



## **Shaping the Future of Senior Living:**

How to Build a Resident Engagement Framework That Enriches Lives and Differentiates Your Community

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# Introduction

Resident engagement is changing. Operators are re-evaluating community life in part due to the pandemic's spotlight on loneliness; and more seniors are adopting digital communications, exposing more of them to the benefits of modern technology.<sup>1</sup> The nature and pace of change have also been impacted by the need to respond to emerging market expectations, as seniors and decision-making family members have started asking how communities will keep residents connected and engaged, and what modern technologies will be used to bring people together.

With the goal of restoring the resident experience that precautionary isolation interrupted, solutions such as video calling and text messaging helped residents maintain family connections. There were even applications that enabled seniors to enjoy socially distanced activities and individual entertainment. Forward-thinking communities quickly realized the strategic importance of building a better overall community experience—one that enables each elder to live their best life. They are now focusing on an engagement framework that emphasizes social connection and purpose-driven experiences to support resident well-being.

This resource offers guidance to help you build an engagement framework that works for your residents and your organization. You will gain strategies to scale the delivery of individualized experiences and generate higher levels of well-being and satisfaction in your community. And when your community empowers each senior to shine with an abundance of social connections and purposeful engagement, it will stand out in the marketplace.

<sup>1</sup> Peter Rinderud, "Seniors and Technology During Covid-19: The Latest Insights," Ericsson (blog), January 26, 2021. <https://www.ericsson.com/en/blog/2021/1/seniors-and-technology-during-covid>.



# Create the Experience Residents Need

To truly thrive as they age, seniors need opportunities to connect with others and the things they enjoy. But the truth is, many seniors are lonely and isolated even when surrounded by neighbors. Many studies link loneliness to severe health conditions, such as heart disease, stroke, and premature death.<sup>2</sup>

That's why it's essential for assisted living communities to create an environment where camaraderie flourishes and each resident feels at home. Camaraderie-rich communities engage seniors meaningfully and connect them to others around them. They embrace each elder, celebrating their unique identity, voice, purpose, and personal contribution to community life. When this fellowship is present, there are higher levels of engagement and sense of purpose—elements that are critical to overall health and well-being. Additionally, residents are more likely to recommend the community to others and to continue to call it their home.

<sup>2</sup> "Loneliness and Social Isolation Linked to Serious Health Conditions." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, April 29, 2021. <https://www.cdc.gov/aging/publications/features/lonely-older-adults.html>.



# Build a New Framework for Resident Engagement

Camaraderie-rich communities stand out in their markets by focusing on the drivers of resident well-being and engagement. Your community can claim this advantage by adopting a new framework for the resident experience—one that supports the social integration and engagement of each resident and that involves families and staff in the happiness it creates.

Creating a framework for joyful resident engagement should include these steps:

1. Emphasize personalization
2. Facilitate friendships
3. Focus on purposeful engagement

Ideally, technology should not be left out of the equation. When communities leverage technology as the connective tissue that brings people together, they can enable enriching, customized experiences that can be tracked, measured, and optimized for better outcomes. The result? A vibrant, camaraderie-rich community with abundant friendships and uplifting purposeful living.

**“ I don’t just want to live longer; I want to live better. There is more need to focus on improving my function, connecting me with friends and fun, and making it fashionable.**

**— Joseph Coughlin, Ph.D.,  
Founder and Director, MIT AgeLab**



Before the pandemic, 39% of residents said they were often or always lonely, while only 1% of senior living community leaders believed loneliness was present in residents’ daily experiences. Not surprisingly, the number of residents who reported always feeling lonely increased by 230% during the pandemic.\*

# Step 1: Emphasize Personalization

To foster a sense of belonging and purpose in each elder, communities must customize daily living in ways that delight and fulfill seniors. That means understanding each resident and facilitating experiences that are relevant to them.

For most of us, personalized experiences are an everyday norm. As we scan social media feeds, surf the web, and shop, our preferences and interests are embedded in virtually every digital interaction, resulting in satisfying online experiences.

It's possible for community residents to have similar data-driven experiences—in fact, it's what decision-making family members have come to expect. When they look at how communities gather information about their loved one, families want that knowledge to be used in innovative ways to anticipate their elder's needs and personalize their daily experience.

Residents who feel known and understood by community staff members—and have opportunities to pursue their interests—will be happier and healthier.



**Less than three-quarters** (72%) of operators say they have a method in place to keep staff informed of residents' personal interests.



Lack of opportunities for engagement activities that interest their loved one **is the #2 reason families would not recommend a community.**

## Getting Started

Think about how your community's processes and culture can be transformed to support personalization. You should aim to make it easy for everyone in the community to get to know residents as individuals, respond to their unique needs and preferences, and contribute to their sense of belonging and engagement. Here are some ideas and practices you can put into action right away:

- 1. Leverage data to achieve personalization.** To increase personalized engagement in your community, you need to effectively capture information on residents' preferences. In addition to asking families and seniors to fill out questionnaires, many communities sit down with them for an in-depth interview. Make sure this information is updated at least quarterly.
- 2. Ensure resident preferences are integrated into daily care and engagement and are accessible to all staff members, especially direct caregivers.** Staff should be trained on the importance of personalization and how to use resident preferences to make every interaction with elders meaningful and personalized. A positive culture shift will happen when everyone is committed to the same goal.
- 3. Re-evaluate the questions your community asks each resident upon move-in.** Strive for comprehensiveness and focus on things that bring seniors joy and purpose to create a sense of contribution for them. For example, in addition to gathering standard life history details, include questions about both current interests and those that are aspirational.
- 4. Make sure your community programming offers something for everyone.** Provide the expected, such as bingo, trivia games, and other popular activities, along with an array of additional options that closely align with the interests of residents and can be experienced individually or in smaller groups.
- 5. Keep family members involved.** Through regular engagement with families, you can gather meaningful photos and memories or gain timely information about new interests or preferences the resident has not shared.



Only **42%** of family members are satisfied with staff knowledge of their loved one.



**Pro Tip:**  
**Engagement**  
**Technology Makes**  
**Personalization Easier**

Engagement technology offers an easier way for your community to personalize the resident experience. An ideal platform lets you capture information about newcomers during the evaluation and move-in process to build a resident profile. This profile can even include digital biographies of residents, which family and caregivers set up and can continually refresh. Applications like resident profiles help families partner with communities in the care of their loved ones.

Engagement technology solutions also give residents autonomy to self-direct their own engagement experiences. Senior-friendly tablets loaded with content curated specifically for older adults enable residents to enjoy their quiet moments with content that interests them. Residents can mark their favorite activities so that they are easily accessible when they want them.

## Step 2: Facilitate Friendships

Did you know friendships are as important as family ties in predicting psychological well-being in elders?<sup>3</sup> In fact, having ties with friends showed stronger associations with mental health than those with other relatives.

It's healthy for seniors in your community to have friends to laugh with, share in mutually enjoyable activities, confide in, and remind each other to stay active. Friendships prevent loneliness and are one of the highest forms of social connectedness available to seniors, many of whom may have outlived their spouse and long-term friends.

That's why friendships should be a pillar of any senior living community. Residents need and crave these relationships, but many of them find it difficult to make these connections on their own. In fact, two-thirds of residents would like to make more friends in their community, so it's a sound strategy for communities to actively facilitate friendships among residents.<sup>4</sup>

Today, there is a growing understanding that the camaraderie and friendships residents need to feel at home in their community are not built by discrete, staff-led activities. Instead, they are created through the process of seniors getting to know each other and connecting over shared interests or conversations about things they are passionate about.



**50%** of residents have never felt like they have had any friends in their community.



**62%** of residents would like to make more friends in their community.

<sup>3</sup> Rosemary Blieszner et al, "Friendship in Later Life: A Research Agenda," *Innovation in Aging* 3, no. 1 March 30, 2019, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6441127/>.

<sup>4</sup> IN2L, *Bridging the Loneliness Gap: Exploring Perceptions of Socialization, Engagement, and Satisfaction Among Key Senior Living Stakeholders*, November 2020.



## Getting Started

1. **Create small group events targeted specifically to seniors with shared interests.** In these intimate gatherings, residents will have an opportunity to bond over things that excite them and share their perspectives and knowledge with their peers.
2. **Make introductions part of your community's culture.** Often, people are too shy or uncomfortable to reach out to forge new connections. By using resident information, you can put them in touch with people they may have shared interests with.
3. **Create a resident directory.** Whether it's printed or digital, seniors will enjoy scanning it for potential friends and conversation buddies.
4. **Create a "buddy program."** With this strategy in place, neighbors can have a role in helping new or more reserved residents become integrated into the social fabric of the community.



### Pro Tip: Digital Profiles and Great Content Supports Facilitating Friendships

Technology can help communities spark friendships among residents. With an engagement technology platform that offers digital profiles, communities have a snapshot of each resident's life—interests, accomplishments, and preferences. This information can be used to connect seniors with similar life experiences and interests.

When engagement technology is used throughout the community, residents' information is readily available at every touchpoint for reminiscing, conversation starters with neighbors, and introducing new staff members to the resident. Seniors can browse profiles to learn about their neighbors, and staff can help connect people with shared interests and backgrounds.

A comprehensive engagement technology system will also have a variety of content applications that help residents get to know each other. For example, a game of trivia can spark conversations about the past. Content about gardening or photography can help people establish bonds that lead to future get-togethers.



## Step 3: Focus on Purposeful Engagement

Person-centered engagement nurtures purpose, as seniors explore long-held interests or develop new ones.

Since purpose in life varies by individual, it's important to discover the interests and goals of each resident. This goes deeper than personalization. When you provide programming and experiences that tap into an individual's purpose, you empower them to maintain brain fitness and happiness through meaningful cognitive stimulation. By staying mentally stimulated, they can age joyfully with stronger cognitive abilities. In fact, the Rush Memory & Aging Project revealed that older adults who demonstrate a greater purpose in life are less likely to experience cognitive decline.<sup>5</sup>

Connecting residents with their interests—the people and things that excite them, motivate them, and bring them joy—is a powerful way to promote well-being. When they can take on projects that strongly align with their passions, seniors are more likely to experience fulfillment. For example, a conversation about previous life experiences can rekindle a resident's interest in a hobby they once enjoyed. This person-centered engagement can lead to purpose, as they take on an exciting project related to this hobby.



***The compelling reason for seniors to WANT to move into senior housing is aspirational. They desire human connection...and a new sense of engagement and purpose.***

***— Bob Kramer, Founder, National Investment Center for Seniors Housing & Care***

<sup>5</sup> Lon R. White et al., "How Do We Validate Approaches That Aim to Harness Reserve to Improve the Aging Brain?" *Neurobiology of Aging* 83 (November 2019): 145–49.

## Getting Started

What really creates a feeling of purpose and fulfillment for residents—and helps reduce depression while increasing other positive predictors of health and wellness—is the ability to continue nurturing interests and passions. Your community can make this happen by tailoring content and experiences to individual preferences.

- 1. Evaluate the collected information for each resident.** Make sure that you've captured data on their hobbies, spiritual interests, favorite conversation topics, goals, life accomplishments, and what motivates them.
- 2. Have one-to-one conversations with residents to uncover their perspectives on their interests.** Ask them what provides them with a feeling of meaning and purpose and find out what they are currently doing to pursue that feeling.
- 3. Include people who know the resident well.** Reach out to family members for their insights on their loved one's interests and purpose.
- 4. Make a plan for each resident.** With a documented path, each resident can be guided to experiences that align with their stated purpose.



**75%** of seniors say tailored activities are **“absolutely essential”** or **“very important”** to their well-being.



**Pro Tip: Senior-Friendly Technology Enables Purposeful Engagement**

Engagement technology that comes with an expansive library of content curated specifically for seniors allows staff and residents to easily search for and navigate applications that facilitate learning, physical activity, nurturing spirituality, creative expression, and more. Beyond an activities program, offering residents the choice to direct how they spend their time by partaking in virtual classes, religious services, and other opportunities will be an imperative that communities can deliver on more easily with a content-driven engagement solution.

# Leverage Engagement Technology to Enrich Community Life

As you build a new framework for community life, personalization, friendships, and purposeful engagement can get a huge lift from a robust engagement platform. When seniors have the capacity to direct their own engagement via easy-to-use, senior-friendly systems, they are empowered to enhance their well-being and quality of life.



*What's really important for community leaders to know is that resident families are very clear when they state that their overall satisfaction with a senior living community really hinges on that community's ability to have relationship building and meaningful engagement. That's something that is not going to go away.*

*— Lisa Taylor, CEO, iN2L*

Engagement technology is most beneficial when it aligns caregivers, families, and the entire community around every senior to enrich their quality of life. Look for a platform that supports this essential collaboration and makes content-driven experiences available from different types of devices throughout your community. This gives caregivers at every touchpoint, as well as residents, access to the right content experiences to create fulfillment.

**At minimum, you should choose a solution with digital profiles for residents and staff.** Digital profiles replace the paper binder in the Activities Department and allow for residents' preferences to be centrally located, easily searchable, and readily available to all staff. As a result, staff can easily see how residents' interests align and uncover commonalities that can spark conversations, such as shared hometowns, career paths, spiritual beliefs, hobbies, and more. With digital profiles, your community can better facilitate opportunities for engagement and social connection.

**You can also consider available next-generation solutions.** Leading resident engagement platforms have AI-driven suggestion engines that mine residents' profiles to suggest social connections among residents whose interests align. They can also auto-generate content suggestions, making individual and group engagement experiences more relevant and seamless for each senior. Advanced solutions can also provide visibility across your community, so you can track, measure, and set benchmarks for individual and group engagement. This means caregivers can easily identify changes in seniors' engagement patterns and take immediate action.

**Ultimately, strive to create a senior living experience where personalized engagement and connections are the norm.** Content-driven engagement technology solutions help communities improve engagement and connection, thereby decreasing isolation and promoting health and wellness by reducing feelings of depression and anxiety. Through person-centered experiences based on specific interests, residents will have something to look forward to every day that supports their well-being and satisfaction.



# Succeeding in Person-Centered Engagement

## Advanced Healthcare and Rehabilitation of Athens in Partnership with Rehab Synergies

Athens, TX

### Overview

Advanced Healthcare and Rehabilitation of Athens has successfully focused on residents' interests and preferences to create the quality, personally relevant experiences they deserve. Staff works as a team and involves residents' family members to help make each elder feel at home.

### Highlights

- Advanced Healthcare and Rehabilitation of Athens creates profiles of each resident on the iN2L platform to make it easier for staff to build rapport with each elder and to engage them with a customized iN2L experience.
- The community uses iN2L tablets to make video calls a regular part of the resident experience for family visits and telehealth appointments.



**“iN2L has been a fantastic care partner with us over the years...We were thrilled when we learned about accessing and using the iN2L tablets to facilitate communication between our quarantined residents and their families and friends out in the communities!! The iN2L tablets have helped us keep everyone safe, involved, and connected, which has been our goal throughout the pandemic.**

**— Carmen Vitton, Chief Operating Officer, Rehab Synergies**

### Need help designing a new framework for resident engagement?

Request a live demo to see how iN2L's advanced engagement technology platform facilitates the personalized engagement and connections that transform community life.

**Schedule your demo today!**

## Sources

1. Peter Rinderud, "Seniors and Technology During Covid-19: The Latest Insights," Ericsson (blog), January 26, 2021. <https://www.ericsson.com/en/blog/2021/1/seniors-and-technology-during-covid>.
2. "Loneliness and Social Isolation Linked to Serious Health Conditions." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, April 29, 2021. <https://www.cdc.gov/aging/publications/features/lonely-older-adults.html>.
3. Rosemary Blieszner et al, "Friendship in Later Life: A Research Agenda," *Innovation in Aging* 3, no. 1 March 30, 2019, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6441127/>.
4. iN2L, *Bridging the Loneliness Gap: Exploring Perceptions of Socialization, Engagement, and Satisfaction Among Key Senior Living Stakeholders*, November 2020.
5. Lon R. White et al., "How Do We Validate Approaches That Aim to Harness Reserve to Improve the Aging Brain?" *Neurobiology of Aging* 83 (November 2019): 145–49.

## Notes

\* This and all the other 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.





# 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).**

