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PANEL 4: NEW PLATFORMS AND USER NEEDS

“Doing it for ourselves: Conversion towards online meetings in organisations of persons with disabilities during the Corona crisis”

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VIDEO PRESENTATION <https://youtu.be/O35hJFxNI64>

ABSTRACT

In spring 2020 the corona pandemic forced us all to depend on a screen for communication. What effect did this have on accessible communication in NGOs representing persons with disabilities?

Even in a rich country like Sweden there are persons with disabilities without access to internet, according to recent data commissioned by the [Swedish Postal and Telecom Authority](#) . The report on “Swedes with disabilities and internet” states that there is a digital gap in society, but “In groups with the same diagnosis, disability or difficulty, there are people who fully participate in online communication and others who are not participating at all.” That is no surprise to us.

Disability is just one of several layers of identity, many internet services are not easy to access, understand and use. Besides, there are persons that do not even have access to devices or internet connection at all. The data is from 2019. The impact in 2020 with the dependence on online communication on an individual basis needs to be further explored.

The transition to online communication for organisations of persons with disabilities, has, turned out better than expected. Most organisations have organised digital annual meetings and open webinars, even more frequently and involving more

persons than before the crisis. Online communication with public agencies on the other hand has proven more complicated.

Ten years ago the Swedish Disability Rights Federation arranged live webcasts with subtitles and a prototype for closed sign language interpretation with the possibility for users to select size and position well ahead of public service broadcasters. The “learning by doing” process with users, an extended network and thanks to cooperation with an innovative supplier proved successful then and has been the way forward in times of crisis. Only this time learning to doing it for ourselves in cooperation with professional training for captioners for CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation) services.

Since March 2020 the advice from the Swedish government was to avoid public transport and that everybody should, if possible, work from home. Persons with disabilities with the right to individual CART services depended on the ability of regional interpreting services to provide digital services. With old software that did not work with digital platforms it was a challenge, not only to existing services, but also for the training of professional captioners.

There is only one institution providing training for CART services in Sweden connected to official authorisation. Södertörns “folk high school” offers one-year blended learning with six weeks internship. The Swedish Disability Rights Federation contacted the school, just before the pandemic stopped face to face meetings. A lecture and test of possibilities to provide live subtitles via zoom was tested, and an internship program planned for live webinars started. This was a win win solution. The benefits included finding and testing new software for online services and providing internship when many interpreting services cancelled. The Swedish Disability Rights Federation have been able to set an example with live subtitles at our webinars and meetings with the public sector.

A new course has just started and the training now includes both individual CART services and live online subtitling services and the cooperation continues. The Swedish Disability Rights Federation is the National umbrella for 46 organisations of persons with disabilities in Sweden and members of the European Disability Forum.