



Alternative Day Programs during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Guidance on Redesigning In-Person Day Programs

June 8, 2020

COVID-19 continues to leave us all navigating a very uncertain and surreal moment in our history. The pandemic and social distancing rules have made providing services more difficult for chapters of The Arc and other disability services agencies.

In April 2020, The Arc's COVID-19 program team [hosted a webinar](#) that provided an overview on how 5 chapters of The Arc redesigned their in-person day programs to virtual learning platforms. We developed this FAQ that provides guidance from 3 chapters of The Arc who are continuing to provide day program services and they describe how they were able to redesign their models to virtual platforms. For more information, please contact Liz Mahar, Director of Family & Sibling Initiatives at mahar@thearc.org.

FAQ and Recommended Practices from Chapters of The Arc

Tyler Freeze, Lifelong Learning Coordinator, [Stone Belt Arc \(IN\)](#)

1. How did you set-up a virtual day program using digital platforms such as Facebook Live, Zoom or Google Classroom?

We created a day program - Lifelong Learning Facebook Group - using our Stone Belt Arc's Facebook page. This can easily be set-up by any assigned Facebook administrator in your organization. Within that Facebook group, we assigned administrator status to our broadcasters who create our content for our virtual day program. This is where the control aspect comes into play. The broadcasters can only affect the Facebook group which has the very specific role of providing the virtual programming and does not create changes for the organization's main Facebook page. To reach the widest audience, we then share this live streamed virtual day programming to our main Facebook page, a function that is handled by an administrator of the main Facebook page during each live broadcast.

2. How do you address HIPPA and privacy concerns with conducting virtual programs on digital platforms?

We maintain documentation on media releases for each client. When we knew which clients would be participating, we reviewed our files to see if we had

proper documentation on file. We secured permissions from guardians or the person participating in the program. Additionally, we did training with our staff on what was and was not appropriate for them to say and do in this regard during a broadcast (for example not saying a client's full name) and how they may have to react to certain unexpected circumstances (a client having a seizure during a broadcast, etc.).

3. What resources did you use to develop a virtual day program curriculum?

We used our regular curriculum of daily activities to transition to virtual programming. These activities include bingo, fitness workouts, art, music, and cooking, and musical experiences, which have all been successful to deliver virtually. With the assistance of a graduate level Expressive Arts intern, we are able to provide Mindfulness/Coping and Relaxation programming in a meaningful way. Finally, we also looked at YouTube and Pinterest for more curriculum ideas.

4. What training did you offer staff to conduct virtual day programs?

We trained staff on how to properly engage clients in a broadcast and the importance of representing our organization. The virtual day program is not for use to sell, solicit, or promote anything, and that while broadcasting it is important to show a bit of character, engage as often as possible with the audience by speaking back to them as they comment. It's important to stay animated and active. Viewers need to feel like we are talking directly to them and want them to specifically be a part of an activity. We also provided technical walk-throughs and on-going troubleshooting support for our staff.

5. How do you get access to technology to your consumers?

A lot of our clients already have the necessary technology in their homes. For clients without access to technology, we have generous staff that have been willing to lend their personal devices to clients.

6. How are you able to accommodate programming for people of various levels (i.e. people who need 1:1 support versus people that are more independent)?

Our programming is designed largely for an audience willing to view when it is convenient for them. Since the videos we produce are populated on a web-based platform they are available at any time for someone to watch. All this can be done without disrupting other participants' experience.

7. Are you able to bill an individual's Medicaid waiver for virtual day habilitation services?

In most cases we are not able to bill. However, there are a few cases where clients are participating, and they utilize their existing waiver to bill services - whether it's virtual or not.

Joshua Weidenhamer, Director of Day Habilitation, [Minute Man Arc for Human Services, Inc. \(MA\)](#)

1. How did you set-up a virtual day program using digital platforms such as Facebook Live, Zoom or Google Classroom?

I purchased an individual membership and began creating a schedule with individualized activities for people to join. Using constant contact, our website and word of mouth we were able to get people to join us regularly.

2. How do you address HIPPA and privacy concerns with conducting virtual programs on digital platforms?

I try to use people's first name only when addressing them. I also try to set behavioral expectations by reminding participants that private details in members lives should be shared privately and not during the virtual program.

3. What resources did you use to develop a virtual day program curriculum?

We were able to utilize the talent and ideas of our staff members to develop the program curriculum.

4. What training did you offer staff to conduct virtual day programs?

We have done online workshops which introduced basic concepts and provided some helpful tips on how to keep people more engaged.

5. How do you get access to technology to consumers?

Fortunately, our chapter's day program had enough digital devices, such as iPads and Kindle Fires, to deploy directly to all of our group homes. A grant was given to us from the Department of Developmental Services specifically for technology. This included enough funding for more large devices for each home (Smart TV's, Echoview, and Kindle Fires). This has been very impactful and allowed people to social distance while staying connected through the virtual classrooms.

6. How are you able to accommodate programming for people of various levels (i.e. people who need 1:1 support versus people that are more independent)?

We have to rely on the support of caregivers and other support persons to facilitate interaction in these groups. Often times, I have been surprised at how engaged some of our 1:1 individuals are by sitting in the same area and listening to the program. It gives them a sense of familiarity and this has helped with behavioral issues at home.

7. Are you able to bill an individual's Medicaid waiver for virtual day habilitation services?

Yes, MASSHEALTH has allowed us to bill fulltime rates for the services we provide our members. We have to make meaningful contact virtually once a week with participants.

Gabrielle Szarek, Director of Transition Services, [Next: A Division of the St. Louis Arc \(MO\)](#)

1. How did you set-up a virtual day program using digital platforms such as Facebook Live, Zoom or Google Classroom?

To move our program to a virtual platform, it really came down to ensuring all participants had access to both technology and Wi-Fi, training staff, and scheduling. From there, it was being as creative as possible to come up with ideas that held everyone's attention while learning.

2. How do you address HIPPA and privacy concerns with conducting virtual programs on digital platforms?

We use the password feature on Zoom and make sure not to post any Zoom links publicly.

3. What resources did you use to develop a virtual day program curriculum?

A lot of it was creativity and thinking about how we could deliver our typical activities via Zoom. We also collaborated with other agencies and did some research for ideas.

4. What training did you offer staff to conduct virtual day programs?

We brought our staff together for one initial training and then scheduled bi-weekly team meetings to troubleshoot any issues or concerns that staff were experiencing.

5. How do you get access to technology to consumers?

We are fortunate that everyone in our program already has access.

6. How are you able to accommodate programming for people of various levels (i.e. people who need 1:1 support versus people that are more independent)?

Offering a combination of both individual sessions and group sessions allow for having peer to peer interaction, but also giving the chance to provide more support if needed.

7. Are you able to bill an individual's Medicaid waiver for virtual day habilitation services?

Our [Launch program](#) is private pay.

This brief is brought to you by the National Conference of Executives of The Arc and The Arc of the United States.