COVID & Canada's Settlement Sector: Survey Results

Survey conducted in collaboration between North York Community House, Department of Imaginary Affairs and Freelance Consultant, Marco Campana

Report prepared for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)

May 2020

North York Community House

"You're not 'working from home'; you're trying to get some work done while confined to your home during a crisis." [Stella O'Malley]

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Preamble

On behalf of North York Community House (NYCH) and our partners (Department of Imaginary Affairs and Marco Campana) I am very pleased to present the results of this survey. We thought it was extremely important to check in with our immigrant and refugee-serving sector colleagues across the country on how we are all doing working remotely during these unprecedented times. This survey provides a snapshot of where we were all at during the first month of working remotely. It looks at what is working, our challenges and concerns and our successes and failures from both the front-line and management perspective.

This point in time when we are all #suddenlyremote provides our sector with so many opportunities to learn. With little or no preparation for our organizations to work remotely, we have all had to experiment and figure out what works and what does not. We are doing this amid the challenges of working from our homes, while managing childcare, home schooling and/or worrying about family, friends, clients and staff (the list goes on).

The results of this survey provide a critical look at how our agencies are doing right now. In reading the results of the survey, I am so impressed by the efforts of agency staff and leaders to figure out how to maneuver during these times and to best serve our clients and participants. I know it has not been easy for anyone and the results of the survey articulate this very well, but we are a resilient sector. The work that we are doing now will provide us with very valuable lessons and experiences for planning for the “new normal”.

At NYCH we have been learning about how best to engage our participants, how to bring our programs online, both those that can be done fairly easily and those that require a lot of creativity (such as childcare), and how to best support staff mental wellness. Our staff’s openness to trying new ways of working, their support for each other and their dedication to their clients and participants have been so inspiring to me.

I would like to thank all of the survey respondents who took time from their busy schedules to complete the survey. We had 166 respondents who completed the full survey. They represented nine provinces and two territories. Thank you to IRCC, which provided funding to cover some of the work of the survey analysis. Lastly, I would especially like to thank Marco Campana and Jennifer Chan who did a huge amount of work on this survey - from developing the questions to analyzing all the data to writing this report.

I believe that not only will we get through these times, but we will also be better equipped to help our clients thrive and to work together to build a more caring and compassionate country.

- Shelley Zuckerman, Executive Director, North York Community House (NYCH)

Survey methodology and reporting

The survey opened on March 30, 2020 and closed on April 20, 2020.

We created an initial list of 234 sector contacts from across Canada. These contacts were emailed directly through SurveyMonkey. We also created and shared social media messaging for all provincial umbrella groups and sector contacts to share with their networks. Numerous individual personal contacts were also emailed directly to encourage them to complete and share the survey. NYCH, DIA, and Marco Campana also used their social media channels and networks to distribute the survey.

We asked participants to choose a path through the survey, based on their role in their organization:

1. Front-line settlement practitioner (any role that is primarily client facing - includes Settlement, Employment, Housing, Health, Childcare, RAP Case worker, Youth, Volunteer Coordinator, Administration (receptionist, assistant), Job developer, etc)
2. Leadership:
    - Program Coordinator/Supervisor
    - Manager Level
    - Director Level/Senior Leadership/VP
    - Executive Director
    - Board of Directors

166 completed the survey. 156 answered the final demographic questions:

Front-line practitioner - 108 started (with some drop-off as they progressed through the survey, some questions had 104, 105, 102 to a low of 95 respondents by the final front-line practitioner question). 97 indicated they work in front-line positions in demographic questions.

Organizational leadership - 58 started and consistently answered questions (only 1 person dropped off in later questions which stayed consistently at 57 respondents). 64 indicated they were in leadership positions, which suggests that some organizational leaders may have followed the front-line path.

10 indicated other roles. Based on submissions we would consider 7 front-line, 3 leadership (these numbers are included above).

What we could have done better

We moved quickly to create and distribute this survey to be able to capture the early days of remote work in the sector due to the pandemic. As a result, we can now see some gaps in our approach.

Most of our questions were open ended and did not include rating scales. This was a choice to get unfiltered feedback from survey participants to understand how they described their situation and experiences. On one hand, it may have been useful to also add rating scales. However, we are exceptionally impressed with the level of insight and detail many provided. Having a rating scale with an option for “comment” may not have resulted in as rich a commentary.

For the questions we’ve deemed priority or offering the most insight from the survey, we have provided our assessment of a standard rating scale where it made sense (Better than expected -> Finding Coping Strategies -> Neutral -> Having Difficulties -> Struggling) as well as unique themes for each question based on survey participant sentiment. We have also included a number of illustrative comments from the survey to support the rating assessment.

Some survey questions contain multiple questions. Clearly this had an impact on how the questions are answered in terms of what a survey participant chooses to focus on. These should have been separated into different questions.

299 survey participants actually started the survey. 133 left the survey after choosing their role as front-line practitioner or leadership level. We cannot explain this drop off of survey participants. However, we chose 166 as our final count of survey participants.

In spite of these deficiencies, we believe this survey provides very useful insight and point in time snapshot of how the immigrant and refugee-serving sector has moved into remote work during a pandemic.

Access to complete survey data

We are providing access to the complete survey data for those interested in conducting their own analysis. Your assessment of sentiment may differ from ours. You may deem other questions more of a priority. We’re interested in how you might use this data and what conclusions you might draw from it.

We will provide access to the data in two forms:

1. PDF with complete survey results (every comment made by survey participants)
2. Response spreadsheet with the complete survey data

Introduction

Like everyone, the immigrant and refugee-serving sector became #suddenlyremote. Agencies had to make decisions quickly to respond to the ever-changing environment. They have been learning, exploring, managing differently.

Immediately, there seemed to be an opportunity to check in to see how the sector is doing. How are front-line workers? How are leadership (managers, EDs, Boards)? How easily have they been able to transition your administration infrastructure to remote and virtual work? How are newcomers doing?

We created a survey to check in with our immigrant and refugee-serving sector colleagues across the country. These survey results are useful for all of us to establish a snapshot of where we all are at right now. This survey was not intended to compare our organizations or to be used for performance reviews.

It was about the culture, mindset and structures in place that are supporting or hindering you from getting your job done. This was not an evaluation of how sector workers were doing their job but a check-in to see how they are managing their “new normal”.

We do not intend to make recommendations or create a roadmap of next steps. Agencies are doing that actively. This is an opportunity to acknowledge where the sector is at, provide a sense of trends of how the sector is coping during a pandemic. We summarized parts of the survey we found most interesting below. We will share our thoughts on these trends, in terms of what has jumped out, what the sector says is working and what is not.

We plan to conduct a follow-up survey when we have moved from this interim normal into the next phase of normal when sector workers are able to start returning to their workplaces.

The interim normal

The reality is that this is not simply working from home. Overall, sector respondents, both front-line and in leadership positions indicate that their agency has been able to make the move online and is adapting to remote work.

However, balance is difficult. There is anxiety and stress. Many have families, sharing space and time with them as they attend to home life pressures, while attempting to launch a new way

of serving anxious clients using existing and new technologies, and dealing with their own anxieties about the pandemic.

True to what we know of the sector, workers and leadership are resilient, adaptable, and committed to the well-being of their clients. When asked how their clients are doing, they show concern about those who are most vulnerable, less digitally literate or lacking technology and thus not as able to access services remotely. As one leader put it "It has been difficult for many, seniors feel even more isolated that before, and families have lost that point of support for meaningful learning and engagement. Going online is intimidating for some. The phone calls have been vital, some have lasted up to 2 hours."

Front-line practitioners and leaders alike suggest that clients range from feeling confused and vulnerable, anxious about employment and income, finding it difficult to access in-language materials about COVID in some cases, and feeling isolated. That’s not surprising.

At the same time, many clients are doing well, they understand the situation and are following public health guidelines. They are grateful for service continuity and the shift to online services is working for many of them.

For those clients with technology infrastructure, remote service is working. But not always for staff. Some workers do not find technology-mediated service delivery to be adequate or equal in-person:

"Nothing is better this way. Direct communication with clients is the only way to deal with people who are under duress and are also anxious."

"I miss my students and colleagues. I don't think this is a better way of doing things."

Others are finding the interim way of working is better for them. Some indicate that service has become more efficient:

"I have always found it efficient to work at home in terms of detailed administrative work as there are many distractions at the office. I also appreciate all the time that is saved in travelling to work, and packing and unpacking my laptop and materials every day. I also really like being able to set my own schedule daily around what works for me, rather than having to be at the office all day on top of whatever I did or need to do early in the morning or in the evenings and weekends."

"One of my clients has expressed pleasure at not having to use public transport to get to class, and being able to wear comfortable clothing."

There have even been shifts in power and team dynamics:

"Team leads are asking staff for recommendations for online training resources, we never had an opportunity to share our training ideas before. We are considering new ways of connecting to clients which can be carried on like childcare staff calling families and a family and wellness facebook group. Team leads used to hold a meeting once a month with us if we were lucky, and this was never a set day, any day they could suddenly say we are having a meeting - now we are having regular scheduled weekly meetings which allows us to prepare and stay well informed and connected."

"Zoom meetings are more efficient, less dominated by certain individuals."

There is time for organizational introspection, including how services previously not considered for remote or technology-mediated approaches can be moved in this direction: "This situation has forced our organization to look at all of the programs and services we offer. Although we have been very proactive over the years in developing remote options for our services there are still some that aren't. Our organization is now actively looking at this and how to do it better."

Both workers and leaders are getting used to a new workday flow. While they balance life with families (both in-home, extended, and overseas), all are working to create some structure in their day. There are more team meetings to stay connected to each other. Many miss in-person connections, but are using video chat technology to its full advantage. For some it is still not the same. They "find that the job is not the same without face to face visits with clients." Perhaps surprisingly to some, these comments are in the minority.

The number of organizations that were prepared for remote work may appear to be surprising but it is a sector that, in some areas, has embraced remote work (pre-arrival services, SWIS/SEPT workers, Settlement Workers in Libraries, etc.). The vast majority of front-line workers who have not worked remotely previously indicate that their leadership has quickly stepped up and their teams are working well together. Others indicate that they are learning as they go and would have done more technology evaluation, staff (and client) training, ensured secure access to client files, as well as had plans for better home office setups (technology, ergonomics, space, etc.).

Overall, staff and leadership are anxious, like most in society, but are adapting to the interim normal. Newcomers are being served. In some cases new clients are being served. The recognition for policy development when it comes to business continuity, remote work, digital services has moved from a nice to have back burner idea to immediate and urgent. It will be useful sooner rather than later to embark on a learning and knowledge mobilization process so the entire sector can learn from each other. This is a useful time for the sector and its funders to build a digital/remote work foundation of capacity that will lead out of the interim normal into a new normal.

Survey Themes and Observations

What is normal for now?

The majority of frontline staff who participated in this survey are finding coping strategies to make this transition workable. Some coping strategies include; doing yoga or meditation for self-care, using EAP services, getting outside for daily walks, spending time eating meals with family members.

For many staff, navigating the balance has been difficult. Many staff shared challenges around child-care, spending more time responding to clients, learning new technologies, being managed remotely, and struggling to stay focused. For many front-line, finding and maintaining a routine is a key strategy to being able to create balance in their day. Many individuals were able to outline a fairly regimented hourly breakdown of their day that they did on repeat. Front-line practitioners who have kids noted that they struggle to balance their work day with child care and schooling.

Most of Leadership who participated in this survey are finding coping strategies to make this transition workable. They are finding their way. They acknowledge that the situation is unprecedented and feel the weight of supporting both their staff and clients. Many shared challenges of doing more work, longer hours and finding it harder to step away from their work without clear boundaries. We found that leadership was having more issues coping than front-line workers. In some ways this makes sense, they have many moving parts to coordinate, while also dealing with self-isolation during a pandemic.

What's shifting?

Almost two-thirds of front-line practitioners have been able to make the switch successfully to remote work. Almost 25% even found themselves surprised to be enjoying this way of working. However, almost one-third found themselves struggling.

Among leadership an almost equal number were making the switch to remote work successfully, with 52% finding it challenging but that they have been able to adapt. However, almost one-third found it a big shift, with 21% working longer hours.

Overall it makes sense that the shift to remote work would be challenging. This is not simply remote work, but working from home during a pandemic. As indicated in the previous section, there are many additional challenges and priorities for all.

What's actually better? Worse?

Most front-line practitioners indicated that making a connection with newcomers was difficult in a digital service environment. In spite of video being a face to face interaction, some workers don't find video provides the same experience. It would be useful to explore this further to determine if this is a technology, personal comfort, training or other challenge. As well, the real issue of client digital divide came up with some clients simply not having the technology or digital literacy to access technology-mediated remote services. In many cases phone technology was used, but was also found to be a challenge for clients who prefer in-person interactions.

What does technology use look like?

Even when working in offices providing in-person services research and anecdotal evidence have shown that front-line practitioners use personal devices (usually smartphones) and accounts (usually digital messaging) to serve their clients.

Findings here are aligned with previous research, suggesting that almost a third of front-line practitioners are using personal devices. We decided to ask about combinations of devices, given that not all would have access to work computers at home, and it is interesting and potentially concerning (related to privacy and confidentiality) to see the high numbers for both front-line practitioners and leadership.

As a follow-up to the question about use of personal devices it was important to understand if front-line practitioners are using devices that others have access to. This has a potential impact on client confidentiality.

It makes sense given the sudden move to remote work that 26% of practitioners are using private, shared devices, but it is also a concern.

There is a misperception among funders and others in the sector about how technology is used in client service delivery. At the same time, there have been disconnects between how front-line practitioners report use of technology and leadership understanding of what technologies are being used by their staff.

It is interesting to see in this survey how front-line and leadership appear to be aligned with top 5 technologies being used. In previous research and anecdotally, front-line workers use email, digital messaging and text messaging predominantly, as complementary technologies to their in-person services. It makes sense here to see video and webinar technologies leap to the top 5 given the nature of remote work. We interpret the higher percentage of leadership using text and digital messaging as tools they use to interact with their staff. In some comments, as well as anecdotal conversations outside of this survey, Microsoft Teams appears to have become a widely used tool mainly for internal communication within agencies and should be explored in more detail.

What do client services look like now?

Early on when agencies moved to remote work, IRCC, the main sector funder provided guidance of what critical services it expected service providers to meet (a summary is here). Eighty-seven percent of agencies that completed this survey receive funding from IRCC. We wanted to know how that was being communicated within agencies and what decisions agencies may have taken on their own to provide service that may surpass funder expectations.

Agencies are trying to maintain the service levels that they previously provided to newcomers. In some cases, they have defined for themselves what are core or critical services, which may align or surpass IRCC's definition.

Interestingly more leadership than front-line participants indicated that they are following IRCC directives. This may be interpreted that agencies are not passing the IRCC directive along directly to front-line practitioners, but are simply instructing staff in what level of service to provide.

How are clients adapting?

According to front-line practitioners, clients are coping. There are also significant numbers who are vulnerable, and anxious about the current situation. Almost a third of front-line practitioners indicated that newcomers are struggling with technology. There is concern that they may become more vulnerable as this situation goes on. Some practitioners indicate that they are having success reaching newcomers using the technology they use and that this has helped with service continuity.

Comments from leadership are very much aligned with front-line practitioners. They also indicate that it has been helpful to specific programs, information, or targeted approaches to help newcomers cope or become better informed. Organizations feel responsible for explaining and ensuring that clients are keeping safe and healthy and following social distancing rules. This can cause frontline practitioners and management to feel guilty and/or frustrated when newcomers don't understand the recommendations or are becoming increasingly vulnerable because of the rules.

How are teams doing?

A majority of front-line practitioners indicated that remote service is working for them and their clients. It was interesting to note comments about service efficiencies, but also administrative efficiencies in terms of meeting with teams, as well as a few who indicated that working remotely had increased their ability to contribute ideas and their voice to their organization where staff who typically dominated internal discourse were not able to. Some practitioners remain unsure

of the quality of remote work and question whether efficiencies come at the cost of better decision-making or deeper interactions with newcomers.

At the same time, practitioner feedback suggests that teams are adapting and struggling equally. Leadership has a slightly more positive outlook on how their teams are functioning together while working remotely. It is a challenging transition and they are learning as they go.

What's structurally changing at organizations?

Few agencies had policies in place before COVID-19. The high number of "not sure" and "none" responses from front-line (29.30%) is not surprising given previous research and anecdotal evidence.

Many organizations felt like they were ready to do remote work or already had some HR policies, practices and processes in place. Almost 20% indicated they now have complete policies, protocols, processes, or practices in place. For others, they developed or adapted existing policies and practices to reflect their new remote working situation.

The creation of new policies, protocols, processes, or practices appears to mainly be ad hoc. "Some" was the highest response among both front-line and leadership, suggesting that new policies were being created to meet specific needs. This makes sense given the sudden move to remote work. However, as we had intended, it makes even more sense now for all of those to be shared sector wide and with the funder with a goal to create a policy framework for all sector agencies. It remains concerning that 21.65% of front-line practitioners answered "not sure" or "none."

When it comes to client confidentiality, some agencies have existing policies that staff are expected to follow. For the most part, staff are asked to do their best, such as finding quiet or private spaces to talk to clients, use earbuds for calls, etc. Some agencies appear to be set up with secure and confidential means of communicating with clients, while others simply ask staff to be careful what is shared via unsecure means, such as email or text. Some leaders are unsure of how well their staff are managing this, which suggests work to be done in terms of policies, as well as prioritizing confidential client interactions.

What's Next?

We created this survey to document the initial reactions, strategies and feelings about transitioning to remote work. Inevitably it will also ignite discussion. That is a good thing.

The current scenario individuals and organizations are navigating is a major shift in the way the immigrant and refugee-serving sector works and serves newcomers. This is a time that could be

devastating. While some are certainly struggling, individuals and organizations are also learning to experiment, adapt, iterate and respond to the needs of clients and staff. All at an extremely accelerated pace. This is muscle memory that will serve everyone in the long run.

We believe the sector's strength comes from the people who are working within and with the sector. This survey strongly demonstrates the sector's capacity to be resilient in the face of unprecedented challenges.

We have shared our point-of-view and observations based on what we see. By no means are we saying we have the only narrative. You have access to the complete data to make your own observations. We welcome hearing about them.

In the coming months, as the sector figures out next steps, we hope this document guides, supports and provokes conversations about what's possible. We hope this survey contributes to these conversations. This document illustrates opinions of a portion of the sector, who self-selected to participate. We hope if you did not participate in this survey you will join these many conversations. Please share feedback with us by reaching out or starting your own conversations to guide your own next steps.

It was always our intention to follow up and check in with the sector when the interim normal shifts to a new normal. We will reach out to you all again with a new survey. We look forward to hearing and sharing how you are and how your agencies are doing.

Specific Survey questions

We have selected some core questions from the survey below. For each we have provided information about what we were intending to capture, our observations of comments, categorized the responses and included some specific quotes to illustrate the themes, to give you a sense of the richness of participant comments and insights.

You're at home. You may be taking care of family. How are you coping with working, juggling personal life and commitments, and any anxiety you're feeling about the current situation? How are you?

Question: We asked "You're at home. You may be taking care of family. How are you coping with working, juggling personal life and commitments, and any anxiety you're feeling about the current situation? How are you?"

Intention: We wanted to start this survey off with a personal question that invited participants to give us honest answers. Even before COVID-19, the sector can feel over surveyed and our concern was that this survey would feel like, yet another thing to do at a time when individuals are already having to do so much transitioning.

Front-line

How many people answered: 108

Observations: The majority of front-line practitioners who participated in this survey are finding coping strategies to make this transition workable. Some coping strategies include; doing yoga or meditation for self-care, using EAP services, getting outside for daily walks, spending time eating meals with family members.

For many staff, navigating the balance has been difficult. Many staff shared challenges around child-care, spending more time responding to clients, learning new technologies, being managed remotely, and struggling to stay focused.

Scale:

Better than expected 8.33%
Finding Coping Strategies 57.41%
Neutral 10.19%
Having Difficulties 18.52%
Struggling 5.56%

Themes:

Balance is difficult 21.30%
I'm worried about my clients 8.33%
Mixture of feelings 12.04%
Anxious about COVID-19 18.52%
Feeling disconnected from others 11.11%

"It is overwhelming. I find that I am working more than before. Adrenaline rush for the first 2 weeks, and there were times I want to cry out loud saying it is too much. Always with neck pain and stiff shoulders. 3rd week I said to myself... slow down. Take it easy. But there was high demand to be available as a front line staff."

"I am stressed. I do not have the space for a home office. I am using my laptop at my kitchen table, I don't have access to the things I need to be able to do my job. It is hard to have good professional boundaries when I am working out of my home. My home space has become my

work space. The workload has not decreased, clients have more worries and questions, I feel overwhelmed. It is hard to 'unplug' after the end of the day. I haven't been sleeping well, and I worry a lot about vulnerable clients who are having many services discontinued at this time."

"Love working from home - wish it could be permanent. Not difficult to juggle at all, in fact, I have more energy to work without the 2 hours commuting both ways. Very anxious most of the time with the current world situation. Makes it difficult to focus on work as it seems fairly inconsequential compared to what's going on."

"It is certainly not easy to be abruptly disrupted from your daily routine. When the new rules has been implemented to work from home, it came in a bit of a shock and inconvenient. At first, there was confusion and feeling of uncertainty. I wasn't sure what to prioritize as you wake up in the morning you can't avoid picking up stuff, start to clean up, prepare meals and soon you realized your hooked with house work and then you work phone start to ring, you'll get email that are urgent in nature. I became disorganized, I guess I am use of taking the comfort of physical office infrastructure, like faster internet, your own work space and access to office files through RDS. I guess the most difficult part in this specific situation is that your mobility is restricted. You cannot head out for a walk when you need fresh air. I live downtown and by the time you're out of your building you see people not practicing social distancing and so paranoia starts to kick in. I feel like I should be happy because I can save more time with family but not exactly because your attention is divided. I was out of focus and the situation is disabling and overwhelming , like you haven't accomplished anything at the end of the day but you feel so tired and restless at the same time. And then there was a tendency to over extend your time to respond to emails and texts from clients. I also felt like my personal space has been compromised as well. I always take comfort in the idea that after a day of chaos from work, I can come home, relax and enjoy time with family."

Leadership

How many people answered: 58

Observations: Most of Leadership who participated in this survey are finding coping strategies to make this transition workable. They are finding their way. They acknowledge that the situation is unprecedented and feel the weight of supporting both their staff and clients. Many shared challenges of doing more work, longer hours and finding it harder to step away from their work without clear boundaries.

Scale:

Better than expected 12.07%
Finding Coping Strategies 44.83%
Neutral 8.62%
Having Difficulties 31.03%

Struggling 1.72

Themes:

Worried about staff 22.41%
Anxious about COVID-19 22.41%
Balance is difficult 20.69%
Worried about my clients 5.17%
Organization was ready 12.07%
Feeling disconnected from others 6.90%

“I'm not taking care of a family so 1 less stress. But it's still stressful. I feel a lot of responsibility to ensure that our organization and services are working well remotely, that we're supporting our staff effectively. I miss the in person connections.”

“Stressed, setting up a skeleton remote team and temporarily laying off the rest of the staff. Finding our way in this new environment.”

“Feeling helpless, tired, overworked and very worried about the future of the nonprofit sector. I don't feel that I am doing enough.”

“Fine. Busier than ever. Managing remote staff, shifting to 100% remote service delivery (we had some remote service delivery previously), and meeting emerging client needs under the current circumstances while managing year-end and transition to a new funding year has all added up to a lot more work than we would typically have at this time of year. Can't relate to those who are experiencing a reduced workload (thankful to have stable employment).”

“Increasingly anxious since it is becoming difficult to help my kids with schooling (online meetings and assignments) while attending online meetings and answering an increasing amount of emails. Overall, we have adjusted quite well, yet it is difficult to keep an 8 hour work day per parent with a 7 hour school day per child.”

“Not well, but coping. Trying to focus on what can be controlled, to feel grounded. The challenge of balancing family responsibilities and work is very difficult. I have a baby, a toddler and older parents to care for at home, along with a team that is going through a lot of change.”

“Having worked through the Syrian crisis resettlement response, lessons learned and best practices that we implemented during and following that experience has allowed us to, so far, manage this emerging crisis. Many of our staff were already set up to work remotely to a great extent. Having lived through similar experiences personally, is also helpful.”

“It has been tough all round. I am blessed with a strong staff team who are newcomers themselves and have lived the struggle of settling in a new country and so are diligent about

connecting with clients. The management team is well connected and brings back updates and ideas and new ways to support staff and services/clients and check in about individuals and families. Considering the magnitude of the pandemic, I feel supported at work. As a family we are pulling together with Facebook and at home retreating to our own corners to accomplish the work on our plates. walking on the spot to keep active."

"I decided to be well. I was not well last week but it is also because I am always able to imagine what is coming well in advance so when it actually comes I have no fears. I also have a lot of family in Europe, some in Italy, Germany and what is happening there is obviously affecting me as well."

What does a "normal" workday look like now?

Question: We asked "What does a "normal" workday look like now?"

Intention: We wanted participants to know that their normal is normal. That there is no one way to be dealing with the pandemic and working remotely situation. Every answer was valid and we wanted to understand how individuals viewed what their normal looks like to them. The variations tell us a lot about the ways individuals are coping and what challenges they are facing.

Front-line

How many people answered: 109

Observations: For many front-line, finding and maintaining a routine is a key strategy to being able to create balance in their day. Many individuals were able to outline a fairly regimented hourly breakdown of their day that they did on repeat. Front-line practitioners who have kids noted that they struggle to balance their work day with child care and schooling.

Scale:

Better than expected 4.59%
Finding Coping Strategies 41.28%
Neutral 27.52%
Having Difficulties 22.94%
Struggling 1.83%

Themes:

Balance is difficult 17.43%
Building in self care and coping strategies 5.50%

Creating a routine is important 40.37%
Worried about clients 8.26%
Juggling family and work life 12.84%

“I start my workday at 9 am and spend the first hour or two responding to urgent emails and catching up with new info from our organization and others. Then I do outreach calls. During the day I generally have a couple of zoom or client meetings scheduled. I take a lunch break around my usual time (12:30/1), and check in with family and friends. Then I get back to work, take a shorter break at 3 , and end my work day at 5. I still check emails and leave my phone on loud in case anything urgent comes up. I worked from home occasionally before the outbreak so it wasn't a big adjustment.”

“Logistically, not much different as I mainly did counseling from home (3days a week). However, I feel I am more easily distracted with constant news updates and feel a lot of pressure responding to clients' questions-which are mainly tied up in the uncertainty of the situation.”

“8.30am-4pm-ish (sometimes a late phone call from my manager comes in after my 'regular' hours) of constantly interrupted work, lots of skype calls during which time my children are unable to ask my help with their learning work and my older children are needed to care for my three year old.”

“1. Wake up minutes before I'm supposed to login to work at 8:30. 2. Work in my pajamas while drinking coffee and eating breakfast. 3. Get dressed and check in with the kids. 4. Interact with the family when needed and appropriate, when the kids are entertained I come back to work. Basically, switch back and forth between interacting with the family in the household and focusing on work. 5. Around 5 or so shut down my computer and do some exercise either alone or with the family. 6. Dinner between 6 and 7. 7. Put the kids to bed between 8 and 9. 8. Watch the news until I can't watch it anymore, then find something mindless on TV like reruns of Friends or Seinfeld. 9. Go to sleep around midnight.”

Leadership

Question: We asked “What does a “normal” workday look like now?”

Intention: Leadership in organizations have been dealing with helping their staff become settled in remote work while they themselves find ways to work remotely. They are also tasked with working with their leadership colleagues on suddenly creating remote and digital work policies, protocols, guidelines and processes. And finally, they needed to come up with ways to manage their remote teams. We were interested in how all of that was working for them.

How many people answered: 58

Observations: We found that leadership was having more issues coping than front-line workers. In some ways this makes sense, they have many moving parts to coordinate, while also dealing with self-isolation during a pandemic.

Scale:

Better than expected 1.72%
Finding Coping Strategies 22.41%
Neutral 46.55%
Having Difficulties 22.41%
Struggling 3.45%

Themes:

Balance is difficult 25.86%
Trying to create a routine for myself and so staff know when I'm available 18.97%
Working longer hours 27.59%

"-Tired in the mornings (that was normal before) -start work late after attending to family needs -feel frustration that it's hard to balance both people's careers with the new role of full-time care for the children -bombarded by a million emails, some about typical work stuff, most about COVID-19 and adaptations, etc. -pass info this way & that. Respond to emails and forward -Here a zoom-call, there a zoom-call, everywhere a zoom call -zoom-call interrupted by cute curly-haired kids. Gracious participants at the other end -feel grateful that being a working mom is finally getting it's moment in the limelight -try to type up some minutes or focus some energy on core mission -get distracted -try to complete an annual report -get distracted -try to feed the family -express gratitude that I even have a job and an income -remind myself that I'm not working from home; "I'm at home in a crisis, trying to work" and tell myself I'll have grace to let good enough be good enough -ignore my own advice and work late into the night -wake up tired"

"Honestly, there is a no a normal anymore, every day has a new challenge, being a parent of two children under 5 finishing a master's and working from home is not normal...mostly a normal day is when the kids had a h Good day, which means I was able to get some work done."

"For me basically the same without in-person contact, lots of video calls as opposed to in-person meetings. I actually find that video calls are more productive."

"It starts earlier than usual since no commute, a quick 15 minute lunch and work longer than usual since I want to finish up on some things (probably working 9 to 10 hr days with only 15min break). It's so busy because I'm supporting frontline staff to access technology and making sure that they are ok and able to support our clients, especially the isolated and vulnerable. It's a

challenge because vulnerable clients with no digital literacy and language skills may require more creativity to support them and that puts a toll on staff."

"I make an effort to work regular hours, 8:30am to 5:00pm so my staff know when I am available. I am on my computer or on the phone for most of that day. I would say a good chunk of it is reporting, another chunk is communicating with staff and helping them make their plans for evolving programs and how to work from home, and the remainder is spent on various miscellaneous tasks."

What has your experience been like shifting to remote work?

Question: We asked "What has your experience been like shifting to remote work?"

Intention: We wanted to understand what shifting to remote work was like for them, in their own words. We were interested in learning about what individuals and organizations already had in place for working remotely and what needed to be rapidly resolved and what barriers there were to getting set up.

Front-line

How many people answered: 108

Observations: Almost two-thirds of front-line practitioners have been able to make the switch successfully to remote work. Almost 25% even found themselves surprised to be enjoying this way of working. However, almost one-third found themselves struggling.

Scale:

Better than expected 33.33%
Finding Coping Strategies 31.48%
Neutral 9.26%
Having Difficulties 16.67%
Struggling 6.48%

Themes:

Stressful, a shift but adapting 22.22%
Stressful, it's difficult to shift 11.11%
Already did some remote work 12.04%
Difficulties serving clients 12.04%
Surprised to find I enjoy doing remote work 24.07%

“It was stressful, looking hard to organize, and not looking very real when started, however gradually I managed to adapt myself with this new style. It's looking real for me now, and I feel more organized and disciplined and with time management and more efficient .”

“Un motivating and not as rewarding as face to face.”

“I don't mind working from home. I find that the job is not the same without face to face visits with clients. I really enjoy home visits so I have been struggling to feel like I'm connecting without being able to visit my clients.”

“Challenging. I have never done online classes, and that is a learning curve. However, I am surprised by how much I am enjoying it.”

“I have experience working remotely in previous jobs. The shift has not been as shocking as I anticipated, mostly because we have very supportive managers. My manager is very clear in balancing self care and work and thus provides flexible scheduling if we want it. Also management is helping staff find trauma informed classrooms and other related professional development webinars.”

“It has been emotional only because it's overwhelming juggling so much at once. That said, I have enjoyed spending more time with my children, having greater flexibility in work hours and deciding when I work best (i.e. sometimes getting ahead with work on a Sunday night). I have not felt disconnected from my team as we have used whats app groups and skype to stay in communication daily.”

“It has been difficult. I don't have access to a landline phone, and have had to use my personal cell phone to conduct 3 way calls with clients and interpreters. I don't have access to office supplies, or a dedicated work space. It has been difficult to only communicate with clients over the phone or through email. For people that do not have access to a computer we cannot do skype calls. Communication has been more time consuming and difficult between coworkers and clients.”

“It has been challenging at times, especially with getting acquainted with, and using, new communications platforms such as social media apps and new remote technologies. However, it has also been very fulfilling because we are able to continue helping our clients even during these very difficult and challenging times when they need us more than ever.”

“I don't have sufficient resources at home as not all agencies have remote working procedures. Our home computers are not fully equipped and fast as our work computers. Devices are giving difficulty to perform efficiently. In the office, we have IT help to assist in smooth working of softwares but at home, we face challenges. We don't have access to client files. Our system was not developed to continue this for long.”

Leadership

How many people answered: 57

Observations: Among leadership an almost equal number were making the switch to remote work successfully, with 52% finding it challenging but that they have been able to adapt. However, almost one-third found it a big shift, with 21% working longer hours.

Scale:

Great 7.02%
Good 36.84%
Neutral 29.82%
Having Difficulties 17.54%
Struggling 0%

Themes:

Big shift to remote work 31.58%
Longer hours & time on computer 21.05%
More regular/daily interactions with staff 14.04%
Challenging shift but we've adapted well 52.63%

"It has been pretty graceful, considering. Gratefully we already had access to email and a data storage server, remotely. My work has become more administrative in feel, than before, due to the decreased human interaction (in-person). It can be a bit tedious to conduct all services over the computer. Something is certainly lost when unable to meet face-to-face. However, for the most part, it has been good."

"This situation has really impacted our work, and ability to measure results. We were part way through an anti-racism campaign (ran for the month of March), and the campaign was greatly impacted in the last two months. It has also affected our ability to facilitate another project, and collect sponsorship funds for an event planned in the fall."

"Not all clients can access technologies we are trying to use to service them so having to help clients set up email accounts, install Zoom or WhatsApp remotely can be a challenge. I see staff responding to emails before and/or after working hours. Less face to face interaction and on the fly problem solving and collaborations has posed challenges and weakened morale in some cases."

"The actual tasks I do haven't changed much, but I do have more intentional conversations/meetings now about staff's welfare."

“While the core of work has not changed, it is challenging to do the same 'level' of work with very different tools. Obviously all in-person activities have ceased as has staff face-to-face interaction. What we are doing now is not indicative of what remote working could actually look like if it was deliberately planned for.”

“So far the experience is great, at least pushing us to use more online tools that we barely had a chance to try before. My daily work has changed from face to face conversation with staff to phone calls and messages, and from in person meetings to Zoom meetings.”

“There has been a 180 degree change. All our programs were offered face to face, and we had not ever explored offering online services to children, parents, seniors and adult learners. It's been an adjustment, but the staff are handling it so well!”

“I think our team is more efficient than before. We are also more accountable for the actual work instead of the 'present-isim' of a person in a chair.”

“We are more connected and touch base with each other more than when we were working from our offices. A lot more communication, collaborative team discussions and problem solving. While most staff have embraced our new working environment, I'm also doing more strategic outreach to some who are having some difficulties with the transition. Staff self care and maintaining work-life -healthy boundaries has also been a key message for me to staff - again more challenging for some staff than others.”

“Less meetings. Better efficiency. I think we are working better as a result of this. But we are also very vigilant because the circumstances are changing, the revenue is changing and a lot of insecurities are coming with it. The conversation that needs to happen is not about remote work but about work security in non profits.”

“I am in less touch with my staff. Productivity is less.”

What are you doing now that you think is actually a better way of getting things done?

Question: We asked “What are you doing now that you think is actually a better way of getting things done?”

Intention: We wanted to know what was most important to individuals as they were getting set up remotely. We were curious about what tasks, activities, technologies were proving to be a better or more efficient way of connecting with clients, co-workers, managers while working remotely.

Front-line

How many people answered: 106

Observations: A majority of front-line practitioners indicated that remote work is working for them and their clients. It was interesting to note comments about service efficiencies, but also administrative efficiencies in terms of meeting with teams, as well as a few who indicated that working remotely had increased their ability to contribute ideas and their voice to their organization where staff who typically dominated internal discourse were not able to. Some practitioners remain unsure of the quality of remote work and question whether efficiencies come at the cost of better decision-making or deeper interactions with newcomers.

Scale:

Better than expected 36.79%
Finding Coping Strategies 32.08%
Neutral 9.43%
Having Difficulties 6.60%
Struggling 9.43%

Themes:

More focused, fewer distractions 18.87%
Nothing is better 11.32%
Better meetings with colleagues - more focused and quicker 10.38%
Democratizing work input - ability to provide more input, be more creative 6.60%
It’s working for clients 17.92%

“Zoom meetings are more efficient, less dominated by certain individuals. Fewer distractions throughout the day (vs working in an office) We're thinking more big picture/practically now when we share resources with clients (is it accessible to everyone, easy to understand or follow, is it meaningful or helpful in this time) less paper waste, less pollution.”

“When I'm at the office I always have 100 projects on the go because I'll be working on one thing then talk to another person and start something else. I am more focused at home and able to start a project and finish before another one. Without the distraction I find it a little bit easier. It is also at the same time hard without co-workers here because we collaborate a lot.”

“Team leads are asking staff for recommendations for online training resources, we never had an opportunity to share our training ideas before. We are considering new ways of connecting to clients which can be carried on like childcare staff calling families and a family and wellness facebook group. Team leads used to hold a meeting once a month with us if we were lucky, and

this was never a set day, any day they could suddenly say we are having a meeting - now we are having regular scheduled weekly meetings which allows us to prepare and stay well informed and connected."

"Having a dedicated office space and meeting room at home to conduct meetings saves a lot of time for me. The office is an open concept with no fixed workspace and it can be time-consuming to look for available private meeting rooms to conduct online meetings with clients. I find it easier to concentrate at home with less noise and distractions."

"Better than before? Nothing. I'm a face-to-face instructor for half of my day, so not being physically in the classroom with my clients isn't better."

"I think that we're more efficient, but I'm not sure that's always a good thing as it's come at the expense of collective decisions, and so many of the little projects & programs we're involved in have been temporarily shut down. As an example, some of the advocacy networks we're a part of are having remote meetings. They're much quicker and cut down on travel, but they also leave no space for meeting with new people, being able to bring up new points quickly, etc. Beyond that, we really operate on the principle of fostering community, which is difficult at this time. We've come up with some unique new ways of doing that, but overall I'd say it's been difficult to maintain that sense of connection in this time."

"Nothing is better this way. Direct communication with clients is the only way to deal with people who are under duress and are also anxious."

How are your clients coping with public distancing and social isolation and how are you supporting them?

Question: We asked "How are your clients coping with public distancing and social isolation and how are you supporting them?"

Intention: We wanted to know how their clients were doing. While the main focus of this survey was on sector workers and leadership, we know that they have deep relationships with newcomers and their communities and would have useful information to share about how they are doing. There is also useful research happening with the COVID-19 Social Impacts Network that also looks at newcomers. We wanted to hear from service providers about their experiences with newcomers with whom they have trusted relationships.

Front-line

How many people answered: 107

Observations: According to front-line practitioners, clients are coping. There are also significant numbers who are vulnerable, and anxious about the current situation.

Scale:

Better than expected 12.15%
Finding Coping Strategies 40.19%
Neutral 25.23%
Having Difficulties 12.15%
Struggling 0.93%

Themes:

Many are concerned and feel vulnerable 23.36%
Anxious about employment 6.54%
Many are doing well, they understand the situation and are following public health guidelines 23.36%
Shift to remote/online services has been useful for many of them 9.35%

“Many were socially isolated to begin with, but the proliferation of local grassroots groups that have emerged from this pandemic has been helpful. They have been able to support clients with groceries where we can't. I hope they stick around after this crisis is over so they can further our work and keep this momentum. We're trying to support the relationships that already exist within groups so people can continue to 'meet' online or via phone. A lot of seniors have adapted quite easily because they're used to being home a lot. Some have expressed that there's too much online activity now and their days are very busy!”

“Most of my learners are not thrilled with social distancing. Some have expressed that they are bored, and others have expressed that having their children at home all of the time has been physically and emotionally draining. I know at least one of my learners is stressed out over financial concerns because he is unable to work. Finally, I suspect a few of my learners may be lonely, although none have expressed this outright. That said, from what I can tell, none of my learners have an unhealthy level of distress over the current situation.”

“Overall good. The majority understand that this is a unique situation and in their best interest. A few have challenges and we have been talking the challenges through and trying to help or refer to other resources.”

“There is alot of fear and frustration. I do check-ins that include a discussion about their own wellness and mental health as well as family support. Based on this, client's are referred to wellness support or other relevant services, provided with resources by email or social media, followed by follow ups.”

“The clients seem to be doing well. Newer arrivals are finding things more challenging as they are concerned about supporting their family. Temporary foreign workers also have questions. We are staying abreast of changes as well as supports available and provide that information to clients via Twitter, email and telephone. We are strongly reminding all that the steps in place now are essential and need to be followed.”

“I struggle to find appropriate translated materials to explain what is social distancing, emergency measures and all other information about what is happening in the community in simple infographics for LEP clients keeping in mind low literacy levels. We are calling every family individually to answer questions and provide information, sharing available translated materials with clients, community and service providers.”

“The biggest concern is financial. People are worried about paying rent, losing their jobs, and food bank closures. We haven't had anyone reach out for more social support, although we have been trying to connect people who contact us with community organisations that are offering more social support, wellness checks, etc. Residents who we live with are faring relatively well, but kids especially are struggling with being at home. We're trying to support them by spending time with kids doing non-electronic things (playing games, drawing, etc.), and organising things within each house (e.g. birthday dinners) to encourage people to socialise and break up the monotony.”

Leadership

Answered: 57

Observations: Comments from leadership are very much aligned with front-line practitioners. They also indicate that it has been helpful to specific programs, information, or targeted approaches to help newcomers cope or become better informed. Organizations feel responsible for explaining and ensuring that clients are keeping safe and healthy and following social distancing rules. This can cause frontline practitioners and management to feel guilty and/or frustrated when newcomers don't understand the recommendations or are becoming increasingly vulnerable because of the rules.

Scale:

Better than expected 3.51%
Finding Coping Strategies 28.07%
Neutral 33.33%
Having Difficulties 19.30%
Struggling 1.75%

Themes:

Feeling isolated 12.28%
Grateful for the continued service 3.51%
Offering specific programs, information, or targeted approaches to help 26.32%

“They seem to be coping quite well, considering. Many of them have large, close-knit families, so they are not alone. We are supporting them through referring them to the appropriate staff member for any needs or access to particular services or assistance that they may need that falls outside of our scope (i.e., referring to the settlement team). The teachers have also provided classes on COVID-19 and the organization has shared resources in multiple languages.”

“We are forwarding translated information from public health sources or IRCC as they become available. When communicating we try to do reminders on the importance of social distancing. For those seeming to experience mental health concerns related to social isolation we work with local partners to make referrals as appropriate and link directly to those offering service in various languages we serve.”

“This aspect has been difficult for some especially if they have large families. Clients are used to family interactions and sharing in the community as well. I call them and do a quick-check-in.”

“Many clients from 'collectivist' cultures do not understand the need or practice social distancing despite the many translated materials provided to them. It is a huge problem for our staff right now, and our top priority. Many are being called every day by staff to check-in. More than 3000 clients have had digital contact with a staff member in the past 2 weeks.”

“It has been difficult for many, seniors feel even more isolated that before, and families have lost that point of support for meaningful learning and engagement. Going online is intimidating for some. The phone calls have been vital, some have lasted up to 2 hours.”

“We "interview" for daily updates (monitor) and provide all the tools they require for a safe environment. However, most are not masking or even covering appropriately when they cough or sneeze. There's some paranoia as well. Some have a deep fear.”

“Through telephone, texting, and other social media we're getting the word out but those communities with languages of lesser diffusion are at a particular disadvantage.”

How have your clients reacted to being served via remote tools?

Question: We asked “How have your clients reacted to being served via remote tools?”

Intention: We wanted to know what challenges, if any, clients were facing and how that might be affecting front-line practitioners and organizations. We expected that some clients were

facing technical difficulties getting connected, but were curious if there was more to any disconnect clients might be facing.

Front-line

How many people answered: 108

Observations: Almost a third of front-line practitioners indicated that newcomers are struggling with technology. There is concern that they may become more vulnerable as this situation goes on. Some practitioners indicate that they are having success reaching newcomers using the technology they use and that this has helped with service continuity.

Scale:

Better than expected 7.41%
Finding Coping Strategies 23.15%
Neutral 7.41%
Having Difficulties 18.52%
Struggling 0%

Themes:

Difficult for clients - some clients aren't technology literate or don't have access to technology 31.48%
Easy for clients - most clients are technology literate and have access to tech 21.30%
Clients are grateful for service continuity 6.48%
Business as usual 10.19%

"A lot of seniors don't have access to online platforms and have discomfort around using it attending programming in person is often their only social contact and keeps them active, so this is a big loss some volunteers are worried about their privacy most seem grateful for our outreach and understand that we're doing our best to accommodate."

"I work with many families who have a beginner level of English and varying degrees of experience using technology. It has been a challenge for sure to adapt programs to meet the needs of all clients."

"At first, effectively communicating important information to my learners over the phone was more difficult than I expected, which made me nervous for teleteaching. Fortunately, translators were able to reach my learners and fill in any information they may have missed when speaking with me. To my pleasant surprise, after a few initial bumps in the road, teleteaching has gone far better than I thought it would. Certainly, having video and homework packet materials to use/refer to in lessons has helped. As I noted above, the learners themselves have been

positive and enthusiastic in responding to lessons. Most of them have expressed how much they enjoy and look forward to their lessons. Others have asked if it is possible for them to receive even *more* homework materials, because they are working through the ones we send so quickly."

"There have been varying levels of comfort with accessing the digital tools, but overall, it has been successful."

"It varies client by client, but our services are still accessible."

"My clients are very low level and literacy learners so they have a lot of trouble getting the information they need at the best of times. Accessing services has taken longer and been more challenging. But I started calling them right away and was able to communicate many of the key messages to them."

"It depends on the client. Some have problems, and we need to spend a lot of individual attention with them to troubleshoot and teach the technology, platforms etc. Others are able to do it quite easily. I think it is good that we have been flexible with how they access our services."

"My students are really excited to be using Whatsapp. Our school had interpreters contact all literacy to CLB 2 students to ask their preferred contact method. Nearly all my students requested Whatsapp. I feel my school has done a great job transitioning to remote services as settlement support was provided and consent was obtained for lower level learners before starting online English learning options."

"I feel we are more accessible than face-to-face. Face-to-face was limiting in time. Now clients access us for more focused and precise service support. It more efficient so far."

"Not all clients have equal access to technology, or experience using it. Not having a computer or not knowing how to navigate the internet is an issue. A lot of services from external service providers have been put on hold, or are now being operated online. A lot of information from government sources and health authorities have been released in english and not in additional languages. There are clients who are having difficulty finding information that they can access and understand."

"They prefer to meet me in person, full stop. It's a more personal experience and more comes out. I can read body language, pick up on cues and they can guide where the counseling session goes. By phone, it's much more challenging and clients already have a general fear of speaking on the phone, so this client anxiety is not helping our conversations move ahead smoothly."

“We have been using text messaging, phone calls and emails to get through to clients. I've found starting with a mode of communication they are familiar with first is the best way and then to introduce other modes, such as BlueJeans/Zoom.”

“Frustrating for some who could not reach me; frustrating also for those who are not tech savvy - not familiar on how to navigate information online.”

“I have always implemented a system where clients can access my services through email/whatsapp/phone, so this hasn't been too hard for them. I always maintain communication with clients so they don't feel too overwhelmed.”

Leadership

How many people answered: 58

Observations: Leadership trends and concerns mirror those of front-line practitioners.

Scale:

Better than expected 3.45%
Well 41.38%
Neutral 31.03%
Having Difficulties 8.62%
Struggling 0%

Themes:

Grateful 17.24%
Not all able to use technology tools 24.14%
For some it’s business as usual, seamless services 24.14%

“Most of them have been very adaptable and participatory. They seem happy to have continued contact and access to classes/services.”

“For those who have access to technology and internet/Wi-Fi, they are grateful for whatever we can do for them. For those without access or limited to telephone, it is more challenging but staff try to find creative ways to be of service and will advocate for clients when necessary if having to resort to snail mail which may pose issues where deadlines are imminent and may pose hardship if not met or deferred.”

“Most comfortable, others are unrealistic that will be able to. In particular seniors are only available over the phone.”

“Some very well, many of our clients are well educated and familiar with online services. Some clients do struggle and we use whatever platforms they are comfortable with and/or can access.”

“Most are receptive - 70-80% of clients are actively engaging in programs.”

“The most vulnerable who don't speak english and have no access to computers are the most difficult to serve.... and are typically the ones with the most urgent issues. Most clients are ok with being served remotely.”

“Not sure - staff have mentioned that the appmts take way longer than usual. We have also told staff there are no "my clients" at this time but rather focus on non-geographical in providing support to the clients eg seeking other settlement workers with the same language to help if they are busy.”

“It has been a confused response because we didn't have time to prepare them. Many of the older/adult clients are frustrated with the tools or didn't all have the same apps to begin with, so they struggled setting them up without our in person help. Youth have had an easier time overall with the transition to remote, but still talk about their preference for in person programming.”

“It is never the same as face to face. Clients with literacy, no internet connections at home, and language challenges are negatively impacted.”

What is your experience of being managed remotely and working in remote teams?

Question: We asked “What is your experience of being managed remotely and working in remote teams?”

Intention: We wanted to know how the transition to working remotely has been for teams. Did individuals feel more or less connected, were there new or different communication channels or practices or was it generally the same as before.

Front-line

How many people answered: 106

Observations: Teams are adapting and struggling equally. It is a challenging transition and they are learning as they go.

Scale:

Great 18.87%
Good 27.36%
Neutral 37.74%
Having Difficulties 15.09%

Themes:

Management has stepped up quickly & well 19.81%
We're learning as we go 23.58%

"Working with the team remotely has been really great so far. We have a whatsapp group for our team where we can share fun personal updates, but also ask specific questions about work. My manager has been very understanding and supportive, encouraging us to have more realistic expectations of what we can do given the current constraints. I think some people who aren't used to working from home still expect more immediate responses because they think there's no excuse not to respond ASAP right now. I think this will change as people adjust to a new normal."

"There are some co-workers for whom communication via skype is challenging. This is one of my biggest frustrations. Many colleagues are on a steep learning curve with technology. My managers have been very responsive though."

"Definitely more difficult - it's especially difficult communicating and having open conversations over zoom with so many people present. At the same time, the workload has become much more focused and so there's less time being spent going over different projects & issues, and things have become much more efficient."

"General management provides daily updates via email and connection. 1 to 2 times a week the team that I work with meet via Skype to do a check in, share challenges/successes, hear each other's voices and keep our manager and supervisor up to date on workload. Still feel connected although at home."

"The number of meetings has increased. Some are productive and needed to complete work and maintain mental and social health. Some are busy work, which gets frustrating."

Leadership

How many people answered: 58

Observations: Leadership has a slightly more positive outlook on how their teams are functioning together while working remotely.

Scale:

Great 22.41%
Good 32.76%
Neutral 24.14%
Having Difficulties 13.79%

Themes:

Learning as we go 34.48%
Miss in-person interactions and informal team dynamics but am adjusting 5.17%

“It has been quite seamless, although I manage a small, close-knit team. I am certainly not nearly as much a fan of video conferencing as I am of in-person interaction, as much is lost (the ability to read gestures and body language) and delivering all services via technology is not nearly as personable and satisfying.”

“Overall, this is going positively. It's accelerated simply because of need. It's slowed down simply because of all the distraction. My role is a network convener/ coordinator. So I don't have direct authority over other workers. I work "along-side" others through an influential leadership role. It's inspiring to be able to do this type of work in a time like this, but of course I'm finding my teams have reduced capacity too & it's really hard to know what level of engagement is the right level of expectation, etc. as they each grapple in their own sectors to come to terms with everything. I definitely need better knowledge of tools to build our capacity in this manner. We have things like Dropbox and Zoom etc, but I'd love a platform where we can meet in one place from across several sectors. Facebook Workplace seems limited to those from a single domain (i.e. maybe not the best for inter-agency collaboration). Microsoft Teams might be great, but I'm under the impression that everyone needs their own account. This experience is definitely accelerating the awareness of the level of technology illiteracy within our sector and others. This topic has been obvious for a long time (we are human services workers, not necessarily naturally tech savvy, etc.). We're definitely at a critical point now. Some good things will definitely come from the pressure to adapt in ways we have never really had to before.”

“Can be done fairly easily if you have proper technology in place. Without the technology, it’s far too challenging. Funders need to pay for the technology, the security levels needed on laptops etc.”

“Our agency set up an online workplace community a few months ago and it's been a very easy way to stay connected, sharing tasks, expectations, and information. Our teams have been

doing a great job of connecting with clients and social media has been amazing for this. We have been doing a lot of work on Facebook."

"It has been busier than ever trying to get staff settled in our new reality and at the same time getting our services and programs online. It has not been easy dealing with emerging challenges like simplest things like 'my internet at home is not strong enough to host online classes or be a part of zoom calls'"

"I am much more comfortable in in-person meetings and thrive on body language and interactions with people. My team is extremely culturally diverse and I feel it is much easier to be informal, joke around, and have fun relationships in person, I feel remote work takes much of that away. I dislike video and phone conferences, but I'm learning to chair these meetings and still be myself."

"A challenge to our outdated work protocol (technological and vision-based), a tale of directors trying to balance worker interest vs. appease expectations of board members/funders (working heavily results in lack of transparency and in favor of unsatisfied workers), an increase in employee indifference and tension stemming from poor political work culture being tested under new circumstances."

"I've been involved in online program delivery for over a decade so online isn't new to me, but working exclusively online is. Our IT team has been amazing in getting us up and running remotely, and our staff are proving to be resilient and quick learners. There's a lot of innovation happening right now!"

What aspects of the job are just not transferable to remote work?

Question: We asked "What aspects of the job are just not transferable to remote work?"

Intention: We wanted to understand the challenges of delivering and receiving services as well as how the services might feel different. During COVID-19, agencies didn't have a choice whether we work remotely or not. After this is all complete we wanted to know if there were aspects of settlement services that were not replaceable during remote work. We asked this question only of front-line practitioners.

Front-line

How many people answered: 104

Observations: Most front-line practitioners indicated that making a connection with newcomers was difficult in a digital service environment. In spite of video being a face to face interaction, some workers don't find video provides the same experience. It would be useful to explore this further to determine if this is a technology, personal comfort, training or other challenge. As well,

the real issue of client digital divide came up with some clients simply not having the technology or digital literacy to access technology-mediated remote services. In many cases phone technology was used, but was also found to be a challenge for clients who prefer in-person interactions.

Themes:

Everything is transferable 10.58%
Face to face 51.92%
Group/social interactions 22.12%
Making deeper connections with clients 19.23%
Office infrastructure and some admin (some are not able to access client files on personal computers) 17.31%
Client digital literacy & tech access 12.50%

“Social programming for clients. As great as these platforms are, nothing replaces physically being in a space with a group of people. We also can't do any of our field trips around the city or share meals together.”

“A quiet workspace, uninterrupted time to accomplish tasks, progressive lessons that are easily explained to low levels. Phone conversations have been a total disaster. Only when clients have video capabilities, have we had any success.”

“For me I can basically do everything remotely but a phone interview versus a face-to-face interview is not quite as effective.”

“Face to face instruction has been more challenging! We are using Whatsapp video chat to help students better understand. However not all students use Whatsapp, have a smartphone, or unlimited internet access. Therefore some students need to have instruction over the phone, which is not a skill set for the level I teach.”

“Not all work files from my work computer can be transferred to my home personal computer because of privacy and security policy. I am not the only one who use computer at my home.”

“Sitting down with someone and reviewing a document together. Assessing whether they really understand what I'm saying. Many don't have access to video technology or don't know how to use it so all of our communication so far has been on the phone only.”

“As of now, conducting group workshops is very challenging both from a technical as well as a logistical standpoint. Also, the personal touch in doing one-on-one sessions with clients cannot be fully replicated by using remote technologies.”

“Being able to attend workshops and training and meeting with clients in person of course are things that are not transferable. However, this showed me that it's been way easier for clients to maintain the online client/worker relationship due to busy schedules. But not being able to sometimes see them in person can be difficult for some, so the balance is being disrupted.”

“Face to face contact with people who are scared and don't have the language and are unfamiliar with technology, or can't afford a laptop... how do you transfer your face to face?”

What policies, protocols, processes and practices did your organization have in place for remote work before COVID-19?

Question: We asked “What policies, protocols, processes and practices did your organization have in place for remote work before COVID-19?”

Intention: We wanted a snapshot of those agencies that were already prepared for remote work and digital service delivery. Given that there are already many remote work projects in the sector (such as SWIS/SEPT, Settlement Workers in Schools, Pre-arrival services, online language classes, etc.) it would make sense that some agencies had policies in place.

Observations: Few agencies had policies in place before COVID-19. The high number of “not sure” and “none” responses from front-line (29.30%) is not surprising given previous research and anecdotal evidence.

Front-line

How many people answered: 99

Scale:

Everything in place 12.12%
Case-by-case 15.15%
For some programs not all 11.11%
Some 25.25%
Not sure 18.18%
None 11.11%

“My organization was/is completely set up for remote work. Complete with policies, protocols, processes, etc.”

“We had a meeting about a week before the office closed when they outlined some policies. However, most of those have changed as the situation has evolved. I am not aware of any

policies that may have been in place prior to the crisis as this is not my area of responsibility in the organization."

"None that I am aware of."

"We were currently working on having an online settlement team and having new positions for it. I believe it was coming along, but due to this, it moved quicker than anticipated. Of course, our regular online submissions of financials, time sheets, google docs, OCMS, narrative reports, (anything admin.), needs assessment, goals, etc. was already online."

"I can't speak on what was already in place but I think it would've helped if there was a plan in place that all staff were already aware of."

"Many. Lots of people work from home sometimes. I still do not think we have enough in place in
terms of protecting client confidentiality and I think this is a big issue across the sector."

Leadership

How many people answered: 57

Scale:

Everything in place 14.04%
Case-by-case 10.53%
For some programs not all 3.51%
Some 33.33%
Not sure 3.51%
None 33.33%

"We had a pandemic plan developed from the H1N1 epidemic several years ago that outlined things such as maintenance of critical services, daily meetings, communications or debriefings, etc. Specifics and details were lacking and certain technologies weren't clearly outlined nor already active or in place."

"Very few. I am currently working on a revised Confidentiality Policy and a Working from Home Policy."

"Our organization discussed what confidentiality looks like from home. Which programs to use and not to use. How to connect."

“None. But we created them during the first week while making the decision. Decisions made and discussed become policies.”

What new policies, protocols, processes or practices have been implemented since you started to work remotely?

Question: We asked “What new policies, protocols, processes or practices have been implemented since you started to work remotely?”

Intention: As a comparison, we were interested if the sudden move to remote work had resulted in the creation of new policies to address this interim normal. If so, it would be an opportunity to follow up with the sector post-COVID-19 to create a policy repository for all agencies to make use of and replicate, or even a policy template for all agencies to use.

Front-line

How many people answered: 97

Observations: The creation of new policies, protocols, processes, or practices appears to mainly be ad hoc. “Some” was the highest response among both front-line and leadership, suggesting that new policies were being created to meet specific needs. This makes sense given the sudden move to remote work. However, as we had intended, it makes even more sense now for all of those to be shared sector wide and with the funder with a goal to create a policy framework for all sector agencies. It remains concerning that 21.65% of front-line practitioners answered “not sure” or “none.”

Scale:

Everything in place 8.25%
Some 62.89%
Not sure 13.40%
None 8.25%

“I have not been informed at all about any new policies created.”

“New Policies were shared by HR and Senior Management. Our safety was considered one of the high priorities.”

“There has been talk of work life balance and maintaining mental health with various support.”

“None. No policy, no protocol or process has been sent out. Its business as usual - contact clients, enter OCMS, create online sessions.”

“1) check with the Communications team before engaging with any new social media. 2) when talking to any client make sure you cover the latest COVID-19 'script' questions (how are you, your family doing? what covid issues are you facing, etc, where to find covid related resources, any warnings about increasing enforcement rules around social distancing, etc) 3) Forward names of any clients to the group dealing with 'Vulnerable Clients' if you know or suspect they need extra support 4) Do not print client information at home if you don't need to and follow all the current privacy policies when it comes to client data.”

“That personal phones be put on private when calling clients; looking for resources which clients could access like photocopying, scanning, etc.; Resources could include finding someone who could assist the client when they are distanced from us.”

“Yes, we have been told a lot of things to be aware while working remotely. The device, for example, the computer I use has all the security devices to protect the database. We are strictly instructed that my PC must not be used by the other family members. While assessing the clients' needs, the task must be performed by maintaining the clients' confidentiality, the clients must feel that they are safe and their personal information is secure andthe computer has been locked in a secure place.”

“An even stronger emphasis on security measures with information.”

Leadership

How many people answered: 56

Observations: Many organizations felt like they were ready to do remote work or already had some HR policies, practices and processes in place. Almost 20% indicated they now have complete policies, protocols, processes, or practices in place. For others, they developed or adapted existing policies and practices to reflect their new remote working situation.

Scale:

Everything in place 19.64%
For some programs not all 1.79%
Some 53.57%
Not sure 1.79%
None 16.07%

“We have developed a much more detailed policies/practices guide for staff working remotely. Also developed a strong business continuity plan.”

“We are currently solidifying into an official policy what we have done in reality i.e. how to work confidentially at home, remote staff meetings, how to connect to clients etc.”

“New security measures, updated protocols for online learning, transitioning face-to-face classes online, establishing consistency and sharing of best practices.”

“We now have a stated HR policy/protocols on working during pandemics.”

“Our remote work doesn't require all this. What we lack are the human opportunities for exchange. Interaction is essential. Telework is disembodied and limited in scope.”

Are you using devices you brought home from work or personal devices?

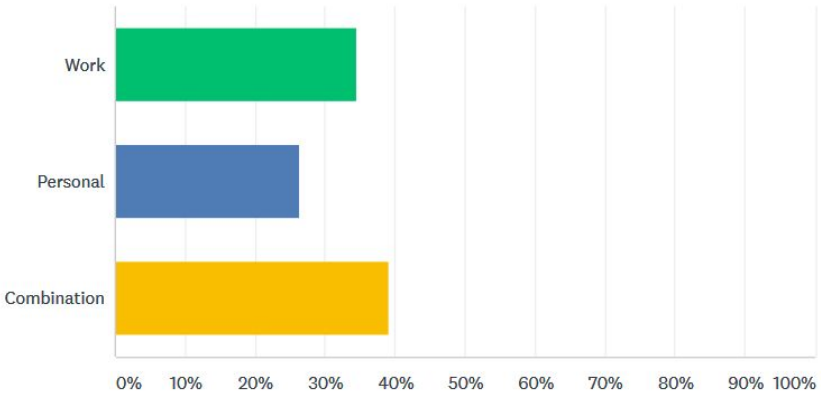
Question: We asked “Are you using devices you brought home from work or personal devices?”

Intention: Even when working in offices providing in-person services research and anecdotal evidence have shown that front-line practitioners use personal devices (usually smartphones) and accounts (usually digital messaging) to serve their clients.

Observations: Findings here are aligned with previous research, suggesting that almost a third of front-line practitioners are using personal devices. We decided to ask about combinations of devices, given that not all would have access to work computers at home, and it is interesting and potentially concerning (related to privacy and confidentiality) to see the high numbers for both front-line practitioners and leadership.

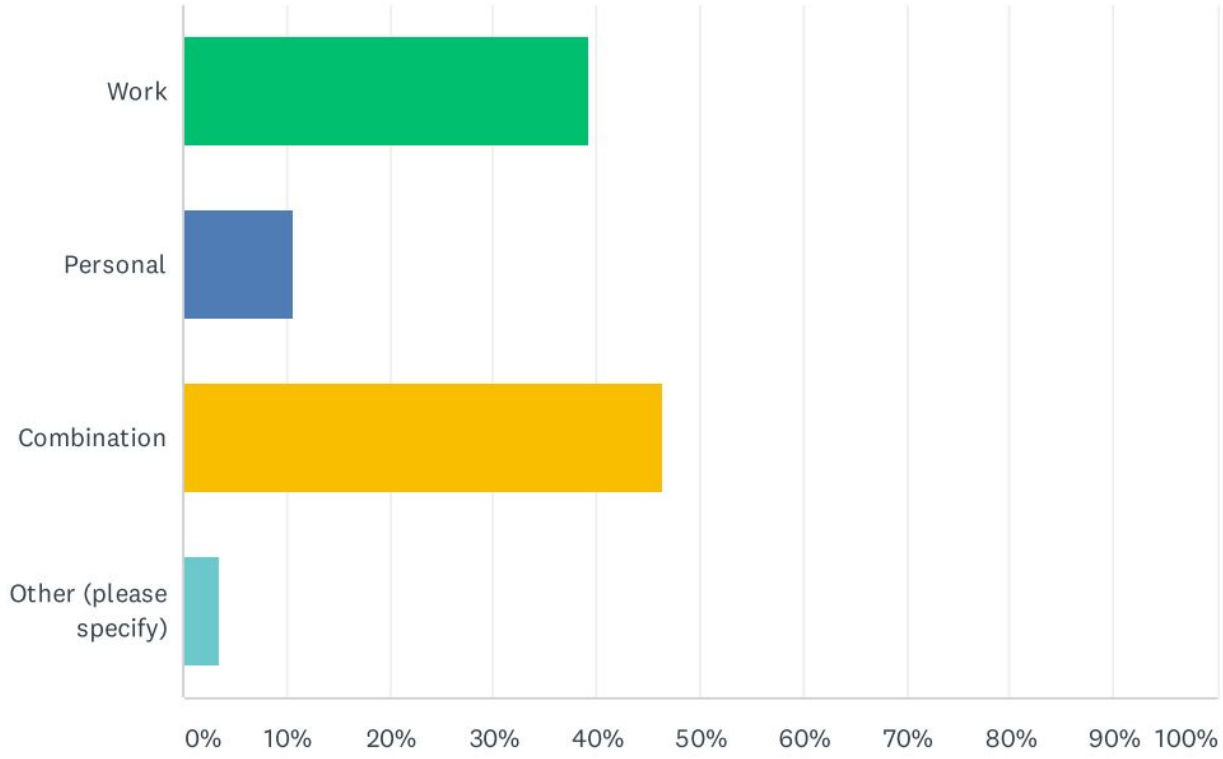
Front-line

How many people answered: 110



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Work	34.55%	38
Personal	26.36%	29
Combination	39.09%	43
TOTAL		110

Leadership



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Work	39.29%	22
Personal	10.71%	6
Combination	46.43%	26
Other (please specify)	3.57%	2
TOTAL		56

Are you using devices to serve clients that others may have access to (such as family members accessing computer, phone, etc.)?

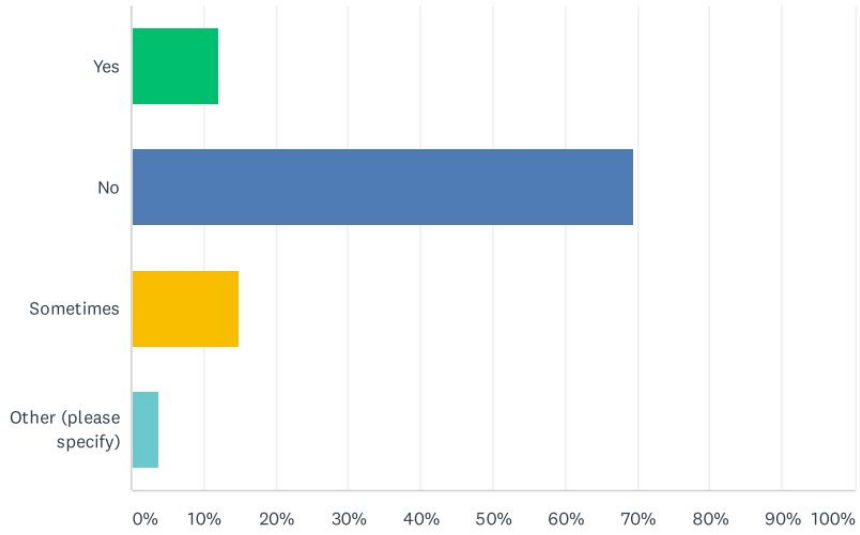
Question: We asked “Are you using devices to serve clients that others may have access to (such as family members accessing computer, phone, etc.)?”

Intention: As a follow-up to the question about use of personal devices it was important to understand if front-line practitioners are using devices that others have access to. This has a potential impact on client confidentiality.

Observations: It makes sense given the sudden move to remote work that 26% of practitioners are using private, shared devices, but it is also a concern.

Front-line

How many people answered: 110



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	12.04%	13
No	69.44%	75
Sometimes	14.81%	16
Other (please specify)	3.70%	4
TOTAL		108

What communications tools are you using in your remote work? (check all that apply)

Question: We asked “What communications tools are you using in your remote work? (check all that apply)”

Intention: There is a misperception among funders and others in the sector about how technology is used in client service delivery. At the same time, there have been disconnects between how front-line practitioners report use of technology and leadership understanding of what technologies are being used by their staff.

Observations: In this case, it is interesting to see how front-line and leadership appear to be aligned with top 5 technologies being used. In previous research and anecdotally, front-line workers use email, digital messaging and text messaging predominantly, as complementary technologies to their in-person services. It makes sense here to see video and webinar technologies leap to the top 5 given the nature of remote work. We interpret the higher percentage of leadership using text and digital messaging as tools they use to interact with their staff. In some comments, as well as anecdotal conversations outside of this survey, Microsoft

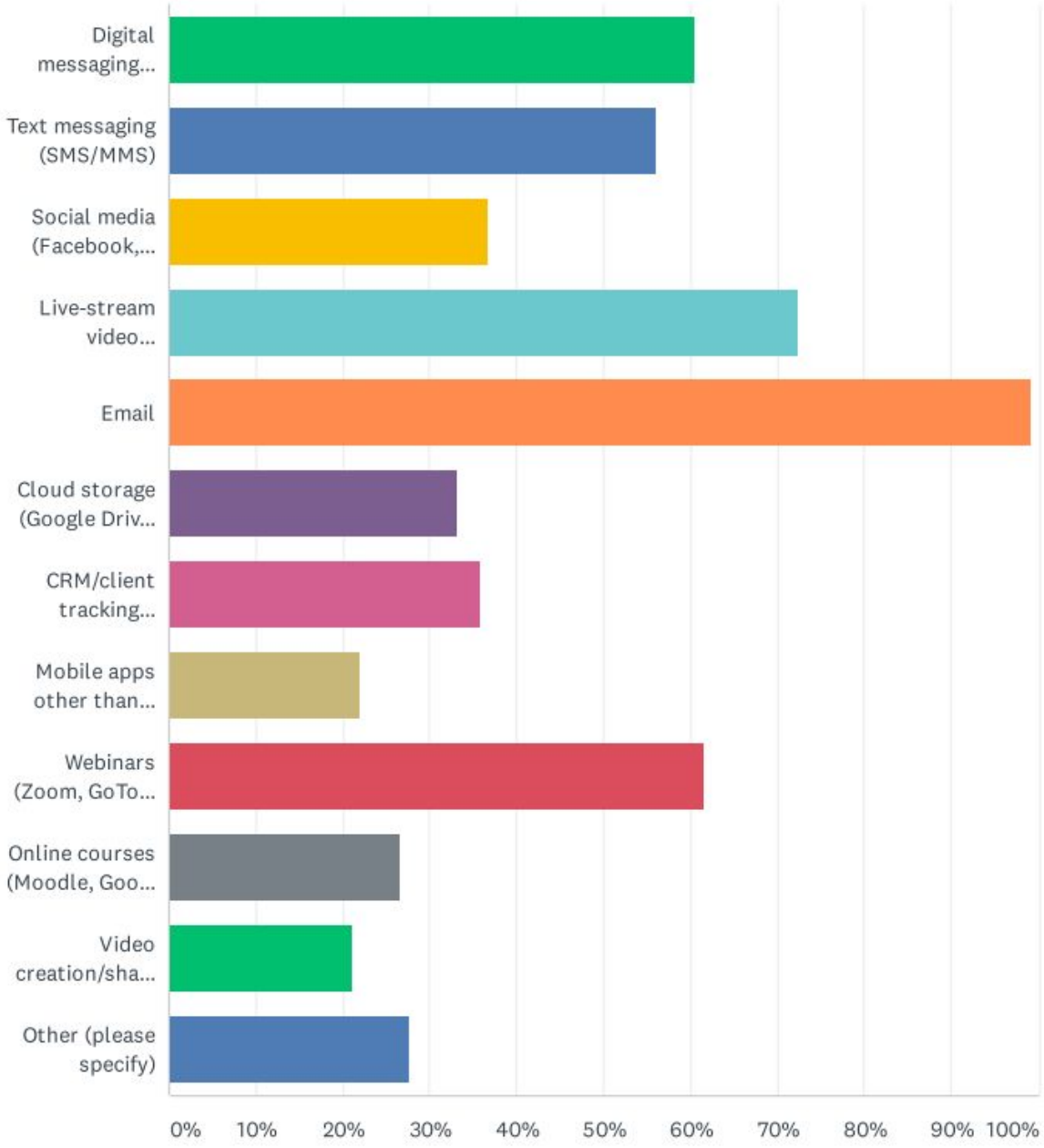
Teams appears to have become a widely used tool mainly for internal communication within agencies and should be explored in more detail.

Front-line

How many people answered: 111

Top 5:

1. Email 99.08%
2. Live-stream video conferencing (Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts, etc.) 72.48%
3. Webinars (Zoom, GoTo Webinar, etc.) 61.47%
4. Digital messaging (WhatsApp, FB Messenger, WeChat, Viber, etc.) 60.55%
5. Text messaging (SMS/MMS) 55.96%

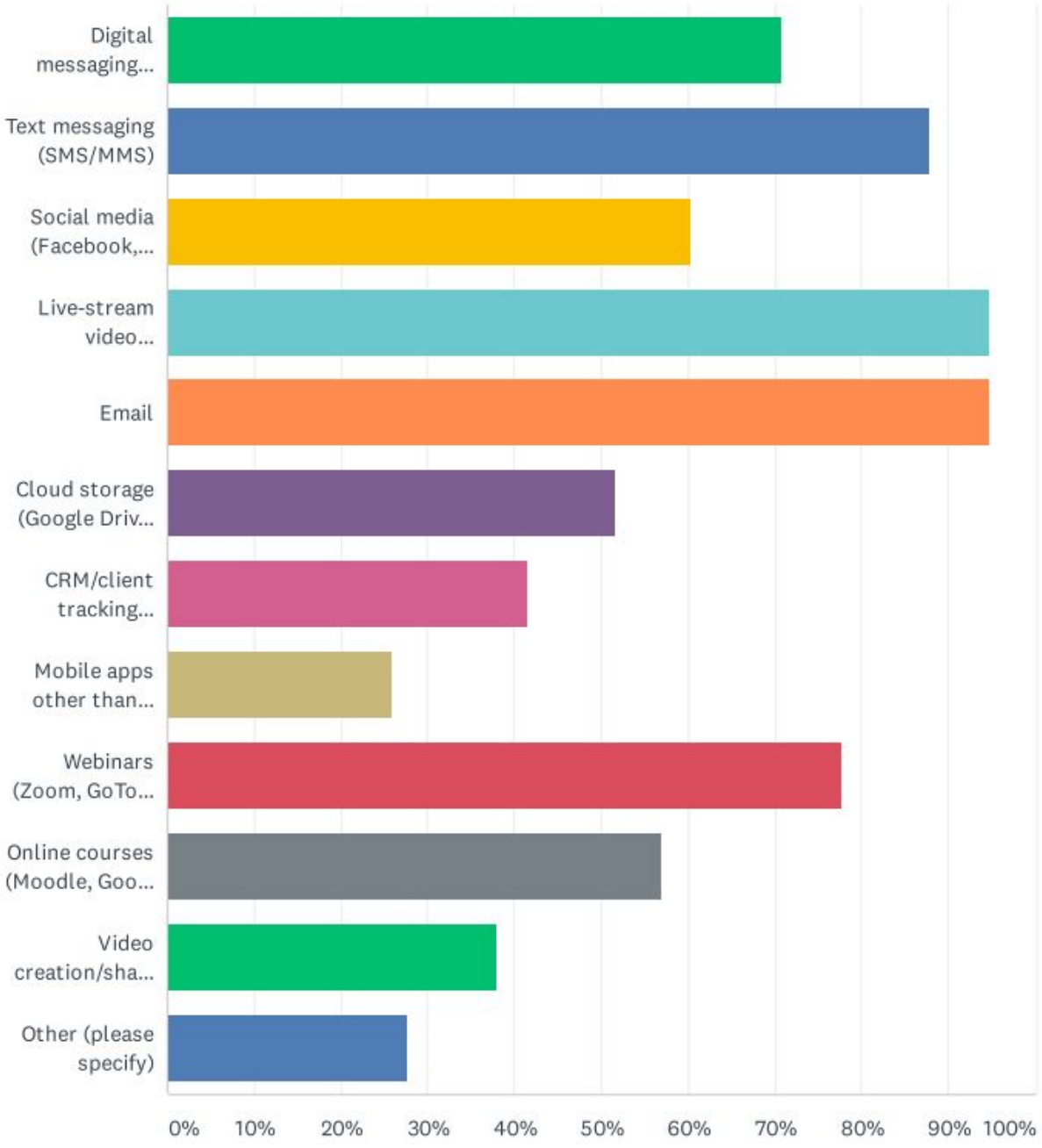

Digital messaging...
Text messaging (SMS/MMS)
Social media (Facebook,...
Live-stream video...
Email
Cloud storage (Google Driv...
CRM/client tracking...
Mobile apps other than...
Webinars (Zoom, GoTo...
Online courses (Moodle, Goo...
Video creation/sha...
Other (please specify)
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Digital messaging (WhatsApp, FB Messenger, WeChat, Viber, etc.)	60.55%	66
Text messaging (SMS/MMS)	55.96%	61
Social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, etc.)	36.70%	40
Live-stream video conferencing (Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts, etc.)	72.48%	79
Email	99.08%	108
Cloud storage (Google Drive, Dropbox, Box, Sync, etc.)	33.03%	36
CRM/client tracking database (OCMS, Salesforce, etc.)	35.78%	39
Mobile apps other than digital messaging (Google Translate, mapping, PointB, etc.)	22.02%	24
Webinars (Zoom, GoTo Webinar, etc.)	61.47%	67
Online courses (Moodle, Google Classroom, Canvas, etc.)	26.61%	29
Video creation/sharing (Youtube, Vimeo, Screencast, etc.)	21.10%	23
Other (please specify)	27.52%	30
Total Respondents: 109		

Leadership

Top 5 tools their staff are using:

1. Email 94.83%
2. Live-stream video conferencing (Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts, etc. 94.83%
3. Text messaging (SMS/MMS) 87.93%
4. Webinars (Zoom, GoTo Webinar, etc.) 77.59%
5. Digital messaging (WhatsApp, FB Messenger, WeChat, Viber, etc.) 70.69%


Digital messaging...
Text messaging (SMS/MMS)
Social media (Facebook,...
Live-stream video...
Email
Cloud storage (Google Driv...
CRM/client tracking...
Mobile apps other than...
Webinars (Zoom, GoTo...
Online courses (Moodle, Goo...
Video creation/sha...
Other (please specify)
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Digital messaging (WhatsApp, FB Messenger, WeChat, Viber, etc.)	70.69%	41
Text messaging (SMS/MMS)	87.93%	51
Social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, etc.)	60.34%	35
Live-stream video conferencing (Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts, etc.)	94.83%	55
Email	94.83%	55
Cloud storage (Google Drive, Dropbox, Box, Sync, etc.)	51.72%	30
CRM/client tracking database (OCMS, Salesforce, etc.)	41.38%	24
Mobile apps other than digital messaging (Google Translate, mapping, PointB, etc.)	25.86%	15
Webinars (Zoom, GoTo Webinar, etc.)	77.59%	45
Online courses (Moodle, Google Classroom, Canvas, etc.)	56.90%	33
Video creation/sharing (Youtube, Vimeo, Screencast, etc.)	37.93%	22
Other (please specify)	27.59%	16
Total Respondents: 58		

How are your staff managing confidential client conversations while working from home?

Question: We asked “How are your staff managing confidential client conversations while working from home?”

Intention: We asked this question only of Leadership participants to gauge their understanding of how their staff were able to maintain client confidentiality while working from home.

Leadership

How many people answered: 58

Observations: Some agencies have existing policies that staff are expected to follow. For the most part, staff are asked to do their best, such as finding quiet or private spaces to talk to clients, use earbuds for calls, etc. Some agencies appear to be set up with secure and confidential means of communicating with clients, while others simply ask staff to be careful what is shared via unsecure means, such as email or text. Some leaders are unsure of how well their staff are managing this, which suggests work to be done in terms of policies, as well as prioritizing confidential client interactions.

Scale:

Finding Coping Strategies 56.90%

Neutral 22.41%
Having Difficulties 6.90%

Themes:

Following existing policies and using work provided devices 29.31%
Managing as best they can while at home 29.31%
Staff asked to try to find private space in their home when serving clients 37.93%

“Password-protected documents and holding conversations in separate rooms or parts of the house (out of earshot) of other family members.”

“The importance of confidentiality is being raised constantly and we can only hope it is followed diligently.”

“There is no way to manage ...just ensuring that they don't share the info.”

“Staff try to use headphones or earbuds so if there are others in the environment background they cannot hear the client. If possible they are trying to set themselves up in quiet or private spaces, asking spouses or older children in the home to monitor and supervise younger children, and have honest conversations about respecting the need for privacy and confidentiality with spouses/partners.”

“By following our organization's policies.”

“We are following our current confidentiality guidelines (no screens facing a window, password protected USBs, passwords for laptops etc). It is most challenging where staff do not have a separate workspace within the home.”

“Using work cellphones, masking their personal phone numbers with *67, working in a private space, following guidelines of confidentiality policy, entering data into remote client database.”

“They can only reach out to client on approved devices/apps (ie; WhatsApp). We are encouraging everyone to use headphones for work calls, and to find a quiet space if possible.”

“In short, to the best of their ability. Guidelines and suggestions have been provided. Some staff have the ability to work odd hours when there are less disruptions from others in their home.”

IRCC has instructed funded agencies to focus on “critical services.” How has your organization defined which services are considered critical? What level of service are you able to achieve remotely?

Question: We asked “How has your organization defined which services are considered critical? What level of service are you able to achieve remotely?”

Intention: Early on when agencies moved to remote work, the main sector funder provided guidance of what critical services it expected service providers to meet (a summary is here). We wanted to know how that was being communicated within agencies and what decisions agencies may have taken on their own to provide service that may surpass funder expectations.

Front-line

How many people answered: 104

Observations: Agencies are trying to maintain the service levels that they previously provided to newcomers. In some cases, they have defined for themselves what are core or critical services, which may align or surpass IRCC’s definition.

Themes:

Trying to maintain previous service levels 68.27%
Following IRCC directive 41.35%
We are focused on core services deemed critical to ensure our vulnerable clients get the support they need 25.96%
Fewer services offered 5.77%
Our organization has not provided any guidance 4.81%

“Outreach to our senior clients/vulnerable populations is critical (precarious work, isolated, newcomers) we're checking in to make sure they have the information and the essential supports they need working on providing engaging programming that meets some of their needs for physical fitness, mental well being, socialization, and entertainment.”

“We are offering almost all of our programs and services remotely. We have many online courses for Settlement, Employment, Language and Business.”

“Actually I have not experienced much difference between what we were doing in office and what we are doing now. We try to support them to settle and find jobs in their fields of education and work background.”

“No, I have not found my organization has been clear at all with what services we should or shouldn't provide. We haven't even been told how often we should call and check in on our clients. I have had to go and meet my clients face to face to get a signature which I'm not sure I should have done or should have been told to do.”

“All of our services are capable of service delivery via distance so we are conducting many of our services by adjusting service delivery.”

“Our organization has not identified any service to be provided for remotely nor have they given guidance as to what is critical. They want info sessions and podcasts but are not providing training information nor equipment. They want us to be first in the community to do things but not thinking about what the clients need. The team has taken on themselves what we deem to be essential. We have created Facebook work profiles, communicating with clients via phone, email etc.. We have focused on active clients, those who live alone so they do not get too isolated, those who are sick (calling doctors, telehealth, health units), those that do not drive as our transit system has been shut down until May 1 - finding food banks and organizations who can deliver food. We have a RAP and CSS team who are making sure that the first year clients have all their needs met. Meeting financial needs by contacting CCTB, GST and assisting with online applications for ODSP, OW and CERB. We try to make our level of service as high as we can.”

“For my job, we started with emergency information sessions to get the information out to newcomers in different languages so that they were getting accurate information that they understood. We want to prioritize access to information that is understandable and getting in touch with clients by phone to ensure that they are okay. We have started doing all our English classes, employment classes, Canada School program and information sessions online so that clients have something to participate in and feel connected. I have been able to connect with past clients (by email/phone), start online information sessions and a new online program session. So far, clients are happy with the level of service that we are providing currently.”

“Not sure. This is above my pay grade. I can say for me and my team, we're working as close to 'as usual' as possible under the circumstances. I suppose my team has taken on some additional responsibilities in supporting in-person teachers in moving their classes online. So, my team is supporting other teams as they work to deliver critical services in a new way.”

“We are offering all of our previous online services and looking at others that would be helpful to have online. We consider services that a client considers important and offer those. Many of these may not be considered critical but if a client wants to participate in an online job search workshop that is something important to the client. The services considered most critical are getting COVID-19 and other information out to clients, outreach to connect and ensure clients are okay. Offering this information in as many languages as possible to ensure it can be understood.”

“This is a very packed question. The organisation I work for provides employment training and language training for newcomers and people with barriers. I know the LINC classes have already begun online, this is critical for newcomers to continue to work on language. For now, I don't know how this is going, I know it will be challenging for many of the clients due to low literacy, low digital literacy and juggling children and partners being at home. There hasn't been a discussion with me personally on defining how critical the services we provide are. The level of the service we can provide will be the best we are able to in these circumstances. The program I work on focuses on collaborative, project-based learning with many field trips and guest speakers, the same experience will be difficult to emulate online but I feel it is better for us to try for the sake of our clients.”

“The organization has not formally defined which cases are critical services. But I can only say that almost every case that I respond to these days is critical needing assistance for EI, financial support, food and rent pay, and questions about COVID -19.”

“Our managers explained that it is not necessary to meet with new clients. However, it is especially crucial to work with our repeated clients and see how we can help them during this time. We have thought of Zoom activities, created FB pages, and Whatsapp groups to connect individually or in groups with our clients.”

Leadership

How many people answered: 58

Observations: Interestingly more leadership than front-line participants indicated that they are following IRCC directives. This may be interpreted that agencies are not passing the IRCC directive along directly to front-line practitioners, but are simply instructing staff in what level of service to provide.

Scale:

Trying to maintain previous service levels 32.76%
Following IRCC directive 72.41%
We are focused on core services deemed critical to ensure our vulnerable clients get the support they need 24.14%
Fewer services offered 0%
Our organization has not provided any guidance 0%

“Considering the unique needs of the immigrant/newcomer population. I would say we are have to provide 70 % of services remotely.”

“We define critical service as case management and support to vulnerable groups such as refugees, seniors and others who are vulnerable. However, we've been able to continue all our IRCC funded services remotely as we adapt to using different platforms/tools.”

“We followed IRCC’s definition of critical services. We are providing I+O services by phone, follow ups by phone/email. We’ll look at outputs on Friday April 17 to make next iteration of service delivery including bringing all the staff back on to deliver programs and one to one services by phone/email.”

“We are ramping up to delivering almost all services, other than CNC, online and remotely. This includes one-on-one NARS, I&O, and CC services, and group services via Zoom.”

“While the organization has deemed RAP and Settlement as essential, we are delivering most of our programs remotely. My team does language training, and service delivery for literacy and lower language levels is more challenging. However, we have established a high level of service remotely.”

“Critical services for us are anything related to housing, income supports, employment, crisis, referal to crisis services, and ensuring people have the right information about current health best practices and expectations.”

“1) info about COVID-19 (reducing the spread, symptoms, what to do if you have symptoms); 2) financial supports and resources (e.g. CERB, food bank, wage subsidies, rent, hydro, etc.); 3) support for stress & anxiety; 4) support for families with children at home; etc.”

“We have maintained all of our existing services except for one FTE and creating virtual work plans and outreach and assessment for all of our departments including CNC, JSW, community connections and settlement.”

“We continue to provide settlement supports online, using all the technology possible e.g. Whatsapp, cell phone. For those who are likely to be isolated, have a history of domestic violence or need child protection we contact these clients and ensure that we are proactive in connecting with clients.”

“With the different announcements, guidelines and directives and information coming from the government and also the different issues clients are experiencing due to the pandemic, passing the accurate information and resources to our clients is very critical to ensuring they are both informed and knows what and where to get help/support.”

“Direct services have been deemed more critical than indirect services. However, indirect services are able to thrive more than direct services which suffer from a lack of client contact.”

“We have defined critical everything that we used to do in person. We are delivering LINC, and various Parenting support programs including HIPPY remotely using a variety of platforms, including drop off packages for literacy learners. Our CNC staff are doing video story time, recipes, and crafts, they are building and sewing materials for when we come back. The level, we haven't gauged yet, but will be able to do so. LINC teachers are keeping attendance, Settlement workers doing iCARE etc. All staff are keeping work logs.”

Survey Demographics

What is your primary role in your organization

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Front-line settlement practitioner (any role that is primarily client facing - includes Settlement, Employment, Housing, Health, Childcare, RAP Case worker, Youth, Volunteer Coordinator, Administration (receptionist, assistant), Job developer, etc)	60.76%	96
Program Coordinator/Supervisor	11.39%	18
Manager Level	8.23%	13
Director Level/Senior Leadership/VP	6.33%	10
Executive Director	8.23%	13
Board of Directors	0.00%	0
Other (please specify)	5.06%	8
TOTAL		158

Province/territory where your organization is primarily located and provides service

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Alberta	3.21%	5
British Columbia	10.26%	16
Manitoba	5.77%	9
New Brunswick	4.49%	7
Newfoundland and Labrador	0.00%	0
Northwest Territories	0.64%	1
Nova Scotia	25.64%	40
Nunavut	0.00%	0
Ontario	42.31%	66
Prince Edward Island	0.00%	0
Saskatchewan	5.13%	8
Yukon	0.64%	1
Quebec	1.92%	3
TOTAL		156

Agency staff size (Full and part-time)

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1-5 employees	5.73%	9
6-10 employees	6.37%	10
11-20 employees	4.46%	7
21-50 employees	12.10%	19
51-99 employees	19.11%	30
Over 100 employee	52.23%	82
TOTAL		157

Do you receive IRCC funding

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	87.10%	135
No	12.90%	20
TOTAL		155