



## COVID-19 AND ONLINE-BASED SOCIAL SERVICES

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FUTFS, where I currently work as an IT administrator, was first established in 1999 and all programs and services have been in person for the past 20 years. In 2020, when COVID-19 spread and everything was locked down, FUTFS was no longer able to provide in-person programs and services. I first came to FUTFS during this time. My first task was to convert all FUTFS's programs and services from in-person to online. This was a daunting task for me, a freshman just out of college. However, with technical advice from several places, we were able to successfully bring things online. This article describes what happened as FUTFS moved to replace all its programs and services to online ones.

FUTFS replaced all of its programs and services that had been provided through direct meetings with online video chat such as Zoom, including educational programs and counselling services.

The biggest problem we encountered during this process was the difficulty for some of our seniors to use these online programs and services due lack of general knowledge of IT. However, this was solved without much difficulty, because our organization taught the seniors, one-on-one, how to use the online programs. In addition, there were quite a number of seniors who participated in some way by asking questions of their acquaintances, their children, or challenging themselves.

Over time, we realized that providing services online also has had many advantages over having all our programs and services in person.

The first advantage is that people who lived far away from our organization were not able to participate in person because of transportation issues or due to disabilities, but they were able to participate online. Over the past 22 years of our operation, many clients have visited FUTFS; many of them have lived far away or moved so that it was difficult to meet them. However, as everything was replaced by online due to COVID-19, the participation rate of people living far away increased significantly. It was a valuable opportunity for us to be reunited with people we really missed, both as an organization and as people who had known each other before.

The second advantage is that meetings can be held very easily. When everything was held in person, clients had to call, visit, and fill out the membership registration form to use FUTFS' programs and services for each program. However, clients can now simply access the FUTFS website and register for all the programs and services we provide by entering some simple personal information.

There is a saying that clients who take online classes say frequently and periodically: "If we have a chance, we eat together." We don't believe that doing everything either in person or online is the perfect answer. What is important to us is that we can provide services to our clients in any form, whether online or offline – each has its own pros and cons. I believe it's good to select the strong points from each one and use them to their best advantage. Even if clients continue to use our services and programs online, wouldn't it be nice to eat "one meal" together when the COVID-19 situation improves?

Regardless of whether you use our services online or offline when we recover from COVID-19, we are very grateful for your use of our programs and services.