Risk Assessment: Not implementing Digital Youth Work

Risk Assessment – not using digital technologies and media in youth work

This risk assessment considers the potential impacts of not using digital technologies and social media in youth work. Practitioners and managers can sometimes be fearful of digital youth work and the risks inherent in the online world. It is sensible to take time to assess and mitigate those risks, and provide appropriate support to staff to do so, as you would with any new programme.

"If youth work fails to embrace digital, it runs the risk of becoming irrelevant" Liz Green, YouthLink Scotland

There are times when the risks involved might seem difficult to mitigate or throw up new ethical challenges for our practice. There are times when organisations respond to this risk by shutting down online communications, blocking access to social media platforms or creating restrictive policies. We encourage your organisation to consider the risks to your service of not engaging with digital youth work, of closing doors to avoid all risks. It's vital to prepare your organisation, staff and volunteers to engage with digitalisation for 'futureproofing' your work and being able to meet young people's needs.

This is a template risk assessment to prompt your thinking, it will need to be tailored to your setting, the young people you work with and the staff, volunteers and resources available. Even if you don't have a big budget allocated to technical resources, or training, there is free training that can be accessed and most social media networks are free or low cost. In some settings staff and volunteers do use their own devices, but they will need guidance and support around boundaries and legal issues.

This document complements the Digitally Agile National Principles, which set out a framework of guiding principles for the use of digital technology and youth work. It supports the training materials and good practice collection also developed within the Digital Youth Work project, funded by Erasmus+ www.digitalyouthwork.eu.

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Organisation:　　　　　　**Name of assessor:**　　　　　　**Date:**

Hazard	Risk Rating		Control measures	New Risk	
	Severity	Likelihood		Severity	Likelihood
Youth workers with a lack of training and information about social networks are confused by young people's problems and their accounts of social dynamics.			• Provide regular training for staff updating on new social networks. • Encourage staff to ask young people about this. • Create dummy accounts on social networks to try them.		
Young people feel that youth workers don't consider their online lives as important as their offline lives, damaging their relationships as there is a lack of understanding and empathy.			• Encourage staff to explore digitalisation and the impact on young people. • Take part in training on digital youth work, considering the youth work outcomes and your youth work goals through a digital lens.		
Not understanding the young person as a whole person if not engaging with the online aspects of their lives. This might lead to missing opportunities to support young people's creativity. This might lead to a lack of understanding about a young person's mental health or wellbeing or social isolation they may be experiencing.			• Encourage staff to ask young people about the online aspects of their lives. • Work with young people as partners in learning about digital. • Take part in training on digital youth work e.g. media literacy. • Research online services which support wellbeing e.g. Aye Mind		

Information about the youth work programme doesn't get to the young people you hope to attract and the numbers attending decline.			• Consult with young people on the best ways to reach them and their peers for sharing information about your service. • Utilise a social media marketing campaign.		
Young people involved in planning activities within your project become disempowered, as every time they suggest using an online platform to communicate with each other, with you, or with the wider community, their suggestions are not implemented.			• Work with managers and IT departments to identify particular platforms that are the priority to be 'unblocked', based on young people's plans. • Create internal policies and guidance around using them in practice to support young people, practitioners and the organisation.		
Young people choose to access a different organisation's youth provision that has technology and media available e.g. gaming or music equipment.			• Ask young people which equipment they would like to use, involve them in funding applications for technical equipment. • Try to source second hand or donated items from tech or gaming companies, local businesses or entertainment centres when they upgrade.		
Safeguarding risk: by not supporting young people to reflect on and navigate the online aspects of their lives, they take more risks online e.g. sharing nude images, connecting with strangers (risk of grooming), cyberbullying, sexting, online gambling.			• Youth workers take part in CEOP and other relevant training e.g. 'Under Pressure' and keep up to date with legislation around social media use. • Employ youth work approaches to discuss relationships and behaviours online with young people to support informed decision-making.		

Risk			Mitigation		
Not meeting young people's needs: Due to practitioner lack of confidence and digital skills, young people are not supported to improve their digital literacy and the essential digital skills they need for life, study and work/employability.			• Prioritise digital skills within the organisation, for staff, volunteers and young people. Utilise frameworks such as 'Essential Digital Skills' and 'Training needs' from EU expert group on digitalisation and youth. • Consider the role of youth work within implementing 5Rights. • Research information from Skills Development Scotland about the role of digital skills in future work, career options.		
Reputational, staff welfare and safeguarding risk: if the organisation is not engaging systematically with digital youth work, some staff or volunteers may see the youth work need and progress this area of work outside of official organisational structures.			• Include digital considerations in planning, evaluation, policies and staff training. • Use the Digitally Agile National Principles and Organisational Self-Assessment for guidance.		
Reputational risk: that your youth project is not keeping up with the times. Potential impact on funding and partnerships.			• As above. • Share your learning in developing digital youth work practice with partners. • Funders are also keen to see new ways of sharing impact e.g. through social media storytelling.		

Training resources from all partners can be accessed through www.digitalyouthwork.eu