



Leo M. Asen, seated, and Milton Greidinger appear before the NYC Council's Aging Committee.

Selfhelp Testimony to the NYC Council's Aging Committee Hearing

Leo M. Asen, Selfhelp's Vice President of Senior Communities, testified before the New York City's Aging Committee on October 28, 2011. The hearing, on the oversight of seniors and technology, provided Selfhelp the opportunity to share its innovative methods of using technology to improve the lives of seniors.

Mr. Asen described several ways in which technology has efficiently and effectively improved the level of care our clients receive. The Virtual Senior Center (VSC), developed by Microsoft, the city of New York and Selfhelp and funded in large part by UJA-Federation of New York, has literally changed lives since its inception in 2010. VSC enables homebound seniors to connect to the Benjamin Rosenthal Prince Street Senior Center, friends near and far and the world, reducing their social isolation and improving their quality of life with a click of a button.

VSC has been so successful that Selfhelp is expanding the number of participants and developing new programs. A popular recent addition, virtual museum tours, offers seniors the opportunity to visit area museums from their home. One VSC participant, Mr. Milton Greidinger, a homebound senior in Queens, participated in the hearing via Microsoft's Skype. Mr. Greidinger asserted that his life has been transformed by VSC. "Before this project, I was bored to death," he says. "I was just waiting for my time to finish. Now all of a sudden, I'm wide awake. I'm alive again."

Social workers use VSC to increase contact with participants. They visually evaluate them during video chats and can identify and address client needs sooner. They also utilize telehealth, another technology Selfhelp has implemented. The Telehealth Kiosk program, now used in two of our housing units through a generous grant from Enterprise Community Partners, allows participants to self-monitor their vital statistics by using a touch-screen device. The kiosks collect and process biometric data from participants, such as blood pressure, blood oxygen saturation and weight as well as ask them health literacy/education questions. If values are outside normal ranges, the system notifies a telehealth nurse to evaluate and, if appropriate, call and talk with the participant to determine if a clinical or social service intervention is required. Selfhelp community nurses follow up and assist the senior to ensure they receive the education, support and guidance needed to prevent a situation from becoming an emergency.

With VSC, telehealth and in-home monitoring devices, Selfhelp is leading the way in combining high tech and high touch experiences. Based on our experiences, we believe that appropriately designed and implemented technology has unique potential to improve the delivery of services to seniors. As a living laboratory, Selfhelp works with private and public organizations to advance usage of technology within the aging services field.