



Supporting learners remotely during a pandemic

Between March and June 2020, a lot of countries in Europe went into total lockdown. People were stuck at home, and most usual activities were put on hold: school and training, sports, restaurants, museums, work, family reunions, ...

As the weeks passed by, trainers and teachers had to innovate to teach remotely, with many complications and doubts. Moreover, the limited contacts and activities caused a loss of reference points and rhythm and the **accentuation of personal problems** (family troubles, small housing, revenue loss, ...) **and troubles** (isolation, anxiety, uncertainty,).

In an attempt to respond to those concerns, actors in the VET sector spent considerable energy to **keep in touch with the learners**. If the recipe was basically similar to what they are used to, the form changed radically and quickly: **multiplikation of communication** means and channels (email, phone, mail, text messages, social networks, etc.), collective and individual **follow-up**, regular contacts, hotlines, sharing of **tips and tricks** to cope with the lockdown, mobilisation of partners, etc.

What about the learners with psychological disturbances?

For learners living with psychological disturbances, lockdown may have **triggered and/or worsened their disturbances**. Beyond distance learning, it was therefore also important to reinforce the remote support, making sure they were okay despite the isolation.

In France, Fabienne Favarel is the **Training Manager and Disability referent at INFREP Périgueux**. A few months ago, when the lockdown was implemented, she witnessed changes within her learners: *“As a result of the lockdown, some learners experienced stress and anxiety. One of them even abandoned the training program, partly due to other reasons than the lockdown, but this situation clearly wors-*

ened their stress”. At INFREP, like in many other organisations, the pedagogical staff had to come up with alternative ways to deal with learners. *“With the learner experiencing anxiety, we had to make sure they had a rhythm”*. In order to keep them on the way, Fabienne called one of her learners every day to remind them *“to organise their days, to maintain a routine, to establish a schedule, etc.”*.

Quickly, the staff had to organise distance learning courses, with groups presenting non-homogenous levels in terms of digital literacy. It was very difficult for the educators to cope with the learners' skills diversity. *“They were all very different in their capacity of following a distanced training that was originally designed to be face to face”*.

Some weeks after the end of the lockdown, last summer, learners had to look for an internship. *“This made them feel secure and confident about the continuity of their training path”*.

One thing is certain: **the sanitary crisis confirmed the central and essential nature of the psychosocial support for learners as a key to maintaining motivation and attachment to the training path**.

These last few weeks, the Covid19 situation across Europe is worsening by the day... Pedagogical staffs will, again, have to work twice as hard to keep on building and nourishing a trustful relationship with the learners, to hold them onto their training path and to reduce their stress, anxieties and insecurities.

