



Exploring 24/7 online support for people with intellectual disabilities

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DigiContact

A 24/7 online support service

- Social and political changes make service providers rethink approach
- Developed and implemented by Philadelphia Care Foundation in 2014
- Aimed at independently living people with ID
- People can contact specially trained support workers **24/7**
- **Support users decide if, when and how often they use online support**



Our research

Focus on the value of 24/7 online support for its users

Studies

1. Exploring support needs in online support
2. Position and role of online support within an integrated system of supports

We work together with co-researchers



Results

The online support is being used for a broad variety of issues

Mental health

- Talking about worries and stress
- Signaling and prevention
- Dealing with emotions
- Dealing with unexpected situations

16/21

Social Contacts

- Conflicts with other people
- Connecting with someone
- Expanding social network

11/21

Practical issues

- Seeking information
- Administration and finances
- Public transport use
- Preparing official meetings
- Planning day/week activities

11/21

Physical health

- Monitoring physical health status
- Reflecting on doctors' advice

3/21

Results

Perceived added value of having 24/7 DigiContact support

- Less accumulation of stress
- Safe feeling
- Opportunity to connect with someone
- More room for self-direction & 'being in control'
- Support 'light'
- Constant factor & easily adaptable

“He would go on longer periods with the weight of a problem on his shoulders. He would get more and more stressed and he might wet himself at night and feel more restless and agitated.” (Onsite support worker)

“Well, I want this out of my system so I can feel fine again. This is how I want it, because if I am doing well, so is the wife and vice versa. Good for me.” (DigiContact user)

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“Really, simply knowing that she can just pick up the phone and call and that she will be heard. That gives her a lot, really a lot of peace of mind.”
(Onsite support worker)

“You can always call them and rely on them if there is something wrong. That feels good.”
(DigiContact user)

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“The fact that you’ve had a conversation with someone, that you’ve been in contact just before you go to bed. That does me a world of good.” (DigiContact user)

“I think it adds something for her, because Sunday can be a really long day. Her children aren’t always available, they also have other things to do. (...) Yeah, I think it adds something, because she has a conversation when she has been alone all day.” (Onsite support worker)

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“Well, if I feel bad, I don’t call anybody. I don’t like that even though they say I can. I don’t even call my brother. I do call DigiContact and I tell them this and that. That I do want. Yes, they are different people. They are close and DigiContact is far away. DigiContact you know.” (DigiContact user)

Reflections

Round-the-clock availability of online support may have substantial value

- Less accumulation of psychological tension
- Timely signaling of worries or feelings of distress. Emotional and behavioral problems may be prevented.
- A preventive role with regard to loneliness may positively affect mental health problems.



Want to know more?

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