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Brookdale

Development of Digital Literacy among People with Disabilities.

Learning process: Mapping of Knowledge

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Abstract

Background

Digital literacy is the ability to acquire, process and evaluate information in a critical manner and to communicate with individuals or organizations by means of computer and internet technology. In the information age, digital literacy has become an essential tool and skill. People with disabilities use online resources to a lesser extent than others and have weaker digital literacy skills. This digital gap is to their detriment and underlines the need to promote digital literacy among people with disabilities in a way that meets their needs. The Disability Administration in the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs, the Special Education Branch in the Ministry of Education and JDC-Israel Unlimited requested that the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute carry out a learning process focused on mapping the knowledge in this domain, with the goal of promoting the development and improvement of programs to enhance and preserve digital literacy among people with disabilities in Israel. The learning process concentrated on adults aged 18 and above, as well as individuals in their late teens.

The goal of the learning process

The goal of the learning process was to map the existing knowledge in two areas:

1. The factors that promote the acquisition and preservation of digital literacy among people with disabilities.
2. Training and learning methods used in Israel and abroad that have been effective in developing digital literacy among people with disabilities.

In the second stage of the learning process, following the mapping of knowledge, a report on best practices based on proven experience will be published by the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute with the goal of improving digital literacy programs for people with disabilities.

Methodology

The learning process during the knowledge-mapping stage consisted of two components:

1. **An in-depth literature review:** academic articles and websites of government ministries and service-providing organizations, as well as grey literature which includes research reports and policy papers.
2. **Interviews with key figures and members of the target population:** 18 interviews. The interviewees included people with disabilities and their families (5), researchers (4), policy makers (3), public activists on behalf of people with disabilities (3), and service providers and care professionals (3).

Main findings

- **The factors that have been found to promote digital literacy** among people with disabilities include personal characteristics – age, education level, disability severity, type of disability, employment status, level of personal maturity, etc.; characteristics of the technological environment – type of online activity, the digital device being used, suitability and accessibility of the devices being used and the level of support by the surrounding network; and macro-level characteristics – policy on the national or local level and the accessibility of online resources among the public as a whole.
- **Effective methods of training and learning for the development of digital literacy** among people with disabilities include: mapping of strengths and weaknesses among the participants and the technologies that are needed for training; choosing content according to type of disability and level of digital knowledge; integrating a variety of digital platforms and devices during the training; setting learning goals; using measurement scales to examine the level of progress in the training program; collecting feedback from the participants and caregivers; and carrying out follow-up sessions after the training for the purpose of refreshing and practicing the material taught and in order to assimilate it for the long term. There were also training sessions involving formal and informal caregivers. The training staff sometimes includes instructors with disabilities, which makes it easier to identify the difficulties encountered by the participants and the effective ways of coping with them; at the same time, the instructor's feeling of self-capability and empowerment is reinforced.

Summary and recommendations

The first part of the learning process identified several **practical work methods** to promote digital literacy among people with disabilities:

- Methods that focus on policy and service provision: It is recommended that effort be invested to promote website accessibility; to secure budgeting for the acquisition of technological platforms and devices (such as in residential institutions); to develop technical support centers; to include people with disabilities in the development of online applications; to improve the technological infrastructure of the internet network; and to achieve more competitive pricing as well as better accessibility of technological platforms.
- Focus on improving training programs for promoting digital literacy among people with disabilities: It is recommended that this effort focus on four aspects – administration, content and target population, instruction, and measurement of outcomes in the training programs.

- The family members and formal caregivers have an important role to play in mediating between people with disabilities and the digital world. Their attitude may have a positive effect or alternatively may hinder the use of digital platforms by people with disabilities. Therefore, it is recommended that they be part of the effort to promote digital literacy among people with disabilities by developing their own digital skills and providing them with tools to deal with the emotional aspect of the learning process, such as the willingness of people with disabilities to accept help.