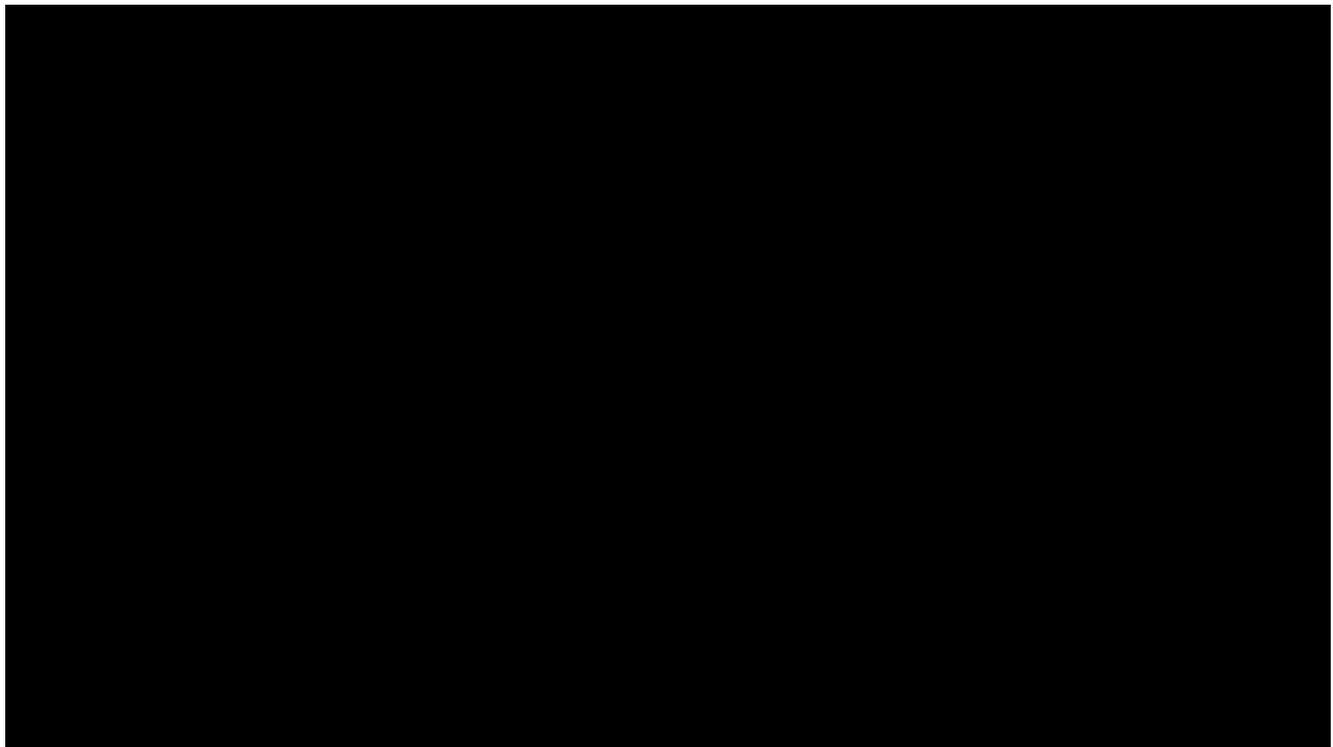


Robotic pets helping people combat loneliness during COVID-19 pandemic



It's not a real dog, but the health benefits of a robotic companion pet are proving to be just as real. Evalina Standifer received an Ageless Innovations Joy For All companion pet in November. The pet was originally designed as a consumer product to inspire play, but the pandemic revealed an even more powerful use, a potential treatment for depression and anxiety, possibly even slowing or reversing dementia disorders, which are all proven to progress more rapidly in isolation.



By: Jennifer Ann Wilson

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(WXYZ) — It’s not a real dog, but the health benefits of a robotic companion pet are proving to be just as real.

Evalina Standifer received an [Ageless Innovations Joy For All](#) companion pet in November. The pet was originally designed as a consumer product to inspire play, but the pandemic revealed an even more powerful use, a potential treatment for depression and anxiety, possibly even slowing or reversing dementia disorders, which are all proven to progress more rapidly in isolation.

“I was a little skeptical at first, but the feedback we have gotten has just been so positive. I mean this has been a life changing experience for some folks,” says Dr. Thomas B. Jankowski, a research gerontologist at Wayne State University.

He says social isolating to protect loved ones from COVID-19 has amplified another serious health risk, loneliness.

“Severe loneliness can affect your physical health as much as smoking and obesity does,” says Dr. Jankowski.

“The lonelier you are, the sicker you get.”

**“THE LONELIER
YOU ARE,
THE SICKER
YOU GET.”**

DR. THOMAS B. JANKOWSKI
RESEARCH GERONTOLOGIST, WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY



Loneliness and social isolation can be as damaging to health as smoking 15 cigarettes, [according to federal data](#).

The National Academy of Sciences conducted a study in 2020 that revealed, 1/4 of those over 65 are considered socially isolated. They are 50 percent more likely to develop dementia;
30 percent more likely to have heart disease or a stroke.

But in the midst of a pandemic: “How do you help people when you can’t have contact with them,” says Dr. Jankowski.

The Senior Alliance of Western Wayne County launched Hotlines and Zoom programs but knew they needed to do more.

“We were taking a look at all the resources available to older adults when it came to isolation during the pandemic,” says Andrew Dabrowski, program manager at the Senior Alliance.

He acquired 30 companion robot pets in November just to see how they would work.

“Are they making the impact? And I would say just based on anecdotal feedback, it’s been overwhelmingly positive,” says Dabrowski.

The [Joy For All Companion](#) dog reacts to touch and voice.

Barking and whining, moving its eyes, wagging it's tail and turning it's head in response. When you snuggle, you can feel the heart beating.

In about a dozen small studies done across the country, these pets have consistently:

- Reduced depression and anxiety
- Slowed cognitive decline
- Increased cognitive capability

[JFA Impact Benefit Exec Summary](#) by [WXYZ-TV Channel 7 Detroit](#) on Scribd



Impact and Benefit White Paper: Executive Summary

Introduction

Ageless Innovation's Joy for All Companion Pets were originally launched by Hasbro as a consumer product for older adults in 2015. They were designed with the goal of inspiring play, fun, and companionship among a population that is too often overlooked as needing something as simple and pure as "play."

Seeing potential

As interest in the pets grew among consumers, health care professionals across senior living communities, memory care communities, hospitals, and health plans became intrigued by the potential impact of the Joy for All Companion Pets.

Specifically, there was interest in measuring how the pets could address two of the most prominent challenges associated with aging:

1. Supporting individuals and caregivers of those with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias (ADRD)
2. Aiding individuals who are suffering from social isolation and loneliness

From this, more than 10 research projects – each independently initiated and led by care professionals – have been conducted on the effectiveness of Joy for All Companion Pets in improving the overall quality of life and care for older adults.

Seeing results

Woven throughout each of these independent studies are the consistent themes of reduced feelings of isolation and loneliness and improved quality of care and life for older adults, their families, and care providers. Findings include:

- Reduced feelings of depression, isolation and loneliness
- Mitigating ADRD decline and associated behavioral issues
- Providing an engaging experience that calms individuals without use of medication
- Improved cognitive activity and capability
- Helping to provide a sense of purpose
- Reducing the burden of care for care partners (professionals and family members)

Continued positive reach

Equally encouraging to the study results themselves is the scalability of the pets' impact and reach. There is high broader distribution potential of the pets to achieve similar positive outcomes. Joy for All pets' proven impact, ease of use, and cost effectiveness compared to many other interventions make it an ideal opportunity for care providers and leaders to consider in their efforts to address the needs of our older and most vulnerable adult populations.

Study outcomes at a glance

	Researcher	Setting	Primary Findings
	AARP/UnitedHealthcare	Home	Reduced loneliness and improved well being (i.e. purpose, resilience)
	University of Albany/Albany Medical Center	Hospital/ICU	Addressed ADRD-related behavioral issues (i.e. delirium)
	Wrexham Glyndwr University, UK	Home	Addressed ADRD-related behavioral issues and increased social interaction
	Pace University/Jamaica Hospital Medical Center	Hospital	Reduced delirium, improved mood, reduced loneliness
	Alacare Home Health & Hospice	Home (hospice)	Reduced agitation, reduced depression, reduced loneliness in those with ADRD
	VA/Sierra Nevada Health Care System	Community Living Center	Reduced ADRD-related behavioral issues and improved mood
	James Madison University/ Bridgewater Retirement Community	Long Term Care	Reduced ADRD-related behavioral issues, reduced loneliness, and reduced caregiver burden
	The Association of Relatives of Alzheimer Patients. (AFEDAZ), Spain	Centers	Reduced ADRD-related behavioral issues, reduced loneliness, and increased social interaction
	Florida Atlantic University, College of Nursing	Adult Day Care	Improved mood and decreased depression
	University of Plymouth, UK	Assisted Living Facility	Improved wellbeing, reduced anxiety and agitation

For more information go to www.agelessinnovation.com

In one anecdotal case, a patient spoke for the first time in years, to her doggie.

“It’s helping prevent people from having to see their doctor more often from having to take a trip to the hospital,” says Dr. Jankowski.

Evalina’s daughter says she noticed her mom is calmer at night, the robotic dog seems to ease her anxiety and bring her comfort.



“I think it’s a security and the fact that he does move gives a sense of friendship and companionship.”

**EVALINA STANDIFER
OWNS A ROBOTIC PET**



"I think it’s a security and the fact that he does move gives a sense of friendship and companionship," she says.

The Senior Alliance of Western Wayne County has hundreds more robot companion pets they want to give away for free to seniors in need. They say other senior resource centers in the area are looking into distributing them, too.

Call the [Senior Alliance in Western Wayne County](#) at 734-722-2830 or 800-815-1112

You can also reach out to them by email and through their Facebook Page.

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