

Purpose-Built for Care: How The Dorm is Redesigning Hybrid Group Therapy Spaces With Zoom Rooms

The Dorm, a treatment center for young adults, is reimagining mental health care using Zoom Rooms to host hybrid group therapy sessions.



The Dorm

Founded: 2009

Location: New York City, Washington, D.C.

Industry: Healthcare

Challenges: Providing effective hybrid mental health treatment to enable flexibility for in-person and remote participants

Solutions: Zoom Rooms

Business benefits: Ability to deliver treatment depending on clients' preferences during the pandemic, and hold inclusive group therapy sessions in a hybrid format

"The fact that we haven't really had to skip a beat with care, regardless of whether somebody is in person or virtual, has really changed the game."

John McGeehan
Founder and CEO

Virtual care is now an integral part of serving clients at [The Dorm](#), a mental health treatment center for young adults.

The Dorm transitioned from zero to 100% virtual services during the pandemic, and within a few months, resumed in-person care with a hybrid approach — four days a week in person and one day where all sessions happen virtually. Additionally, The Dorm's founder and CEO, John McGeehan, estimates that between 20% and 25% of clients have chosen an entirely virtual treatment path, which may include individual therapy sessions and remote participation in group therapy sessions taking place at The Dorm.

McGeehan and his team are focused on implementing this new hybrid model of treatment in a way that's effective for all participants.

"Everyone was masked in our facilities, so how could we overcome the audio hurdle? How could we set up cameras that weren't just a 180-degree view but had a 360-degree perspective, so it didn't matter whether you were remote or in-person?" he asked.

See how The Dorm is approaching hybrid mental health treatment using [Zoom Rooms](#) and DTEN devices to create spaces purpose-built for care.

How The Dorm went virtual

Before March 2020, virtual treatment wasn't even on the center's radar. McGeehan said his team prioritized in-person care and even had concerns about the effectiveness of treating high-acuity patients online.

All that changed with the COVID-19 pandemic. The Dorm migrated 900 sessions a week to Zoom meetings, ranging from psychotherapy to life coaching and group therapy.

"We did extensive research on platforms and landed on the Zoom platform largely because of its ability to help us enable a HIPAA-compliant program, and its user-friendliness. We pivoted our entire platform to virtual for all sessions, each and every day," McGeehan said.

"During the early pandemic days, we had some clients move back to Singapore, China, Japan, and they were accessing treatment. It was like nothing we could have imagined."

John McGeehan
Founder and CEO, The Dorm

The Dorm was even able to create a virtual clubhouse inspired by the real-life communal spaces in its New York City and Washington, D.C., locations, where clients gather to socialize, study, and attend events.



Photo credit: The Dorm

"A client came to us and said, 'Let's create a virtual clubhouse and start doing virtual activities.' Very quickly, we had a clubhouse open 10 hours a day, six days a week, where all sorts of different community-based activities were happening and therapists were available," McGeehan said. "It became just as organic and natural as our in-person clubhouse."

Back in person: challenges with hybrid group sessions

When The Dorm reopened for in-person therapy four days a week, McGeehan and his team had to adjust to new challenges — namely, group therapy and other sessions that combined remote and in-person participation.

"We were looking at ways to facilitate group therapy, like process-oriented groups or didactic groups. We also do a tremendous amount of health and wellness programming like yoga and personal training," McGeehan said.

The team tried a 360-degree camera placed in the center of the group room, but audio issues with the device's built-in microphone made it hard to pick up the voices of in-person participants. They tried accessory microphones, which introduced added layers of complexity.

"Then we landed on the DTEN devices, which really overcame the audio barrier," McGeehan said.

Exploring the possibilities with Zoom Rooms

While the decision to add DTEN devices offered an easy all-in-one solution, The Dorm's team wanted to continue elevating the experience for remote participants.

"The issue we're faced with now is that the DTEN device has a 180-degree view. We have our groups in a semicircle and as capacity limits change, we want to get back to a traditional circle," McGeehan said.

With plans to move into larger facilities in New York and Washington, D.C., in 2022, McGeehan is specifically looking at how to design the new spaces with hybrid group treatments in mind.

"A core part of those treatments is the 360-degree experience," said Jay Jay Kim, Zoom Rooms solutions architect on Zoom's [Professional Services Organization \(PSO\)](#) team, who consulted with McGeehan on their design plans. "So we asked, 'How can Zoom deliver that?'"

One potential solution The Dorm is exploring involves [connecting multiple screens](#) to one Zoom Room. Two DTEN screens could be placed on carts and situated at opposite ends of a circle during a group therapy session, providing a 360-degree view of in-person participants. Both screens would be connected to the Zoom Rooms system to enable a one-touch-to-join experience.

With this setup, remote participants could be pinned to either screen on a multi-gallery view, essentially giving each person a "place" to sit within the circle without duplicating their video feed on the other screen.

Additionally, the use of [Smart Gallery](#) would allow participants to be represented equally on screen. Smart Gallery uses artificial intelligence (AI) to take a single-camera view of different people in a physical Zoom Room and break it up into multiple video streams. This would give remote clients a view of individual video tiles of each person sitting physically in the therapy room, enabling them to better see facial expressions, hand gestures, and other physical elements of communication.



A visualization of Zoom's new Smart Gallery feature.

Features like Smart Gallery and the [ability to hide self view](#) could even help address sensitivities around body angles and images, which McGeehan said The Dorm's staff is mindful of.

"With the types of symptomatology and diagnoses we deal with, there's a hypersensitivity to this, and more importantly, an interest in figuring it out," McGeehan said.

The future of hybrid mental health treatment at The Dorm

"All this leads me into the future and how this could potentially transform care. We're making comprehensive care available any time, anywhere," McGeehan said.

As he and his team focus on designing and moving into their new facilities, they're seeking solutions that will enable all clients to feel comfortable and included, no matter where they're receiving care. And of course, that solution will need to be simple and intuitive enough for therapists to use without a production team.

"The fact that we haven't really had to skip a beat with care, regardless of whether somebody is in person or virtual, has really changed the game — not only in response to COVID, but things like taking a vacation. Treatment can continue from wherever clients are, so Zoom has offered tremendous opportunities around flexibility," McGeehan said. "Now for me, the evolution is creating something like a mental health studio, like we've seen done in fitness really well, where you can truly remote into an in-person experience."