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Online activities for individuals with intellectual disabilities at a day centre in the wake of COVID-19

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Accessible summary

- Many day centres in Sweden closed during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Some day centres provided online activities like FaceTime calls and short films instead.
- This was to help people keep in touch.
- Some people with intellectual disabilities also got involved in making films when lockdown lifted.
- People with intellectual disabilities and staff learned a lot about doing things online and using technology. It would be good to keep this going.

Abstract

Background: The lockdown of a day centre for individuals with intellectual disabilities led to digital activities instead of traditional physical presence.

Method: This study is based on 17 interviews with staff of a day centre, directors of day centres and support persons.

Findings: The purpose of the digital activities was to overcome physical distance and to create "social connectedness" with service users at a day centre. Emphasis was placed on recognisability to meet the needs of the service users. When the lockdown was lifted, service users were included in the production of digital artefacts. There were also obstacles to digitalisation: some service users had no access to Internet or tablets at home, some lawyers forbid the use of common digital programmes and service users were denied being visible on social media, support persons lacked digital competence and were reluctant to digital activities.

Conclusions: The experiences of digital activities including coproduction of films made individuals with intellectual disabilities active and visible on social media. This might facilitate the possibilities for future digital inclusion in society. The support from staff at the sheltered accommodations was vital and when it succeeded it promoted a more holistic approach to the service users' everyday lives.

KEYWORDS
day centres, digitalisation, intellectual disabilities and social connectedness, profound intellectual and multiple disabilities

1 | INTRODUCTION

According to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006), individuals with disabilities have the right of access to information and communication technology. In Sweden, digital inclusion – increasing the digital competence of people with disabilities and making technology more accessible is part of the national strategy for digitalisation. Despite these good intentions, research shows that individuals with intellectual disabilities do not make use of the Internet to the same degree as other groups (Caton & Chapman, 2016; Chadwick & Fullwood, 2018; Johansson et al., 2021). Variables that affect access to the Internet for persons with intellectual disabilities are individual impairments as well as affordability, education and support (Chadwick et al., 2013). In Sweden, individuals with intellectual disabilities have less access to the Internet, smartphones or tablets (Alfredsson Ågren, 2020). A Swedish survey (Socialstyrelsen, 2019) concludes that only 60% of municipalities offered Internet access in their sheltered accommodations. Day centres have more access to the Internet and digital equipment than sheltered accommodations (Ramsten et al., 2017).

Digital inclusion can be seen as an on-going process rather than a fixed status and van Dijk (2012) presents a model of digital inclusion including motivation to use digital technology, access to this, ability to use it, and finally the use itself. Barlott et al. (2020, p. 511) discuss the importance of the "fit between training, personal and technical factors" in enabling digital inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

This article is based on a collaborative study with a day centre for individuals with intellectual disabilities which, during the lockdown due to the first wave of the pandemic (April 2020), chose to offer their service users online activities like films and FaceTime calls. This shutdown triggered a digitalisation process where the staff had a clear vision of what the digital activities would provide. They should substitute for ordinary physical activities aiming at development and meaningfulness. Consequently, the staff at the day centre were very conscious about building the films around easily recognisable elements with the service users' interests and preferences in mind. They also realised the importance of access to support at home for the service users to make the digital activities reachable. To understand the importance of the films we can follow Baumer et al.'s (2011, p. 34) advice: "If we are to understand blogs or any other social media, we must focus not on the media being produced, not on the artifactual byproducts of this interaction, but on the interaction itself, on the socialising in social media."

Digital activities have been offered at day centres before the pandemic (e.g., Isaksson & Björquist, 2020; Näslund & Gardelli, 2013), but not with the main purpose of overcoming physical distance or including service users in the coproduction of films and aspiring to make individuals with intellectual disabilities active and visible participants on social media.

1.1 | Day centres, digital activities, and the pandemic

In Sweden, adult individuals with intellectual disabilities have a right to support with meaningful activities according to the Swedish Disability Act (SFS, 1993, p. 387). This support is supposed to be individualised, and most individuals with intellectual disabilities are enroled at centres offering daily activities. The collaborating day centre in this study has a focus on communication and aesthetic activities targeting people with intellectual disabilities including people with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities.

Until the pandemic, taking part in day centre activities was based on physical presence; i.e. service users had to go there to be able to participate. The day centre offers structure, familiarity and predictability. This is achieved through daily and weekly schedules, by communicating in appropriate ways using different communication styles, including pictures and simplified sign language, and by making it possible for service users to relate to one or more special support persons (Skarsaune et al., 2021).

During the first wave of COVID-19, a third of the local municipal authorities in Sweden decided to close down their day centres to reduce the spread of infection even though no national restrictions or guidelines were directed to disability care (Socialstyrelsen, 2021a). Not visiting the day centre had great impact on the service users' lives and well-being. Staying home all day, combined with the banning of visits at some of the sheltered accommodations resulted in a large risk of isolation (Socialstyrelsen, 2021b). Other digital activities, like chats and workout programs, were also offered by disability organisations during the pandemic. However, these online activities presupposed the users' access and familiarity with the Internet.

Having the residents stay at home during the day was a new situation for the staff at the sheltered accommodations. In Sweden, sheltered accommodations consist of 4–6 people having their own apartments but also access to common areas and staff. During the pandemic, the staff had to expand their more care-oriented work to also include more pedagogical tasks and meaningful activities. To make the digital activities work, the staff at the sheltered accommodations had to assist the residents. Studies have emphasised the vital role of staff members and the everyday practices of social care in introducing digital activities and getting people to engage with them (Beadle-Brown et al., 2016; Darcy et al., 2016; Isaksson & Björquist, 2020; Ramsten & Blomberg, 2019). Occasionally, support persons' ambition to manage risks, sometimes coupled with personal moral judgements, have led them to restrict, as well as control, what individuals with intellectual disabilities can access on the Internet (Caton & Landman, 2022; Chadwick et al., 2016; Ramsten & Blomberg, 2019).

This vital role of staff members at the sheltered accommodations also include knowledge about informed choices, that the residents are given preconditions to actually make a choice about participating in digital activities. Residents with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities often are given too few alternatives and too little time to be able to make a choice. This "inability" to make choices is too often interpreted by staff as a consequence of their impairment (Stefánsdóttir et al., 2018; Talman et al., 2021).

1.2 | Aim

The overarching aim is to analyse the digital process mobilised by day centre staff in the wake of covid 19 restrictions and day centre closure. The article starts with an empirical account of how this digitalisation was carried out and ends with a discussion about the future role of digitalisation. It also discusses the strategies to create social contact through digital activities by using a theory of "social connectedness." The text is structured around the following questions:

What were the purposes of the digital activities and how were they received?

What were the challenges of implementing digital activities at this day centre?

What are the future prospects for digital activities at the day centre?

2 | DATA AND METHODS

The researcher and the day centre had a joint project of documenting the process of digitalisation triggered by the pandemic in 2020. To understand and to analyse the process, several interviews have been done by the researcher. All staff members of the daily activity centre were offered interviews and 11 staff members wanted to participate.

Two support persons of service users were also interviewed to grasp their perspectives of the digital activities and how they interpreted the reactions of their service user. They were initially contacted by staff at the day centre project and were asked to contact the researcher for an interview. These support persons were selected due to their positive attitude toward digitalisation and their effective support of their service users.

The project also included a call for other day centres in the county of Stockholm that had gone digital during the pandemic to participate in the study. The results were meagre, with only 15 centres responding, four of which worked with people with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities. The directors of these four day centres have been interviewed as well. All interviews were voluntary and this fact was repeated at the start of the interview before informed consent was collected.

Consequently, this qualitative study includes interviews with 11 staff members (IP 1–11) working at one day centre, two support persons of the service users to the centre (IPS 1–2), and four directors of other day centres (IPD 1–4) (see Table 1).

TABLE 1 Interviews

	Staff members at day centre (IP)	Support persons of service users (IPS)	Directors of other day centres (IPD)	Sum
Number of interviews	11	2	4	17

The interviews were done by phone and took about 30 minutes each (Block & Erskine, 2012). They were all performed during the informants' ordinary working hours. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The themes discussed during the interviews were the transition to digital activities, what kinds of digital activities that were offered, their experiences of success factors as well as obstacles, their experiences of the service users' reactions and, finally, returning to the physical day centres and the digital future.

In this study, only the staff have given their perspectives. The important perspectives of individuals with intellectual disabilities are lacking. The reason for not interviewing the service users was the restrictions due to the pandemic which meant that I was not allowed to visit the day centre when service users were present. One way to partly compensate for this deficiency is to include second-hand information about the service users' reactions and actions. I have asked staff and support persons how they interpreted the service users' opinions and feelings (Cluley, 2016). However, the staff's perspectives can only complement, not replace, those of the service users.

Methodologically, conventional, qualitative content analysis was used (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Initially, the interviews were read several times looking for the purposes of the digital activities, as well as the informants' descriptions of success factors and obstacles. A range of techniques such as coding, categorisation and theme formation was used to discover similarities and differences in perceptions and experiences (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The individual interviews about digital activities are interpreted in a context of digital inclusion for individuals with intellectual disabilities. In the later phase of the analysis, theoretical concepts from "social connectedness" were added that helped to analyse the material.

The research was conducted in compliance with codes of ethical conduct in social science research covering the recruitment of informants, informed verbal consent, anonymisation, and the storage and publication of data (Swedish Research Council, 2017). All informants have been deidentified. Ethical approval was provided by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (2021-06646-01).

2.1 | Theory

In discussing the intentions behind the online activities, a theory of "social connectedness" was employed. The goal is to generate a subjective experience of belonging, despite a format that at first glance may appear as a form of one-way-communication (like blogs and films). Social connectedness is designed to capture earlier social experiences, social contacts and familiarity, and tries to convey a sense of being together without a physical meeting (Van Bel et al., 2009). The concept of social connectedness has been defined by Van Bel et al. (2009, p. 1) as "a short-term experience of belonging and relatedness, based on quantitative and qualitative social appraisals, and relationship salience". It has been used in previous studies to analyse digital materials such as blogs that can trigger a sense of belonging and relatedness and produce social connectedness, which

may lead to influence (e.g., Alias, 2013; Barlott et al., 2020; Baumer et al., 2011). The digital activities during the lockdown have strived to instil a feeling of inclusion and meaningfulness in the day centre, despite the imposition of physical distance between the staff and service users. Van Bel et al. (2009, p. 1) describes this as "…the feeling of being together outside of social contact."

3 | FINDINGS

3.1 | The digitalisation process during lockdown and re-opening

The digitalisation process at the day centre can be divided into two phases; the lockdown and the re-opening when the service users returned. The closure decision was unexpected, and in interviews staff describe it coming as a shock, causing a strong feeling of uncertainty and leading to a very quick start-up of digitalisation. An important part of the digitalisation process was individual regular FaceTime calls, a technique that some of the younger service users were already familiar with. Some service users needed assistance with answering the call, whereas others learned how to do it themselves. In one case a service user needed help answering the call but wanted the personal assistant to leave the room while speaking. Out of 28 individuals, 13 had regular FaceTime calls. In one case, they stopped holding calls after discussing the situation with the service user's mother, because the calls led to tearful outbursts (IP5).

The other part of the digital offerings was the production of daily short films. The staff initially produced two films a day. The films were uploaded on the day centre's own YouTube channel at 10:00 AM and 1:00 PM. After some weeks, the staff felt like they needed some kind of structure and introduction to the daily films, and a morning meeting was presented and uploaded at 9:00 AM. Like the other films, the morning meetings were supplied with visual support in the form of signing and pictures.

The transition to digital activities was announced to sheltered accommodations and parental homes in the weekly information letter. Initially, the staff made phone calls and visited some of the sheltered accommodations to assist with Internet access and digital competence. "But then we had to push on personally as well/---/I had to contact that individual's… support person, if they lived in a sheltered accommodation, for example, and try to figure out how they could do it" (IP1).

From the very beginning, the element of recognising familiar aspects of the centre was salient. The director said: "To me it was very important that our customers experienced familiarity. They must recognise people who were there. And they should recognise environments, and … that was A to Z for me" (IP6). Another staff member said: "So it was a bit like we partly wanted to continue with our activities, what's familiar, but also to make sure to offer something that can stimulate them, as it were, that gives content to their lives in some way" (IP8).

During the summer the lockdown was lifted and some service users returned to the day centre and a new phase started. The digitalisation process took a new turn when service users became involved in the film production and other forms of digital activities. The staff experienced that the service users had enjoyed the digital activities and wanted to continue with them. Some service users wanted to watch specific films at the day centre as well. "That's when I felt that it was a success. I thought that was really great. Because they still carried it with them. Then it wasn't just a film clip but something they wanted to watch more of" (IP1). Consequently, the service users were included in the production of films for those service users who had not yet returned. The interest in producing digital artefacts also included the service users who were not, for different reasons, active online.

3.2 | The films as activities and social connectedness

The films should not be perceived as a one-way communication from the day centre to the service users, but as part of a co-creative process aiming at social connectedness (Baumer et al., 2011). Social connectedness can be seen as comprising three separate elements: *participation*, *sense of belonging* and *sense of relatedness* (Alias, 2013). Participation in this context might be perceived as access to wi-fi and digital equipment. Sense of belonging is made up of recognising of the staff and environment at the day centre, and sense of relatedness is created by engagement and participation in the activities. In short, as Alias (2013, p. 3) says: "Sense of connectedness is, therefore, the sense of belonging, being linked to and related to." It is an emotional experience independent of the presence of others (Alias, 2013).

3.2.1 | Belonging

Sense of belonging was a starting point for the digital activities and especially the films. "To recognise, to feel that they have… the place, the rooms, that they were still there. To see that we were here, that we hadn't just disappeared. Just because we didn't get together, we still exist." (IP4). Familiarity was achieved by filming the staff. All the films centred around well-established staff members. Staff at another day centre that made a few films, also emphasised the importance of a familiar voice: "… you sent a specific film to somebody with that special staff member who you know that the individual has worked a lot with. So they recognise it." (IPD1). The films were produced in the ordinary rooms at the day centre or in outdoor locations where the service users had been before. Excursions were made to well-known places.

At the same time, the staff were aware of the difficulty that some of the service users have when it comes to generalising. "It's hard to understand that this is my occupation. But we did think about the factors of recognition and having alternative supplemental communication modes and cognitive support to create participation…" (IP8).

Part of working with the sense of belonging was to include alternative supplemental communication modes. Spoken communication was always complemented with signing, pictograms, etc.

3.2.2 | Relatedness

Sense of relatedness is about engagement and participation in the activities. There was strong agreement among the staff that the purpose of the digital activities was to remind the service users about the day centre. To show them – in a new situation where everyday life was characterised by lockdown and social distancing – that the day centre still existed and the staff were still there. "So I think it was like, many thought that it should be something similar that we have here [at the day centre] but digital instead" (IP2).

They accordingly focused on ordinary activities that usually occurred during a regular week, but asking: "…how can we make them digital, when the individual himself cannot participate here, but make sure it still offers something at the other end?" (IP8). The very first idea was music since it is a prominent part of the ordinary schedule. Music was a salient feature of the other day centres as well: "Well, about music. It was an obvious component because we know that 99% appreciate it" (IPD1). At the morning meeting they spoke about what was going to happen during the day, which films which were coming, the name of the day which contributed to structure and predictability to the day. A support person said: "…if it had been missed on someday, she could get depressed, because the outline of the day is so important to them" (IPS2).

The idea of creating relatedness was accepted, but with more than 30 service users with different interests and diverse scheduled activities it was not always easy to please everyone at the same time. This led to some films being produced by request and with a certain individual in mind. Other day centres also made films for specific service users. The very idea of adapting a film to a specific service user shows how the staff took it as self-evident that the service users are agents with their own individuality and specific wishes.

Working with individuals with intellectual disabilities demands active staff who try to engage the individuals, to supply them with opportunities to act, get involved and take part. This knowledge was also brought to digital activities. Relatedness was about creating opportunities to be engaged: "…then we also wanted them to interact with us, for example in aerobics, which we usually have in small groups. So you could be active with aerobics from home…" (IP 4). Other films aimed at participation in things like baking, dancing or guessing. Some films were designed as puzzles. The digital activities during lockdown were guided by the commitment of the day centre:

> It's easy to produce films and many people make films. However, it's not always rewarding and we have our mission as a day centre. We're supposed to create meaningful activities based on the customers' interests and wishes, but we should

also have activities that stimulate development. So you need to think of the whole. To consider this [the digitalisation] to be the same thing as working here on site. (IP8)

3.2.3 | Social connectedness

The goal of reaching the service users to the day centre through digitalisation was based on high ambitions regarding social connectedness. In addition to examples of a strong sense of relatedness and connectedness, there are also examples of participation and influence. The films started out as ideas from the staff, but a looping effect took place, and the service users became involved in the themes of the films. Some service users have given feedback themselves in FaceTime calls, for example, while others have been supported in giving feedback by people around them. Support persons could tell how the service users were feeling from reactions like laughing or watching the films intensely. A director told how staff members said to them "you could see a big smile, especially when hearing the music teacher" (IPD1). Giving feedback is a complex action. One staff member (IP8) said: "This business with evaluation is something we work very hard at, and it's hard to do digitally. If you ask a question, it's common not to get an answer at once. It takes some reflection time."

Some service users contributed their own specific wishes. One example is a service user who urged the staff to go to the recycling station with cardboard. This is usually his assignment at the day centre, and the staff felt that this request was his way of making sure that the staff were handling the recycling properly. Another man wanted to see more boats. One service user asked for a film where the staff stumbled and fell. "He thought it was boring at home and wanted to laugh at some crazy staff making fools of themselves. So we did it." (IP11). Among the most liked and watched films were one where the entire staff did a line dance and another where they danced "the bird-song." The films of dancing and stumbling may be perceived as a way of supplying the service users with levity and laughter, as well as a way of giving them real chances to exert influence.

The staff showed an awareness of the importance of the common history, relationships and activities done together at the day centre before the pandemic. The traditional, well-known physical meetings were the solid foundation that made it possible to translate these things into digital activities:

> To have digital activities, if you don't have your own personal relationship to those you see … it might work, it might work out, but I, … for our group, I think the best thing is to be able to be on site, and that this [the digital activities] becomes an extra dimension or something, that adds something extra, but not instead of … (IP4)

4 | CHALLENGES

Despite high ambitions, not all service users took part in digital activities. The obstacles were of different kinds and can be summarised as technical, juridical and attitudinal. Some service users also reacted with feelings of sadness.

A big obstacle was lack of access to digital devices and Internet. The reality of the digital-access situation was worse than expected. The staff realised that even sheltered accommodations that advertised that they had digital resources were lacking Internet connections or devices; wi-fi Internet might be installed but the password is only known by the director, the computer may be used for documentation about the residents and therefore the residents are not allowed to use it, or the individuals with intellectual disabilities might not have their own email addresses "and they haven't been able to watch, because, well, there is no Internet, or … no access to any computer …" (IP2).

Other day centres experienced legal dilemmas concerning digitalisation. The survey showed that according to some municipality's lawyers, the day centres were not allowed to use Teams, Skype or Zoom for reasons of confidentiality. Other more expensive and complicated systems were recommended, which meant that digital activities did not take place at all. The same municipalities denied service users the right to be visible on social media. Photos and films must exclude faces, which meant that only feet, legs or backs were allowed to upload. This reduced some of the service users' interest in participating in digital activities. A director said: "… it's great that there are laws and rules about integrity and security and GDPR and all that, but it can also be an obstacle for individuals who want to be part of social media." (IPD3). Different municipalities interpreted the laws differently, which affected the realisation of digital activities.

Another known problem concerns staff attitudes. All the day centres had experience of a few specific sheltered accommodations that often exhibit a lack of interest in new activities, including digital activities. "Among some staff of the sheltered accommodations, there has been some resistance." (IP6)

Sometimes the day centre staff experienced that when an individual with intellectual disabilities exhibited a lack of interest in participating in digital activities, residential staff were too quick to take that as a definite no. The day centre staff argued that if a service user does not want to look the first time it is not the same as rejecting the digital activities altogether: "Perhaps someone needs to watch it 10 times before they realise: 'aha, this is familiar, watching this'" (IP8). This is a question of having a chance to make an informed choice, the staff member argued.

The service users needed assistance to use FaceTime or watch the films on YouTube, but some did not receive it. Sometimes, it was a challenge to get the residential staff or elderly parents to understand that the digital films and calls were a form of activity. One staff member reflected on how the staff at the sheltered accommodations seemed to think: "Shall we take the time to sit with her alone in a room? And watch YouTube? We don't have the time …" (IP11). Another staff member described, on the same theme, how other discuss digitalisation: "They might think – an iPad, why should they [the service users] have that? It's just sitting still, sitting there with a screen, it's not positive, or what can you say, relatives and guardians are often a bit elderly and they have … another view on this medium" (IP4). She continues: "It looks random … just pressing on a screen without a plan" (IP4). An inability to perceive the films as activities became an obstacle to the service users receiving support.

Despite ambitions to reach all service users, only about half of them had regular FaceTime calls and some did not watch the films. Digital activities can, despite the intention of social connectedness, enable feelings of loss and distance. This was obvious in one case where a woman started to cry when FaceTiming. One director mentioned individuals with dementia who did not recognise the staff at FaceTime calls and took no interest in the films (IPD3).

5 | A MORE ACTIVE DIGITAL LIFE AFTER COVID-19?

In the interviews, the staff were asked if they consider their experiences of working with the digital activities as useful for the future. They answered that one aspect is the possibility to stay in contact with service users who are not physically present. FaceTime calls might be useful when a service user has to stay at home due to an appointment or illness, and online activities could make it possible to work with individuals who have difficulty leaving their homes.

The interviews also touched upon a wider aim, namely how digitalisation at day centres might facilitate the possibilities for digital inclusion in society. One staff member said:

> Well, this is about… digitalisation – everyone should be included in it. And we wanted, we work a lot with the idea of participation. To create participation and try to develop tools to make our customers participants in their lives and society. So it's a natural idea for us to continue with this, that this wasn't just something to do during Corona… (IP8)

During the pandemic, some of the service users have become used to the digital possibilities and therefore it is probably easier to continue. Some service users have practised making FaceTime calls, and this might be the start of their being able to do so in other more private and familiar contexts: "I hope we can inspire them to keep in touch with other people, like, this a way to do it" (IPD3). Service users were also encouraged to make their own films and upload them to YouTube. The support person of one service user described the reaction when they came back to the day centre: "…when he saw this line dance with only staff, and that was… he got extremely inspired by this: 'I really want to do this' and we arranged it and recorded the line dance" (IPS1). A staff member said: "I'm so happy that our customers could also be part of this digitalisation which has happened in all of society. I'm so very pleased that they've been a part of this, which is so natural for all people – a right." (IP 8)

A few members of the staff also emphasised the importance that individuals with intellectual disabilities are visible and active on social media, that they can be seen and noticed, like everybody else. The experience from this day centre is that when the service users were active in the films on YouTube, families and friends responded positively. A member of staff said: "You get feedback from your family, for example, create an understanding of me being out in the world, I have contact with my family, I'm not isolated and alone ..." (IP8). She further mentioned the importance of "being knowledge-able," that is, being someone who knows how to do things (IP8). Therefore, certain municipalities' prohibition of participation on social media is problematic, a director said, and it is very hard to explain to a service user who wants to publish films and photos (IPD3).

6 | DISCUSSION

The overall aim of this article was to analyse the process of digitalisation triggered by COVID-19 at a day centre for individuals with intellectual disabilities from the perspective of digital inclusion. The decision to close day centres was an attempt to reduce the spread of infection. In hindsight, the decision has been criticised due to its one-sided medical perspective, which neglected aspects like social and psychological well-being (Engwall & Storm, 2021; Socialstyrelsen, 2021b). The initiative to use online activities as a surrogate for physical presence at day centres was in line with a social ambition to preserve a sense of structure, familiarity and predictability in a very unusual situation. The online activities, adapted to the service users' abilities, created opportunities to keep in touch.

Bridging the physical distance during the lockdown with digital activities turned out to be fraught with many difficulties. Report after report has ascertained how individuals with intellectual disabilities are lagging behind when it comes to digitalisation (Caton & Chapman, 2016; Chadwick & Fullwood, 2018; Johansson et al., 2021). In the real-life situation caused by the pandemic, some day centres discovered that the obstacles to moving online were even more extensive than expected. Basic things like Internet access, digital devices and e-mail accounts were lacking. There were legal obstacles, when the service users were treated as a vulnerable group and did not get the opportunity to choose if they wanted to use digital systems like zoom or Teams and were denied the right to give consent to be visible online (cf. Stefánsdóttir et al., 2018).

There was a lack of support structures for some service users at home. Part of this was because of a reluctance to see how individuals with intellectual disabilities would benefit from taking part in digital activities and an unwillingness to consider viewing films as an activity (cf. Mietola & Vehmas, 2019). Such resistance can be explained by digital ignorance among support persons, but also shows how the support persons' values, ideas and preferences are pushed onto the individuals with intellectual disabilities, depriving them of the possibility to make their own choices (Stefánsdóttir et al., 2018; Talman et al., 2021). Support from staff or other support persons at

the service users' homes was vital to make the digital activities work (Beadle-Brown et al., 2016). Initially, the staff at the day centre spent much time supporting staff of sheltered accommodations and convincing them of the importance of digital activities.

However, when the support worked out, it facilitated digital participation but also communication more generally and made it possible to get a more holistic view of the service users' everyday lives. There was, for example, an exchange of different uses of cognitive support. Earlier research concerning online projects for individuals with intellectual disabilities has concluded that it is often difficult to maintain an active online presence when the projects are over (Caton & Chapman, 2016). Increased digital knowledge among support persons of the service user might counteract this.

The day centres aimed to make films that could serve as interactive activities facilitating two-way communication. By working with recognisable and familiar staff members, environments and activities, they encouraged the service users to participate and exert influence. The staff wished to remind the service users of their social connection to the day centre, staff and other service users, even in the absence of actual contact. "Social connectedness" was created by using a sense of belonging and relatedness (Alias, 2013; Van Bel et al., 2009). Through digital activities, the staff tried to shift the locus of "here and now" – which is so important for individuals with intellectual disabilities – from being on-site to being online. It succeeded in some cases, but also failed in some, due to service users' challenges to generalising and feelings of loss and sadness.

The challenge of making films interesting for all service users was handled by producing single films with a particular service user in mind or upon request. The requested films where staff made fun of themselves were popular. Since the service users often spend much time with paid carers, the carers can be the ones offering fun, not least in the form of "vulgarity, pranks, jests and banter" (Johnson et al., 2012, p. 332). Taking service users' preferences and interests into account reflects an attitude of attributing individuality to each particular person (Bigby et al., 2015).

When the service users started to return to the day centre a new phase began, with more digital activities being integrated in the ordinary schedule. Working with digitalisation can serve several purposes. Digital solutions will replace more traditional ways of doing things, but one important reason is to promote inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities in the digital world. Besides the personal benefits of being able to access and use digital solutions, members of the staff argued, it is also important to be present on social media and be visible to others. Possibilities of networking through social media might motivate use of digital technology. Motivation is an important factor of van Dijk's (2012) model of digital inclusion beside physical and material access, digital skills and usage. When it comes to individuals with intellectual disabilities, visibility on social media has often been discussed in terms of risks like the potential for abuse, exploitation or bullying. McClimens and Gordon (2008) mention another risk: What happens if no one responds to social media contributions from people with intellectual disabilities, and this becomes a new kind of discriminating practice? A counterargument is to ask whether this fear should make us refrain from trying.

COVID-19 triggered a digital process at this specific day centre. Despite good intentions and hard work, not all service users have been reached by these digital activities. Nevertheless, the experiences have laid a solid foundation for continuing the process of digitalisation, and show how digital activities create opportunities for participation and engagement.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

ETHICS STATEMENT

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