

## Case Study:

# Project VITAL: Impacting Loneliness and Well-Being through Engagement Technology



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### Categories:

- ◆ Increased Resident Engagement
- ◆ Reduced Social Isolation and Feelings of Loneliness
- ◆ Improved Mood

### About the Organization

#### Organization Name:

Project VITAL (Virtual Inclusive Technology for All)

#### Technological Partner:

iN2L

#### Main Contributor:

Lydia Nguyen, Ph.D.,  
Lead Researcher

#### Organization Type:

Assisted Living Facilities, Skilled Nursing Facilities, Memory Care Facility, Adult Family Care

#### Organization Description:

Project VITAL is a public-private partnership between the Florida Department of Elder Affairs, the Alzheimer's Association, iN2L, and other stakeholders. Project VITAL is multi-faceted, leveraging resources to support residents, their family members, and staff of senior living communities. These resources include iN2L tablets, virtual educational and support programs.

### Project Description

The goal of Project VITAL is to help mitigate the negative effects of social isolation and loneliness for older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The first two phases of Project VITAL (VITAL 1.0 and VITAL 2.0) were launched in April and June 2020, respectively, and involved a total of 300 senior living communities (55% assisted living, 37% skilled nursing, 6% memory care, and 2% adult family-care homes).

### Socialization Modality

- ◆ Video chat
- ◆ Photo sharing
- ◆ Text chat
- ◆ Games
- ◆ Exercise
- ◆ Music

### System Embodiment

Tablets

### Implementation Approach

iN2L tablets are a core component of Project VITAL. The iN2L tablets are designed to be intuitive and easy to use for older adults with a simple touch screen interface. The tablets are Wi-Fi-enabled and include more than 1,000 content items that have been specifically designed and curated for older adults. Content includes games, puzzles, trivia, videos, movies, TV shows, music, sing-alongs, music therapy, audiobooks, travel information and virtual tours, history, and spiritual/religious content. The tablets have video call capabilities which allow residents to connect with their family and friends. Lastly, the tablets had information and tips about COVID-19, as well as Alzheimer's Association programs, resources, and services.

iN2L provided senior living community staff members with an initial tablet training, as well as ongoing support for the duration of the project. After training, staff members gave residents access to the tablets. Each resident had a profile created for them, which they could access using a simple passcode. This profile allowed residents to access their personal phonebook, initiate video calls, view photos sent to them by family and friends, and access their favorite content.

A survey of staff members at the end of the project showed a high level of agreement that they had received sufficient tablet training and technical support. Additionally, they reported that the tablets were easy to incorporate into their daily routines and that they were easy to use.

## Outcomes

As part of this project, staff members were asked to complete an evaluation survey approximately six months after the tablets were implemented in their communities. A total of 105 staff members completed the survey (62 staff from VITAL 1.0 and 43 staff from VITAL 2.0). The survey assessed staff perceptions of tablet effectiveness in alleviating residents' feelings of social isolation and loneliness and improving mood during the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff members were asked to rate statements on a 5-point scale: Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), Strongly agree (5). In communities that have a separate memory unit, staff were asked to rate statements separately for residents with and without dementia. There were 61 communities with a separate memory unit for residents with dementia and 44 communities without.

iN2L tablet usage data was also collected as part of this project. The data presented in this case study includes usage data across an 11-month period from May 2020 through March 2021. A user session is defined by distinct tablet use between a login and logout of a profile.

### Increased resident engagement

Staff were able to use the tablets to distract residents from the COVID-19 pandemic and keep them engaged:

*"The tablets have been a great tool for distractions from COVID."*

*"We will continue to use the tablets as the residents benefit greatly from the engagement."*

*"When residents were in [their] rooms, I would set up the tablet for a half hour and assist with their choice."*

On average, there were 4,140 user sessions on the iN2L tablets each month, lasting approximately 34 minutes per session. An average of 10,343 content items were accessed each month, with an average of 926 being unique content items. During the time that COVID-19 information was available on the tablets (May-October 2020), that content was accessed an average of 466 times per month.

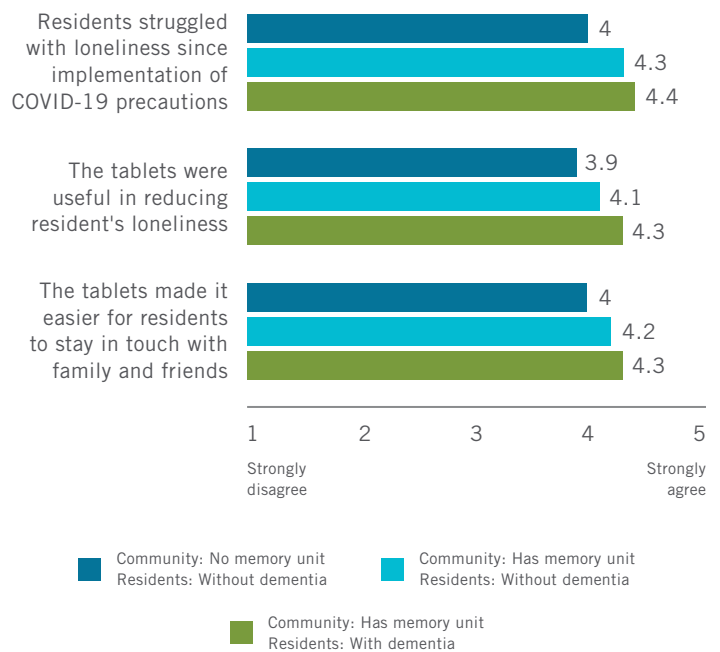
### Reduced feelings of social isolation and loneliness

Staff survey responses revealed that there was a high level of agreement that residents struggled with loneliness

since the implementation of COVID-19 precautionary measures in the community. However, importantly, staff also agreed that the iN2L tablets were useful in reducing residents' loneliness.

Staff also agreed that the tablets made it easier for residents to stay in touch with their family and friends. On average, 1,995 video calls were made each month. One staff member noted that the families appreciated the video calls as well:

*"The families enjoyed the video chatting."*



### Improved Mood

Survey responses showed strong agreement from staff that the residents also struggled with mood since the implementation of COVID-19 precautionary measures, but that the tablets helped to improve residents' mood.

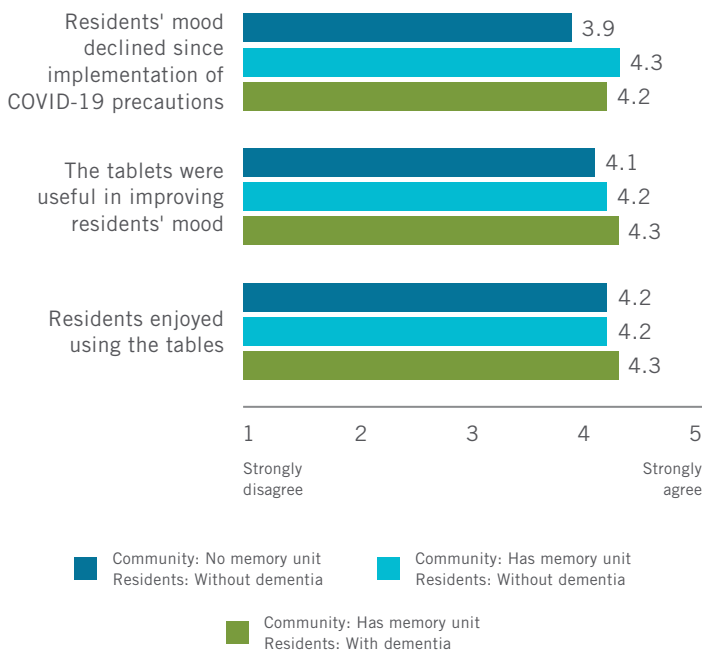
The boost in mood may be related to the higher level of staff agreement that the residents enjoyed using the tablets and that the staff members enjoyed using the tablets with the residents (average rating of 4.5 on the 5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree).

*"Great resource to keep residents entertained."*

*"The residents have truly enjoyed all of the features."*

“We have very much enjoyed [the tablets]. Each month we celebrate a different country and we use the iN2L for music from the country we are celebrating. We also use them for bedbound residents to play relaxation music.”

“I have used the iN2L [tablet] in my memory care unit. The sing-alongs and the old programs (Lone Ranger, etc.) are fabulous, thank you very much. It makes a HUGE difference in my residents suffering with sundowners.”



## Challenges and Pitfalls to Avoid

The tablets are not meant to replace staff members, but rather are supposed to help support and supplement staff. Residents, particularly those in memory care, will still require some level of help from staff members to use the tablets or to get them started on an activity with the tablet (e.g., games or video calls).

## Lessons Learned/ Advice to Share with Others

Technology can be a valuable tool to combat social isolation, loneliness, and declines in mood. Having engagement technology in your community can benefit the well-being of your residents, staff, and even residents’ families.

For engagement technology to be effective in your community, it is helpful to have interest and buy-in from both leadership and staff members. This will help to ensure that the technology is being used frequently and appropriately. In this project, there was strong agreement from staff that executive leadership was supportive of the tablets.

Engagement technology can be used as a way to differentiate your community from others when talking with potential future residents and their families, particularly when it provides an easy mode of communication between residents and family.