

Reduction of services offered to people with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic...

Myth or reality?



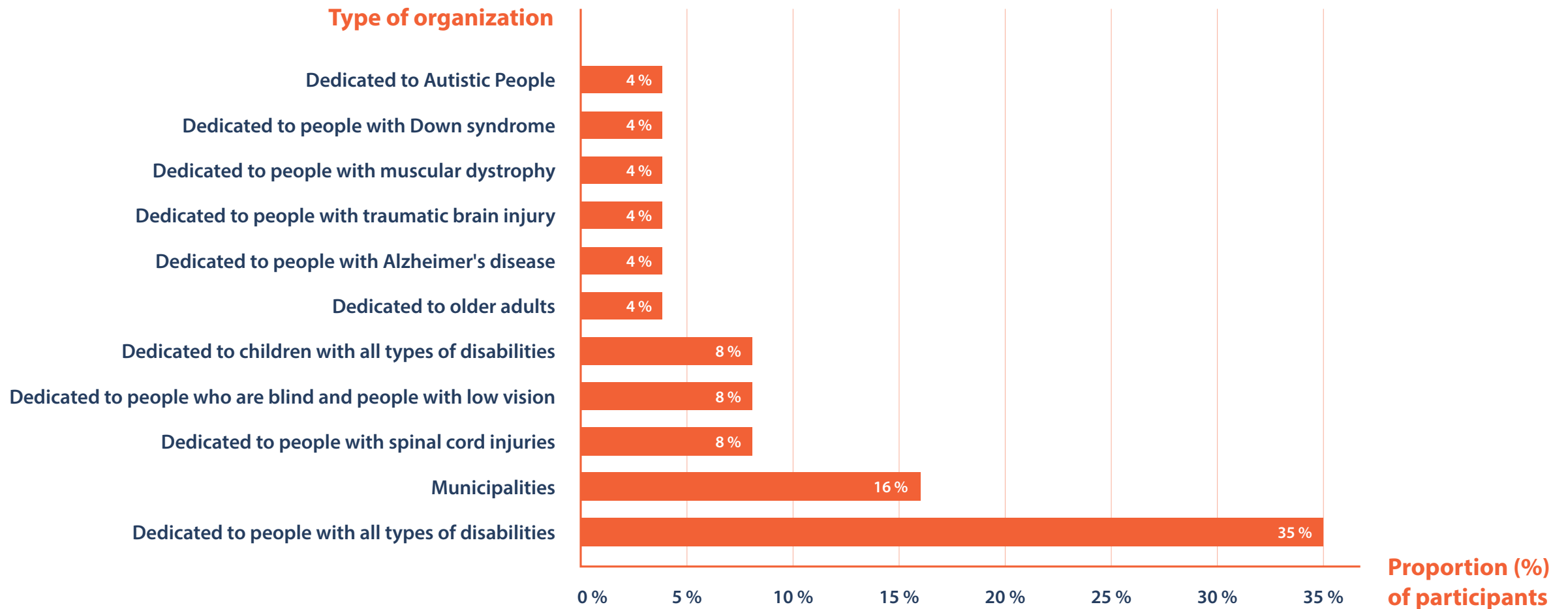
Analysis of testimonials from people working in the field

Organizations providing services to people with disabilities (PWDs) faced numerous challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, in terms of human resources, technology and logistics.

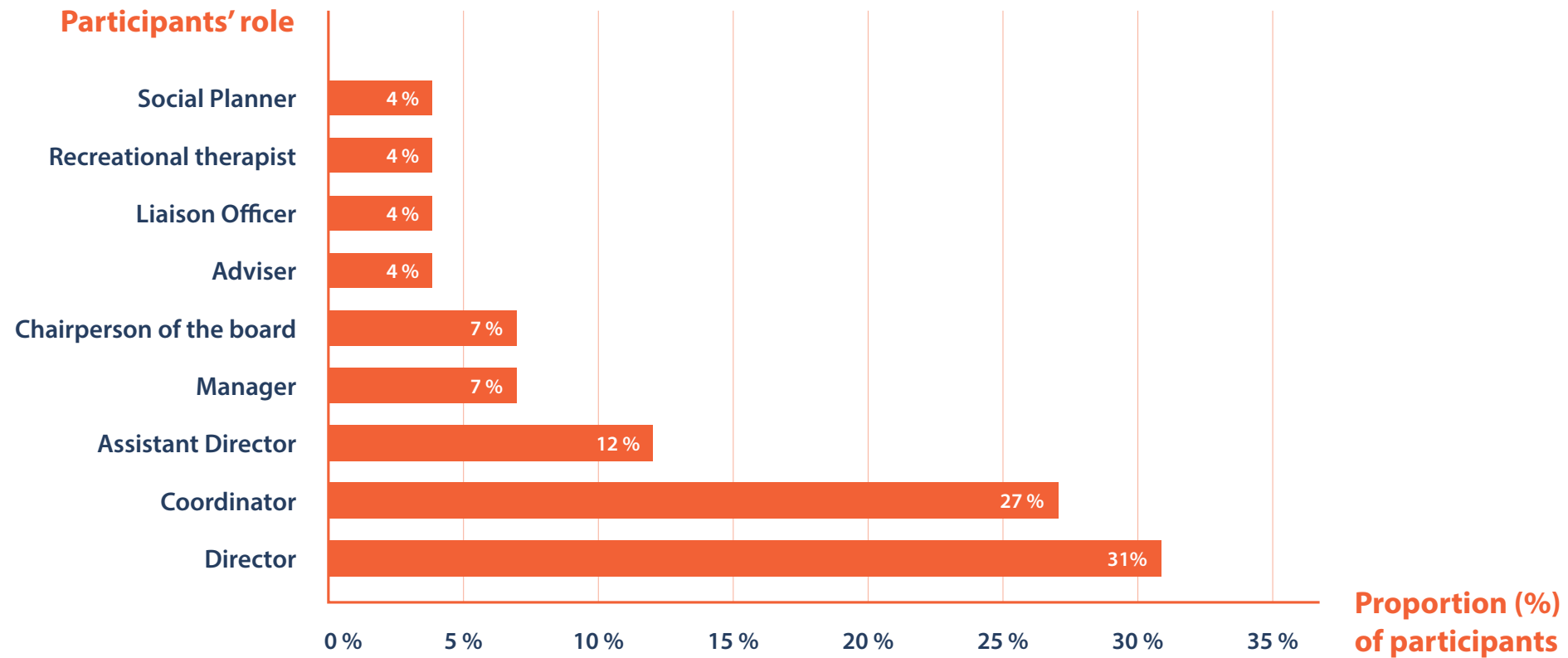
Did these constraints translate into a reduction in the services and resources offered to this clientele, or into the development of new, innovative practices?

A research team examined this question by conducting semi-structured individual interviews. They gathered the testimonies of 26 people working or volunteering in 25 non-profit community organizations or municipalities. These organizations, based in Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia, provide services to people with physical and/or cognitive disabilities.

Participants' Organizational Affiliation



Participants' role in the organization



Common themes raised during the interviews

1

Quick adaptation

Organizations reported adapting quickly, especially smaller ones. The participants, coming from organizations based in British Columbia, reported adapting their services in a few weeks, while Quebec organizations took a few months to adapt.

2

Adaptation with limited human resources

Adaptations were possible even if organizations had to work with fewer human resources. Workloads increased and positions had to be restructured.

3

Adaptation rather than creation of new services

To ensure continuity, organizations adapted services already in place. However, they modified the method of service delivery by making services available remotely.

4

Development of some services and cuts for others

Organizations cut services that did not comply with public health measures and reduced the number of face to face activities. Psychological support services, by telephone, were increased.

5

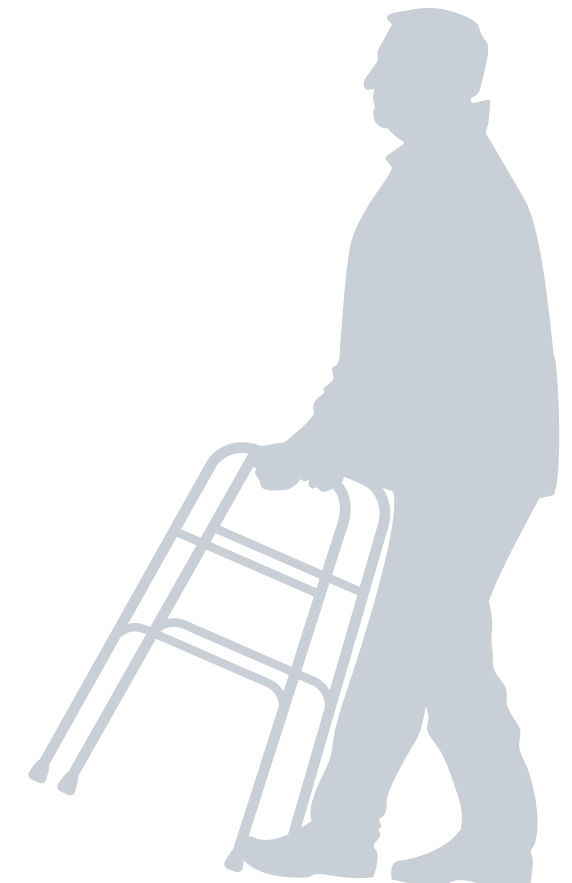
Remote work

To meet the needs of their members organizations used multiple modalities such as Zoom, Facebook, websites and telephone.

6

Remote Service Funding

One of the concerns for organizations was to provide their members with electronic devices (e.g. tablets) essential for online services. To meet this need, funding related to the COVID 19 Pandemic was requested.



Common themes raised during the interviews

7

Collaboration with other organizations

Collaboration with other organizations greatly facilitated everyone's adaptation (e.g. sharing contacts).

8

Consultation with members

All organizations indicated that they surveyed their members in order to meet their needs. These consultations were done through surveys, calls and the inclusion of these members on committees.

9

The feeling of having successfully adapted services

The majority of participants felt they had succeeded in adapting their services well. Although they were satisfied, this transition came with its share of challenges, such as reaching the most isolated members or those on lower incomes. In some cases, remote services were able to attract more people than face-to-face services.

10

Innovation with fundraising

In order to maintain their services, some organizations needed new sources of funding. Several organizations then used social networks to reach as many people as possible.

11

Openness to change

To address the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, participants recommended being open to radical change. All participants also highlighted the importance of organizational flexibility in order to adapt effectively and benefit from one of the silver linings of the COVID-19 pandemic: taking a leap forward in the adoption of new technologies.



In conclusion

This study provides insight into how non-profit organizations and municipalities serving people with disabilities have been flexible and creative in adapting their services to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Remote services were favored where possible and a user-centered approach to services was fostered to meet the needs of the clientele.

Référence: Nolwenn Lapierre, Dylane Labrie, François Routhier & W. Ben Mortenson (2023) Service delivery and programming adaptations for individuals with disabilities by municipalities and non-profit organizations during the COVID pandemic, Home Health Care Services Quarterly, DOI: 10.1080/01621424.2023.2193560

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