

No Isolation

The company on a mission to end loneliness and social isolation

No Isolation designs, manufactures and markets user-led devices that help excluded groups – such as the elderly and children with long-term illnesses – reconnect to society.

With its user-centered design approach, No Isolation has become a leading proponent of ‘warm technology’ – defined as technology that seeks to accommodate human behaviours and meet emotional needs, rather than replacing them. Rather than being adapted from existing tools, warm technology communication products are built from scratch, with the specific needs of niche user groups as the key building blocks. The result is a highly targeted communication tool that generates a ‘warm’ feeling of connection and belonging.

This entails a research process rooted in direct engagement with potential users, makes sure the design solves the right problems, and results in a product that is accessible and intuitive to use. Warm tech doesn’t demand anything of the user, it simply makes their life easier.

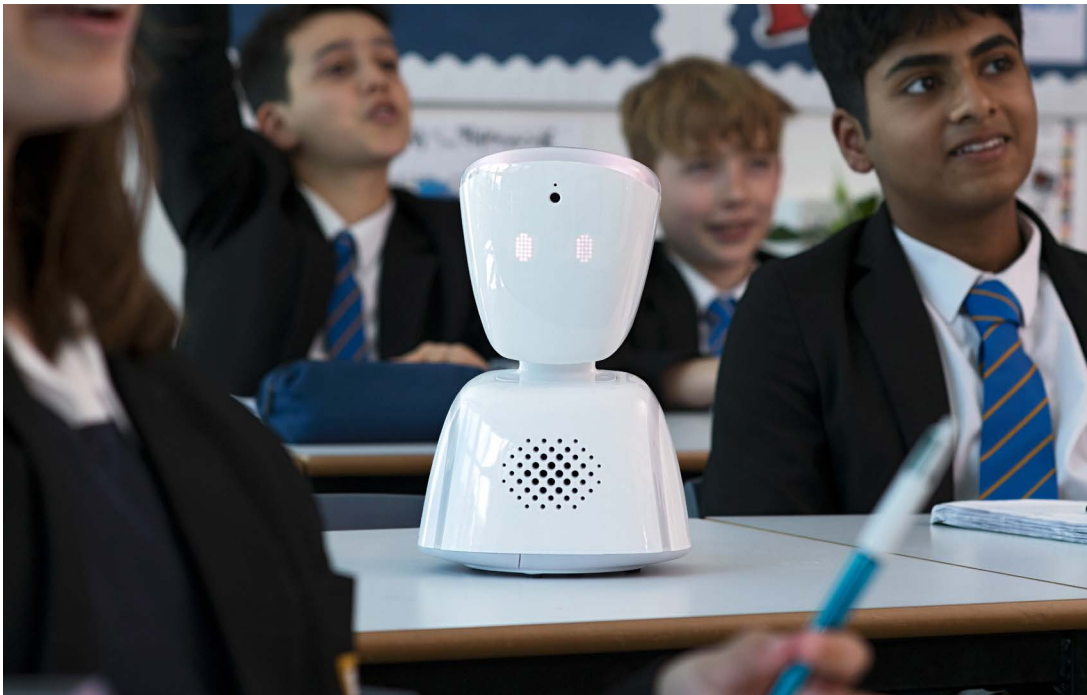
The problem of loneliness

Across the modern world, loneliness is a serious and growing societal and public health issue that can affect anyone, regardless of demographic, age or education. The effects of loneliness – and the social isolation that often causes it – can be profoundly damaging not only to our mental health, but to our physical health as well.

According to research conducted by the [Campaign to End Loneliness](#) in the UK, the health impact of loneliness is comparable to other high-profile risk factors such as obesity, air pollution and smoking, increasing mortality by as much as 26%. Lonely adults are more prone to high blood pressure, heart disease, depression and dementia. In younger people, prolonged social isolation can result in poorer educational outcomes, reduced self-esteem and psychological distress in later life.

After 2020 – a year in which the pandemic necessitated a series of lockdowns worldwide – the impact of loneliness and isolation has been felt more widely than ever before. No Isolation believes that, for all the talk about technology pushing us apart, warm technology can also be used to bring us together, easing or even eliminating loneliness and extending lives as a result.

AV1 – keeping kids connected to the classroom



In 2021–22, approximately 1.7 million children in the UK were persistently absent. Launched in 2016, AV1 is a robot avatar that acts as a child's eyes, ears and voice in the classroom when illness, disability or mental health conditions prevent them from being there in person.

AV1 was conceived in response to an encounter between No Isolation founder Karen Dolva and a woman who had lost her child to cancer. While her daughter was ill, the physical pain of the illness and treatment was secondary to the social isolation she suffered as a result of being separated from her school and her friends. Dolva set up No Isolation with the aim of helping children in similar situations maintain a connection to their education and social life, when illness or disability would otherwise have prevented them.

Developed in collaboration with children, teachers, scientists, families and the St Olav Hospital School, AV1 is an app-linked device fitted with a camera, speaker and microphone, that opens up a two-way audio and one-way visual channel between the student and their classmates, allowing them to learn

alongside their peers, and maintain social contact with their friends, without obliging them to appear on camera themselves – which can often be a source of concern and/or discomfort.

Standing 30cm tall and weighing 1.5kg, AV1 sits neatly on a desk, or can be easily carried by friends in the playground. Two motors enable AV1 to raise and lower its head or revolve up to 360°, enabling the student to see and hear everything going on in the classroom; and 4G and WiFi connectivity ensure it can function both indoors and out.



Today, AV1 is provided to children with illnesses and/or disabilities by 50 local authorities in the UK and has been used by more than 1000 schools.

“ [AV1] enabled one of my students to take six GCSEs this summer who previously hadn't been in full time education for years. It's a marvellous, inclusive device – highly recommend it to all schools.

– Louise Clancy, Head Teacher at Canbury School, London

Komp – digitally connecting the analogue generation



In 2017, following the successful adoption of AV1 across Europe, No Isolation turned its attention to a demographic at the other end of the spectrum. KOMP is an intuitive digital-communications computer for those who grew up in an analogue world.

Approached by the Norwegian Cancer Society and asked whether AV1 could be used to support elderly cancer patients, No Isolation saw the need for a communications platform bespoke to the needs of older people and others for whom the demands of digital technology proved obstructive. Many older people are cut off from digital social networks – and therefore their own families – by overcomplicated devices and digital barriers such as the need to remember passwords, small screens, and unresponsive touchscreens, caused by dry skin on fingertips and reduced circulation.

With a single rotary button (a mechanism familiar to anyone who has ever used a wireless radio), Komp allows its user to maintain contact with family and friends by receiving video calls, messages and photos shared via a secure app. The device features a wide high-definition screen, clear high-volume audio and WiFi connectivity. The design is kept deliberately simple to make sure there is no possibility for human error and that the communication experience is always seamless and hassle-free.

Since Komp's launch in June 2017, around 12 million moments (video calls, photos, messages) have been shared through the device.

Spokesperson Karen Dolva – CEO and co-founder



Karen studied computer science and interaction design at the University of Oslo, began her career at StartupLab Oslo, and went on to co-found the user-experience consultancy UX Lab during her final semester, where she specialised in digital user experiences. She was inspired to found No Isolation by meeting Anne Fi Troye, who, after losing her own daughter to cancer, was determined to improve the lives of children in hospital by ensuring they didn't feel alone. Karen applied her own area of expertise to develop a tech-based solution to the same problem – No Isolation and its first product, AV1, were the result.

Karen regularly speaks on the subject of loneliness and isolation; delivered a TEDx talk about loneliness in 2018; has been featured in Forbes 30 under 30 and was named one of the BBC's 100 Most Influential Women in 2020.

What inspired you to make ending loneliness your mission?

I, like most people, have experienced loneliness. What drove my co-founders and I to set up No Isolation was the idea that technology could potentially contribute positively rather than negatively.

How has your perception of loneliness evolved since you started No Isolation?

Significantly, I've discovered how closely connected loneliness is with depression and, in turn, with our physical health. I've also been surprised by how taboo the subject is. Admitting you're lonely can be painful, and almost impossible for many people. I also thought of loneliness as something that afflicted those who were physically on their own, but on the contrary, it is possible to be lonely even when surrounded by people – even loved ones.

What three things would you recommend we can do to end loneliness in our society?

We need to talk about loneliness, and build an understanding in the population for what loneliness actually is. Governments across the world should focus on and spend money on awareness and initiatives that can contribute positively. Investing money in preventing loneliness has been proven to reduce cost over time significantly.

When an understanding is there I think more people will analyse themselves and discover what they are personally missing. Loneliness is individual, so one solution will not work for everyone. Governments and other authorities should analyse what their users might need to feel included and achieve a sense of belonging.

Warm technology, non-profit organisations and the public need to team up to be able to solve this for everyone. Loneliness is not something a single organisation or the government can solve on its own; it's a complex issue that needs to be addressed from several perspectives.

Do you have plans for more products?

I hope we eventually will work with all the demographic groups that experience social isolation. For now, we have our hands full with making sure our two products truly deliver on their potential to change lives for the better.

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