

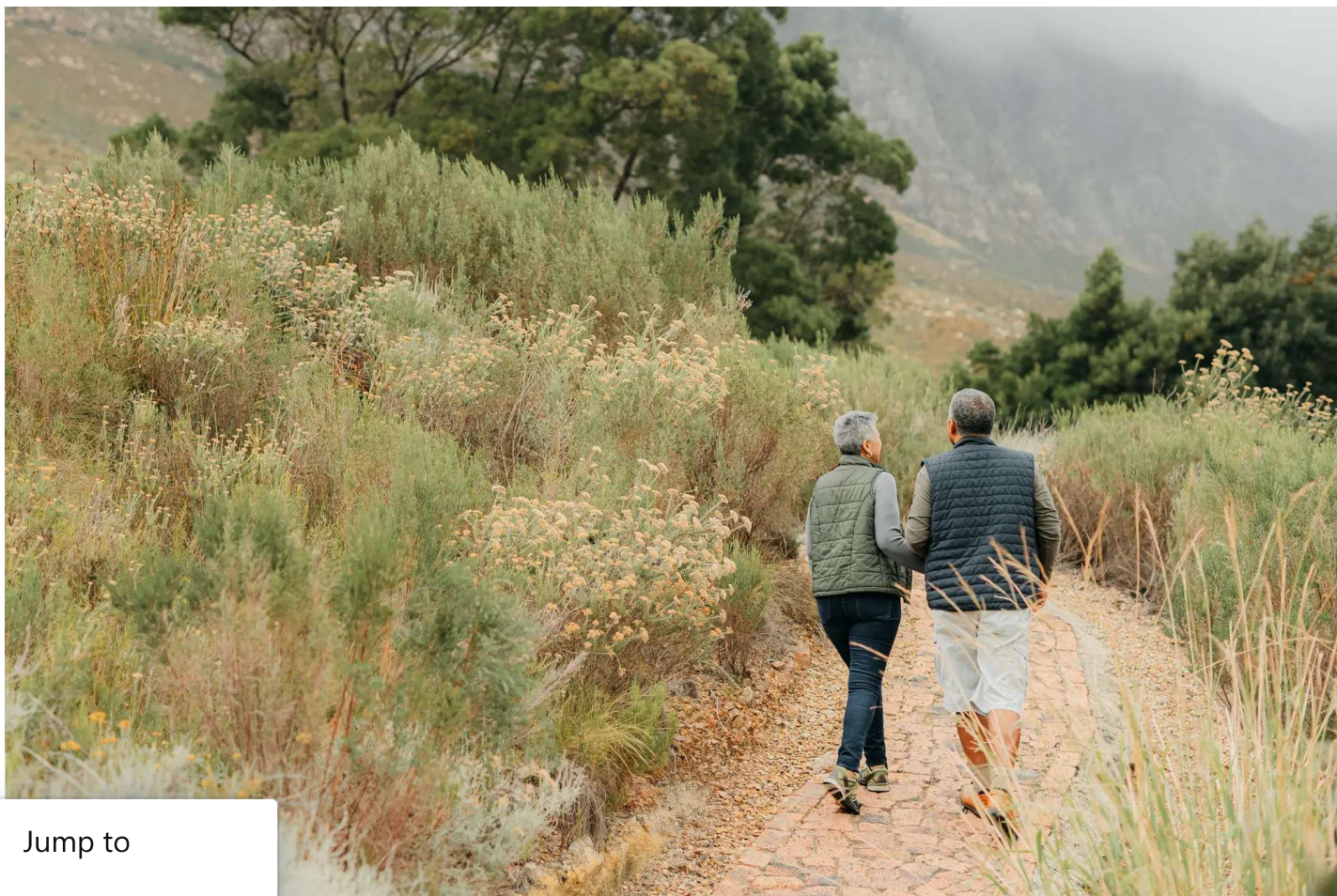
ECONOMY

A 70-year-old who finally found a solution to a lifetime of loneliness says the friendships he's made are worth the cost

[Ayelet Sheffey](#) Feb 5, 2024, 8:40 AM PST

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...rossman, 70, had struggled with loneliness for most of his life.

That changed when he joined a "senior village," connecting him with virtual and in-person resources.

He has made lasting friendships and hopes for a greater focus on loneliness among older adults.

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Rick Grossman, 70, thought it was absurd that at the start of the pandemic, he kept getting emails advising him not to isolate.

"I thought that was just about as helpful as saying, 'don't grow a tail,'" Grossman told Business Insider. "It's advice without much more behind it."

Grossman described himself as having "12 second acts," holding jobs as a schoolteacher, in computer tech support, in business sales, in corporate communications, and as a toy-store owner — and those employment opportunities have brought him to Pennsylvania, Texas, California, New Jersey, and now Seattle, where he currently lives.

All the moving around has made it difficult for him to maintain relationships. Grossman also said that growing up as a gay man on the autistic spectrum made it harder for him to find a community he felt he could belong to.

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"A lot of gay people at my age had major issues with their families growing up and have completely separated, whether their families threw them out or whether they couldn't accept them," Grossman said. "Things are different in the future, but there are a lot of single people in the LGBTQIA community who don't have the support and friendships that they need."

That all changed about three years ago. Grossman was struggling to find friends in Seattle, and while he tried to join groups to meet new people, nothing seemed to stick. But when someone mentioned a "senior village" in Seattle to him, he decided to give it a shot. Since then, he has found a community and formed close friendships.

Senior villages are part of a nationwide network of community-based nonprofits that connect older adults to others in their area through resources and activities. There are more than 400 senior villages in the US, and they're unique in that, in contrast to a retirement community, these villages allow older adults to live where they choose while still having access to virtual and in-person resources that the village offers.

"There's suddenly a lot of opportunities and activities that I can rely upon and be with people, and there are people who know me and care about me," Grossman said. "And if I were to sign up for something and didn't go, someone would call me and say, 'What happened?'"

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Grants, donations, and membership dues fund senior villages, and members of the villages can pay from \$150 to \$425 a year, depending on their level of involvement. For Grossman, the cost is well worth it.

"There are a lot of times when I would've just stayed home alone, and now I will do some of the things I wanted to do before, like go to the movies or to dinner," Grossman said. "It's like a family."

'We need to be more concerned about other people'

Loneliness is something that's hit Americans of all ages especially hard over the past few years. In May, the US surgeon general, Vivek Murthy, described the issue as an "epidemic of loneliness and isolation" that could have detrimental effects on a person's physical and mental health if it went unresolved.

Some Gen Zers have spent money on a range of activities in an attempt to meet new people and form friendships, but seniors tend to have fewer options. The University of Michigan's National Poll on Healthy Aging in January found that one in three adults ages 50 to 80 reported feeling isolated.

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Grossman said it needed to be talked about more.

"When COVID hit and everyone isolated, that's when I became more aware that I really needed something," he said.

"What if I were to fall down and get hurt in here? Who would know, and how long would it take? And if I go out and buy something on sale and get too much of it at the grocery store, I would like to be able to share that with people," Grossman continued. "So just all of those things helped me realize that living as a single was very isolating."

Senior villages are one way older adults can become involved in a community to meet others. The [Village to Village Network](#) has a resource that allows those interested to search for villages in their area that they can join.

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Other older adults are also working on innovative ways to form connections later in life. BI previously spoke to Joe Lamy, a 75-year-old retiree who started regular meetings at a senior center where people can simply sit in a room and talk to each other at no cost.

Grossman said he was hopeful the government would take more steps to address the loneliness epidemic and pay more attention to the challenges older adults were facing.

"It's just about being a human being, and we need to be more concerned about other people," Grossman said. "We can't just abandon people when they age."

Have you found a solution to loneliness? Reach out to this reporter at asheffey@businessinsider.com.

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*Note: February 5, 2024 — An earlier version of this story
! senior villages' funding sources. They are supported by grants,
s, and membership dues.*

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