

The Vincles project: reducing social isolation using digital inclusion

The challenge

More than 300,000, or 20 percent, of Barcelona's elderly residents live alone, and a third of these people are over 80. This isolation not only reduces their quality of life, but also increases their risk of developing health complications. How has Barcelona City Council's Vincles project helped to improve people's health and wellbeing by increasing their interaction with others?

“ Vincles looks at ageing in a positive way, empowering the individual to be truly independent. It starts with what is possible rather than the deficit; it is about prevention rather than cure.

Fermin Minguez Orayen, Chief Project Management Officer, Tunstall Spain

What we did

Vincles, which means “social ties” in Catalan, is an app-based service designed to strengthen and expand older people's personal and social networks. The project is funded by the Bloomberg Philanthropies Mayors Challenge Prize, which contributed €5m towards the creation of a digital and community ‘trust network’.

Managed and delivered by Tunstall, Vincles is a social innovation aimed at people over 65 who have a feeling of unwanted loneliness, whose objective is to strengthen the relationships of older people, both with their family and friends and with people in their neighbourhood. Referrals can be received from health and social care professionals, from the existing Barcelona teleassistance service or from individuals who wish to use the service. Tunstall staff also make proactive visits to community centres to promote the service to potential users.



Participants use an app on digital tablet, which allows them to make voice or video calls, and send messages and photographs. They also have access to a calendar, where they can record social events and appointments. Regular meetings and activities are also organised, with Tunstall staff using the calendar to invite members.

Participants can connect with two networks:

- A family and friends network, which includes the residents' informal support network, and health and social care staff
- Vincles user groups network, which aims to connect older residents with their neighbours, in the hope of better engaging them in community activities

The service is free, with the tablet, app and internet access (if required) supplied by Tunstall. Users are supported in learning how to use the technology by Tunstall staff and Vincles champions, individuals in the networks who have volunteered to help others to increase their confidence with technology.



Progress

Launched in 2017, Vincles currently has more than 500 active users in Barcelona, located in the neighbourhoods of Sant Martí and Eixample. The service plans to become citywide, reaching more than 30,000 people, or 10 percent, of the city's seniors who are living alone by 2020.

The project offers a strengths-based approach, focusing the individual's abilities rather than any illness or disability. It empowers the users by giving them the confidence to try something new and make decisions about their level of involvement.

All members also have use of a Lifeline home unit and pendant, to enable them to get help from the Tunstall 24 hour contact centre in the event of an emergency at home or episode of acute loneliness, giving them reassurance and a friendly voice available day and night.

The service is also used to promote wellbeing, for example by sending public health messages to the tablets e.g. advice on coping in hot weather, avoiding falls, how to prevent the spread of flu.

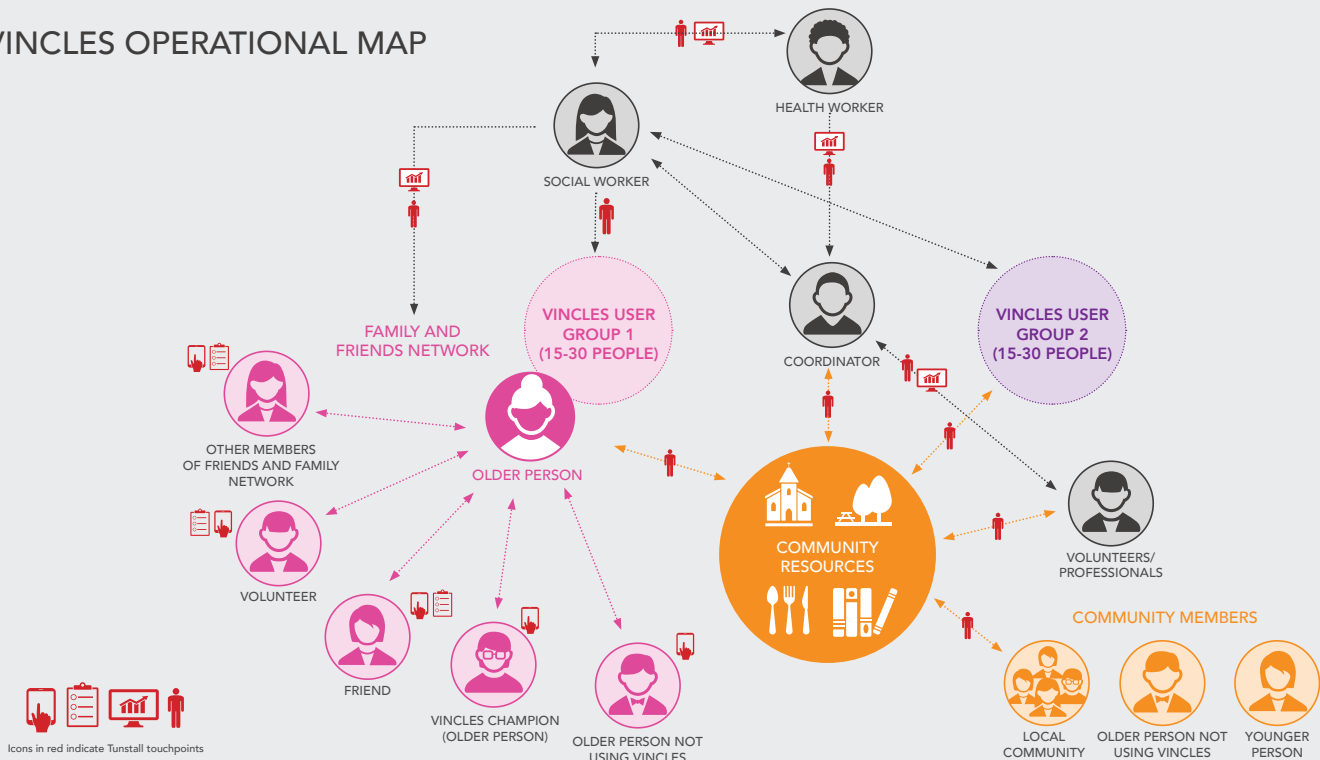


User experience:

In December 2017 65 users from different areas of Barcelona arranged to meet via Vincles. The idea arose spontaneously from various Vincles user groups and was supported and coordinated by the project's managers and social care professionals.

Users met in the Plaça Sant Jaume, and viewed the Christmas tree and manger in the square, taking photographs and getting to know each other. They also went to the market of Santa Llúcia, and some visited the Cathedral. Other activities were also organised to facilitate interaction and dialogue between participants.

VINCLES OPERATIONAL MAP



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