



Grants from Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Shelter Rock and  
Other Community Organizations will Bring  
Selfhelp/Kimmel's Acclaimed **Virtual Senior Center** to Nassau County's Homebound Elderly

Live Classes and Online Friendships Aim to Combat Isolation and Promote Wellness

[New York City – October 7] --The Selfhelp/Kimmel nonprofit partnership is expanding the nationally acclaimed Virtual Senior Center (VSC) initiative to a select number of homebound seniors in Nassau County in October. The VSC, already available in Queens (NY), Chicago, San Diego and Baltimore, is an innovative program using technology to easily connect homebound elderly through live interactive classes and online activities to help thwart the deleterious effects of social isolation. Planning for the expansion to Nassau was made possible by a grant from the Long Island Community Foundation, and implementation of the program by a \$100,000 grant from the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock (UUCSR) in Manhasset and supporting grants from the Manhasset Community Fund and Hofstra University's National Center for Suburban Studies.

The Long Island VSC launches officially this fall and kicks off with a special preview for community groups and a media event October 7, featuring a live class demonstration and offering the opportunity to speak with participating seniors as well as the program sponsors.

The initial curriculum of local live classes hosted by the Glen Cove Senior Center, the Sid Jacobson Jewish Community Center in East Hills and the Magnolia Senior Center in Long Beach, will include classes on current events, painting, the history of Long Island and more. Recruitment of the 24 Long Island senior participants began in August and is ongoing.

The seniors' residences will be outfitted with a touchscreen, VSC-enabled computer and assistive technology. The hardware will be installed, training provided and technical support made available so that the seniors can easily take part in live classes and connect with the Internet for a range of other options. Classes will be streamed live from the participating senior centers. The Long Island-based seniors will also have access to all VSC classes initiated by the NYC/Queens, Chicago, San Diego and Baltimore VSC partners, including special live events and discussions from the Guggenheim, the Museum of Modern Art, the New

York Historical Society, the New York Hall of Science, weekly wellness classes including yoga and Karate movements, current events discussions, technology that can connect the seniors with far-away friends and relatives, as well as courses on self-esteem, managing your finances, computer skills, support groups, book and movie review classes, virtual vacations and celebrations for holidays and birthdays. [Click here for a story about the VSC from the Wall Street Journal <http://tinyurl.com/kamog77> ]

“When Selfhelp and Kimmel formed our partnership last year,” said Stuart C. Kaplan, CEO of Selfhelp Community Services, “we had hopes of bringing the VSC to Long Island’s homebound seniors. But we had no idea a pilot project would take shape so soon. We are delighted and most grateful to the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Shelter Rock, the Long Island Community Foundation, the Manhasset Community Fund and Hofstra University’s National Center for Suburban Studies for making this dream a reality.”

“Long Island is the perfect area to expand access to the Virtual Senior Center,” said Ronald Roel, a member of the Board of Directors of the Kimmel Housing Development Foundation, and part of the Selfhelp/Kimmel partnership. “Nassau and Suffolk are among the fastest growing aging populations in the state, and with so many seniors aging in place, we need to find creative and cost-effective ways to keep seniors healthy and connected in their homes.”

“Funding awarded by our Large Grants Program is decided by a vote of the members of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock,” said president, Nancy Chen Baldwin. “The grant to the Virtual Senior Center demonstrates our congregational commitment to improve the lives of those who are historically underserved. Part of UUCSR’s mission is to support efforts consistent with our religious and spiritual perspectives that are aided by community partners. We are proud to sponsor this promising pilot introduction of the Virtual Senior Center and are eager to witness the impact it will have on seniors in Nassau County.”

A separate grant from The Manhasset Community Fund’s Good Neighbor Grant program will help identify and prepare an additional four seniors, bringing the total pilot participation to 24 homebound seniors who will have access to a broad-based curriculum of interactive and discussion-oriented programming from across the country. Long Island-generated classes will be offered four times a week. Additionally, seniors will be able to enjoy the classes live at three participating centers in Long Island over the course of the year.

“This is a wonderful idea!” says Jamy Kanas Santoro, Long Island’s first Virtual Senior Center participant. “Due to health reasons I couldn’t physically get out to go to places where I could enrich my mind. Now I am busy with interesting classes, meeting new friends.” Jamy, who is an inspiration to many as a 10-year survivor of Stage 4 breast cancer, says “the VSC has the potential to become a great, great thing.” She enjoys a wide range of classes including special presentations by the Museum of Modern Art, music, and nutrition discussions through which participants enjoy swapping recipes.

“Without exaggeration,” says David Dring, Executive Director of Selfhelp Innovations, “I can tell you the VSC is a life-changing experience. It promotes good physical and emotional health, dispels loneliness and can spark a new interest in life. You only need to see it once in use to believe its potential.” Dring has been meeting with community groups across the country to help expand access to the VSC as well as to develop high quality content.

*Virtual Senior Center: Click here to Change Your Life*

Since its inception in 2010 as part of a demonstration project involving Selfhelp, Microsoft and the City of New York, the Virtual Senior Center has grown to include an impressive variety of classes from hubs in four major cities. The VSC today boasts countless testimonials from the seniors themselves explaining how the VSC enabled them to re-engage with life – in a way that has had a profound impact on their outlook, health and emotional well-being.

“This program is such a wonderful thing for seniors like me,” says Elizabeth Pula, who has been homebound for years. “I feel like I am with my peers. We are all alone, but connected. I am making friends with the other participants. It is just wonderful,” she adds.

Similarly, Shirley (age 85) explains, “I check the class schedule before I go to sleep and I look forward to tomorrow. This program has enriched my life. I have friends I can talk with every day.”

Selfhelp is in the process of gathering statistically significant and publishable outcomes data from the VSC experience, which will help quantify the physical and emotional benefits for seniors participating in the program.

The VSC effectively helps to fight one of the most significant threats to emotional and physical health as we age...and that’s isolation. Often underestimated by the general public, health professionals have come to realize the profound and crippling effects loneliness can create, as reported in this recent article in LeadingAge Magazine <http://tinyurl.com/ormd8pr> .

*How the Public Can Help--  
Calling all Class Facilitators*

“We are committed to expanding the VSC’s curriculum over time,” explains Dring. “And that means identifying new and worthwhile classes as well as instructors. We prefer to call them ‘facilitators’ because it doesn’t really require extensive previous teaching experience. If you have a passion and a talent – whether it’s singing, playing a musical instrument, teaching a language, moderating a discussion group, teaching a cooking class on great 20-minute meals, sharing simple computer shortcuts...or any one of a thousand different topics...we’d like to hear from you. As a facilitator the experience may be just as rewarding for you as it is for the senior participants.”

Selfhelp invites qualified individuals interested in facilitating a class to check out the requirements posted on Selfhelp's website, or to contact Selfhelp's Senior Program Administrator, Carmella Chessen, at [cchessen@selfhelp.net](mailto:cchessen@selfhelp.net).

#### *About Selfhelp Community Services*

Selfhelp Community Services, which serves more than 20,000 seniors in the NYC-area, is a 78-year old nonprofit organization dedicated to maintaining the independence and dignity of seniors and at-risk populations through a spectrum of housing, home health care, and social services. It leads in applying new methods and technologies to address changing needs of its community. Selfhelp remains true to its founding mission to serve as the "last surviving relative" to its historic constituency, victims of Nazi persecution.

<http://www.selfhelp.net>

Selfhelp and Kimmel formed a partnership in 2013, drawn together by their shared commitment to build housing and communities that promote the individual's independence, health and well-being.

#### *About the Kimmel Housing Development Foundation (KHDF)*

Since its inception in 1994, Kimmel's mission has focused on creating affordable housing for low and very low income people: seniors, working families, single heads of households, veterans and others with special housing needs. Established initially as the Anna and Phillip Kimmel Foundation, KHDF has developed and maintains two residential buildings in Nassau County recognized as models for suburban affordable rental housing.

<http://www.kimmelhousing.org>

#### *About the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock*

Founded in 1940, UUCSR has over 600 members and is the largest Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Long Island. Located in Manhasset, NY, we honor the diversity of beliefs and shared values of our members in serving our religious mission of worship, education for all ages, fellowship and social justice. We as a congregation aspire to be a loving, religious community where members can grow spiritually and build a more just and joyful world.

<http://www.uucsr.org/>