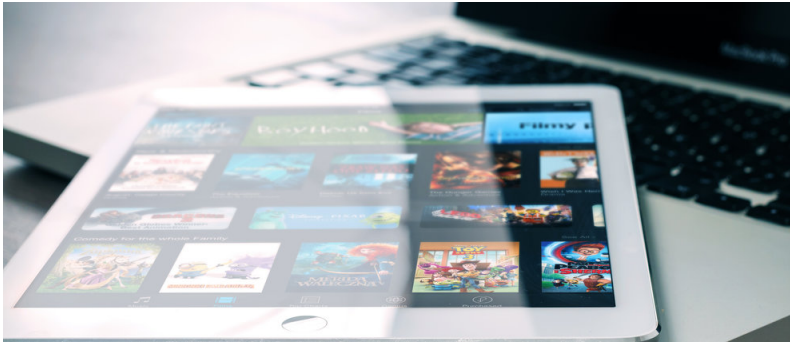


# How technology can help combat social isolation



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**The world's leading expert on loneliness suggests that online sites can be valuable tools – if they are used to develop offline social connections.**

Social connectedness is a known protector against loneliness. Across Europe, there are initiatives that have been designed to bring people together, with the aim of alleviating isolation.

From befriending schemes and community navigator initiatives that help give vulnerable individuals access to the right services and support, to inclusive community projects that foster social connections, initiatives focus on starting a conversation and facilitating community involvement. Individual support and group interventions make a significant difference to people's lives.

One of the first steps towards tackling loneliness and isolation is identifying those who are most at risk. Loneliness mapping, where services and local authorities use existing data to predict where the most isolated residents live, can be used as a preventative measure. They can then focus resources towards the people and places who need them most.

## What about technology?

Technology can also play a key role in addressing loneliness, enabling people to stay connected and empowered. John Cacioppo (<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/05/is-facebook-making-us-lonely/308930/>), the late world-leading expert on loneliness, suggests that although online contact can sometimes increase loneliness, these sites can be valuable tools if they are used to develop offline social connections:

*"If you use Facebook to increase face-to-face contact, it increases social capital."*

It may be unhealthy to turn to social media as a substitute for actual encounters, but if internet sites are used to organise a football game, a community meetup, or a conversation, they can be a healthy way to maintain and build social ties. For those with long-term illness, technology can offer a vital solution to isolation by overcoming barriers to social connection.





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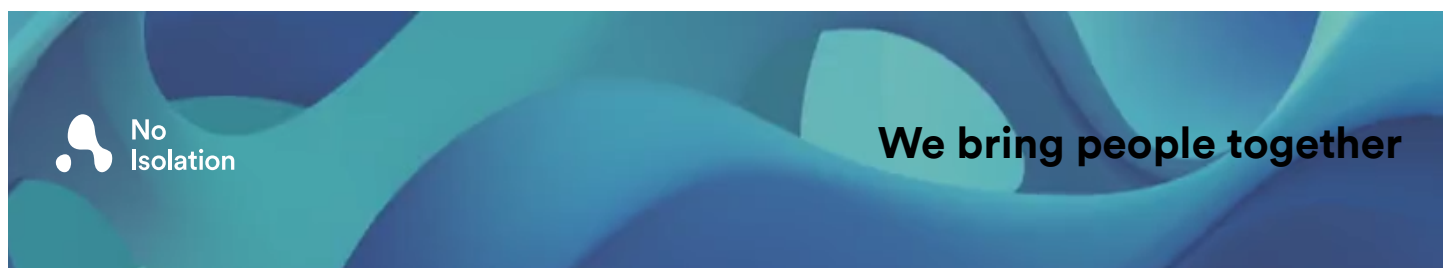
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