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## **For Immediate Release**

### **Verde Valley Caregivers increasing healthcare and social connections for seniors**

**August 14, 2020—Sedona—** Older adults who live alone can fight loneliness and isolation by staying connected to family, friends, and their healthcare providers. Verde Valley Caregivers Coalition plans to help seniors do this by utilizing their smart phones and tablets.

Through a partnership with Northern Arizona University nursing students, VVCC recently surveyed 264 of its neighbors (older adults enrolled to receive VVCC services), with an average age of 77. The survey found 71% of respondents have a cell phone, personal tablet, or computer with internet service. The survey also found 28 percent are not comfortable using the technology, and another 29 percent do not have the technology at all.

“The gap between those who can and cannot afford internet services and smart phones, tablets, or computers, or the availability of training will result in more and more adults and seniors feeling isolated and left behind,” said VVCC Executive Director Kent Ellsworth.

The need to stay-safe by staying home during the COVID-19 pandemic has especially affected older adults who are vulnerable to the deadly consequences of the virus, Ellsworth adds. “Although trained VVCC volunteers and staff social workers are regularly reaching out by phone to check-in on well-being and health, our elderly neighbors are noting increased loneliness, anxiety, and depression with being so isolated.”

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To improve the health and social connectedness for older adults, VVCC plans to increase communication through technology coaching including internet, smart-phone and tablet applications, and computer training. Technology training would be provided by trained tech coach volunteers and staff. This program will also assist seniors with solving internet access problems by providing or arranging signal boosters.

In early August, VVCC launched an initial pilot to test the Tech Coach program concept with one tech coach volunteer providing direct support for VVCC neighbors to utilize their mobile smartphone to connect with their family members who live out-of-state and to their primary care physician. At this early stage, the three neighbors who received our direct, in-home assistance with downloading and using apps and with entering contacts all express their complete satisfaction and gratefulness for having this assistance. These early recipients of this service all state they gave up using regular customer support services provided by their mobile phone service.

“Long before the current COVID-19 pandemic environment of isolating at home was in effect, researchers were studying consequences of prolonged isolation on older adults,” Ellsworth said.

According to the National Institute on Aging, “Research has linked isolation and loneliness to higher risks for a variety of physical and mental conditions: high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, anxiety, depression, cognitive decline, Alzheimer’s disease, and even death. Conversely, people who engage in activities with others tend to live longer, boost their mood, and have a sense of purpose.”

VVCC is seeking funding for the new Tech Coach Program. Ellsworth said, right now, and through the foreseeable future of stay-at-home, stay-safe, increasing resources for technology

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coaching will enable our neighbors to interact with their world and reduce the detrimental health effects of isolation. Ellsworth continues, “We want to add life to your years by helping you get and stay connected.”

VVCC is in its 28th year serving approximately 1,800 older adults throughout the Verde Valley. Volunteers drive neighbors to the grocery store, medical appointments, dialysis, physical therapy and other important appointments. Volunteers also provide home safety checks, shop for neighbors, provide business help, patient scribe, respite and pet assistance. VVCC also loans Guardian Angel emergency alert units to older adults at risk for falling.

For information about VVCC services, volunteering, or becoming a tech coach, please call (928) 204-1238. You may also visit our website at: [www.vvcaregivers.org](http://www.vvcaregivers.org) for a full list of volunteer opportunities. You decide when and how often you can volunteer.

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