



Digital Adaptability Quotient during COVID-19: Stories of Innovation from Indian CSOs



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Perspective

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SATYA SPECIAL SCHOOL (SSS)



SSS was set up in 2003 which works with disabilities, primarily intellectual and developmental disabilities. It works in Pondicherry, and a few districts of Tamil Nadu. They run a centre for children with special needs within Pondicherry city, as well as three rural centres.

Their work primarily consists of therapy and learning for children with special needs. Their work is highly personalized and depends on personal/physical connect, especially their physical therapy, occupational therapy and alternative therapy work.

When COVID-19 hit, they had to close the school and centres down indefinitely. They could no longer conduct any therapy sessions, and while their school had used Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) for learning, it had never been used in isolation, and the children did not have the electronic devices at home either. In the initial days, their work came to a complete standstill. They were focused on relief measures and ensuring that their students and their communities had full and complete access to their medication and groceries.

They knew that they had to continue the services for their children, but they did not know how efficient it would be. In the beginning there were several sets of problems:

- Not all the teachers were tech-savvy.
- Not all the parents had smart phones.
- Some children were not responding the online/ telephonic mode as well.
- One phone and multiple siblings vying for the same.
- Although the hours were flexible the teachers were working at all hours to ensure no child is left out.
- Connectivity issues were faced from both ends.
- Physio-therapy was limited to what the parents could do without harming the child with online instructions.

So, they started with the easiest accessibility tool, webinars. Multiple webinars for both the parents and the technical team (teachers, therapist and incharges), more so the technical team. Internal webinars and training sessions ensuring each had at least done 5-6 webinars in the first month itself. The training process was more or less similar for all staff. First a document would be provided with step-by-step manual followed by a webinar to explain the process and exercises during the webinar to ensure learning. For the less technically savvy staff, they conducted separate one-on-one sessions to ensure their comfort with the new processes. All 100 odd technical and non-technical staff (except drivers and helpers) were connected online. Drivers too were connected due to relief work. WhatsApp groups, various meeting platforms (Zoom, Google Meet etc.), conference calls for meeting and discussions were used. For data collection and storage, they used to google drive products, i.e. Google Forms and Google Sheets.

Children and families stayed connected with the organization. Children continued their learning and had outside interactions beyond their homes. Group classes became a hit as it helped children understand that they were not the only ones not going to school, and they also got to speak to their friends / peers.

Your Adaptability – Remote Working and Connectivity आपकी अनुकूलन क्षमता - ऑफिस से दूर काम करने और संपर्क बनाये रखने की क्षमता

What was the impact – आपकी ऑफिस से दूर रहकर या वर्क फ्रॉम होम से काम करने से क्या प्रभाव पड़ा

Classes (Tracking before July was not as formal) across 428 children across all centers of Satya

98 Webinars across staff and parents
300+ case conferences online

	Total - Classes	Individual classes	Group classes	
August	6346	5465	881	
September	5953	5092	861	
October	5321	4560	761	
November	4474	3874	600	Diwali holidays
December	4765	4163	602	Christmas
January	4761	4187	574	Pongal
February	5560	4844	716	
March	2930	2594	346	School started
Average (rounded)	5300	4600	700	
Total	40110	34769	5341	

Some children were however, not responding the online/ telephonic mode. For these children, Satya special School brought them within the tablet library project, so children could access pre-loaded lessons and activities, interspersed with offline worksheet activities. They also had weekly meeting for sharing issues where teachers could help each other with different ways to engage the child.



Rajesh, son of Kumar, who worked in a petrol bunk, had trouble adjusting to life without school. Rajesh, who is on the autism spectrum, could not attend online class either, as the parents could not afford a smart phone, he would just sit idle, or try to go out of the house. After an e-tablet was given to him, there are a lot of changes in him, says his mother, K. Kavitha. “Now we could see lot of changes after e-tab was given to him. With interest, he is watching the activities and tries to imitate what is visualized. We can also see that he is learning quickly. Also, he has reduced watching television. Now his younger brothers also like to watch the lessons taught in the tab, and they are now playing together. That’s a good sign to us,” she says.

Due to the digital innovation, Rajesh was able to continue his developmental journey. He was also able to play with his siblings, something that might not have happened otherwise.

