

Success in Senior Living's New Frontier

Strategies to Optimize Activities and Engagement

iN2L™

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Preface

Recent months have been challenging for the global senior living community, which has worked hard to implement social distancing measures while combating the negative effects of isolation among residents. We commend you for your innovation and tireless commitment to residents. The incredible efforts of community staff to provide virtual activities, video call platforms, and other creative options such as hallway happy hours and socially distanced games have had a positive impact. However, the hard work isn't over yet.

Given today's challenges, what does resident engagement look like at your senior living community? What are you doing now to prepare for the future? How will your role change as you shape the next normal at your community?

K4Connect and iN2L share a common mission of serving you and the older adults you care for. This ebook was inspired by discussions we are having with senior living professionals on what the future will look like for programming post-COVID and what can be done today to help residents remain healthy, happy, and engaged. It's our hope that the strategies and tips we share will guide you in continuing to deliver a vibrant experience for elders now and in the future.

Thank you for all you do!



Dr. Cindy Phillips

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Introduction

With the disruptive effects of the pandemic on senior living communities, it seems as if change is occurring at warp speed. Lockdowns and quarantines have transformed community life and put the spotlight on resident engagement. Merely adapting is not enough. As you respond to current challenges, you should also take steps to increase your community's readiness for what's next in resident engagement.

By 2025, your current role will most likely morph into **Curator of Community Life** (yes, that could be a new title). Your job description will be transformed not only by the actions you and your fellow activities directors take today to enhance community engagement during the pandemic, but also by increasing demand for an even higher level of person-centered care.

As you adjust to the present situation and think about the future, consider these three emerging trends we predict will influence your role:

1. Programming and activity curation vs. development
2. More personalized resident experiences
3. Greater diversity in communities

In this ebook, we discuss these three trends and present seven steps that will make it easier to adapt to the next normal and meet the future expectations of residents. We also share real-life success stories to ignite the creativity you need to bring about the purposeful engagement your residents require, now and into the future.



A background image showing the backs of several people. On the left, a person with long blonde hair is wearing a tan quilted vest over a blue denim shirt. To their right, another person is wearing a dark blue sweater. The background is a warm, out-of-focus indoor setting.

1

Three New Trends That Will Change Life Enrichment/ Community Wellness as We Know It

Moving around campus, enjoying a hug or handshake with a fellow resident. Connecting with individuals who share your interests, regardless of location. Rushing out of an apartment to meet some new friends for appetizers and a game of bridge. Boarding the bus for an overnight trip to watch a Major League Baseball game in a nearby city. Enjoying coffee or a glass of wine with your daughter after attending a wonderful performance in the cultural events center.

While these activities may seem almost dream-like now, they will someday again be the narrative of life for older adults residing in senior living communities. In addition to these traditionally “normal” activities, what changes or new trends might be in store for them?

Here are our predictions:

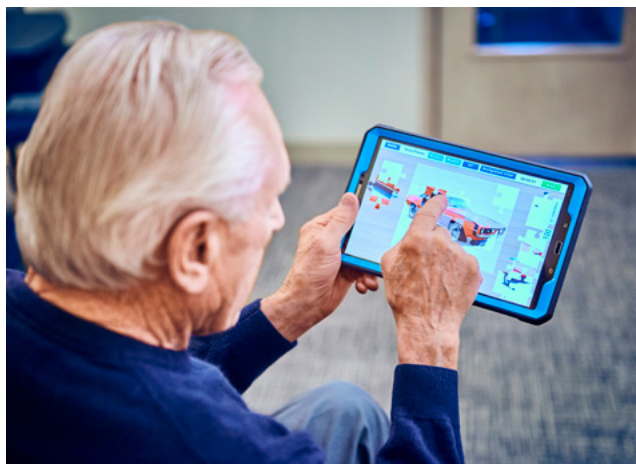
1. Programming and Activity Curation vs. Development

As older adults get more tech-savvy and are able to navigate the world of social media and online resources more independently, their dependence on community staff will change. As resident needs and interests get more varied, it will be nearly impossible to develop programming that matches the needs of everyone.

By 2025, staff will no longer deliver value by developing programs or leading activities—instead, they will curate them. A [curator](#) is defined as someone who “gathers something, organizes it, and makes it available to others.” This is an incredibly valuable role, especially with all the options and information that exist for every possible hobby, topic, or means of connecting with others, either in a local area or around the globe. Just like many of us who appreciate the time savings and efficiency of a curated news feed each day, future residents will benefit from the breadth of events, content, classes, and resource options for the dimensions of wellness that best suit their lifestyle.

2. More Personalized Resident Experiences

Thanks to COVID-19, we’ll look back on 2020 and say good-bye to the “large group” activity. Following the first trend, getting to know the residents will still be as important, but now the lifestyle staff will deliver options in a more personalized way. There will still be social events, clubs, and other gatherings, but the groups will likely be smaller. Think “meet-ups,” where there are more organically emerging connections, and the community staff will have tools in place for those smaller affinity groups to discover common interests and to gather and find connections. Each new move-in (single or couple) will have a head start on finding their niche—like a college freshman—and will have a clear view of how and where they can find their fit in the community with the help of their **Lifestyle Curators** (we like this title as well).



3. More Diverse Communities

As the trend of staying in your home longer continues, senior living communities may get a little smaller. In fact, some may even take a targeted approach to finding prospects by marketing to artists, musicians, or social identity groups such as LGBTQIA. Our definition of “community” will expand to include more than just physically bringing together like-minded people. We are a much more global society today, and we will leverage that in senior living by no longer letting our geographic boundaries define us. Residents will be able to find others who share their interests or beliefs by seeking connections across the U.S. or even around the world, no matter what zip code or time zone they live in. **Community Curators** will provide the window to those connections or activities, likely through technology, empowering older adults to make new friends, learn about the world, and continue to feel they are a part of something meaningful.

The next five years present an exciting future for residents in senior living, and those staff whose job title currently includes health, wellness, or life enrichment will lead us forward!





2

Seven Ways to Prepare for What's Now and What's Next



Without specific research to point to, it's our guess that most senior living professionals would agree that COVID-induced isolation has taken a toll on residents across the continuum. While combating [depression](#) and [loneliness among older adults](#) has always been a priority, the pandemic makes the hill even steeper.

As each [state takes a phased approach to re-opening](#), most senior living residents, currently in "stay-at-home" mode, are watching and seemingly reacting in one of two ways:

1. When is our community going to allow visitors or re-open amenities and wellness activities?
2. I am not going out yet. Cases are still emerging, and it is just too risky.

Both groups are getting restless, and it is only a matter of time before each will begin navigating their new way of life.

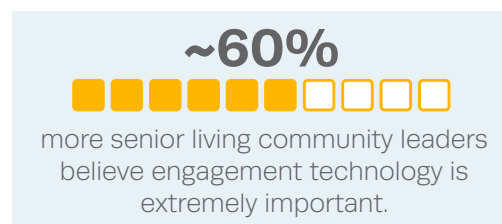
While most senior living communities have already begun the [re-opening process](#), some are more conservative, taking it step by step, and others remain in a "wait-and-see" mode. No matter which scenario fits your community, all are engaged in planning those next steps. These next few months will certainly set a tone for your community that will carry throughout the rest of 2020, and likely into 2021. As the Wellness/Activities Director, you should be in the center of those discussions around what and how to re-open.

In that spirit, here are the top seven things we believe each Wellness/Activities Director should be doing:

- 1. Re-Examine Everything.** We cannot go back to our same approach to life enrichment and wellness. [We need to continue a mix of virtual and face-to-face programming](#). Evaluate what you've learned so far and learn from others. Everyone is experiencing dramatic changes, and we can leverage innovative ideas from around the world!
- 2. Explore New Sources of Content.** Senior living vendors (including K4Connect and iN2L) are producing and making available all kinds of content designed to fight isolation. Hundreds of resources that historically charged a fee for online access—such as museums, live-streamed concerts, Broadway plays, and more—are now available for free. It is remarkable what is out there, and we know residents are eager to access it! In fact, a recent resident user survey conducted by K4Connect revealed nearly 20% of residents are interested in more technology "how-to" content, 18% want access to more documentaries, and over 17% are looking for ways to stay active with fitness content.* [Here is a link](#) to some great experiences, and we see this continuing to expand in addition to new service offerings.
- 3. Focus on Staff Readiness and Well-Being.** With so much changing, we have to assess how we prepare staff to manage these shifts in daily operations, training, and support. Consider these questions: Were my staff doing other things during COVID? How are they holding up? Do I have enough staff to deliver the future programming? Do they have the right skills—especially for technology? What training or support do they need to be ready for a future with or without COVID-19?

*Based on K4Connect's internal company data from an in-application survey of 327 residents conducted on June 8, 2020.

- 4. Tap into the Creativity of Residents.** Residents are coming up with remarkable solutions to address isolation, both with and without technology. Most of the negative press around isolation comes from stories about families being disconnected, but what about the four ladies inside of your community who like to get together at 2:00 pm every afternoon? Or the group who started an online Bible study? The ease of live streaming and other interactive technologies opens doors that did not exist in the past, and content for these experiences can oftentimes come from the residents themselves.
- 5. Pay Attention to At-Risk Resident Groups.** This pandemic has been harder on some cohorts than others. Consider the single or widowed residents, those without family, or who recently experienced a loss. A visitor program is a great step for some residents but not for others, especially if you cannot use volunteers. How can we more intentionally support these high-risk groups as communities re-open?
- 6. Operationalize Social Distancing and Safety.** You have done capacity or attendance management on a lesser scale for trips, ticketed events, or small classes, but how will you ensure social distancing for all in-person activities? For access to the pool or gym facilities, how will you limit the flow of people? What about no-touch sign-ins or sign-ups? Will you require testing or screening at all face-to-face events? How will you track attendance to help with contact tracing if you happen to get a positive COVID-19 test result?
- 7. Close the Technology Gaps.** To effectively implement the action items above, you need a robust technology backbone (broadly, WiFi) or toolkit (devices, content, and applications). Ask yourself, what else do we need to survive or even thrive during another “stay-at-home” period? Now is the time to make your case, as there may never be as good a time to gain the support you need to secure the right tools for resident wellness and mental health. As you contemplate purchasing technology for your community, make sure your vendors have a proven track record in senior living. Ask about their training and on-going technical support for both staff and residents. Do they integrate with applications, devices, and systems you already have? Seek a partner, not just a vendor!

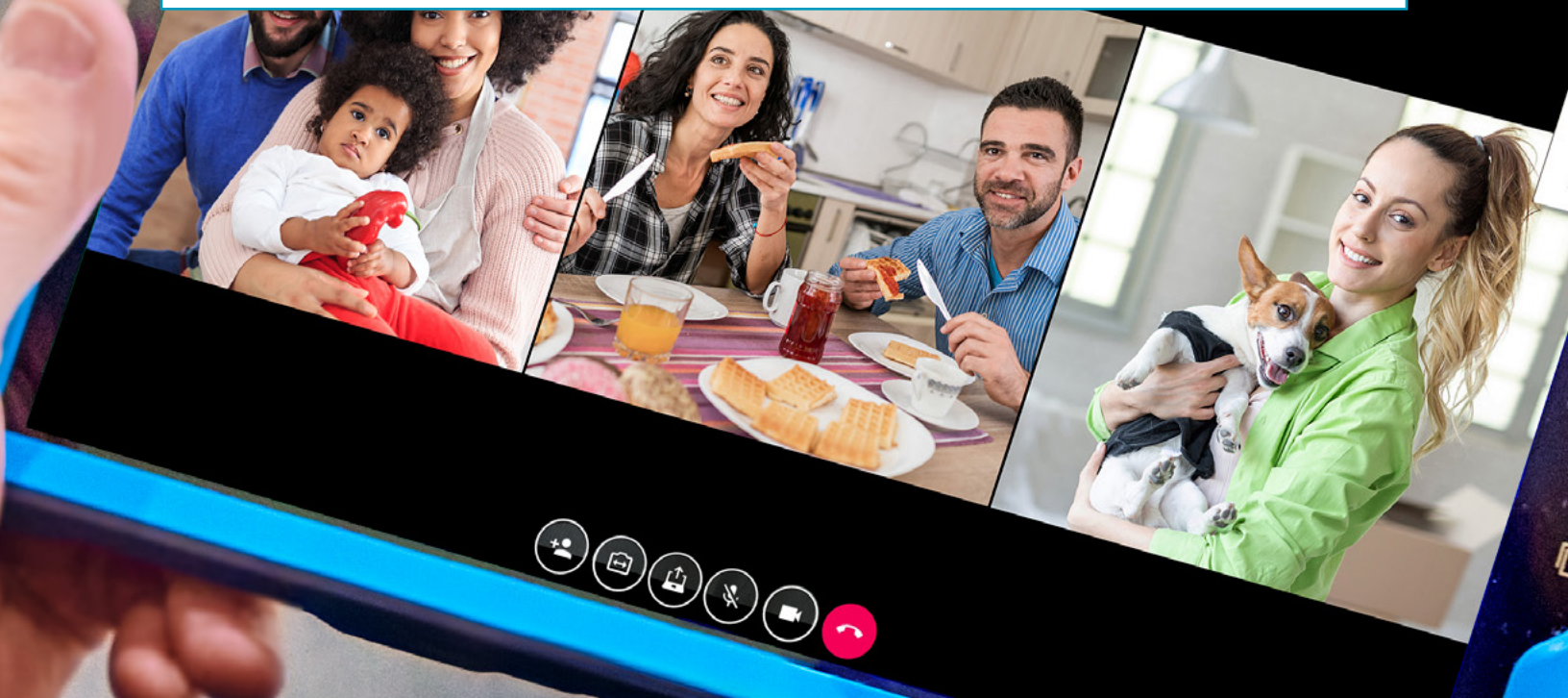


Source: iN2L, *Senior Living 2020: The State of Engagement and Technology*, September 10, 2020.

Obviously, there is a lot to do, but the goals have not changed. You have been through a lot already, so take care of yourselves as well. Limiting your priorities will be key; look wide and discuss many options, but in the end, pick a few initiatives to get started and evolve from there. If there is one thing COVID has taught us, it is to expect the unexpected and be prepared to shift quickly.

3

The Creativity That Can Pave the Way for What's to Come



“For the times they are a–changin’” Those words rang true when Bob Dylan blasted them out in the sixties, and they are ringing true today in virtually every context of our lives. In senior living communities, the issue of resident isolation, always recognized but not always acted upon, has quickly risen in importance. The world of every activity professional, in fact the whole profession, is being turned upside down. Yes, the times they are a changing, but as you’ll see, it’s not all bad.

We are weaving our own thoughts into these words, but first let’s call out a couple of friends who helped us with this: Cameo Rogers from Immanuel in Nebraska and Carrie Chiusano from Presbyterian Retirement Services (PRS) in Pennsylvania. Both have been longtime friends and colleagues, individuals always thinking outside the box. While these months have been challenging for them, it has allowed their teams to do what they do best—be creative! Cameo shared, “Social distancing has provided Immanuel Life Enrichment and Recreation Therapy with an unprecedented opportunity to showcase our creativity, flexibility, and positivity.” The innovation is obvious, with everything from acting out skits for residents from patio and balconies to facilitating in–apartment arts and crafts prompts. She has even had a horse make an impromptu visit to a resident!

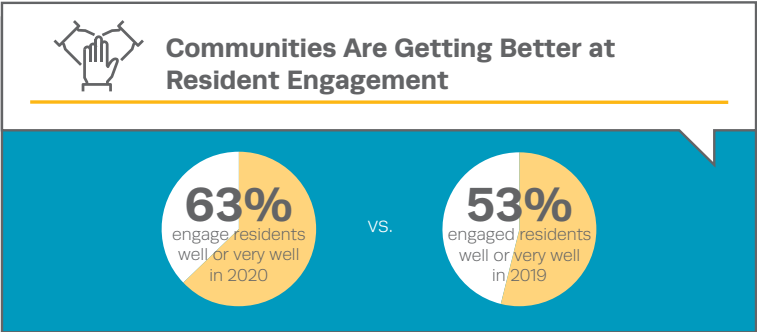
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Social distancing has provided Immanuel Life Enrichment and Recreation Therapy with an unprecedented opportunity to showcase our creativity, flexibility, and positivity.

– Cameo Rogers
Corporate Life Enrichment Manager,
Immanuel

Carrie’s list of creativity is long as well. Below are some of the activities they have been embracing at PRS. How many have you tried?

- ECHO Show trivia in small groups following social-distancing protocols or with one-on-one visits
- Live streaming events via Facebook or YouTube on in-house closed-circuit TV channels
- Virtual reality activities with those residents who can safely enjoy it
- Doorway or hallway exercises such as BINGO or Happy Hour
- Engaging residents to sort mail or menus for the team
- Arranging flash mob dance sessions, where the entire campus stops what they’re doing to engage in a simple dance at a certain time each day
- Setting up themed days for residents and team members. For example, one community had all team members and residents wear tie-dye t-shirts on the same day
- Virtual family visits for residents and family members via iN2L or K4Community on tablets or cell phones
- Socially distanced family visits in the garden area, by appointment



Source: iN2L, Senior Living 2020: The State of Engagement and Technology, September 10, 2020.

The list goes on and on, but the creativity never stops. It has been great to watch, and there is no reason to stop some of these things once some semblance of normal (whatever that will mean) comes back into play. Silver linings are out there if you look for them.

The entire field of Activities or Life Enrichment, whatever term you choose, has been elevated since the pandemic struck. The issues of isolation and loneliness have always been out there, but suddenly they are more visible and relevant. As a result, creative activity professionals are being allowed to enjoy a level of stature and respect that they have not always had. And technology, riding that same wave, is a key piece of the puzzle. It is no longer a novelty; it is a must-have, an expectation.

Immanuel and Presbyterian Retirement Services are great examples of senior living communities utilizing engagement technology to enhance their programming, not replace it. They are well-positioned to transform their communities with a person-centered engagement model that's customizable to support the health and wellness of every resident.

Times are indeed changing; let us embrace them for the better. Back to Dylan: "You better start swimmin' or you'll sink like a stone." Your residents and their families will be forever grateful!



Conclusion

The pandemic has both amplified the persistent problem of depression and social isolation among older adults and accelerated the pace of change in senior living communities. As communities act with greater urgency to foster purposeful engagement and social connections, Wellness/Activities Directors should be prepared to take the lead.

Next Steps: Build a New Resident Engagement Model for the Future

As 2025 looms, it is important to take key learnings from the pandemic to build the new model for community engagement that current and future residents need.

You can help lead the way by taking a careful assessment of your current resident engagement strategy and determining opportunities for immediate improvement. With the latest trends in mind, collaborate with the leadership team to design a resident-centered, technology-enabled engagement model. As you do so, consider how the community engagement function might be distributed among your organization's staff members. For example, personal information and preferences for each resident should be captured and stored so that the data is easily accessible at virtually every touch point to provide relevant activities that align with a resident's passions and interests.

To build the resident engagement model your organization needs, technology will be a strategic enabler driving the personalized experience residents require. It will be important to invest in a technology platform that supports your vision, and then train both staff and residents, on how to leverage it. Additionally, it will be essential to use these tools to gather data on use and adoption to know who you are reaching and what is most effective or popular across the diverse resident groups.

Future Curator of Community Life—Get Ready to Shape and Own Your New Role

As your role changes to **Curator of Community Life**, keep leading with creativity and innovation to give your increasingly diverse and technology-savvy residents the vibrant life they deserve. Communities that lag in their move to person-centered engagement technology may not be able to provide the experiences residents need. For that reason, be sure you're able to fully articulate the potential impact technology investments can have in terms of resident wellness and community occupancy. As the Curator of Community Life, you'll have a more elevated role within the organization, and your insight can point the executive team to a future-ready model of person-centered, technology-enabled engagement.



About K4Connect

K4Connect is a mission-driven technology company that integrates the best in technology to serve and empower older adults and individuals living with disabilities, together with the people, communities and organizations that also serve them. K4Advisors is the strategic consulting arm of K4Connect, committed to bringing the full value of technology and process innovation to the providers and operators of housing and support services to older adults. Based in Raleigh, N.C., K4Connect is currently serving tens of thousands of senior living residents and staff at over 800 continuing care, independent living, assisted living and memory care communities across the nation.

K4Connect.com



About iN2L

As the market leader in content-driven engagement for seniors, iN2L has been creating possibilities, enjoyment, and connection for older adults since 1999. 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. iN2L is a critical part of the resident experience in more than 3,200 nursing homes, assisted and independent living communities, memory care settings, and adult day programs across the U.S. and Canada.

iN2L.com