

Experience and arrangements made during the pandemic by

AIC (International Association of Charities)

[As a movement, an association... how have we experienced these months of crisis, of shut-down \(due to the pandemic\)?](#)

Difficult period: International assembly cancelled, election via the internet of a new Board of Directors which started its work in unprecedented and difficult conditions.

Positive: Commitment of the international team, inventiveness of new ways of working, development of virtual working meetings (with Zoom.), concern to remain in communication with the national associations via facebook, newsletters or the website, participation in a Vincentian family prayer chain for the Covid victims.

On the ground with the elderly: Inventive proposals, remote presence through: telephone calls, letters, concerts, flowers, cakes, home shopping... welcoming students in our activities, strengthening spiritual support.

AIC Italy

1) [As a movement, an association,... how have we experienced these months of crisis, of lock-down \(due to the pandemic\)?](#)

- Very difficult period: forced interruption of most activities, many volunteers too old to be able to resume certain activities after the confinement (confined until Christmas).

- Positive: Partnerships between charities to try and find solutions. Awareness of the vital importance of human contact beyond the indispensable material aid

2) [How have older persons with whom and for whom we work experienced the months of crisis and containment associated with the pandemic? Difficulties? Positive aspects? What challenges?](#)

- Difficulties: Isolation due to confinement measures prohibiting visits; many deaths among the elderly (trauma).

- Positive aspects: Dedication and inventiveness of the associations and people who are mobilising to try to help them,

3) [What are we doing, what are we planning to do to help older people find and implement a project that gives flavour and meaning to their lives?](#)

- As soon as possible: Home visits to the elderly, Visits to retirement homes (for the moment only in the south) and organisation of various activities: Musical animations (video available) Crochet workshops, Reading books

- Distribution of meals to be consumed at home. Communication by telephone when visits are not allowed. Giving tablets (iPads) to some older people to enable them to communicate with their loved ones,

- Joint action with other voluntary associations: Appeal from civil society to the Italian government suggesting avoiding overcrowding in old people's homes where people are isolated from their families and an invitation to privilege care structures with a more human dimension that facilitates contacts.

Via WhatsApp, a video with the following message: "Here is a message of greeting from a retirement home in Salento (Puglia, Lecce) in which several elderly ladies play the

"Taranta", a popular song that says in local dialect: Sing, play, love and as long as you have life, don't stop, sing all night long until the light comes. »

AIC El Salvador

[1 As a movement, an association, an institution... how have we lived through these months of crisis, of lock-down?](#)

These months have been lived with fear, fear of the unexpected, but at the same time with faith in God, taking the necessary measures and protocols to take care of our health. Thinking that at any moment we could leave this world. Some institutions have suffered human losses, but we have managed to move forward, thanks also to the support we have received from people working in solidarity to provide the necessary material to face the pandemic. There have however also been some small associations that have had economic difficulties because they have not been supported by other institutions. In spite of all this, we have continued to work with love so that the elderly can have a better quality of life, providing them with housing, food, personal hygiene products, clothing and the necessary treatment for their health. Nourishing their spirit with different religious activities.

[2 How have the older people with whom and for whom we work experienced them? Any difficulties? Any positive aspects? What challenges?](#)

Our elderly people also felt fear, uncertainty, not knowing what was happening, not seeing their loved ones, not seeing the AIC volunteers, not going for a walk. Some are confronted with depression and anxiety.

[3 What are we doing, what are we planning to do to help older people to find, to implement, a project which will give flavour and meaning to their lives?](#)

We have succeeded, through the spiritual, in letting them know that they are not alone.

There was more creativity and responsibility because we had to learn how to use virtual media.

Some associations have resorted to buying articles for their entertainment, setting up special afternoons, celebrating birthdays, doing occupational therapy and gradually opening up visits to rekindle the enthusiasm and joy of meeting family and friends. It all depends on how much money you have and how much support you receive, always trusting in God, St. Vincent and St. Louise who support us.

AIC Spain

[1 As a movement, an association, an institution... how have we lived through these months of crisis, of lock-down?](#)

- The months have been very difficult and the situation is still very complicated. Several volunteers and spiritual counsellors have passed away. It is very difficult to move around the country. Meetings are still forbidden (max 6 people).

Communication with the volunteers was by telephone and via the Internet (sending e-mails and training sheets).

- The distribution of food is the only thing allowed and only with young volunteers of up to 64 years of age. The distribution of clothes is very limited, only for urgent cases (several Caritas sites now take care of the wardrobe service; it is thought that the distribution of clothing is very limited).

Many of these wardrobe services will probably no longer be provided by the AIC.

Over the age of 65, their children do not allow women volunteers to go out. The older people resisted because they were isolated at home with their daughters.

- Once a month we try to have a meeting with Father Paul and the Daughters of Charity with a Eucharist.

2) How did older people with whom and for whom we work experience this time? Difficulties? Positive aspects? What are the challenges?

In general:

Dreadful loneliness. Many older people have died without their families being able to say goodbye to them. A lot of time with no connection to the rest of the world. Unable to go out or move around, they have lost a lot of memory and mobility.

The situation in old people's homes has been and remains terrible: All visits have been suspended and this continues for the moment. Many older people have died. Lack of doctors and staff to care for people they have had no contact, either by telephone or electronically, due to lack of staff.

Staff couldn't take residents to hospital because there were no ventilators for the elderly.

Staff are sometimes confined with the elderly (only in villages).

Positive experience: HCs organised songs in their residences.

3) "What are we doing, what are we planning to do to help older people find, implement, a project that gives flavour and meaning to their lives?"

AIC group project in Chiclana: volunteers take care of 7 elderly women who live together in a nice little house. During the pandemic, they were organised as follows:

One of the old ladies' daughters lived with them. Volunteers took their shopping and cleaned the house for when they got up. When it was necessary, the volunteers went to fetch medicines that they then hung at the door.

Older women felt very bad about not being able to receive visits and being locked up, but thanks to the presence of this daughter and the volunteers it was less bad than others.

AIC Burundi

Theme: support for the elderly

Since 2017, 350 abandoned elderly people have been accompanied by AIC-Burundi volunteers. They are integrated into the "CDI" intergenerational development cooperatives set up to break the loneliness of the elderly and promote the development of a society for all ages. The CDIs bring together inactive older people, active older people and AIC volunteers around IGAs mainly in agriculture, livestock farming and small trade.

Most of the older women who are accompanied are widows who have survived wars and are now facing multiple economic, psychological, spiritual and also physiological challenges. Most of the families of the elderly are supporting orphaned children who have lost the physical strength to be able to be productive, and most of them have been reduced to begging in the cities of Bujumbura and Gitega in spite of themselves.

In the framework of support for the elderly, a Centre for the Support and Animation of the Elderly has been created.

- Spiritual accompaniment through the setting up of intergenerational prayers, sharing the word of God,
- Development of intergenerational income-generating activities (agriculture, pig and rabbit breeding, small trade)
- Sanitary support (health care, clothing and environmental hygiene)
- Training of volunteer support workers in communication techniques with the elderly,
- Nutritional care for inactive older people.

AIC Germany

1 As a movement, an association, an institution ... how have we lived through these months of crisis and lock-down?

The CKD volunteers lived through the pandemic with feelings of powerlessness, their own fears and also resignation. Many wanted to help, but were unable to do so because of their advanced age and illness. Unfortunately, it was also noted that there was no good cooperation between full-time helpers and volunteers. But it was also surprising to see how many young people who did not belong to our association took initiatives to improve living conditions, especially for the elderly. For example: students who organised grocery and medicine shopping for elderly people who cannot or have not been allowed to leave their homes, or who went out to walk their dogs. Suddenly it became possible to launch completely unusual and inventive actions: musicians who got together and gave small concerts in the gardens in front of old people's homes.

Every evening at 7.30 p.m. all the churches in our diocese rang for 5 minutes. At the same time many people in many streets of our town and diocese placed a lighted candle in their windows to show everyone: You are not alone - we are not alone! And in our street every evening at 7 p.m. there was a trumpet player standing on the balcony of his house playing the European anthem and then a church song that corresponded to the moment, for example, at Easter I think the trumpeter meant: we are in this situation together - all over Europe! Women, men and teenagers used to sew protective masks when medical masks were no longer commercially available. Sewing together led to new contacts in our network. The solidarity between people of all ages was impressive!

2 How did the older people with whom and for whom we work experience this time? (Difficulties? Positive aspects? What were the challenges?)

Older people, often with no family or few friends, are even more isolated than before. Any kind of conviviality and social contact was almost impossible if they did not want to endanger their health. Social life, such as attending a concert or theatre, regular meetings for common leisure activities (games and sports) no longer take place. Health and medical care were reduced to what was

absolutely necessary. There was also a great fear that necessary operations could not be carried out because hospitals had to provide space and care for corona patients.

3 What do we plan to do to help older people find and implement a project that will add flavour and purpose to their lives?

The CKD volunteers tried to show through possible actions that we are always close to these people. As visits could not take place, contacts were maintained through phone calls or video conferences (Skype, etc.). Many older people have become aware of the importance and significance of digitisation for their present and future lives. The CKD would like to promote more contact options in retirement homes and hospitals via virtual tours using tablets. Postcards have also been sent, especially to the elderly, with the motto: we can't meet, but we think of you and pray for you!

As church services no longer take place, many churches broadcast Holy Mass live. This gave people support and was also a sign of community! CKD suggested new spiritual ideas every day on its own homepage to encourage people to show that God is with them even in adversity. At the same time, volunteers were also thanked for their input.

AIC Brazil - Maceió - Alagoas - Brasil,

This centre was founded on 16 May 1963 by a group of ladies of Maceió and since then it has been developing systematic activities of human solidarity, assistance and/or social promotion in the neighbourhood, adjacent and outlying areas of Maceió. It has always relied on the dedicated work of 22 active volunteers and the support of people of good will, partners, in the actions developed.

1) As a movement, an association, an institution... how have we lived through these months of crisis, of lock-down?

- As the majority of the volunteers were mature, the initial priority was isolation and suspension of activities. After the first phase of suspense and fear, some activities were resumed in order to meet the new demands of the moment:

Mask making, for donation/sale at affordable prices; Reopening of the Brechó, for receiving donations and distribution/sale at affordable prices, depending on the situation. Food and hygiene support for the families of the children from the Vila Brejal neighbourhood who are part of the Awakening project (this project works on school tutoring for 18 to 20 children and teenagers between the ages of 7 and 16; it offers Spanish classes to some of the project participants who are preparing for ENEM and provides logistical support to those who are already attending the college or technical school in Maceió).

2) How did the elderly with whom and for whom we work experience this crisis? Any difficulties?

- As it was difficult to receive news from the older people with and for whom our Nucleus works, information was sought from family members and friends, which made it clear that the situation was (is) precarious and that government support was, for the most part, the solution for their families to survive. It is possible to deduce that the deficiencies in their homes have become more pronounced, with the need to remain isolated from the whole family, in the same environment. It should be noted that this unusual situation has deprived all the Volunteers of a more welcoming and comfortable place for themselves and their families. More than ever, the Nucleus has become aware of the urgency to act in this area, with those elderly women whom Saint Vincent placed in us as sisters, "masters and mistresses".

1.3) What are we doing, what are we planning to do to help the elderly to find or implement a project that gives taste and meaning to their lives?

- Since the 1960s, AIC volunteers have been working with an average of 120 elderly women from the outskirts of Maceió, particularly in the Vila Brejal district. Each week, craft activities are developed, such as painting on fabric, embroidery, crochet; and educational activities - literacy, recovery of reading skills and mathematical operations, with small groups (10 elderly women), respecting the interests and talents of each one.

Monthly meetings are held with each of them, during which time various activities are carried out - spirituality and/or health and life orientations, complemented by fun and dynamic group moments. These are always complemented by snacks and rewards, birthday parties and various celebrations. In partnership with Pastorais da Igreja - Paróquia de São Pedro Apóstolo de Ponta Verde, many of these elderly women receive medical assistance and guidance as well as support with the appropriate medication. Many of these actions were suspended during the pandemic and are now gradually being resumed, using all possible care, so as not to harm the older people being cared for or the volunteers who are also part of the special care group (to avoid saying "at risk").

Plans for the coming years (from 2021 onwards)

- Organise working meetings to identify priorities for action after the pandemic. It is advisable to plan and carry out a survey on the housing situation of registered elderly people, to identify the precariousness of their housing and to carefully assess the possibilities of effective support for the rehabilitation of the rooms in these houses, as well as the improvement of hygiene conditions and the well-being of their families. The preliminary investigations carried out with our assistants and the discussions initiated between the Volunteers and certain collaborators have highlighted the urgent need for this service as well as the financial difficulties that will certainly have to be faced by all. However, motivated by the Hope which is rooted in the Vincentian Charism and by the proposal of the AIC "13 Houses" Project, we aspire to follow this direction in the coming years in our Nucleus/Regional.

AIC USA

1) As a movement, an association, an institution... how have we lived through these months of crisis, of lock-down?

As Ladies of Charity, we are called to BE with the poor as we serve them. Since the beginning of this pandemic, we have been ordered to remain isolated from one another. We have been told to wear masks, to keep a distance of one metre between us, and not to have any meetings indoors - including gatherings at Mass.

As Ladies of Charity, we had the chance to meet each other via Zoom calls, and thus, to see and talk to each other. However, not being able to be in physical contact with each other was difficult. But we are doing what we can right now - especially PRAYER.

2) How did the elders with whom and for whom we work, experience this time? Any difficulties?

These have been particularly difficult times for the elderly, many of whom are in assisted living situations or in old people's homes. Even within these institutions, residents have been socially isolated from other residents. For example, they are kept in their rooms for dinner - no communal meals. And no outside visitors - not even family. Some residences have begun to allow outside visits,

but not many, and especially not visits from non-family members. In some cases, isolation has led to an increase in dementia and deterioration in physical health.

3)) What are we doing, what are we planning to do to help older people find or implement a project that gives taste and meaning to their lives?

In associations serving older people, women have taken up these challenges by ensuring that older people know that they are not forgotten. The women provided snacks (such as home-made pastries), TV trays for the elderly to eat comfortably in their rooms, Bibles and puzzles. One association brought flowers home for Mother's Day and sweets for Father's Day. They are planning to do something special for the next holidays. But all presents have to be left at the door.

AIC France- Saint Vincent Teams

1) As a Movement, as an Association, how did we experience these months of crisis and lock-down?

The Federation of Saint Vincent Teams experienced the confinement, with, as a priority, regular communication with the teams on decisions taken at the Federation level and the dissemination of government directives. The aim was to set up crisis communication with a view to remaining faithful to our mission: to remain present with our vulnerable publics while protecting ourselves.

In this state of mind and already before the confinement, the date of the Congress was postponed and a letter specifying the criteria to be assessed in order to suspend or not to suspend activities was sent.

On 15 March, events developed rapidly and decisions were taken: postponement of the Board of Directors, postponement of the GA, of training, closure of our offices, and teleworking for all.

In the field, many teams have found a way to reinvent themselves, making adaptations creatively to the health rules. On the whole, they have succeeded in maintaining close links with the people they welcome. We are proud to have been present, reactive, inventive and responsible.

2) How did the elderly people experience the months of crisis and lock-down?

35 Saint Vincent teams spread throughout France have the mission of accompanying elderly people.

This takes several forms: organisation of group activities (meals, games, etc.), and the organisation of activities for the elderly,

Theme-based conversations, manual workshops, cultural outings, etc.), visits to institutions: EHPAD (accommodation for dependent elderly people), home visits, memory workshops. This activity has been very impacted by the lock-down as all visits were very quickly prohibited by the authorities.

Older people housed in institutions suffered from isolation and loneliness. The priority was therefore to maintain the link while respecting health rules.

Several teams then decided to become referent correspondents for some residents. The mode of communication is established according to the state of health, the cognitive capacity, the feeling of the team members, the instructions of the EHPAD.

The telephone was well used - « Mrs Z was lost by the fact that she had to be alone in her room, but our exchange on the phone reassured her « Beautiful cards and Easter Eggs, poems or a text from the Word of God were sent via the Post

3) What do we plan to do to help older people find and implement a project that gives flavour and meaning to their lives?

An entry into a relationship - long term if possible - that allows it to exist. A person is a unique being who is only revealed in exchange, encounter and communication.

Helping these people to bring together their memories, which can often be scattered, by adopting active listening. Helping them to find in themselves the answer to questions, not giving it in their place, but re-formulating the question, respecting everything that is expressed.

Valuing their desire to be useful, to be of service, to transmit. For example, by asking him/her about their history, by borrowing a book from them, getting them to participate actively.

Preserving and maintaining their intellectual capital through suitable memory exercises, exercises with a playful and energising aspect that keep minds alert, and through play.

Sharing celebration moments where they are themselves actor in the festivities.