

CASE STUDY

Community Providers And Local Students (PALS)

Preparing Future Clinicians to Treat Loneliness as Part of Care

PARTNER



ADVISORY SERVICE

PROGRAM DESIGN & TOOL DEVELOPMENT

The Opportunity

Social isolation and loneliness drive worse health outcomes and higher healthcare use among older adults, and the risk is highest in underserved nursing homes. Yet most medical, nursing, and pharmacy programs offer little training in social connection, empathic communication, or social prescribing. CMS saw an opportunity to test a structured relationship-building model that could reduce isolation for older adults and prepare future providers to address it in clinical care.

Our Approach

F4SC advised on **program design, curriculum, and evaluation**, grounding the PALS model in the EAR (Educate, Assess, Respond) Framework. Alongside our [Scientific Leadership Council](#) Co-Chair, Dr. Carla Perissinotto, and our larger network of experts, we developed tools for storytelling, empathic communication, and social prescribing that guided six in-person visits between each student and resident. We also supported a mixed-methods evaluation combining validated measures with student journaling, and worked with partners to integrate the curriculum, interpret findings, and refine the model.

The Impact

Storytelling and empathic listening built trust quickly: one student noticed her partner grew more willing to admit loneliness as their relationship deepened. Students also gained practical skills in screening and social prescribing, and every student surveyed expected to keep the connections they made. The pilot gave CMS a replicable model, a ready-to-use toolkit, and proposed measures and considerations for scaling.

"While conducting the assessment, she admitted to feeling lonelier and more isolated than she had initially. It seems that it's not because she worsened, but rather, she felt more comfortable acknowledging these feelings to me."

— Student participant

Explore More

Read more about the PALS program [here](#). Contact us to learn more about this project and explore how F4SC can support your work below.

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