

Introducing Hands Virtual Agent, “Digit”



The Challenge

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an increased demand for Hands’ services, especially mental health supports. With virtual mental health supports being prioritized, Hands needed to be flexible in their approach to delivering mental health support.

Hands needed a solution to help connect with more families, provide self-directed supports, connect families and service providers to resources, and provide next steps to reach Hands and book an appointment, especially during the pandemic.



The Solution

Pre-pandemic, Hands had partnered with IBM to develop “Digit”, a 24/7 virtual chat agent for Autism Services to increase access to information and resources, with a view to expand to child and youth mental health (CYMH) services. As a result of that partnership, Hands was offered the opportunity to enhance “Digit” with COVID-19 information, developed and populated by IBM. Access to the enhanced “Digit”, provides Hands’ clients with easy navigation to provincial resources and public education about COVID-19. Digit has been designed to provide users with:

- anonymity in seeking information;
- current COVID-19 content and resources;
- a welcoming, bilingual presence;
- connection to supports, including Public Health Units.

The virtual agent has helped build the framework for future projects aimed at increasing accessibility for families, particularly in rural and remote communities.

Improvements to Digit are ongoing as content is updated regularly based on interactions to better understand and react to user needs.

The Process



Deep dive to understand client and staff challenges



Leveraged work completed with Autism Services Virtual Agent, “Digit”



Expanded Digit’s repertoire to include information specific to COVID-19



Updated COVID VA “Digit” goes to production



Developed branding, content assessment and guides



COVID VA Digit expansion and go-live on website

For more information on Hands’ Virtual Agent, Digit, please contact:

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