



## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

### Using Technology to Enhance Relationships

In the last few years of my mother's life, she struggled with the transition from her trusty flip-phone to the smart phone that we purchased for her one Christmas. At one point, each of her twelve grandchildren, at least two of her sons, and a few in-laws were all called upon to give her a lesson. Her frustration never became evident—and her learning process became quite the conversation at family gatherings. One day, after finally sharing with me her frustration with her “new” phone, she lamented that the neuropathy in her fingers resulting from chemotherapy treatments made it difficult for her to even answer simple calls.

“I wish there was a pen or something that I could use instead of trying to get my fingers to do what they just can't do anymore,” she bemoaned. “Mom,” I said, “it's called a stylus, and they've been around for a while.” That afternoon we went to the store and she picked a stylus designed for her phone and a case that would hold it—and away she went! In the next few months, she became a whiz at using the phone, and even learned new apps so that she could teach them to her grandchildren!

Aaron Smith of the Pew Research Center highlights several obstacles that prevent older adults from embracing technology. Among them, he highlights the following hurdles: physical challenges to using technology, skeptical attitudes about the benefits of technology, and difficulties learning to use new technologies. He notes, however, that “once seniors join the online world, digital technology becomes an integral part of their daily lives.”

In December 2017, AARP released a landmark study entitled *Technology Use and Attitudes among Mid-Life and Older Americans*. At that time, over 70% of Americans over fifty were online and had spent considerable time using technology. Among the most interesting conclusions, AARP found:

- Mobile and traditional computing devices are the primary tech for Americans 50+ with 90% using a laptop or desktop computer and over 70% using smartphones;
- 91% of those with devices report that their technology use aids them in staying in touch with family and friends—ranking in order text messaging, email, and then social media as the tools most frequently used for communication;
- Traditional activities dominate computer use for older Americans, most popularly surfing the internet, online shopping, getting news, and mobile banking *although* more and more are utilizing mobile/web platforms for medical care, entertainment viewing/streaming, and travel;
- Across all devices, more than 75% of adults 50+ are on social media—primarily Facebook and Instagram, with a growing number using Twitter;
- Privacy and security is the greatest threat to older adults' internet use, but many do not take proactive steps to protect themselves online with fewer than half using passcodes on their devices and less than one-third using two-factor authentication.

With the rapidly changing world of technology, the Princeton Senior Resource Center is committed to being a leading source of support for older adults seeking to stay connected and relevant with technology use. The Technology Lab, supported by an incredibly talented group of volunteers, provides 1:1 assistance (on your device or one of our computers), along with a host of classes and workshops. In addition, this spring we are relaunching our annual conference with a focus on technology for seniors. I encourage you to register to join us

for the *Reimagine Aging Conference: Technology for Active Living* on Saturday, March 28. For more information, visit the conference web page link at [princetonsenior.org](http://princetonsenior.org).

After my mother began to become more proficient with her iPhone, she became involved in the world around her in a way that had not yet been possible for her. FaceTime allowed her to watch soccer games in Punxsutawney. Instagram and Facebook helped her stay current on the lives of her children and grandchildren. Uber and Lyft apps helped her to make simple trips around town that enabled her continued independence. She even learned how to record a TikTok video for her grandson's graduation.

Yes, technology can seem overwhelming and, at times, it probably seems easier to remain gleefully unaware. However, research shows that maintaining an active engagement in the world through technology significantly enhances overall wellbeing. At the same time, technology is designed to enhance relationships and participation in the world, not to be a substitute for genuine engagement. Properly used and understood, technology is a significant tool that contributes to thriving in older adulthood. I look forward to seeing you at the conference in March or in the PSRC Technology Lab.

All the Best,  
*Drew A. Dyson, PhD*  
*Executive Director*