

## CARE IN THE TIME OF COVID: SMART WAYS SENIOR LIVING IS STAVING OFF ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

As winter is upon us and Covid numbers continue to increase, there's comfort in knowing that senior living facilities across the country continue to make tremendous efforts to keep residents safe and well. Knowing that reduced social engagement can result in cognitive decline, Total Brain Health's, Dr. Cynthia Green, spoke with engagement staff at leading companies to hear how they are finding next level ways to keep residents thriving and intellectually stimulated.

In this interview series, Dr. Green spoke with:

- **James Harvey**, VP of Marketing and Communications, and **Chuck Jennings**, Senior VP of Clinical Services, both with ALG Senior, which serves 160 communities throughout the Southeast;
- **Ashlea Smalley**, Corporate Director of Life Enrichment at Tutura Senior Living & Health Care, with 38 communities in the South and Midwest; and
- **Laura Ellen Christian**, Senior Vice President of Engagement and Dementia Training for the Arbor Company, with more than 40 communities in 11 states.

### **Pandemic Playbook**

All the experts told Dr. Green that despite the lack of visitors, they're seeing residents thrive by being in a calmer environment and receiving added person-centered attention from caregivers either individually or in small groups.

"We're always looking for the silver lining in this dark COVID cloud," says ALG's James Harvey. "To me, the augmented resident engagement, the more personalized care, the new focus on communication—are all things we'll continue to implement going forward, even outside the realm of the pandemic."

Speaking for the Arbor Company, Laura Ellen Christian says, "We think about two buckets to help us keep going on the journey: *safety* and *joy*. How do we balance keeping people safe with making sure there's joy in their life? And it's not just our corporate office making decisions: we're having these conversations with staff *and* residents to learn what's meaningful to them and then acting upon that."

"We all pitch in to play a role in life enrichment and to foster deeper connections," says Tutura's Ashlea Smalley. "Our life enrichment teams were stretched pretty thin initially with all the new responsibilities around COVID safety. Now, bringing in other staff members has really helped—plus they're getting to know residents in a deeper way." Smalley adds that sometimes they get silly just to boost morale. "Like, in the middle of a shift we'll go 'Everybody dance now!' and do a cha-cha slide down the hall."

### **Tech Support**

Senior living continues to lean into Zoom and FaceTime for social engagement. “The son of one of our Illinois residents moved to North Carolina, making her sad that she couldn’t see his new house,” continues Smalley. “But he was able to give her a full walking tour on his smartphone! That was an *aha* moment—we realized we can keep doing this, connecting people in ways we hadn’t thought of before. Now we’re looking for an app to let families check in on their loved one without having to physically be there,” says Smalley. “They could log in and see, ‘Oh, Uncle George went to bingo this morning.’”

“We’ve reached out to the North Carolina school system to establish partnerships with students to fulfill their community service requirement,” says AG’s Chuck Jennings. “These will be distance relationships with our residents, as pen pals or via FaceTime. It’s an opportunity we never tapped into, but that intergenerational connection is definitely going to become part of our fabric.”

### **Up Next**

“Being really prepared has become part of our larger strategic plan,” says Smalley. “I’m putting together what I call a ‘pandemic playbook for life enrichment,’ so if there’s, say, a bad flu outbreak, it won’t be such a scramble—we’ll know what we have to work with. For life enrichment teams, having the right tools is just as important as a stockpile of PPE.”

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