Vincles - Tackling loneliness amongst the elderly by strengthening networks of trust

About our Innovation

**Challenge**

Social isolation and feelings of loneliness are a growing problem in society which have a negative impact on health and quality of life, especially for older people.

**Idea**

The Vincles digital platform supports elderly people who feel lonely to build and maintain their personal trust networks in order to communicate with and meet new people.

**Intended impact**

- Increase the quality and frequency of communication for older people, enabling them to identify and develop more meaningful relationships.
- Build a sense of belonging within a social group through the use of digital technology which supports group-based communication.
- Decreased feelings of loneliness amongst elderly people in Barcelona.

### Our journey implementing our idea

Building a team of experts: increasing collaboration across disciplines to tackle the issue of loneliness

Gathering diverse perspectives on the issue

Designing a service that is meaningful for users

Building on the expertise that exists

Establishing ways of working together as a team

We are building a team of experts to work together in three main areas: understanding the issue of loneliness and social isolation, developing the Vincles service and developing technology to support the service. Creating a team with varying expertise requires coordination and working together requires shared goals, a shared vision and, above all, a culture of collaboration.

### Next steps

- Identifying and investing in training needed for the new service
  - Developing a new service and new technology means people involved in delivering the service need to learn a new way of doing things, and this takes training, resources and time.
  - Through a service design approach, we are defining the user experience journey of both the older person and their shadow (closest person to them in the network), which will highlight where the opportunities for training might be and what might be needed at each point.

- Holding a conference with the Vincles team alongside all the suppliers and collaborators
  - Working in parallel on various aspects of the project with a high level of interdependency means managing a wide team formed by external and internal suppliers. This requires a different way of working, with open and clear communication, and time and space for shaping things together at points.

### Key learning

- To get a better understanding of loneliness in old age we commissioned the researchers at the University of Barcelona (Health and Ageing Foundation of the UAB) to share their insights with us. We have now redefined the challenge of isolation as loneliness (feeling lonely).
- We have worked with users, user experts and service design experts to bring together:
  - Learning from engagement with 20 potential suppliers.
  - In-house expertise to ensure it is reflected in the development of both the service and the technology.
  - Knowledge about loneliness.
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- For us it was important that everyone in the team was open and able to share their thoughts; not just successes but also worries, challenges and potential risks. Bringing everyone’s feedback into the room has been key because “We are not used to being so open”.
- “At the beginning I was confused... what helped was working with economists, people very different from what I’m used to” Lali Andreu

### Key activity

- Developing user personas and mapping user journeys to ensure the service responds to user needs.
- Having a person as ‘the glue’ in the technology team, specifically tasked with liaising with the different suppliers and the Vincles team.
- Creating space for open discussion across mixed working groups to gather feedback.
- Set ways of working and group norms that enable teamwork and meaningful collaboration when you’re working with people from different backgrounds.

### Who is involved?

- Led by the Barcelona City Council’s Area of Social Rights.
- Maria Gas (Director of Life Cycles)
- Marta Juan Serra (Project Director)
- Lali Andreu (Service Development Lead)
- Alfon Sanchez (Technology Lead)

### Building on the expertise that exists

- We have worked with experts in each of the different suppliers and the Vincles team.
- Having a person as ‘the glue’ in the technology team, specifically tasked with liaising with the different suppliers and the Vincles team.

### Establishing ways of working together as a team

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### Gathering diverse perspectives on the issue

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### Challenges and Vision

- Decreased feelings of loneliness amongst elderly people.
- Increased collaboration across disciplines.
- Building a sense of belonging within a social group through the use of digital technology.
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### Intended impact

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