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Culture Change in Practice

Technojoy for Elders

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posted by Steph Kilen



"Culture Change in Practice" is our own weblog where people can become involved in a conversation about Culture Change as it is practiced by professionals in real nursing homes. Feel free to join the conversation, or post a comment about something you have learned on your journey.

www.culturechangenow.com/weblog

Isolation is obviously a huge issue for elders living in nursing homes. Of course, there are mobility issues in getting from one room to another in the facility, but even residing in a nursing home keeps elders from the rest of the community. Many residents don't have phones in their rooms and therefore don't have the opportunity to pick up the phone to say hi to someone whenever they want. Then there are cognitive impairments that further isolate them by breaking the bridge of communication and understanding with others.

The thing that has made all of our lives easier may be just the tool to address all these isolation issues: the computer. I'll first say that the gender gap in technology has, itself, caused some isolation for elders in the same way I feel out of the loop with text-messaging teens. It is quite possible that someone living in a nursing home had not even used a computer earlier in life. However, for starters, email makes communication with friends and family more frequent and common than visits, especially from those who live far away. Checking email has become part of daily life for many of us. It can be part of elders' daily lives too.

Obviously computer skills and access can be the hurdle for elders but HP makes a "[printing mailbox](http://www.presto.com/)" that along with service by Presto, allows people

to receive email and photos without a computer and with very little technical knowledge. The system only receives (you can't reply or send from it) messages from approved email addresses, which means no spam. Imagine one on every hallway, neighborhood or household. If you ever lived away from your loved ones for a period of time, you know how much "mail" can make your day. It is such a simple, and inexpensive, way to bring joy to elders.

Taking elders and computers to the next step is [It's Never 2 Late](http://www.in2l.com/), a company started by [Jack York](http://www.actionpact.com/whoswho/jack_york.html) in '99. Using adaptive hardware including touch screens and modified keyboards, the software is designed specifically for nursing homes. It offers engaging activities for elders from puzzles and games to a flight simulator. But, it also has many applications for perpetuating person-centered care. Staff can create power point type presentations to profile each resident in a "get to know me" fashion. One facility made a short video to show other staff members a way to transfer an elder from wheel chair to bed in a way that did not agitate the particular resident. The content can be personalized to meet the needs of individuals and community. Computers have enhanced our lives in many ways and it is exciting to see the possibilities they can offer in nursing homes as well. Contact glenn@actionpact.com for more info on It's Never 2 Late.