

# Technology

## The means to a BEGINNING



A number of residents look on as Jean Hales, 87, uses the IN2L system

**Tim Dixon** looks at how one enterprising facility in South Australia took a good idea – using computers to bring out the human side of aged care – and has started to run with it.

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Jean Hales is playing Deal or No Deal. The 87 year-old resident of the 18-bed aged care facility at the Tailem Bend District Hospital – just over an hour’s drive out of Adelaide – sits hunched in front of the computer screen. She is deep in thought, weighing up whether to take the money she has already won or risk it all in the hope of adding to her takings, and loving every minute of it.

But it hasn’t always been like this. The first time Jean was asked if she wanted to use a computer, there was no doubt in her mind.

“She said, ‘I’m 87. I don’t need to do that kind of thing’,” recalls nursing staff member and project coordinator, Nigel Langes. “Then she said, ‘I don’t know anything about using a computer. I’m too dumb’.”

The next time Jean was asked if she wanted to use the computer, the same thing happened. Then Langes changed tact. He told Jean that he needed her help with ‘something’ and soon enough, Jean was on the computer, playing Deal or No Deal.

“She just started playing when she saw the game and now she always wants to do it,” says Langes. “And it doesn’t just benefit her – it is a great involvement activity. The other residents like to watch and they all shout out, ‘Take the money!’ or ‘No Deal!’ Now some of them have started to play too. In fact, the first time Mary played, she won \$1 million.”

“I wish it was real,” says Mary, sitting nearby.

### FROM IDEA TO IMPLEMENTATION

Just over a year ago, Nigel Langes was sitting in the audience at the ACSA National Conference in Melbourne with his DON, Terry Wilby, when something clicked. The thing that grabbed his attention was a presentation about an adaptive computer system for nursing home residents by American, Jack York.

Nine years earlier, as an IT whiz in Silicon Valley, York and a group of friends had decided to donate computers to local nursing homes. They quickly discovered though that ‘regular’ computers were not always appropriate

for older, frail people in residential care. So they put their skills to use and developed the IN2L system by bringing together existing accessible interface devices – such as touch screens, large keyboards and joysticks – with a software program, specially developed by Ablelink Technologies.

As well as allowing residents to play Deal or No Deal and other interactive games, the system can be used to send and receive voice and video messages, watch classic TV shows and movies, surf favourite websites, listen to music and, perhaps most importantly, to create multimedia presentations of residents' life stories. When York showed a sample life story at last year's ACSA conference, there was barely a dry eye in the house.

"It was the first session on the first day and I knew we had seen something with real potential," says Langes. "At the end of his presentation, Jack York said, 'Come and see me if you would be interested in introducing this type of technology here in Australia'. I just leaned back in my chair, turned to Terry and said, 'We've got to do that!'"

Many emails and one trip to the United States later, Langes and Wilby were even more convinced. And by this stage, their 'pestering' had managed to convince York as well. In September this year he found himself back in Australia, officially launching Tailem Bend's 'Planting the Seeds Project' – the first IN2L installation outside America.

"After last year's demonstration," says York, "we talked to two or three large organisations in Australia about the possibility of developing some type of partnership.

"They were interested in the concept, but became concerned about how to manage a project when there was no infrastructure set up in Australia to support it.

"If you want all the details to be perfect before you start on something, you are never going to achieve anything. I have to give credit to Nigel and Terry for overcoming what were probably fairly significant objections from within their organisation, and for persisting despite my own hesitations at times."

### FOSTERING RELATIONSHIPS

While the benefits to residents like Jean and Mary are obvious, Langes and Wilby feel the system has the potential to bring about some practical advantages for staff as well. To date, twelve staff members at Tailem Bend have been trained in how to use the IN2L product and six more are currently going through the process. They are all being encouraged to create their own

"We are all emotional beings and I think this technology can tap into that emotional need."

Terry Wilby

profiles, complete with photos and videos of children and grandchildren, which can be shared among colleagues.

And by engaging with residents' interactive life stories, Wilby hopes care staff will gain new insights into the people they are caring for. Far from being a cold, impersonal piece of machinery, he believes the IN2L computer system will help to humanise care.

"When you develop a conventional care plan, it is a very detached document," he says. "It tells you practically all you need to know about how to care for Mrs Jo Bloggs but it doesn't tell you who she is. It's much more engaging when you have something pictorial in front of you that shows you the person as they were – as a family member, as a worker and as a contributor to society. Then when they tell you in their own voice, 'When you bathe me I would like it if you do it this way...' it makes a lot more sense. It takes the clinical edge away."

"Nurses and carers are trained in a certain way and sometimes they can forget that they are caring for a human being. We are all emotional beings and I think this technology can tap into that emotional need."

Jack York often tells the story of a man he saw sitting, slumped over in a wheelchair when visiting a care facility in Nevada. At first, he didn't think much about it. But later in the day, when he logged on to the home's system and watched the man's life, York discovered that the person he had walked past hours earlier was one of the principle engineers behind the construction of the massive Hoover Dam on the Colorado River.

"My whole perspective of him changed!" says York. "He was no longer just a man slumped over in a wheelchair – he was a man who built the Hoover Dam!"

The IN2L system is also helping to build links between the nursing home and the broader community. The town of

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Tailem Bend has got behind the project right from the start, with well over a dozen local organisations – businesses, clubs and media outlets – providing financial support. For over a month now too, groups of students from the local primary school have been visiting on a weekly basis to use the system with residents.

“It was a lot of work initially,” says Wilby, “but as the project progresses it is starting to develop a momentum of its own as all sorts of different partners come on board.”

### NEXT STEPS

After a twelve-month trial at Tailem Bend, Wilby and Langes hope to introduce the IN2L system to another small facility in Meningie, which is part of the same multi-purpose service (MPS). On a bigger scale, connections are starting to form as well. Jack York is currently in talks with Novitatech – the technology division of Novita Children’s Services – to establish a partnership that could see the

company providing technical support for IN2L users throughout South Australia.

At an international level, York has plans to connect facilities with IN2L systems around the world.

“The issues faced by different people using the same technology are going to be quite similar,” he says. “From what we have heard they would like to talk to their peers to workshop ideas and share their problems as well as their successes. Some time around the beginning of next year, we hope to set up a blog or online network for facilities using IN2L technology to enable them to do just that.”

One day, residents in Tailem Bend will even be able to send video messages to residents of care homes on the facility’s other side of the globe. As the project motto states: ‘From the smallest seeds, amazing things grow’.

**For more information or to organise a tour of the Tailem Bend facility, contact Terry Wilby at [Terry.Wilby@health.sa.gov.au](mailto:Terry.Wilby@health.sa.gov.au)**



Tailem Bend’s IN2L system is the first to be launched outside of North America.

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