverview have medical as well as psychiatric diagnosis the first step to beginning the program, before Eisan could even help the residents with their new technology, was to build trust-based relationships with them so they felt comfortable spending time with Eisan and talking to her about the things that they like.

“Leisure and leisure activities were lacking,” said Kelley about the impact the iPads have had on the residents. “We’ve seen a big improvement.”

After 12 iPads were donated to residents, other members of the corporation’s households wanted to take part in the activities as well and some even brought in their own iPads. Many of the

residents are autistic or sensory deprived so the stimulation of an iPad with activities that are based on their interests is helpful with improving moods.

“The technology has really changed their day,” said Eisan. The project is the first of its kind that Kelley and Eisan know of.

“I didn’t really understand how it would change things,” said Eisan about when she first began. “But you have to see it to believe it.”

Another big step, other than being able to pursue interests such as drawing or reading books, is helping residents contact relatives they do not often talk to.

“People can contact their family, which a lot of them couldn’t,” said Kelley, further explaining that phone conversations were and still are possible but are much more complicated to navigate through the phone system of the residence. Some of the residents have been using Facetime or Skype to contact relatives that live far away, it gives them a chance to see loved ones who cannot make it for a visit, face to face.

“The bigger socialization is that residents get to communicate with other residents,” said Kelley.

Having shared interests such as specific books or games to talk about, encourages residents to have a reason to go and visit others, which Kelley mentioned did not happen often before the iPads were introduced.

“It fit in with our mission, vision and value of Riverview. We want them to experience the same things as everyone else.”

Some of the activities that residents enjoy while using iPads are things like checkers, Apple TV, music, games and audio books as well as face timing. The audio book aspect has also turned into a program for any of the residents who wish to take part called The Listening Hour. During the hour, residents gather in a room to listen part by part to an audio book a few times a week. They also often discuss the book with others in the group in their spare time. The first book they listened to was *The Outsiders*; the residents are currently trying out other books to decide which one they would like to hear next.

Social skill building apps and other apps like Lumosity are also popular.

“Giving the gift of leisure activities, you can’t put a price on that,” Kelley said.