



Filling the Gaps

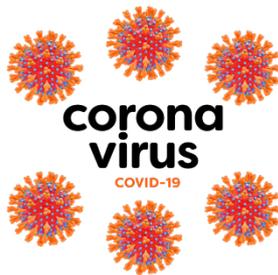
Easy Read Report

By Lorna Rouse, Liz Tilley, Jan
Walmsley and Shaun Picken

November 2020



This is a report about Self-Advocacy during the COVID-19 Pandemic.



COVID-19 has made life difficult for people with learning disabilities in lots of ways.



In July 2020, we asked members from 11 different Self-Advocacy groups what they had been doing to help people with learning disabilities.

What we found out:



All groups closed their offices and found ways to support people without meeting face to face.



We found out that the groups were doing lots of different things to support their members during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Support on the Phone:



All of the groups we spoke to used the phone to contact their members to see how they were and find out what support they needed.



Some people needed support to get their food and medicine. Some self-advocacy groups provided help themselves.



Other groups were able to direct their members to people who could help them.



Some groups asked volunteers to help by calling members regularly on the phone.

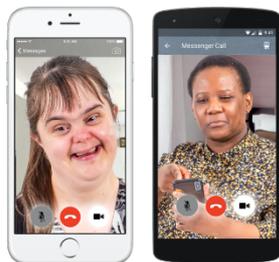


The people with learning disabilities that we spoke to said this made a really big difference.

Support online:



10 of the groups we spoke to helped their members to get computers and tablets so they could access the internet.



Lots of people learnt new skills which helped them to get online and to connect with friends and family.



We found that Zoom was the best system for most people to do video calls.



Lots of people also used Facebook to chat to their friends.



It made a big difference to people's lives.



There were lots of activities that people could do online.



They could keep in touch with their friends and family.



They could get information about COVID-19 and how they could keep themselves safe.



Some people have been able to do some work over the internet such as training and inspections.



Some people told us that they did fun online activities like Karaoke, arts and crafts, bingo, exercise classes and many more.

Trouble Getting Online:



Sadly, some people have not been able to get online.

There were different things that stopped people accessing the internet.



Some people did not have the money to pay for an internet connection (wifi).



Some people did not have a computer or a tablet that could help them get online.



Some people were not supported to use the internet as their supporters were worried they might get into trouble.



Some people said their homes do not let them use the internet.



Some supporters themselves did not know how to use the technology and could not support them to get online.

Support by Newsletter:



Most of the self-advocacy groups sent out newsletters to their supporters.



They sent out Easy Read information about COVID-19.



They sent members a card they could cut out to show people if they did not need to wear a face mask.

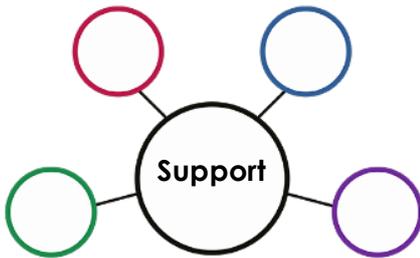


The groups share stories of what their members had been up to during lockdown.



They also sent out fun activities such as puzzles and word searches.

Practical Support:



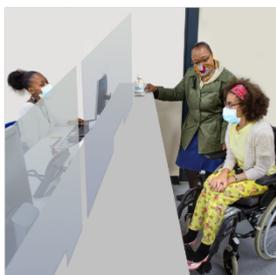
Lots of groups provided practical support to their members.



Some groups have delivered people's medicine and food themselves.



Some were able to arrange for meals to be delivered to their members or helped them to find foodbanks.



Some groups drove their members to hospital the hospital and supported with their medical appointments.



Some groups arranged for people's hearing aids to be replaced.



They were able to inform local healthcare or social services of members who needed extra support.



They helped their members to manage their money and helped with PIP assessments.

Support to Keep Healthy:



Groups were able to provide lots of support to help their members to keep healthy.



Some groups ran walking clubs.



Other groups helped their members access health services.



Groups offered advice on staying safe.



Some delivered exercise classes online.

Support for Mental Health:



All groups made sure that their members knew they were there for them when they needed it.



Most groups set up telephone check-ins with their members.



All groups set up online activities to keep people connected.



Some people said this was the only social contact that they had.

Conclusion:



Self-advocacy groups did amazing things to support their members during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Without this support, things could have been much worse for people with learning disabilities.



We need to share and shout out loud about this so groups can continue to do this really important work.

What needs to change:



Everyone with a learning disability needs access to technology to help them connect with their friends, family and online activities.



People with learning disabilities should be encouraged to join a self-advocacy group.



Commissioners need to realise the role self-advocacy groups play in supporting people with learning disabilities.



They are filling in the gaps in services and this should be thought about when making funding decisions.