

Lockdowns Unlock Innovation: Case Studies

Case Study One - Trinity Access and Disability Services

Trinity Access and Disability Services (TADS) conducted a series of surveys with students to assess the supports they needed to engage effectively with remote learning. The response of the TADS was also shaped by responses to the AHEAD survey of Learners with disabilities in FET and HE and by input from staff and students that contacted the TADS.

The TADS Team adapted quickly in March 2020 when COVID-19 closed the University. The TADS Team continued to meet with students in person, via MS Teams, phone, or email. Students had the facility to book an appointment online with Team members or they could arrange a drop-in online appointment via a scan QR code system. Alternative meeting formats were established to connect with and support students with disabilities. TADS also provided practical guidance on issues such as managing mental health, engaging in good study routines, setting up a study environment, and assisting with technology to support remote learning.

As learning moved online, many accessibility issues required solutions to ensure accessibility needs were being met. Disability services worked with Trinity IT Services on two projects, Blackboard Ally and Closed Captioning in Panopto.

Blackboard Ally is a tool that helps content authors to ensure that the lecture materials that they upload into Blackboard meet accessibility standards. A key feature of Blackboard Ally is the 'file transformer' facility that allows course content to be uploaded in a file and then downloaded in an alternative format. It was launched in Trinity in November 2020 and tags all Blackboard documents with information on the accessibility of their contents. As there are typically 6-7,000 live modules in Blackboard in Trinity in a given academic year, with over 1,000 content owners and tens of thousands of pieces of digital content authors must be enabled to make their documents accessible. The introduction of Ally has greatly increased awareness of accessibility needs and highlighted the need for adequate training for authors.

The lecture captioning facility provided by Panopto adds artificial machine-generated (English) captions to new Panopto lecture videos. Machine generated captions can be edited. Lecture captioning has not yet been fully implemented due to the cost of the high quality version of the software.

TADS developed advice and guidance regarding remote teaching and learning and remote assessment for students with disabilities.¹ TADS provided input into the development of modules that supported staff and students to adapt to online learning. TADS also ensured that the move to online examinations was guided by all relevant accessibility and reasonable accommodation issues.

TADS also undertook a review of all HEI's online examinations and produced a report for the Disability Adviser Working Network (DAWN) leading to revised and nationally agreed on guidelines for the academic year 2020-21.

COVID-19 has fast-tracked the introduction of technological solutions that students with disabilities have always needed and asked for. The disruption it has caused has provided a golden opportunity for change. When a return to on-campus teaching emerges, there is an opportunity to strike a better balance between on and off-line teaching and learning. TADS believe that systemic change has the potential to benefit all students and result in a more inclusive learning environment.

Case Study Two - Blossom Ireland

Blossom Ireland supports young people with an intellectual disability and their families as they transition from school to life after school.² Prior to March 2020 services were delivered in person during the weekends or evenings primarily with young people from Dublin.

As a result of COVID-19 restrictions Blossom Ireland developed an accessible blended learning course geared towards young people with an intellectual disability who have different levels of academic ability including non-readers. The skills and training courses are now delivered through a blend of online learning activities, weekly video challenges and weekly virtual group meet-ups. The skills taught range from social skills, community life skills and preparing for life after school. It uses engaging graphics, video, audio and games to make it fully accessible to non-readers and those with limited means of communication. To date 55 young people have attended the Blossom Personal Empowerment Programme Assertiveness course and a further 30 attended online events like yoga, mindfulness and practicing coping skills. An Assertiveness module is already developed and two more modules are currently under development.

¹ <https://www.tcd.ie/disability/resources/inclusive%20teaching%20and%20learning.php>

² <https://blossomireland.ie/>

This programme continues to be expanded and is now accessible to young people with an intellectual disability nationally, which previously was not logistically possible. This blended learning course won the AONTAS award for Mitigating Educational Disadvantage using Innovation during COVID-19.

Case Study Three - The Willing Able and Mentoring Programme

The Willing Able and Mentoring (WAM) programme run by AHEAD³ is a graduate work placement programme that supports employers and graduates in a range of private and public sector placements.⁴ WAM continues to provide supports to employers and graduates in a remote work environment.

WAM updated all policy and support documents to facilitate and reflect a shift to remote working. For example, pre-placement an individual work placement needs assessment is carried out to identify the accommodations required by graduates. When graduates switched to a remote work placement the accommodations were re-examined to ensure that they could transition to the home environment. For example, WAM, in conjunctions with employers, had to ensure that graduates with hardware or software accommodations could access them remotely. The accommodations will be re-examined as graduates return to an office based work placement.

Support meetings take place remotely with graduates. These were initially set up by WAM as a response to remote working and now graduates run the meetings independently. This is particularly important for graduates who were recruited remotely as WAM received feedback that some graduates felt isolated as they had never met colleagues in person.

WAM created a Web page with a suite of webinars to assist and support both employers and graduates in the workplace with remote working practices including: features of different remote platforms; virtual recruitment; best practice for zoom meetings and accessibility.⁵ WAM report that conferences “WAMinars” are better attended remotely than had been in the past and future

³ The Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) is an independent, non-profit organisation that works to create an inclusive environment for people with disabilities in work and educational settings. See <https://www.ahead.ie>

⁴ <https://www.ahead.ie/>

⁵ <https://www.ahead.ie/wam>

events will take a blended approach that incorporates both remote and in-person events to facilitate wider access.⁶

Case Study Four - The Irish Wheelchair Association Ability Programme

The Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA) Ability programme provides job seeking and employability skills coaching to young people with physical disabilities aged 18 to 29. The programme currently has 86 people registered nationwide many of whom move on to paid employment.

During the pandemic the IWA Ability Programme had to change how they "met" their participants, how they prepared them for interview and how they recruited new participants onto the programme. All coaching and recruitment sessions moved to remote platforms. Participants were asked their preference on the platform to use for their coaching session as a variety of platforms are available, for example, Microsoft Teams and Zoom. Participants were sent tutorials and detailed instructions on how to use their chosen platform and practice runs were completed before coaching sessions.

Emails, texts, phone calls and WhatsApp messages were also used to keep in regular communication with clients. Mock interviews were completed virtually, which gave clients good insight into what current real-life virtual interviews would be like. When restrictions reduced, participants who were in need of a face-to-face meeting were accommodated with relevant public health measures in place.

As well as one-to-one and group coaching sessions, the participants also take part in a series of regional group workshops covering interview skills, personal development and CV writing all of which are now delivered virtually. A series of monthly webinars are being delivered to connect all the participants at a national level with speakers talking about employment related issues. The IWA Ability Programme notes that COVID-19 has highlighted to employers that remote working is now a viable option, which may be a positive outcome for jobseekers with a physical disability. The more frequent use of technology has resulted in an increase in IT skills and confidence for many of their participants.

⁶ These are WAM webinars, <https://www.ahead.ie/waminars>

Case Study Five - Brothers of Charity Services Galway Area

The Brother of Charity Services Galway (BoCSG) provides a range of services to people with an intellectual disability and their families in Galway City and County. This includes early intervention services for young children through to school age services. They also provide a variety of programmes and services for adults including: educational, day, residential, respite, family support, a range of multidisciplinary support services and supports to individuals who live independently.⁷

The main concern for the BoCSG during the pandemic was to alleviate the sense of fear and feelings of isolation among their clients. Staff were supported and upskilled in mental health wellness to support people living alone and in residential settings. The service collaborated with other community organisations and used technology to maintain contact with clients. To reduce isolation and help clients remain active services delivered a range of food, care and activity packages to those who used their day and outreach services. Funding for this initiative was provided through the government's COVID-19 Emergency Fund. This initiative also helped those who were experiencing financial difficulty.

To combat feelings of isolation and to focus on health and fitness the services began remote activities and educational classes. Evening and themed activities also took place, for example, movie nights and a virtual Galway Races night. Virtual fitness events included a mini-marathon, cycling events as well as a six week Operation Transformation challenge.

There are many examples of how BoCSG collaborated with a range of community groups. For example, they linked with Food Cloud to obtain excess food supplies from retailers, Christmas cards and gifts were sold in local coffee shops and at a pop-up Christmas market. One service linked with a nursing home and crafted bird and window boxes for residents. There were also links with the Community Garda in Galway city where the Gardaí developed relationships and supported people in vulnerable situations, including some BoCSG services users. It is anticipated that these new partnerships and collaborations will stay in place after COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.

Pre COVID-19 clients were supported by BoCSG to be on interview panels for staff recruitment but the pandemic disrupted this process. Interviews are now

⁷ <https://www.brothersofcharity.ie/galway/>

taking place remotely and with training and support clients are now reinstated on interview panels. This will continue until it is safe to hold face-to-face interviews.

The Galway Advocacy Council⁸ which is made up of BoCSG clients kept up their meetings throughout 2020. Meeting minutes were circulated throughout the services to keep people updated and connected. The Council also made a Vaccine Information Video to allow people make an informed decision about getting the vaccine.

In terms of continuing remote classes when restrictions are lifted the BoCSG will be guided by the people they support: if there is a demand for remote classes they can continue to deliver them remotely. The BoCSG recognise that the remote classes have proven beneficial as they reach a greater audience and there is no geographical divide. BoCSG look forward to exploring digital accessibility further and supporting the changes it brings for their services

Case Study Six - St. Michael's House Dublin Area

St Michael's House (SMH) provides a range of services supporting adults and children with an intellectual disability in the greater Dublin area. This includes: residential and day supports; clinical supports; respite supports; school and vocational training services.⁹

SMH devised an online Activity Hub to support clients, staff and families during restrictions. The content is categorised into three key areas: physical activity; mental health and wellbeing; and, skills based engagement and learning. The SMH website hosts a weekly virtual timetable signposting synchronous (through Zoom) and asynchronous (on YouTube) virtual classes. The classes promote health and wellbeing, social connectedness education, including digital skills, and personal development e.g. confidence, self-determination and autonomy. The Activity Hub now hosts approximately 150-200 attendees on live online classes. SMH is building capacity for the hub by establishing new relationships with community-based external tutors, other disability service providers and external agencies. Many of the adults who have attended online classes are now interested in developing their digital skills so they can plan and co-host meetings and events themselves. This will be supported through a mentoring scheme. This platform will also be used into the future for e-health, e-learning and a range of activities

⁸ <https://www.brothersofcharity.ie/galway/advocacy/>

⁹ <https://www.smh.ie/about/about-st-michaels-house/>

and events to help support quality of life outcomes for individuals who use SMH services.

The SMH Home Teaching Department designed a range of videos capturing performances of popular short stories or nursery rhymes. The story-teller uses Lámh¹⁰ throughout and the videos are posted to the SMH YouTube channel, which is public.¹¹

Working in collaboration with the Fundraising Department, St. Michael's House launched an interactive eBook to celebrate World Book Day. This project was developed as part of the SMH's Annual Bring a Book, Buy a Book campaign which became a virtual event in 2021. This interactive eBook –which uses Lámh throughout- is a free resource available on the St. Michael's House website. A student volunteer has been recruited to help produce more videos. SMH is now linking with Lámh¹² to continue developing additional online resources.

The Devices Scheme established in October 2020 provides devices to support the provision of remote day services to SMH clients living at home and in residential houses. This Scheme was funded solely from finances raised through St. Michael's House Fundraising Department. It expanded in January 2021 to include both adult and children's services and also to support the delivery of clinical services. The technology funded to date is used in a range of ways including: communication purposes, education, online activities, hospital liaison support, online dementia group-work, person-centred planning and the use of different apps to support personal outcomes. SMH plans to support individuals and groups share their experiences of using technology funded through the scheme.

The SMH Infoshare provides a platform for staff to receive organisational information and updates on upcoming and ongoing projects/initiatives within SMH. Live webinars have reached an average of 96% registration with a 90% live view. The Staff Communications Survey 2020 highlights that staff would like this method of communication to continue.

¹⁰ Lámh is the manual sign system used by children and adults with intellectual disability and communication needs in Ireland

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCz3BGhZnH5AOYEfyDWxyKqw>

¹² <https://www.lamh.org/>

Case Study Seven - The SMILE Project

The SMILE (Supporting multi-morbidity self-care through integration, learning and eHealth) Project is a research partnership supported by funding from Sláintecare and implemented by Caredoc, Trinity College Dublin (TCD) and Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKIT).¹³ The project aims to empower and support individuals with chronic comorbidity to actively self-manage their care. This is achieved by nurse support and remote monitoring in tandem with the use of wearable health technology devices to measure blood pressure, blood oxygen levels, blood glucose and activity levels. Participants also complete daily digital questionnaires to self-report and track health and wellbeing.

Potential participants were identified by GPs and invited to take part in the project. Participants were enrolled in February 2020 just before the arrival in Ireland of the Coronavirus. Participants live in the South-East and have one or more of the following chronic conditions: chronic heart failure, coronary heart disease, diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Although the project design and roll-out pre-dated the pandemic it proved to be perfectly suited to the pandemic. Participants were keen to avoid admissions to, and contact with, acute hospital settings due to the risk of contracting COVID-19.

Each participant was provided with a tablet and wearable devices. The tablet comes with a preloaded App that is synced with the wearable devices.

The data from the devices is collated daily on a digital platform available to the nursing team. Pre-set thresholds trigger a system alert for readings outside of a participant's normal levels. An alert prompts an intervention from a nurse who supports the patient to manage their condition or if necessary refers them for specialist care. Nurses also check-in with participants at regular intervals to provide advice and support. Patients are stratified so that those with the highest risk profile are offered support more frequently.

All participants were at risk of serious illness or death if they contracted COVID-19. Consequently they had very limited social interactions and the ongoing support offered throughout the project was especially reassuring and valued. Some patients reported that the support of the nurses during lockdown was of

¹³ TCD and the Netwell Casala Centre in DKIT are two of the partners in the EU funded Horizon 2020 ProACT (Integrated Technology Systems for ProACTIVE Patient Centred Care) project. <http://proact2020.eu/>

enormous benefit to their mental wellbeing. They reported that contact with the nurses relieved their anxiety and provided a welcome psychological lift at a difficult time. It also helped to maintain their motivation and participation.

The project is the subject of a formal evaluation. Preliminary indications suggest that involvement in the project has provided many participants with the motivation to implement and sustain positive lifestyle changes. The data provided to participants reinforced the link between behaviours and health. As patients became more familiar with the data they felt empowered and found the consultations with the supporting nurses to be more meaningful. Positive outcomes reported include weight loss, improved mobility, smoking cessation, reversal of Type 2 Diabetes, increased ejection fraction for a patient with heart failure, early intervention for cardiac investigations, improved medication adherence and avoidance of hospital admissions.

The project demonstrates that a combination of technology, self-managed care and community based health supports has the potential of to deliver positive outcomes for patients with chronic conditions and reduce reliance on care in acute hospital settings. As infection control measures are likely to figure prominently in health care settings for some time, projects such as this which shift the locus of care away from acute hospital settings seem especially apt.

Case Study Eight - The Living Well Programme

The Living Well Programme¹⁴ delivered in Ireland is licensed by the self-management resource centre (SMRC) in California.¹⁵ The conditions of the licence are prescriptive. Until the pandemic the licence conditions did not allow the course to be delivered online. With the onset of the pandemic, the programme transformed to an online version, approved by the SMRC. This case study describes how the programme was adapted as a result of COVID-19 restrictions.

The Living Well programme is primarily targeted at adults (18+) with a wide-range of long-term health conditions and their carers. It is a self-management support programme consisting of the daily actions and choices people take to manage their long-term health condition. Self-management programmes promote better choices about diet, physical exercise and smoking. The programme also

¹⁴ Living Well has received funding from the Government of Ireland's Sláintecare Integration Fund 2019 under Grant Agreement Numbers 185, 418, 219, 78,413 & 38.

¹⁵ <https://www.selfmanagementresource.com/>

provides advice and guidance with regard to managing medication, monitoring symptoms, coping with the emotional aspects of the condition and communicating with healthcare professionals.

In response to public health guidelines regarding social distancing the course content was adapted for online delivery. Online courses can cater for up to 12 participants. This is less than the capacity of in-person courses which can be delivered to up to 18 participants. Prior to COVID-19 courses were delivered in six of the nine CHO areas. However, the shift to online delivery has allowed participants to be recruited nationally. A key enabler of the project was the development of a living well web page (www.hse.ie/livingwell). Project leads from all CHOs worked together with HSE communications team to develop the website which is the centralised point of contact for those with queries and for persons wishing to register on a course.

The programme is delivered primarily by peer tutors. For some peer tutors the shift to online delivery was very welcome as the physical burden of delivering the course was reduced. However others were not digitally literate or had difficulties with digital connectivity and were not able to continue in their role as tutors. The pool of peer tutors has reduced and the recruitment of peer tutors has been more difficult since the pandemic.

An introductory session was added to the course to tackle digital literacy and digital aversion. Technical support is also on hand for each session. One of the outcomes of online delivery has been the increase in the digital skills of participants which is of benefit to them in all aspects of their lives.

Online delivery removes participation barriers for persons living in remote locations, persons with difficulty accessing transport or with physical impairments or ill health that makes travel more difficult. This advantage was especially relevant during the pandemic when many potential participants were likely to be cocooning. Since the shift to online delivery course participants have included people in hospital for the first time. However, online delivery potentially excludes people with no access to digital technology/poor broadband.

An independent evaluation is ongoing. Anecdotal feedback is very positive but the continued delivery of the online programme will be subject to the agreement of the SMRC.

Case Study Nine - Care Alliance Ireland Family Carer Support Group

A Facebook group was established by Care Alliance Ireland to provide a space for family carers to discuss their issues and concerns in a private and supportive environment. Members pose questions to the group and this generates discussions and support from fellow carers. The main aim is to keep members engaged and connected outside of their caring role. Questions and discussions take place in the main Facebook thread, which are moderated by Care Alliance Ireland. There are also a range of social groups organised through their Facebook page. These include:

- A book club - Care Alliance purchases and distributes the books which are discussed online using Zoom
- Gardening club – Care Alliances distributes seeds and hosts gardening club sessions
- Presentations – different topics facilitated live with Q+A session

There are now over 2,000 members and the support group is envisaged to continue as a source of support when COVID-19 restrictions are eased. COVID-19 prompted the establishment of this resource but the uptake suggests that it may have addressed an unmet need that pre-existed the pandemic.

Case Study Ten - The Activities for All Programme

The Activities for All programme was developed through the collaboration of Sport Ireland with a working group of Local Sports Partnerships (LSP), Sport Inclusion Disability Officers (SIDOs) and CARA.

The programme aims to improve an individual's Gross Motor Skills (core strength, balance, and bilateral movement and ball skills) in a fun way while also helping people to reach their minimum recommended daily physical activity of 30 minutes a day on five days, as recommended in Ireland's National Physical Activity Plan.

The programme provided a four-week physical activity plan (and communications campaign) and activity cards for people with disabilities that was released in both Irish and English. Activity cards and physical activity plans were produced and circulated widely on social media and through the LSP network. The pack includes suggestions to modify the activities to make them harder or easier as so that they suit all abilities. Participation does not require any investment in

equipment as the activities are designed to be completed using ordinary household items such as chairs, mats, balls and pillows. The activities are not weather dependent and can be done indoors or outdoors. They can also be done individually, with a family member or in a group.

Some LSPs assembled and distributed activity packs for the programme to community based residential and day services for persons with disabilities and to nursing homes.

The activity plans included in the programme encourage participants to plan their exercise, set daily exercise targets and to keep a record of their activity. This is aimed at motivating and encouraging participants.

Sport Ireland report that very positive feedback was received in relation to this programme.

Case Study Eleven - Sailing into Wellness

Sailing into Wellness is a not for profit social enterprise that supports individuals, families and communities to develop physical and mental wellbeing using the natural setting provided by the sea. Sailing provides an opportunity to enjoy the outdoors, to socialise, to work in a team, to be active and to acquire skills. Sailing into Wellness provide sailing programmes to support the recovery of persons affected by substance abuse and poor mental health. The programmes deliver educational and therapeutic benefits.

In summer 2020 Sailing into Wellness offered families with children with ASD the opportunity to participate in a sailing programme. Sailing trips were tailored to the needs of each participating family. Families were able to actively participate in sailing or to simply enjoy the experience. The programmes offered the families an opportunity to have a shared outdoors experience that they otherwise would not have been able to access.

Participating families reported an increase in general motivation and optimism for everyday life, increased confidence in social skills and enjoyment of experiencing new family dynamics as the sailing programme uncovered individual strengths and abilities.

There was a high level of demand for the programme. Families that participated would like ongoing access to sailing. Sailing into Wellness hopes to secure funding for a more progressive program to develop the skills of those that have already acquired foundational sailing skills and accommodate more families to experience and enjoy sailing.