

Synthesis of the reports on the period of the lockdown due to the pandemic.

Reports : IDA Partners

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1) Description of the situation

Most facilities for people with disabilities (PWDs) were no longer accessible. Some Pwds found themselves in residence, others in their families. Some home help services have operated in a reduced way for more isolated people or their families, taking all necessary precautions.

People confined to the residence were not allowed to see their families or relatives. Nothing was possible anymore, like shopping or participating in an outdoor activity.

Professionals and families were able to see the great distress of the Pwds. The more severe the disability, the more intense the anxiety.

The sense of loneliness, the difficulty of managing time, the need to be part of a community have heightened fears related to the pandemic.

The suddenness of the information and the timeliness of a decision of lockdown took by surprise everyone. No one was prepared for this situation, let alone the Pwds.

2) Actions and tools implemented to face the situation

To cope with this situation, professionals have shown their creativity by using numerous means to keep a link with the clients / students of their establishments or services.

They had to inform them about the gestures barriers and the health situation, to maintain a rhythm of activity, to continue to accompany them individually as needed.

These means were adapted and made available to a part of the beneficiaries, those equipped with computer equipment (some may have equipment on loan), able to use it alone or with the help of the family or professionals.

For the others, there were telephone calls and material sent by postmail or delivered at home.

Among the means used:

- Loan of computers or tablets
- Delivery of a loaded Sim card for the use of the smartphone (Internet access)
- Telephone training to use videoconferencing (download and use)
- Regular or daily encounters with Zoom, Skype, What's App, Viber, Messenger
- Creation of contact email addresses, closed Facebook groups

- Creation of a blog fed in part by the beneficiaries (jokes, testimonials, cooking recipes, art, etc.)
- Sending individualized and adapted programs of daily tasks to be accomplished (video of sports sessions, well-being, research to be done on the Internet, etc.)
- Downloading a card game and online games between people with disabilities
- Creation of an Internet portal (communication, activities, therapeutic consultations, etc.)
- Basic IT instruction guide and information on barrier gestures in Easy to Read Language.
- Remote meetings for democratic participation in the functioning of the organisation

3) Observations

Families, Pwds and sometimes professionals were not prepared to use digital tools during the lockdown.

There was also resistance and dissatisfaction with remote communication.

Those who did, however, think that these tools helped them to overcome this situation, overcome fears, keep a contact with others.

They were able to communicate, structure their day with fun, sports, well-being activities, training courses, while others no longer had any reference points and we could see problems of overweight, as opposed to no meals, loss of reference points over time.

The Pwds have shown patience and perseverance in developing digital skills.

For some, more proactive, they took initiatives (e.g.: remote event). There was also a real awareness of the importance of digital by all.

However, it has not always been easy to create a relationship of trust by interposed screen, also to keep a constant relationship over time.

4) Main difficulties to implement remote actions

The lack of Pwds equipment illustrates the fact that they are not in the digital world. The lack of basic knowledge about ICT confirms this.

In addition, the number of apps on smartphone screens, the demand for updates and pop-ups on the Internet, not to mention the fake news about the pandemic made it more difficult to adopt these tools.

Essential during the confinement, the videoconferencing, required multiple phone calls and training sometimes up to 15 days before being able to be used by the Pwds. This distance training was to be conducted in one-on-one sessions.

Another difficulty is the compatibility issues of operating systems, software versions, network power and other technical issues.

The personal information to be filled in in the fields for the creation of an account (social networks) as well as the creation of a password were added to all these difficulties.

Again, the lack of basic computer knowledge, both in terms of device use or messaging or application use, was a major barrier at the beginning of the lockdown. Computer vocabulary is also a source of difficulty in the transmission of digital skills.

5) What we learnt from this situation that could be useful for IDA Project

Clearly, this episode of confinement demonstrated the importance of the inclusion of people with disabilities in the digital world.

The use of remote tools should be prioritized to better prepare Pwds for such situations.

Digital is a way of cultivating one's belonging to a community.

Digital learning requires individual work because the levels of knowledge are different and not everyone has the same acceptance with these kinds of tools. It also presupposes an adapted pedagogy.

The information must be simple and secure (number of icons, avoid pop-ups, etc.) The use of ETR language seems unavoidable as the vocabulary and the use of digital is complex. There is also a real job to do to avoid security problems, especially for social networks.

We need to ensure that every online content or app is responsive to avoid any compatibility issues.

This experience also showed us that we must not forget to include the family in the learning process of the Pwds.

Beyond all these issues, it is clear that the priority is access to equipment for all.