

***It's More Than Just Tech!:
Combating Social Isolation
through Virtual Programming
Solutions***



Introduction to OATS

- **2004:** Nonprofit activist Tom Kamber and a group of volunteers launch Older Adults Technology Services (OATS) in New York City.
- **The purpose?** To help seniors learn and use technology to live better in the digital age.
- The inaugural program is a free ten-week computer course for people age 60+.
- Classes meet twice weekly in community technology labs.
- First taught in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, OATS courses are soon spreading all across New York City.
- Approach rooted in Adult Learning Theory (Andragogy)



OATS Takes Root

- Within ten years, OATS teaches 10,000 class sessions at over 70 partner sites and built 30 new computer labs in New York City.
- In March, 2013, OATS launches the Senior Planet Exploration Center in Manhattan—America’s first technology-themed community center for older adults. Nearly 15,000 seniors attend during the first year.
- The Senior Planet motto is “Aging with Attitude.”
- Senior Planet and its innovative programs receive extensive press coverage in print, television, radio, and digital media, eventually winning a PR Week award for best campaign of the year.
- The OATS content website for older adults, SeniorPlanet.org, receives over a million unique visitors each year.



OATS Expands

- 2015: OATS expands programs outside of New York City for the first time.
 - A new Senior Planet center launches in Plattsburgh, New York, focused on rural aging and technology.
 - Partnerships with local sponsors bring OATS to Maryland, Florida and California.
- In 2018, foundation grants of more than \$3 million help expand Senior Planet into Texas and Colorado.
- Also in 2018, international partnerships bring OATS to Israel and launch a consultancy in Spain.
- OATS is asked to speak on five continents promoting the ideal of “aging with attitude.”



SENIOR PLANET
EXPLORATION CENTER



Social Isolation & Loneliness

- Approximately 22% of the U.S. Population is 60+ (roughly 73 million people)
- American Community Survey (2019) found that 42.8% of households 65+ lived alone
- National Academy of Sciences report data:
 - 24% of “community-dwelling Americans” aged 65 and older are considered to be socially isolated
 - 43% of those 60+ report feeling lonely
 - 19% frequently feel lonely





Isolation vs. Loneliness

- **Isolation:** objective - separation from people, community, resources, etc.
- **Loneliness:** subjective - associated with the feelings of being alone or separated from social connections, networks or supports
- Both loneliness and isolation pose health risks, which increase in acuity for people as they age
- The factors that lead to both conditions are exacerbated by the pandemic





So What?

- Social isolation significantly increases a person's risk of mortality from all causes, a risk that may rival the risks of smoking, obesity, and physical activity ([Holt-Lunstad et al., 2017](#))
- Social isolation has been associated with a 29 percent increased all-cause risk for mortality and a 25 percent increased risk for cancer mortality ([Fleisch Marcus et al., 2017](#); [Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015](#))
- Loneliness has been associated with higher rates of clinically significant depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation ([Beutel et al., 2017](#))



Solutions

- Finding the “why”
- Engaging, age-appropriate programming that links technology to purpose
- Bridging connections through technology training and addressing social isolation/loneliness is possible, but takes a comprehensive approach that meets people where they are
- Technology sticks when the relevancy clicks





COVID Response

Pivot to digital

- OATS locations across the country ceased in-person program activity as of 3/16
- By early-April, we had converted 20+ lectures for delivery through SeniorPlanet.org; now 100+ lectures and workshops are available for free
- Developed a virtual programming framework to help shape our digital response - lectures, workshops, phone support, social events, guest speakers, and more

Virus Resource Guide

[Basics](#) · [Upcoming Events](#) · [Stuck-at-Home Guides](#) · [Connect with Friends](#) · [Health & Wellness](#)

ion? Call the Senior Planet Hotline at 920-666-1959. Or, [take this](#)

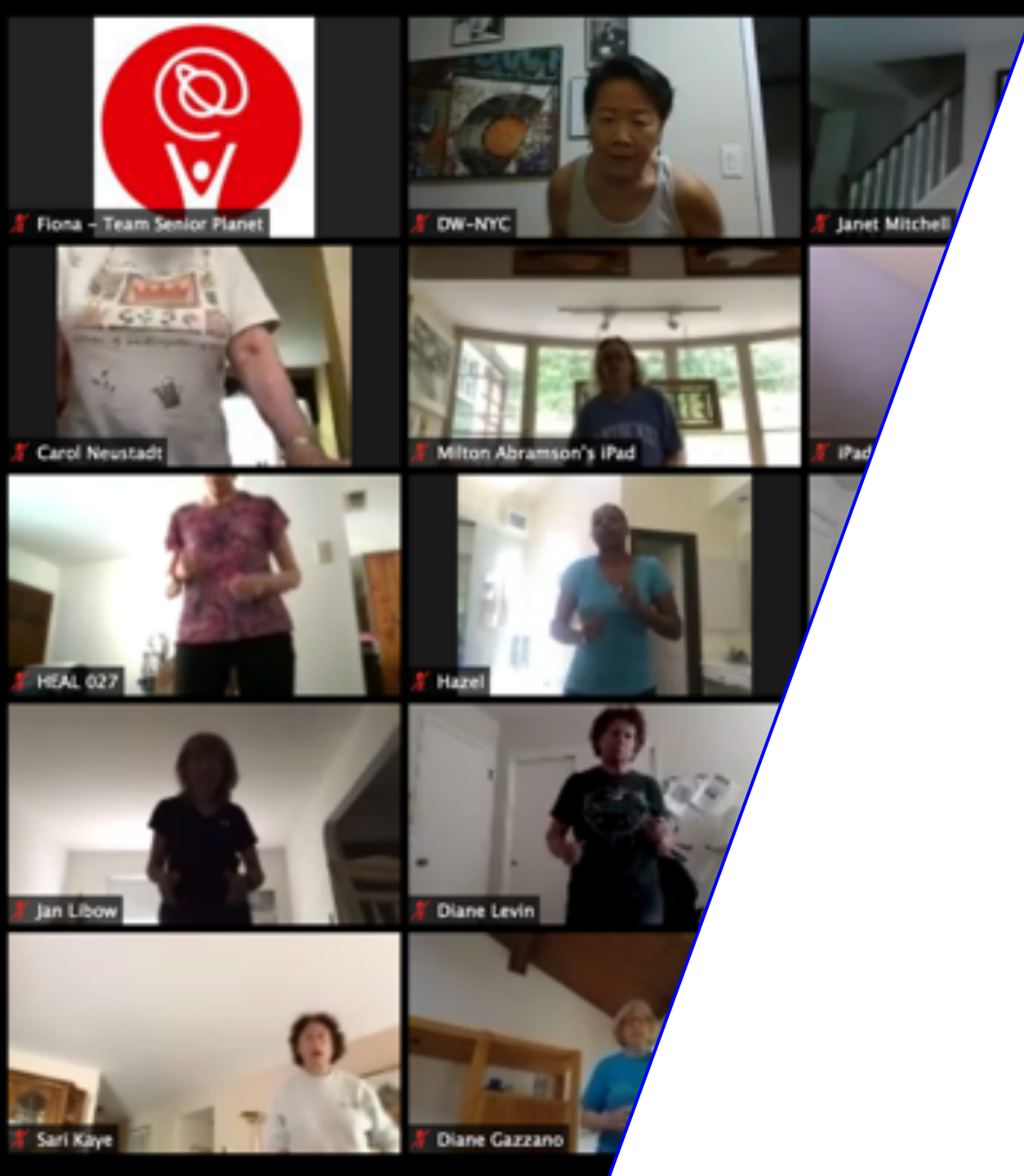
at home and stay connected to the Senior Planet community!



COVID Response

Crisis outreach

- Phone calls made as of 11/1: 8,200+
- Developed resource guides and pages
 - <https://seniorplanet.org/coronavirus>
 - <https://seniorplanet.org/online>
 - Senior Planet Stuck-at-Home-guides
 - Zoom instructions in three languages
 - [Tech Tips Video Tutorials](#)
 - National Tech-Help Hotline: 920-666-1959, plus local hotlines
 - Mainstream device recommendations
 - Low-cost internet options
 - [Zoom FAQs](#)



Updates to Programs

- 55+ virtual lectures converted from existing Senior Planet content; 45 virtual workshops
- Online Programming Framework: Developed best practices for virtual delivery
 - Explore Tech Lectures & Workshops
 - Online program series
 - Social activities, tech-talks, local special events
- Operationalized national and local hotline support systems
- Hotlines provide wraparound support before and after virtual program participation, allowing first-time technology users to build skill before participation
- Experimented with several video platforms (Zoom, Google Hangouts, OneClick.chat, Teams)
- Worked through ease-of-access and security considerations
- Increased trainer support with new guides and increased practice
- Revised and supplemented all curriculum

Taking Senior Planet Virtual



Pre-Covid

- Nearly **40,000** older adults trained in-person since 2004

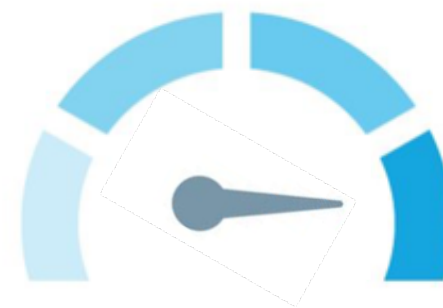


NPS

81

Post-Covid

- More than **80,000+** older adults engaged in virtual programs since 3/16



NPS

94



Impact Post- Covid

- **86%** more connected to the world around them
- **78%** more confident connecting with friends and family online
- **82%** better equipped to find resources online
- **80%** felt less alone
 - **n = 4,134*



Impact Post- Covid

I hope all is well with you and your family and that you are enjoying the summer.

I just finished an assignment as poll worker for the Board of Elections and had been assigned work for all of the early voting days and the actual primary day. We used the iPad, and it reminded me of our class, because without the class, I would not have been comfortable using an iPad. I have already been selected to work in the Nov. Presidential Elections, if it is not conducted by mail-in ballots, due to the virus.

Now, another milestone, with a portion of my earnings, I just bought a 1997 Chrysler Sebring Convertible so that I can get to my pool club in New Jersey and be able to interact with people again, as no one wants to come into the city in the summer.

So, Jeanette, a big shout out for your help in getting me here. Many people are depressed because of the conditions today, but I am of a positive state-of-mind because with knowledge all is possible to improve one's life!

*Best regards,
Marcia Lee*



Learnings

4 challenges

- Instruction
- Infrastructure
- Impact
- Launch

5 solutions

- Operationalized hotline
- Continuum of support
- Trainer support
- Revised curriculum
- Solving continuity issues with community

2 unknowns

- Is the virtual model sustainable?
- Are interventions addressing the needs of the pandemic?

1 outstanding problem

- Maintaining high-level impact

THANK YOU

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