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## Calling all senior citizens online

**From blogging to social networking, a group of nine youngsters are hoping to give the elderly a virtual hangout zone**

**Sandeep Ashar**



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The computer and the Internet are not usually associated with senior citizens, but a group of young professionals has decided to use the Internet to highlight the plight of the elderly in the city. Using e-interactive mediums and social networking sites like Orkut and Facebook, the group — which calls itself 'Silver Innings Foundation' — and comprises nine members from different walks of life, is attempting to bridge the ever-increasing divide between the youth and the elderly. They recently launched a one-stop information portal [www.silverinnings.com](http://www.silverinnings.com), but are now looking at other tools to bring the various issues that senior citizens face to the fore. And judging by the web traffic that Silver Innings has been getting since its launch, it looks like this young group of entrepreneurs is on the right track. According to Sailesh Mishra, the foundation's founder president, more than 150 people have joined the organisation as volunteers; of these, 40 per cent are youngsters. The group has also

written to computer companies in the hope of initiating schemes like '1 laptop, 1 senior citizen' to make technology more accessible to everyone.

Blog space

Buoyed by their initial success, Silver Innings is planning to set up an exclusive blogspace where senior citizens can discuss important issues and the problems they are facing. The foundation's creative head, Bhavesh Chheda, says, "We are presently analysing the Internet usage patterns among senior citizens across the country. In Mumbai, for instance, 15 per cent of the senior citizens are net savvy. The numbers are even more in cities like Hyderabad."

And in starting the blog, Silver Lining is hoping that senior citizens will be able to interact with each other and share their problems. Gerontologist Amruta Lovekar, who works as the group's honorary secretary, says, "Loneliness is among the key issues concerning senior citizens in this busy urban society."

According to Chheda, the plan is to use the blogspace to encourage more dialogue and interaction among senior citizens. Another advantage is that it provides space for the youth to interact with their elders. "The blogspace will be open to the younger lot," he says. They also plan to launch an NGO dedicated solely to elderly citizens and their family members.

The people behind the initiative

Not a single founding member of Silver Innings is a senior citizen. The average age of the core group of nine members, says Mishra, is 39 years, with the youngest being 26 years. They say that the passion to work for their elders and their expertise in different, but specific fields is the common thread which binds them together. "Many of us were working individually to sensitise people towards the issues that senior citizens face. We instantly connected and decided to work together when we met last month," says Mishra.

The first thing they did was float a virtual space online, which served as a single-point destination for senior citizens. "We have put up information on helplines, old age homes, and police station numbers. We also address issues like ageism, Alzheimer's, dementia care management and memory loss, which affect a number of senior citizens. Information on how to make a will is also put on our site," says Mishra.

The issues the elderly face

According to Lovekar, unlike in developed countries, ageism comes as a shock to many senior citizens as Indian families are not trained to deal with it. Senior citizens do not know how to adjust to the urban ways adopted by their children, while children do not know how to take care of their parents and grandparents. This triggers a lack of dialogue, which manifests in various forms of abuse ranging from physical to psychological.

According to Mishra, the idea of an urban nuclear family is yet to be completely understood. The virtual NGO organises home-care services and counselling sessions to reach out to senior citizens facing either physical or mental abuse. Lovekar strongly believes

that society needs to stop stereotyping ageism. She asks, "Should a senior citizen not attend a party if he/she feels like it just because of their age? "Many of these problems are internalised by the senior citizens themselves."

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