

Talking Robot Helps Seniors Fight Loneliness

高齢化や一人暮らしの増加により、「誰とも話さない時間」が長くなる人が増えています。そうした状況の中で、人の生活に寄り添うロボットの活用が少しずつ広がっています。会話や反応を通して、人の気持ちを和らげる役割が期待される一方、不安や疑問の声もあります。人と機械の距離が近づく今、私たちは何を大切にすべきなのでしょう。孤独と向き合う方法について、あなたの考えを話してみましょう。



1. Article

Read the following article aloud.

Joyce Loaiza lives alone in a community for older people in the American state of Florida. When she is home, the retired office worker often talks with a friendly female voice that asks about her day.

A few kilometers away, the same voice helped 83-year-old Deanna Dezern when her friend died. In New York state, it plays games and music for 92-year-old Marie Broadbent. And in Washington state, it helps 83-year-old Jan Worrell make new friends.

The women are some of the first in the United States to receive the robot ElliQ made by Intuition Robotics. The company and other officials say it is the only [device](#) using artificial intelligence (AI) to help older Americans from [loneliness](#).

"It's entertaining. You can actually talk to her," said Loaiza who is 81. Her ElliQ calls her "Jellybean" for no clear reason. She said, "She'll make comments like, 'I would go outside if I had hands, but I can't hold an umbrella.'"

The device looks like a small table light and it has an eyeless, mouthless head that lights up and turns. It remembers each user's interests and their talks, helping create a special experience with each new discussion. They can be as deep as the meaning of life or as light as a small joke.

ElliQ also plays music and provides creative or spiritual sayings. On a video screen that comes with it, it will show different cities and places of interest. The device leads exercises, asks about the owner's health, and gives [reminders](#) to take medicines and drink water. It can also support video calls and contact family, friends, or doctors in an emergency.

Intuition Robotics says none of the conversations are heard by the company, with the information staying on each owner's device.

Intuition Robotics chief executive office Dor Skuler said the idea for ElliQ came before he launched his Israeli company eight years ago. His grandfather who lost his partner needed an aide, but the first did not work out. The next person, though, understood his grandfather's love of music and his special sense of humor.

Skuler then thought a robot could fill the space of a friend by adapting to each person and their interests. He said, "That just did not exist anywhere."

The average user [interacts](#) with ElliQ more than 30 times a day and more than 90 percent report lower levels of loneliness, Skuler said.

The robots are mostly sent out by state agencies in New York, Florida, Michigan, Nevada and Washington. But they can also be bought individually for \$600 a year plus \$250 to set it up. Skuler would not say how many ElliQs have been sent out so far, but the goal is to have more than 100,000 out within five years.

Brigham Young University professor Julianne Holt-Lunstad studies the [effects](#) of loneliness on health. Holt-Lunstad worries that a device like ElliQ might have short-term helpful effects, but it could make people less likely to seek human contact. She told The Associated Press that the difficult feeling of loneliness should push people to reconnect socially.

Skuler and state officials agreed that ElliQ is not a replacement for human contact. But some older people cannot leave home or do not have many friends.

Greg Olsen is director of the New York State Office for the Aging. His office has sent out 750 of the 900 ElliQs it received. He said he wished that he could "make a person show up at the home of one of the many, many older adults that don't have any family or friends."

Charlotte Mather-Taylor is director of the Broward County, Florida, Area Agency on Aging. She said the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath left many older people more disconnected. Her agency has provided 300 ElliQs which, she believes, help the situation.

She said, "We've seen very positive results with it. People generally like her and she makes them smile and brings joy."

Carla K. Johnson reported this story for The Associated Press. Gregory Stachel adapted it for VOA Learning English.

Source: Talking Robot Helps Seniors Fight Loneliness

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2. Key phrases and vocabulary

First repeat after your tutor and then read aloud by yourself.

1. device (n.) a tool or equipment made for a special use

The scientist used a device to measure the temperature of the ocean.

2. loneliness (n.) the feeling of being alone and unhappy

After moving to a new city, Takeshi felt loneliness until he made new friends.

3. reminder (n.) a note or message that makes you remember something

The director gave everyone a reminder to send their reports by tomorrow.

4. interact (v.) to communicate or do things with someone or something

During their trip to the seaside, the children interacted with the animals there.

5. effect (n.) a change or result caused by something

The medicine had a positive effect on Kaori's health.

3. Questions

Read the questions aloud and answer them.

1. What can the ElliQ robot do for its users?
2. How many ElliQs has the New York State Office for the Aging sent out?
3. Why do some experts worry about robots like ElliQ?
4. Do you prefer talking to a machine or a person when you feel lonely? Why?
5. What qualities do you think make a good companion?