



# **Shaping the Future of Senior Living:** Changing Your Community's Perspective on Resident Engagement



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# Introduction

What happens when resident engagement is personalized and human connections between staff and residents are valued and cultivated? Opportunities for social connection and engagement increase dramatically. There are higher levels of trust and a feeling of belonging, and seniors feel more at home in the community because they personally know their caregivers and may even have something in common with them.

There's a solid opportunity for your community to emphasize purposeful engagement in ways that empower each staff member to make personalized resident engagement and tailored connection experiences the norm. Based on market insights, this is truly the way to go. According to a market study published by iN2L\*:

- Less than three-quarters (72%) of operators say they have a method in place to keep staff informed of residents' personal interests
- Only 24% of family members give top marks to the community's use of resident information to tailor and assist in picking activities and creating individualized care for their loved one

Forward-thinking communities understand the value of person-centered engagement and are fully leveraging staff members across disciplines to contribute to meaningful resident experiences. If you're interested in empowering staff to build a more personalized and fulfilling experience, the first step will be re-evaluating how your community sees resident engagement.

\* All survey findings in this ebook are from iN2L, *Bridging the Loneliness Gap: Exploring Perceptions of Socialization, Engagement, and Satisfaction Among Key Senior Living Stakeholders*, November 2020, unless otherwise noted.

# Three Ways to Change Your Community's Perspective on Resident Engagement

Many in senior living still think of life enrichment as scheduled events convened in large groups and directed by the Activities Department. In this model, each event is typically led by an Activities staff member and measured by the number of seniors in attendance rather than its impact on individuals. The programming's impact on each senior is usually not measured or even considered. However, this is a missed opportunity for communities to provide a personalized and fulfilling resident experience. Here are three ways to change your community's perspective on resident engagement.

## Embrace the Club Model

Innovative communities are adopting the Club Model, an approach that supports personalized resident experiences. Scott Smith, the National Director of Resident Programming for Five Star Senior Living, has taken a key role in [advocating the Club Model within the industry](#). This model defines enrichment as experiences that are organic and resident-directed and that enhance community life by resonating with residents. Impactful socialization happens in small groups, with a focus on creating purpose. Key success factors for this approach include:

- Deeply understanding each individual and responding to individual preferences
- Facilitating connections among residents based on their shared interests
- Ceding control of engagement to residents

The Club Model also recognizes the value that staff members can bring to the larger community. It encourages staff to be actively involved in clubs because their participation adds dimension to the overall community experience. These purpose-driven experiences can transform your community because as staff get to know seniors and interact with them, they can share their interests and hobbies with elders within these small groups, resulting in higher levels of satisfaction and trust between residents and staff.

## Tap into the power of small groups and targeted individual experiences

For many residents, social capital (the networks, attitudes and norms promoting coordination and collaboration between people; and the social connections that provide people with emotional, instrumental, and informational support<sup>1</sup>) is in short supply. Their network of friends outside the community and their support system of siblings and cousins in their age group have diminished as people passed away. Plus, many of them have not made any friends in their community. In fact, two-thirds of seniors say they would like to make more friends. Yet, most communities don't make a sustained effort to spark and nurture these vital relationships. That's where small groups can come into play.

Small groups that fuel social connections among residents based on shared interests or passions can be a powerhouse in reducing loneliness and helping residents make valuable social connections. They help build social capital throughout the community by strengthening bonds among neighbors.

## Facilitate friendships—so residents want to stay

Small groups, or clubs, enable residents to discover content and activities that excite them and explore what they want to learn. These smaller groups also give them the chance to share their skills and talents with others. This creates opportunities for each senior to develop new friendships—and these relationships can positively impact lengths of stay. [When you consider that 50% of residents surveyed said they never felt like they had any friends in their community](#), just imagine the sense of purpose and belonging residents will have when they are active members of several clubs. The connections that emerge have a multiplier effect, exponentially increasing both the individual and collective social capital in your community.

Communities are also finding better ways to guide residents in their individual pursuits, an approach that acknowledges personality differences and each senior's autonomy to direct their own engagement. For example, those who are introverts may prefer listening to an audio book rather than meeting up for game of bingo or the quilting circle.

### What is social capital?

“**The networks, attitudes and norms promoting coordination and collaboration between people; and the social connections that provide people with emotional, instrumental and informational support.**

— Deloitte

<sup>1</sup> Deloitte. “Inclusive and resilient communities: Co-creating our human and social capital.” State of the State 2018.

# The Difference Between High and Low Social Capital in Assisted Living Communities

## High Social Capital

vs

## Low Social Capital



### Higher Levels of Trust

Among community members and between staff, when the community knows about each resident to provide personalized care



### Strong Social Networks

Connectedness among community members, familiarity and fellowship among peers resulting from personalization and sharing



### Camaraderie

Friendships and collaboration based on shared interests and backgrounds



### Purposeful Engagement

Active social life, membership in multiple clubs, greater autonomy, better measurements of physical and mental health



### Low Levels of Trust

Due to limited knowledge and understanding of community members



### Weaker Social Networks

Fewer connections to peers and less independence, making residents less likely to stay



### Isolation

Feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression



### Less Engagement

Feelings of boredom among residents, who may be more susceptible to cognitive and physical decline



## Getting Started

As you seek to create a better everyday life for each resident, one of your biggest challenges will likely be getting everyone on board. To get the buy-in you need, be sure to clearly communicate how you would like the Club Model to work in your community. When residents and staff understand the outcome and how it benefits them, they will be enthusiastic participants in this new model for community life. Here are some ideas to help you get started.

- 1. Get to know seniors and staff.** Gather information on both residents' and staff members' backgrounds, preferences, and hobbies. Find an efficient way to share this information within the community, like digital profiles that are easily accessible across platforms in different areas of the community.
- 2. Engage influential residents.** Share your vision of resident engagement with seniors who are leaders among their peers. These residents can help you evangelize change so that it happens faster.
- 3. Educate all staff on the importance of engagement and social connection.** It's essential that all staff members understand the detrimental effects of social isolation and loneliness. Teach them basic skills in identifying signs of loneliness and how to help mitigate them. Also, emphasize how important it is to document what they've observed.
- 4. Build a cohesive and supportive work culture.** To achieve the organizational shift your community needs to succeed with the Club Model, you may need a culture shift. Don't give up! It may be an iterative process to foster a workplace culture where purposeful engagement, person-centered care, and the employee experience can flourish.
- 5. Modify community layout.** Make sure you have enough areas for multiple small groups to gather for meaningful interaction, where every senior can be accommodated and heard.
- 6. Give people access to the tools they need to make an impact.** Be sure to make room in your budget for the supplies, technology, and other resources clubs need to succeed.
- 7. Share success stories and give praise.** In your community newsletter, be sure to highlight the amazing projects seniors are working on through their club activities. This gets everyone excited and encourages both residents and staff to model behavior that increases everyone's social capital.



## Sources

1. [Deloitte. "Inclusive and resilient communities: Co-creating our human and social capital." State of the State 2018.](#)

## Notes

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# About iN2L

As the provider of the leading engagement and social connection platform for seniors, iN2L has been enriching the lives of older adults since 1999. A critical part of the experience in more than 3,700 nursing homes, assisted and independent living communities, CCRCs, life plan communities, memory care settings, and adult day programs, iN2L creates purpose, possibilities, enjoyment, and connection for seniors. iN2L's expansive content library promotes wellness, empowerment, and engagement among older adults and is the foundation for activities that facilitate social interaction, cognitive and physical exercise and therapy, education, reminiscing, areas of interest, and memory support engagement.

**For more information or to schedule a demo, visit [iN2L.com](https://iN2L.com).**

