# Case Study:
# VSC powered by enliveo: Empowering Social Wellness for Isolated Older Adults Since 2010

**Selfhelp**

**VSC**
POWERED BY @ enliveo

## Categories:

◆ Reduce Social Isolation, Feelings of Loneliness, and Depression
◆ Increased Resident Engagement and Satisfaction
◆ Increased Social Networks, Quality of Life, and Staff Efficiencies

### About the Organization

**Organization Name:**
Selfhelp Community Services

**Main Contributor:**
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**Organization Type:**
Housing with services, home health/home care, adult day care/senior centers

**Organization Description:**
Selfhelp Community Services (Selfhelp) is a not-for-profit organization serving 25,000 low-income seniors through a comprehensive range of homecare and community-based services. Our mission is to help New York's most vulnerable older adults to age at home where they most want to be, with dignity and independence.

## Project Description

We define enliveo as "an online social wellness platform," which underscores its crucial purpose: to mitigate the debilitating effects of loneliness experienced by socially isolated and homebound individuals. Launched in 2010, the Virtual Senior Center (VSC) powered by enliveo provides an enriching and safe virtual space for older adults to connect and socialize through interactive online programs. The VSC offers a suite of live weekly programs including exercise, virtual travel tours, health workshops, live symphony performances, direct video chats, and more.

## Socialization Modality

Video chat, audio chat, event/activity sharing, email, life stories, community blog, activity calendar, art, games, exercise, music, facilitated communications and conversations.

## System Embodiment

Tablet, desktop computer, laptop, all-in-one computer

## Business Mode

Private Pay

## Implementation Approach

VSC uses the enliveo platform, which is highly customizable, easy to use, and secure. Organizations can brand enliveo with their logo, customize the content, host their virtual events, and participate in chat rooms in which only their members have access.

The platform is accessible to all populations and is compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).

We train organizations that partner with VSC to give access to their members. We show them how to enroll new members and manage the program. Resources are also provided on such topics as marketing, recruiting members, engagement strategies, hosting virtual programs, and reporting. These resources enable organizations to implement VSC among their members smoothly and effectively. For organizations with limited resources, we onboard and administer their members.

The implementation approach for the VSC, powered by enliveo, is designed to be inclusive and adaptable, catering to both individuals and groups. The implementation approach is underpinned by three key innovations:

**Shareable and adaptable:** The enliveo platform offers a white-label option, enabling organizations to customize their virtual communities and offer tailored content to their members. This approach promotes inclusivity and allows for the facilitation of social engagement across diverse populations.

**Safe, age-friendly platform:** The enliveo platform was developed to provide a secure and user-friendly environment specifically tailored to the needs of older adults. Managed login access ensures security, mitigating risks such as scams and identity theft commonly associated with mainstream social media platforms.

**Social connection:** Unlike pre-recorded content, the VSC offers live, interactive classes that allow participants to engage with instructors and peers in real time. Additionally, online events and celebrations allow socially isolated older adults to connect within a supportive online community.

## Outcomes

Participation in the VSC has resulted in the following impacts (these are the results of a 2020 self-evaluation; surveys were conducted by phone, email, and home visit with 200 VSC users):

- Loneliness: 80% of participants felt less lonely after participation.
- Connection: 60% experienced an increased sense of connectedness.
- Friendship: 76% have made new friends through the Virtual Senior Center.
- Feeling better: 74% felt less depressed.
- Quality of life: 97% reported an improvement in their quality of life.

Our engagement study (Aug 2022 – Jan 2023) comprised extensive surveys of 56 users. The results confirmed that many of our users were homebound, living alone, and turning to the VSC for social connection:

- **85%** of members are at risk or high risk of loneliness.
- **74%** of members live alone.
- **63%** of members leave home less than 4 times a week.

- **63%** of members reported that the key reasons they participated in VSC was to engage with others and join the live interactive programs.
- When asked "what challenges do you solve by being part of VSC?" the most popular answer was "**social connection.**"
- The top two motivations of our members joining VSC are **affiliation** (desire for acceptance from the group) and **comfort** (desire for physical or emotional security) rather than learning and entertainment.
- Members who attend live programs on regular basis are **more likely** to answer their life has a purpose, compared to the low-attendance members.

## Challenges & Pitfalls to Avoid

Challenges encompass addressing technophobia and motivating older adults to embrace technology. A pivotal aspect in overcoming these obstacles is to ensure a straightforward and intuitive user interface design. Additionally, fostering genuine and meaningful relationships among members and volunteers presents another challenge. Large group sizes, recorded classes and public online classes may not provide the ideal environment for meaningful conversations and connections, especially for the vulnerable older adults. Therefore, finding ways to facilitate intimate interactions within a safe and conducive setting is essential.

## Lessons Learned/Advice to Share with Others

*Ongoing Engagement and Technical Support*

The successful implementation of programs for older adults requires more than simply providing access to technology. Ongoing support beyond the initial onboarding is critical for older adults with limited experience in using computers and social platforms. Without this ongoing assistance, we risk disengagement. Our evaluations have found that technical support and engagement support are a vital factor in older adult participation.

*Live Interaction*

While recorded programs may fulfill the need for learning or entertainment, they cannot replace live interaction in addressing social isolation. Live interactions offer older adults a sense of belonging, addressing their desire for physical and emotional security. Therefore, to effectively combat social isolation among older adults, programs should prioritize live interactions.