iN2L: Enabling, Expanding, and Enriching the Resident's World

# Senior living organizations faced unique challenges in 2020

Social connection has always been the value proposition in senior living. While important, it did not seem to require a special organizational focus. Today, however, recent crises have challenged the industry to do better. Everyone connected to senior living has the opportunity to work harder at connection, whether it is management, associates, families, or the residents themselves.

The COVID–triggered crises both in nursing homes and senior living communities were well documented in the media. With family visits prohibited for extended periods, as well as many communities confining residents to their rooms for safety, the crisis exacerbated social isolation of these older adults – which in turn has threatened their health and wellbeing. Furthermore, many residents historically have been unable to connect digitally with their families because they lacked access to applications like Zoom and Skype or the skills to use them.

Community team members have always sought to tailor activities to resident interest, but recent pandemic circumstances have made that even more difficult, yet also more important than ever. The traditional approach for activities has been driven by the Activity Director and is based on interviews with residents and their families to create profiles of interests. Team members in all types of communities have been looking for alternative approaches, since in–person group activities have been curtailed or eliminated. The focus on replacing normal in–person activities with other forms of engagement has been largely successful. A June 2020 survey of senior living leaders by iN2L states that 63% of communities report engaging residents well or very well compared to 53% of communities asked the same question in 2019. Additionally, communities that incorporate technology as part of the engagement experience were 11% more likely to rate themselves as doing very or extremely well at engagement during the pandemic, compared to communities without engagement technology. As we move forward from the height of the pandemic, communities must be prepared to deliver based on resident and family expectations for mitigating loneliness and maintaining life–sustaining connection to others, and the proper technology backbone will be essential to success. As the driving force behind a large part of the resident experience, residents and their families need the community team to:

- **Offer personalized activities.** So often these are targeted to the mid–point level of interest among residents. In this new world, it's more important than ever for Activity Directors and other staff to find ways to customize possibilities at the person level. They need to be able to gather and use information not only based on past experiences, hobbies, and interests, but also on residents' hopes and aspirations for the "now" and the future. What have they always wanted to learn about or try? What knowledge or passions do they have to share that others might want to hear about? What types of experiences would they consider to be interesting, meaningful, and relevant? What will inspire them to engage actively and enthusiastically—versus passively spending time?

- **Elevate resident engagement.** Staff or residents can use technology to invite small groups to convene in person or virtually. These interactions can be enhanced with specialized content that truly meets their personal interests for engagement and social connection. Residents and staff have already shown that they can and will use technology in new ways if it serves a personal unmet need, and they are provided appropriate guidance. As resistance is being overcome due to the need created by the pandemic, communities are increasingly motivated to move forward with alternatives.

- **Engage groups in new ways.** Without requiring in-person group meetings, team members need to help residents with shared interests find each other, both in the building (or the adjacent hallway), in other buildings, and even beyond. While the team will continue to offer scheduled and group activities, they can facilitate introductions from the point of move-in to ensure a smooth transition and lay the foundation for lasting camaraderie. Associates can enable expansion of interest groups by providing detailed information about all individuals, thus empowering residents to find friends with common interests.

- **Boost interest in and leverage use of technology.** The deficits that COVID-19 exposed demand that communities view technology as connective tissue. The loss of connection could be tackled by using tablets and targeted common area content to help compensate for some of what's been lost. Technology is an ideal facilitator for event-based and ongoing everyday moments of social connection. The team can think of connection as more than bringing people together. It can also be a way of connecting residents to interests through targeted and interactive content that provides an easy way of encouraging them to explore and engage with the technology.

- **Monitor and measure the online experiences.** With a dashboard tracking the resident interactions with the solution, management can use the information as a means to understand more about what residents care about and help them leverage the solution for improved quality of life.
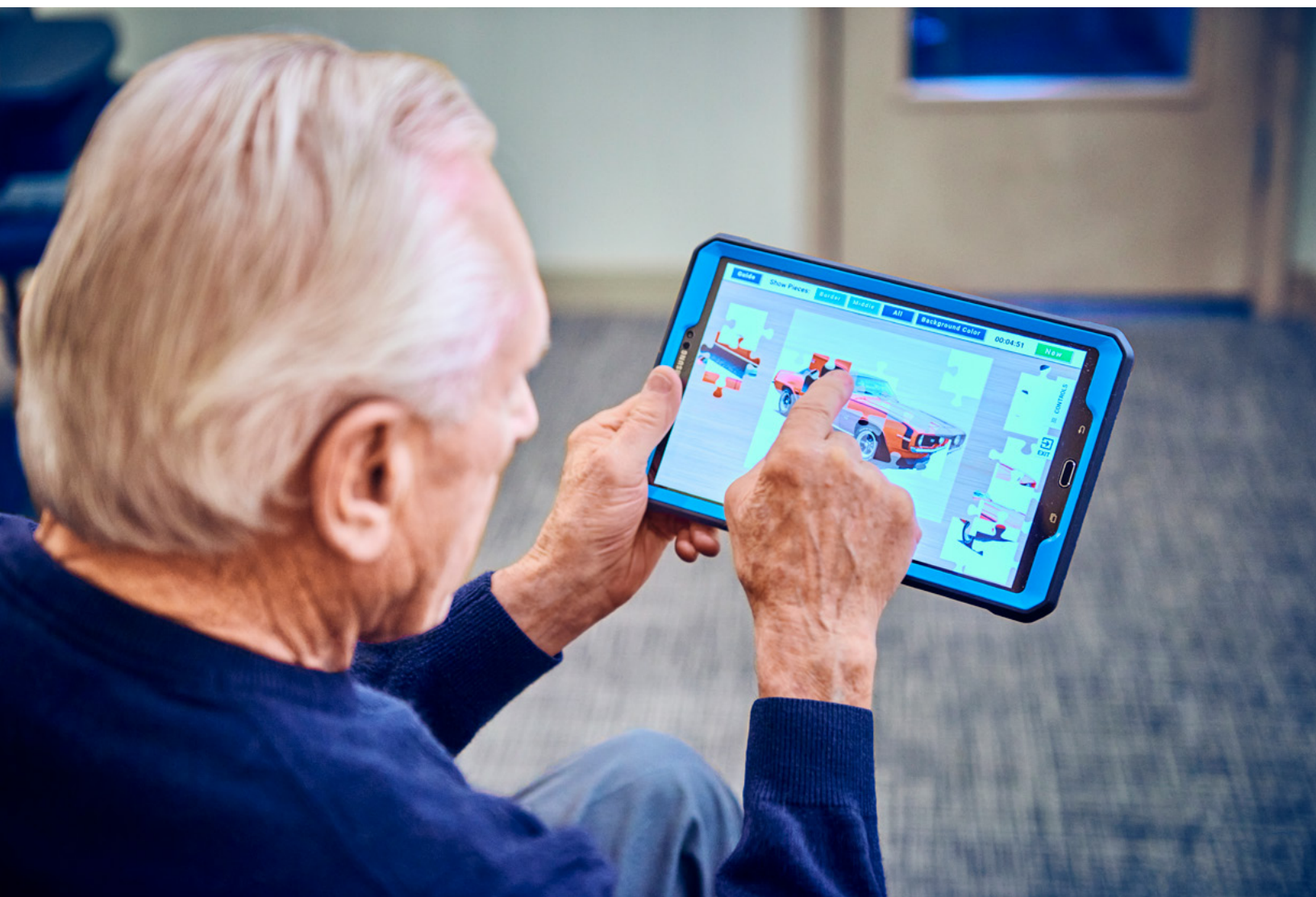
The empowered older adult
Using technology to expand the resident's world

In this new world shaped by the COVID experience, empowerment of residents and involvement of staff and families will take center stage, enabled by technology solutions like iN2L to help expand the current paradigm of engagement. What are the steps to expand the individual resident's world and provide possibility?

What is an empowered older adult?

Owns their experience.
Takes ownership of social interests, facilitated by new technology connections.

Makes choices.
Opts–in to available experiences, enhanced by data–driven, personalized suggestions.

Meets with others.
Engages with other residents inside walls and beyond—using safe online tools.

Seizes possibilities.
Depends on tech as a supplement to and enabler for interaction.

1. **Getting started – use technology to help residents take ownership of their engagement.** If an individual in one room can meet online with friends in other wings, or family members can chat with a parent, that becomes a significant step on the path to conquering isolation. The solution can help overcome the ageism inherent in resident programming and in the minds of residents as well as activity leaders. Consider that online tools enable broader possibilities, whether it is online yoga or stretching classes, learning to paint, or finding a cohort of online jazz lovers. What are the key elements of getting started?

   · **Demonstrate what's in it for them.** Staff can lead by ensuring residents connect to the experience in a meaningful way from the very first use. By gearing the experience toward something personally relevant to the resident, staff can help them have the desired "that's so cool" moment.

   · **Provide a personalized solution to each person.** Ideally, tablets delivered to the resident will have already been personalized with their information and preferences based on "know me" data captured by the community staff. Common area technology systems will similarly have personalized content for residents.
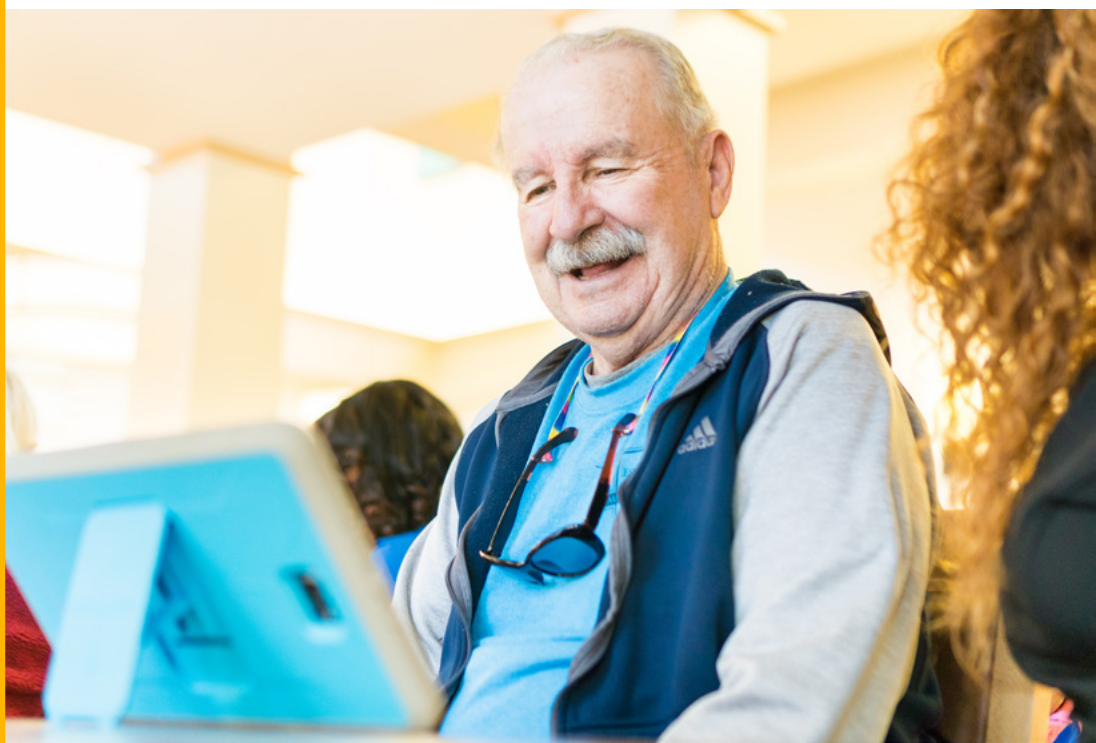
- **Ensure access.** Staff should make sure that technology is at residents' fingertips, available to use independently when and how they'd like. Knowing how to access their favorite content and personal albums as well as video calling with family and friends creates a feeling of empowerment for residents and saves staff time.

- **Inspire staff to participate based on what they see.** Providing staff members a chance to see what's possible will enable them to be familiar enough with the solution to be able to guide the resident if needed.

- **Involve families.** A big part of reinforcing use involves both staff and families–beyond a simple hand–off. Staff's jobs can be made easier if they ensure that both resident and families are aware of the technology's capabilities and how they and their loved one/resident might use it.

- **Encourage staff through ongoing management commitment.** Help them make iN2L solutions available to residents, including reminding them why they like using it so much and keeping them posted about new content. Encourage staff to use video chat with the residents, helping to make its use a habit, ultimately freeing up staff time for other tasks.

2. **Personalizing information for individuals makes it actionable and empowering.** Consider the definition of personalization and how to continuously incorporate it to enhance the solution's role in resident life. **(See Figure 1)**

Personalization is the act of tailoring an experience or communication based on information learned about an individual.

Figure 1 Resident Personalization

Use ongoing profiling for personalization. [Research on loneliness](#) shows that the impact of interventions cannot be sustained without follow–up communication. **(See Figure 2)** Aside from automation of profile creation and updates, management should consider the power of having residents and family members help contribute and keep profiles fresh.

Figure 2 Process for Personalizing the Resident Experience

The continuous process of using the tablets in a community needs to incorporate:

- **Refreshing profiles** dynamically based on activity and interest participation and incorporating insight from residents and families. Families can be notified every six months about profile changes.

- **Observing participation** and shared passions and cultivating future ones within the community. What activities offered today could be better targeted for more appeal?

- **Identifying actions** taken in the community as a result, such as scheduling a concert, an art show, or author readings.

- **Fostering new relationships across a community** to create camaraderie built off common interests or ambitions of what they want to explore together. These could include interests in art, music, painting, or books.

- **Repeat.**

3. **Moving throughout and beyond the building.** The use of personalization from profiles is a way to use technology to empower residents. For example, a solution can offer suggestions and guidance based on the information provided during the initial intake and then leverage an ongoing process to refresh it. Consider:

   - **Establishing a recommendation engine.** Over time, the solution can make suggestions, for example: "Would you like to learn more about…" audio books, games, action movies?

   - **Scheduling community activities in small groups.** With the solution's techniques for friend matching based on shared interests, it will be possible to fine tune activities schedules to offer more small–group activities.

   - **Offering online events.** These can range from discussions about food to an array of activities, book clubs, and more. Each of these can be tailored to the specific interests within a community.

   - **Creating a virtual neighborhood.** In larger communities, it may become feasible to develop interest–based virtual neighborhoods extending down the hall, across the courtyard, and beyond.

   - **Learning about others "outside" the boundaries.** Once strong connections to other residents, activities, and content are established within the community, then it becomes feasible to build on that by thinking across communities within the parent organization.

What's different about the iN2L–empowered world?

Personhood becomes front and center through empowered residents, enabling creation of a culture of personalized care. Personalized solutions with information about and for the resident may result in notable changes to roles and responsibilities for staff. This can transform the day–to–day world for residents and their families. Associates will have an opportunity to upgrade their own knowledge and skills. They can share with peers what they learn from resident empowerment, improving job satisfaction and retention over time. **(See Figure 3)**
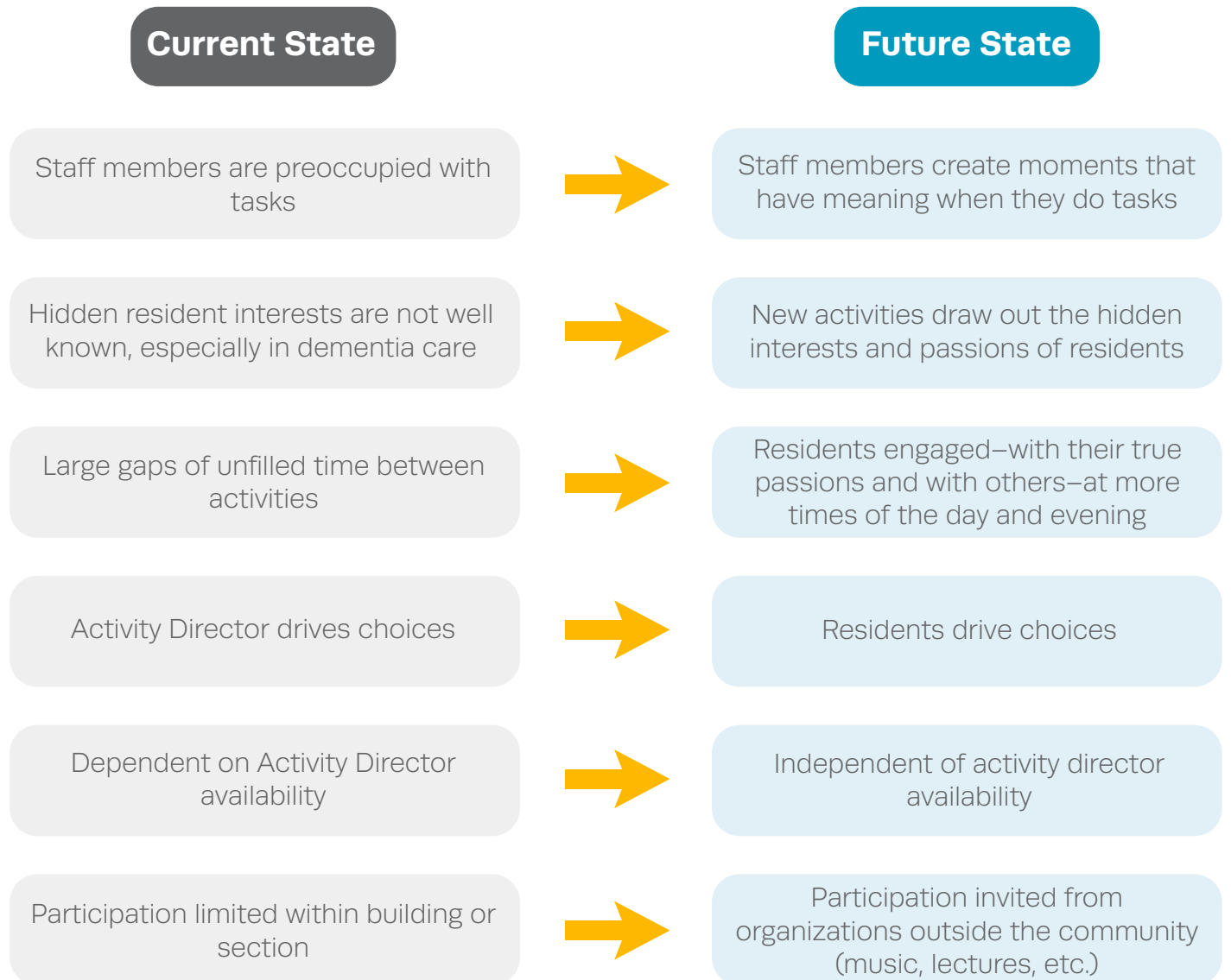
Current State	**Future State**
Staff members are preoccupied with tasks	Staff members create moments that have meaning when they do tasks
Hidden resident interests are not well known, especially in dementia care	New activities draw out the hidden interests and passions of residents
Large gaps of unfilled time between activities	Residents engaged–with their true passions and with others–at more times of the day and evening
Activity Director drives choices	Residents drive choices
Dependent on Activity Director availability	Independent of activity director availability
Participation limited within building or section	Participation invited from organizations outside the community (music, lectures, etc.)

Figure 3 What's different in the iN2L–empowered world?

Put the power of connection and engagement in your residents' hands. If you're ready to talk with iN2L or would like to learn more, please visit **iN2L.com**.

Aging and Health Technology Watch