**The ability to be able**

Dear blind and partially sighted colleagues in Europe,

ONCE and ONCE Social Group send fraternal greetings and solidarity to those of you suffering the effects of coronavirus first-hand or who have lost a family member or friend to the virus. Here in Spain we are also experiencing this harsh reality which forces us to foster, more than ever, our ‘ability to be able’.

The entire ONCE Social Group, as one great organisation working in unison, has again turned its focus in these difficult times to solidarity, both towards our own people (our members and employees) and towards other citizens, who know very well that, at this time, they can continue to rely on us as they have been doing every day for the last 81 years.

We have contacted practically all our older members – and especially the 15 000 members who live alone – to make sure their basic needs are covered. We have done this through efforts by social workers, psychologists, other professionals and volunteers. Our teachers are doing their level best to make sure our 7 500 student members don’t miss a course and can continue to study, just like others, in their homes. We are contacting our colleagues who are deafblind. ONCE Foundation has rolled out voluntary schemes to reach persons with reduced mobility in isolated settings. ONCE Social Group is putting its 3D printers, normally used to produce embossed books for blind people or pieces for people with disabilities, to good use in different services by making masks and ventilators for hospitals. And our education centres are available and are being converted, like the one in Madrid, into medical care homes for people with coronavirus to help relieve hospital overcrowding.

In Ilunion, our staff in our laundries, cleaning and security services and call centres, among others, are making sure hospitals and care homes have clean clothes and bedding; handling extreme cases over the phone; cleaning or disinfecting at-risk areas; and making our hotels, such as Ilunion Atrium y Alcala Norte in Madrid or Alcora in Seville, available to the health authorities and turning them into the embodiment of solidarity for the sick and their families, who can see how our Social Group welcomes them and does everything it can to help them, as will be the case also in our hotels in Barcelona, Zaragoza o Málaga, among other places.

In an effort to make lockdown more bearable and even an enriching experience, Club ONCE, an on-line, members-only space on our web site, has beefed up several of its existing services, including the following:

1 ONCE digital library: the library has more than 62 500 downloadable works in audio and/or braille formats, including novels, essays, short stories, foreign-language books and books in easy-to-read format, among others.

2 Audesc video library: our video library has over 700 audio-described films, series and documentaries.

3 Stage hands: a very nice competition where our members put on a dramatized work in audio format or using braille.

4. Audio library: a new service for lovers of unique and unrepeatable recordings to enjoy.

5. Leisure and cultural magazines and journals: in addition to all of the above services, ONCE regularly publishes free magazines on a variety of interesting topics, such as, among other, ‘Audio @’ for tech fans, ‘Knowledge’ for those looking to reflect on current affairs, ‘Pass it on’ for our young members, ‘Playtime’ for the kids and ‘Universe’, which covers science questions.

6. Other publications and news: we also give our members the chance to keep up-to-date with news and events in our organisation through ‘The way we are’, our in-house magazine, and other news bulletins for the visually-impaired community or social publications such as the magazine ‘Profiles’.

7. Training material for self-learning: any time is a good time to widen your knowledge and keep learning. That’s why Club ONCE offers an adapted English-language course and training materials on teamwork, coaching, negotiation skills, marketing and other topics.

8. App accessibility assessment: new technologies are undoubtedly a great ally in promoting personal autonomy and social inclusion among people with a visual impairment, so take advantage of this time to test and get to know different iOS- and Android-based apps that can help us. In this section of the web site we offer our assessment of apps and some handy tips.

9. On-line shop: even in such unusual times you can still purchase anything you need like canes, board games, accessible watches and so on.

10. ‘Integration’ magazine and our catalogue of specialist publications: these publications enable us to gain a deeper, more technical understanding of visual impairment - <https://www.once.es/dejanos-ayudarte/la-discapacidad-visual/revista-integracion>, <https://www.once.es/comunicación/publicaciones/biblioteca-discapacidad-visual>.

11. Virtual visit to the ONCE Museum for the Blind: sit back on your sofa and enjoy the treasures in our museum as if you were there.

Despite the great effort we’re all making together, we face difficult decisions, both individually and as an organisation. Our network of over 19 00 people who sell our responsible gaming products are at home, unable to work and trying to get through these difficult times. Our hotels are closed to tourism but open to solidarity. Our ONCE Foundation people and our staff in the car industry, physiotherapy, retail and other areas have all had to stop work and are waiting at home until the current state of emergency is lifted. As a result and just like other businesses and organisations, we have been forced to take steps to safeguard jobs and ensure the viability of a responsible, committed ONCE Social Group, in line with the options provided for in the laws adopted here in Spain to deal with the current situation and in agreement with our employees’ legal representatives.

Rest assured it is our intention and obligation to safeguard as many jobs as possible. In the case of people with disabilities, and especially visual impairment, employment is, as you know, not just a way to earn a living but also an end in itself, a goal – to provide employment to as many people with disabilities as possible, creating new life opportunities – and it will continue to be so.

Everything we are doing is for the good of our 72 000 ONCE members, the 73 000 men and women who work in our Social Group, and the many, many people who are linked in one way or another with this large family we are all part of.

We are ONCE Social Group and we will overcome this harsh reality we have been forced to endure. Once again, united, we will come out the other end to share, embrace and appreciate even more, if that is at all possible, that “Hope can cope with everything”.

We are people with the ability to be able and, now more than ever, to demonstrate it. ¡Upwards and onwards, colleagues!