

## Case study

# Selfhelp Community Services, Inc.



## Virtual Senior Center leverages HP All-in-One touchscreen PCs

### Industry

Healthcare

### Objective

Positively impact health and wellness of homebound elderly through community, social interaction and education

### Approach

Create Virtual Senior Center providing HP All-in-One PCs delivering rich content, connectivity to homebound seniors

### IT matters

- Deliver ease of use with HP All-in-One PCs
- Simplify navigation with custom-designed VSC interface
- Overcome mobility limitations with at-home content delivery, connectivity
- Deliver rich array of facilitator-led classes, discussion, interaction opportunities

### Business matters

- Combat social isolation associated with poor physical and mental health
- Reduced seniors' feelings of isolation by 85%
- Improved quality of life: 97% of participants reported affirmatively
- Reduced feelings of being "very disconnected" by 60%; increased feelings of being "very connected" by 38%
- Increased self-reported health status by 51%, a critical indicator in one's use of health services



**“The technology is mind-boggling and so easy to use. I’m sitting face-to-face with people all over the U.S. as if they were in my living room.”**

– Joe Margolin, volunteer contemporary history discussion facilitator, Selfhelp VSC



Selfhelp Community Services, Inc., is a non-profit senior-services organization based in New York City. In addition to addressing issues of housing and care management, Selfhelp tackles challenges of mental stimulation and social connection. In Selfhelp’s Virtual Senior Center (VSC), homebound seniors take part in live classes, museum-hosted tours, current-events discussion and other online events. The program’s top PC choice for VSC participants is the HP All-in-One.



## 97% of user respondents reported that the Virtual Senior Center improved their quality of life

Margie Jones is a retired graphic designer who once worked for some of the world's top corporations and taught at the world-famous Parsons School of Design. A rare collagen disorder makes it difficult for Jones to leave her New York City apartment, but with VSC she tours European art galleries, visits with friends, and learns the latest computer skills. "It opens a doorway to anything you want. Anything," Jones says. "I don't have loneliness."

**"The results of our evaluation confirm our observations that the Virtual Senior Center is an important tool to reduce social isolation."**

— Evaluation Report of Selfhelp Virtual Senior Center Program, May 2015

At 91 years of age, Doris Shankman is enjoying her very first computer. A VSC IT professional came to her house, set up an HP All-in-One, and showed her how to start using it. Shankman was married for 33 years to a physician and pianist, and holds degrees in sociology and early childhood education. Though hip and knee surgeries have limited her mobility, VSC helps keep her intellectually and socially engaged. "It's something I look forward to each day."

One of Shankman's favorite VSC instructors is Joe Margolin. A retired attorney and social studies teacher, Margolin himself has physical disabilities that make him understand how important it is for homebound seniors to stay connected. He teaches history and current events in weekly sessions that typically start with participants catching up on one another's lives. "The technology is mind-boggling and so easy to use," Margolin says. "I'm sitting face-to-face with people all over the United States as if they were in my living room."

## VSC combats social isolation

Studies show that social isolation of the elderly is associated with poor physical and mental health, poor quality of life, and even avoidable death. Acting on evidence that computer technology can help reduce social isolation among older people, Selfhelp launched VSC in 2010 with 6 Pilot participants and eventually added an additional 16 participants in the following months in the New York City area.

Selfhelp, North America's oldest and largest provider of services to Holocaust survivors, finds VSC participants through its partnerships with community agencies nationwide. Increased public and private funding have enabled Selfhelp to expand VSC to 250 participants in New York, Baltimore, Chicago, and San Diego.

<sup>1</sup>"Evaluation of Selfhelp's Virtual Senior Center Program," completed May 2015

Several criteria help determine participant eligibility. Seniors who are government-qualified to receive home-delivered meals can be defined as home-bound. Selfhelp wants them to attend at least four classes a week; the person therefore must be cognitively fit enough to navigate the service and interact meaningfully with others. They must possess the mobility to raise their arms and use the touchscreen. They have to be willing to try something new. Once these criteria are met, Selfhelp does everything possible to help them succeed—starting with setting up a loaner PC in the participant’s home.

## HP All-in-One PC delivers ease of use, speed

Selfhelp’s top choice for VSC participants is the HP All-in-One PC. “It’s an enterprise-grade device with a great touchscreen and fast processing,” says David Dring, executive director of Selfhelp Innovations. “The HP AiO is easy to use, and its power and speed handle the video streaming of VSC classes with ease.” Combining a crisp monitor and CPU in one unit, the HP AiO also incorporates a webcam, microphone, and speakers. The small footprint with fewer cables, makes it ideal for use by seniors. The touchscreen makes the device accessible for people who cannot easily grip a mouse.

“You have to feed your brain. I love my computer. I use it as a journey. I live in a one-room apartment but I can tour the art galleries of Europe with VSC.”

—Margie Jones, VSC participant

Dring brings more than 15 years of experience innovating uses of technology to transform the experience of aging. He’s also looking at potential uses for the HP Sprout, a fully integrated desktop 3D scanning solution with 3D object capture, editing and multiple streamlined 3D print options.

For the VSC, in addition to providing touchscreen PCs for senior home use, Selfhelp has designed a unique interface that enables

participants to see and hear the other people in the class, and actively engage in discussions and activities. Large onscreen buttons support navigation for those with limited ability to move their fingers. The interface also makes it easy for older adults to Skype with friends and family or use the Internet on their own.

The Selfhelp technician who sets up the PC in the program participant’s home also teaches him or her the basics of how to log on and navigate. After that, the sky’s the limit on program content ranging from computer classes to virtual tours of London.

## Class content ranges from MOMA to yoga

Many VSC classes are facilitated by volunteers from community-based organizations; cultural institutions such as the Guggenheim Museum and the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York, or the Lyric Opera in Chicago; other classes are facilitated by individuals such as former social studies teacher Margolin.

Class offerings nurture both mind and body; popular ones include computer classes, armchair yoga, art appreciation, interactive games, current events, well-being sessions with geriatricians, museum tours, holiday events, music programming, singalongs, and Tai Chi.

“The programs fill a tremendous gap,” says participant Shankman, who’s made online friends with several women and one “gentleman,” a former opera singer, who tend to like the same classes she does. “It lifts my spirits, because I don’t get out much anymore,” she says. “My words to anyone interested would be ‘Do it, do it, do it!’ You keep learning and there’s wonderful camaraderie.”

## Evidence verifies program effectiveness

Selfhelp hears all the time about what a huge difference VSC makes in seniors’ lives, but it wanted to back that anecdotal evidence with a formal evaluation. The organization engaged Michael Gusamano, a Ph.D. research scholar at the Hastings Center, a nonprofit bioethics research institute. Also holding

adjunct appointments at Columbia University and Yale University, Dr. Gusamano is a noted expert in health policy, aging, and comparative welfare state analysis.

His study focused on changes in social connectivity, health status, digital literacy, and quality of life. It found that VSC reduced feelings of isolation by 85%; positively impacted perceived health status; improved computer literacy; and 97% of respondents reported that the program improved their quality of life. The program reduced people's feelings of being "very disconnected" by 60% and increased feelings of being "very connected" by 38%. "The results of our evaluation confirm our observations that the VSC is an important tool to reduce social isolation..." the report states.<sup>1</sup>

Facilitator Margolin sees the difference in people first hand. Typically 10 to 14 seniors attend his weekly current-events discussions. They dress up. Quiet people eventually speak. People who looked sick when they first started attending appear enlivened over time.

"It gives a reason to look forward to tomorrow," he says. "Until you're a senior citizen who's home bound, you can't imagine the value of this tool."

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– Joe Margolin, VSC instructor

Margie Jones, the retired graphics designer who lives with a collagen disorder, says her VSC online friends have become like another neighborhood she can call home. "It's like being in college again; it opens up your mind," she says. "Life has sad things in it, but if you have goals and interests and passion, good things come."

**Learn more at**  
[www.hp.com/go/healthcare](http://www.hp.com/go/healthcare)

<sup>1</sup>"Evaluation of Selfhelp's Virtual Senior Center Program," completed May 2015

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