



NATIONAL REPORT OF THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL OF IRELAND

The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) is the representative body for voluntary youth organisations in Ireland. It represents and supports the interests of voluntary youth organisations and uses its collective experience to act on issues that impact on young people.

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The Screenagers International Research Project is a collaborative study focussing on the use of ICT, digital and social media in youth work. It is a partnership between agencies in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Finland, Austria and Denmark.



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SCREENAGERS INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH PROJECT

NATIONAL REPORT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

By Marie-Claire McAleer

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	5
1. Introduction	7
2. Research Strategy & Methodology	9
3. The Youth Work Sector in Ireland.....	14
4. ICT Policy Context in the Republic of Ireland.....	17
5. Quantitative Research Findings	21
6. Data Analysis & Discussion of Research Findings	25
7. Case Studies of Good Practice	47
8. Conclusion and Report Recommendations	54
Executive Summary	56
Bibliography.....	64
Appendix A: Findings of the Focus Groups with Young People	66
Appendix B: Graphs	72
Appendix C: Global Voice for Change Poster.....	77
Appendix D: Discussion Guide for Focus Group with Youth Workers	78
Appendix E: Discussion Guide for Focus Group with Youth People	80

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1

INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

Report Structure

This report presents the research undertaken in the Republic of Ireland by the National Youth Council of Ireland on the use of social and digital media in the youth work setting. Although the focus of this study is to examine the experience of youth workers in relation to the use of social and digital media, young people were also consulted as part of this study about their views and experiences of the use of social and digital media in the youth work setting (see Appendix A for the findings from the focus groups with young people).

This report provides a brief overview of the research methods employed in the Republic of Ireland. A contextual background on the youth work setting and a brief overview of current policy on ICT in the Republic of Ireland is also provided.

The report discusses and analyses the quantitative and qualitative data collected. Drawing on the findings from the focus groups and the results from the survey of youth workers, the report examines the use of social and digital media in youth work practice in the Republic of Ireland.

The report concludes with an overview of the main research findings. It proposes 4 recommendations, arising from the research, to support and enhance the use of social and digital media in youth work practice.

2

RESEARCH STRATEGY & METHODOLOGY

2. Research Strategy & Methodology

Research Aim

There are a number of key objectives to this study

By interviewing youth workers about their views and experiences of using social and digital media in their youth work practice, the study seeks to ascertain answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the extent of the use of i) social media and ii) digital media in youth work?
2. What types of digital media are used in youth work, and for what purpose?
3. What is the value / contribution of the use of social and / or digital media in youth work for young people, and for youth work practice?
4. What are the challenges of the use of social and / or digital media in youth work and how can these challenges be overcome?
5. Is there training available to the youth work sector, and what supports are required to enable youth workers to apply social and digital media as a tool in their youth work?

Research Methods

The Screenagers research undertaken in the Republic of Ireland employed a mixed methods approach (combining documentary, quantitative and qualitative), however, the study relies mainly on qualitative research methods to explore and answer the key research questions.

Methodology

Qualitative research methodology is employed in this study to consult with youth workers on their experience of and thoughts on the use of social and digital media in youth work. Sherman and Webb describe qualitative research as directly concerned “*with experience as it is lived or felt or undergone*” (Sherman & Webb, 1988: 7). Qualitative research tends to focus on exploring in as much detail as possible, smaller numbers of instances or examples which are seen as being interesting or illuminating and aims to achieve depth rather than breadth (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2001: 64). It can offer the policymaker a theory of social action grounded on the experiences – the world view – of those likely to be affected by a policy decision (Walker, 1995).

The study also included a questionnaire containing 13 closed-ended questions – see appendix B for a copy of the survey. The questionnaire sought to ascertain information on the respondents’ place of work, gender and age. It also included questions to ascertain the respondent’s employment status (for example whether they were a volunteer or a paid staff member). It sought information on the age cohort of the young people the respondent mainly worked with. The questionnaire asked if the respondent used social and digital media in their work and if they did, for what purpose. It also included questions on what

tools and type of social and digital media the respondent used in their youth work. For those who did not use social or digital media in their youth work, the questionnaire sought to ascertain the reasons why they didn't use it. The questionnaire also included a question about training and asked the respondent if they had received any sort of training on the use of social and digital media to work with young people. Respondents who had received training were asked to provide details of the training received. At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were invited to leave their contact details if they wished to participate further in the research.

The questionnaire was disseminated via NYCI databases by email and NYCI twitter in April 2015 and 283 youth workers responded. Surveys not completed in full were eliminated from the total number of responses.

The survey was designed to get an insight into the nature and extent of social and digital media use in the youth work practice. It was used as a first phase in the study to obtain information about the nature and scope of the use of social and digital media in youth work practice and to inform the qualitative research undertaken as part of the study.

Limitations of the Survey Research

It is important to state that including a quantitative research method in this study presented many challenges and limitations principally because of the difficulty accessing a representative sample within the youth work sector. As a result, the survey findings are not statistically significant. The survey findings, however, serve to generate some interesting insights into the nature and extent of the use of social and digital media in the wider youth work sector and to inform the qualitative research undertaken in phase two of the research.

Profile of Research Participants

Four focus groups were conducted throughout the country - 2 with youth workers and 2 with young people. The focus groups were undertaken in Dublin (urban area) and in Tipperary (rural area), and participants were from the Leinster and Munster provinces. The participants in the focus groups with youth workers were of mixed ages and had a broad range of experience as youth workers ranging from working in 'mainstream' youth work or working in youth work on specific youth projects. Some youth workers had been working in youth work for many years while others were relatively new to the profession and had a minimum of 3 years professional practice.

The focus groups with young people were conducted with young people of varying ages ranging from 13 – 19 years of age.

Recruitment of Research Participants

Focus group participants were recruited via youth organisations or randomly selected from the responses given by individuals who had responded to the survey in phase 1 of the study.

Focus Groups with Youth Workers

At the start of the focus group discussions with youth workers participants were invited to introduce themselves and say a little bit about the work they do with young people, how long they have worked in youth work and what age group of young people they work with.

The focus groups were exploratory and facilitated engaging and lively discussion amongst participants. Focus group participants spoke openly about their experiences of the use of social and digital media in youth work.

The focus groups generated substantial information on the sorts of challenges they encountered. They highlighted the advantages and disadvantages of using social and digital media in their work with young people. They also highlighted a number of supports required to enable and support youth workers to enhance their skills to use social and digital in their professional lives. Invaluable insights into current practice were provided. It was apparent that there is quite a lot of inconsistency in the use of social and digital media across youth work practice within the Republic of Ireland. Some organisations are more advanced in the use of social and digital media in youth work than others. In such cases, the youth workers had received a lot of support and training to incorporate social and digital media into their work with young people. Other youth workers were less confident and competent in using social and digital media in their youth work practice. In many incidences, use of social and digital media in youth work tends to be personally driven. Many youth workers described themselves as 'self-taught' and motivated by a desire to *"keep up with the young people who they worked with"* (Youth Worker).

Based on their experiences, participants advised and proposed practical recommendations, which if implemented, would help to support and enable greater use of social and digital media throughout the youth work field.

The conduct of each focus group was governed by a discussion guide, a copy of which is included in Appendix D.

Focus Groups with Youth People

The focus groups conducted with young people generated some fascinating findings and reaffirmed a lot of the literature and research to date in relation to young people's use of social and digital media. It was apparent that social media in particular, forms an integral part of their daily lives and is a key channel for communication between friends. In some incidences, more time was spent chatting to friends through social media than in person and in many respects, social media had replaced the traditional face to face time and personal interaction once so common.

It was evident that many young people were much more knowledgeable about both social and digital media than their youth workers and seemed to enjoy this advantage.

The young people were very engaged on the research topic and openly shared their experiences of using social and digital media in their personal lives and in the youth work setting. They talked about what they enjoyed about using social and digital media. They also acknowledged what they perceived to be the 'dangers' or downsides of using these mediums - referring to on-line bullying, being vulnerable to 'predators' and spending too

much time online, to the detriment of spending quality time with friends and family. Some young people spoke about feeling tired because they had stayed up late at night on-line 'vamping.'¹

Case studies

Three case studies are used to profile examples of innovative practice in the use of social and digital media in the youth work setting in Ireland. Yin defines a case study as an empirical inquiry that *"investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context and addresses a situation in which the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident"* (1993:59). Case studies tend to be rich in data and suited to the research questions under examination in the research. The use of case studies provides a greater insight into the experiences and attitudes of the group of people under investigation and the social context in which they live in. In qualitative research the use of case studies enables participants to define the situation in their own terms.

¹ 'Vamping' is a new teen trend referring to adolescents staying up all night using forms of social and or digital media. Vamping is defined as "a tame social craze in which teens forgo precious, sweet sleep to talk to their friends, watch YouTube tutorials on how to make hip-hop beats, and post selfies tagged #vampires or #breakingnight" (New York Times, 3rd July, 2014).

3

THE YOUTH WORK SECTOR IN IRELAND

3. The Youth Work Sector in Ireland

Youth Demographics in the Republic of Ireland

Ireland has one of the youngest populations in Europe with one-third of its population under 25 years of age. The proportion of young people aged 10-24 years of age represents 18.3% (882, 741) of the total population of 4.59 million.² These numbers are predicted to grow, with the number of 10-24 year olds increasing by 13% between 2015 and 2020.

There are over 40 national youth work organisations in the youth work sector in Ireland, and they in turn oversee a much larger number of local, community-based projects, services and groups, which deliver services on the ground.

Legislative Background

'Youth work' is defined by the Youth Work Act 2001 as *"a planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young people through their voluntary involvement, and which is complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training and provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations"* (2001: 7).

The appointment of the first ever Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and the establishment of a Government Department for Children and Young People in 2011 were significant developments. They were significant because they provided greater emphasis at a political level to responding to the needs of children and young people. Since 2011, the formulation of public policy on children and youth issues has adopted a much more integrated and cross-cutting approach.

Key Policies

The cross-Governmental, overarching policy document which focuses on responding to the needs of children and young people in a synergistic and integrated manner, is the national policy framework for children and young people 2014-2020³ entitled *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* (BOBF). BOBF identifies young person specific commitments and outlines 5 national outcomes for children and young people which strive to ensure they are:

- active and healthy,
- achieving in all areas of learning and development,
- safe and protected from harm,
- have economic security and opportunity,
- are connected, respected and contributing (BOBF, 2014: 7).

² CSO Annual Population & Migration Estimates, 2015.

³http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/cypp_framework/BetterOutcomesBetterFutureReport.pdf

Underpinning this national policy framework is the *National Youth Strategy 2015 – 2020* which addresses the needs of the total youth population, with a particular emphasis on young people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing the poorest outcomes.

Number of young people and volunteers participating in Youth Work

Based on Indecon's research amongst youth work organisations, it is estimated that 382,615 young people participate in and benefit from the various activities and programmes provided by youth organisations throughout Ireland. This figure of 382, 615 represents 43.3% of the total youth population aged between 10 and 24 (Indecon, 2012). Indecon's independent analysis indicates that 53.3% of young people participating in youth work organisations in Ireland are believed to be economically or socially disadvantaged.

A unique characteristic of youth work services in Ireland is the contribution of thousands of volunteers who give their time and expertise to work for and with young people. The Indecon Report found that there were 40,145 volunteers and an estimated 1397 paid staff working in the youth sector.⁴

Youth sector funding

The vast majority of youth work organisations provide recreational, arts and sports-related activities, while over half are engaged in activities which are focused on welfare and wellbeing. Issue-based activities also form an important focus for youth work organisations.

The current expenditure for youth work services from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs has fallen by almost 31.7% since 2008 from €73.1m to €49.9m in 2015. This has placed enormous strain on youth services at a time when the numbers and needs of young people are growing. In 2008, the spending on youth work services was €76 per young person. By 2014, the amount spent on youth work service fell to €58 per young person. €500,000 was allocated in 2015 for a Youth Capital Funding Scheme intended for small projects.

As a result of the budget cuts imposed during the recession, capital funding is limited. This has had an impact on the financial capacity to support the development of new physical infrastructure, to renovate existing facilities and to acquire IT and digital equipment. Currently, the funding deficit in the youth work sector has greatly impeded the development of youth work services to adequately support young people to engage with ICT.

⁴http://www.youth.ie/sites/youth.ie/files/Economic_Benefit_Youthwork_2012.pdf

4

ICT POLICY CONTEXT IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

4. ICT Policy Context in the Republic of Ireland

In relation to Government policy on realising the potential of children and young people through the use of social and digital media, the current Government national policy framework for children and young people, *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures* (for the period 2014 – 2020) makes a number of commitments in this regard. In section 2.11, the policy framework makes the following commitment to:

“support and link existing partnerships, strategies and initiatives that aim to improve the decision-making capacity of children and young people through strengthening self-esteem, resilience, responses to social and interpersonal pressure, health and media literacy (including social media literacy”(2014:113).

It also states that Government recognises that:

“With the growing role of technology in children and young people’s lives, parents need advice and information on how best to protect their children from harm online and in relation to social media and texting. Equally, children and young people need the guidance of teachers and parents to learn to manage and cope with this added dimension to modern life” (2014: 77).

Section 3.19 of the policy framework acknowledges the importance of continuing to ‘*promote best practice by social media providers with respect to privacy controls and reporting mechanisms for abuse/bullying so as to better protect children online*’ (2014:82). Under aim 5.3 of the national policy framework, there is recognition that the ‘*development of new technologies, in particular social media, has created new modes of engagement and activism, and has helped connect the local and the global*’ (2014: 102).

There is very little recognition in BOBF of the role of the youth work sector in realising the potential of children and young people’s use of social and digital media. The focus appears to be on the formal education setting, teachers and parents to drive, deliver and support young people to realise their potential in the use of social and digital media.

The National Digital Strategy (NDS)

In July 2013, the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, published (Phase 1 – Digital Engagement) of the National Digital Strategy (NDS). The strategy sets out a vision and a number of practical actions and steps to encourage and assist more citizens and small businesses to get on line. Phase 1 focuses on Business & Enterprise, Citizen Training and Schools & Education. The ultimate goal of the strategy is ‘the optimal economic and social use of the internet by business, individuals and by Government.’

The Department of Education and Skills has also published a new National Digital Strategy for Schools (2015 – 2020), which seeks to build on the current roll-out of broadband to the classroom. Contained in the new digital strategy for schools are plans for a Leaving Certificate Information and Communications Technology subject and the greater use of electronic devices in class. The five-year plan identifies the rollout of wireless networks within schools as “a key Government priority.” While high-speed broadband has now been extended to all secondary schools under a programme jointly funded by the Departments of

Communication and Education & Skills, the report acknowledges the need for “scalable, robust wifi solutions” to bring the technology into the classroom.

Key recommendations of the report, which was developed over the past two years through consultations with teachers, management bodies and other stakeholders include:

- Aligning teachers’ professional learning in ICT to Teaching Council registration.
- Encouraging and supporting the use of ePortfolios for teachers.
- Enhancing ICT capacity and awareness in the education system in partnership with industry.
- Encouraging a culture of innovation.
- Providing parents/guardians, students and teachers with information, advice and tools to promote safer, more responsible and more effective use of the internet, including developing additional resources on cyber-bullying awareness.
- Providing advice and funding for greater access to devices in the classroom, cloud services, and internet connectivity.
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment to provide advice and options to the Minister on further developing the provision for digital learning in the Senior Cycle including the feasibility of an in-depth ICT Leaving Certificate subject.

The strategy notes that *“ICT also has the potential to be misused in schools,”* citing the recent OECD study which cast doubt over its benefits in boosting literacy and numeracy test scores. It also emphasises the need for “distributed leadership,” whereby school management and other key stakeholders *“take ownership of this challenge so that we achieve ICT integration and equip learners with the digital competencies that we value.”*

Digital Media

When digital media is referred to in the *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures* national policy framework for children and young people, it is in the context of promoting positive influences for childhood. It acknowledges that rapidly evolving forms of digital media are pervasive in all aspects of children and young people’s lives. It states that there is the need to counter the increasingly negative set of messages about behavioural norms and expectations that children and young people are exposed to. In order to respond appropriately to the increasing influences on childhood of new technologies, digital media, sexualisation and commercialisation, the policy framework states that it needs to develop a better understanding of the different forms of social and digital media. Such information and learning is essential to equip children, young people, parents and society to respond to the inherent challenges that accompany the use of social and digital media. The policy framework document also refers to the need to *‘foster a culture that promotes positive influences for childhood.’*

To achieve these aims, the Government commits to increasing the digital literacy of young people, to build their skills and understanding about being safe online and to protect them from commercialisation and sexualisation. How it intends to achieve these ambitious

objectives, however, is not explicitly stated within the national policy framework for children and young people. The focus would appear to be through investment and implementation of the new National Digital Strategy for Schools.

Ireland's first National Youth Strategy was published in October 2015. This strategy builds on the national policy framework for children and young people published in 2014. It identifies specific policy outcomes. Under outcome 2 – 'achieving full potential in all areas of learning and education,' point 2.7 identifies the promotion of "*the use of new technologies and support acquisition of digital skills of young people*" as an outcome (2015: 27). Government and 'other stakeholders' are identified as stakeholders in achieving this outcome. Although the inclusion of this outcome in the National Youth Strategy is commendable, unfortunately the youth work sector is not specifically named as a key player in achieving this outcome. It is also worth noting that point 2.7 is the only reference made to digital media in the entire National Youth Strategy and 'social media' is not referred to at all.

There is scope for the youth work sector to play a key role in achieving these objectives but greater financial support is required to support and enable youth workers with the skills to incorporate new and emerging forms of social and digital media into youth work practice.

5

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Questionnaire Findings

The following statistics are from a survey of 283 youth workers:

Profile of Respondents

Gender

- 73% of respondents were female
- 27% of respondents were male

Age

- 10% of respondents were 18 – 24
- 34% of respondents were 25 – 34
- 36% of respondents were 35 – 44
- 16% of respondents were 45 – 54
- 4% of respondents were 54+

Youth Worker Status

- 81% of respondents are paid staff in the organisations they work for
- 19% of respondents are volunteers in the organisations they work for

Hours Worked

- 64% of respondents stated that they worked full-time
- 32% of respondents stated that they worked part-time
- 4% of respondents stated that they worked periodically

Age group of young people respondents mainly worked with

- 6% of respondents worked with under 10 years
- 11% of respondents worked with 10 – 13 year olds
- 36% of respondents worked with 14 – 17 year olds
- 8% of respondents worked with young people aged 18+
- 39% of respondents worked with young people across all age groups

Use of social/digital media in work with young people

- 77% of respondents use social and digital media in their work with young people
- 23% of respondents did not use social and digital media in their work with young people

Purpose for using social and digital media in youth work

- 68% of respondents stated they use social and digital media to provide information/advice to young people
- 60% of respondents stated they use social and digital media to arrange meetings/activities
- 60% of respondents stated they use social and digital media as part of their youth work
- 59% of respondents stated they use social and digital media to recruit young people to their work/activities
- 10% of respondents give other reasons for using social and digital media in youth work. These reasons are presented on pages 26 - 30 of the report
- 4% of respondents stated they use social and digital media to provide counselling

Reasons cited for not using social and digital media in youth work

- 49% preferred to use face to face work with young people
- 28% of respondents provided other reasons discussed in more detail on pages 33 – 37 of the report
- 21% state they didn't have the relevant knowledge or skills
- 20% stated that it was because of lack of resources
- 10 stated that it was due to poor connectivity e.g. lack of broadband
- 8% stated that they lacked the capacity

How many youth workers had received training on using social and digital media in youth work?

- 76% of respondents had not receiving training
- 24% of respondents had received training

6

DATA ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

6. DATA ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Responding to the key research questions this study seeks to explore, section 6 analyses both the quantitative and qualitative data collected. Drawing on the questionnaire results and the qualitative data generated from the focus groups with youth workers and young people, a number of key findings emerged in relation to the use of social and digital media in the youth work sector in the Republic of Ireland. In this section, these findings are outlined and discussed. They also contribute to the recommendations made at the end of the report.

Section 6 is presented in two parts. The first part presents the findings from the focus groups with youth workers which is the primary focus of the research study. The second part presents the findings from the focus groups with the young people interviewed as part of this study which can be found in Appendix A of the report.

The key themes emerging from the qualitative data conducted with the youth workers are distilled and discussed under the following 7 headings:

1. Nature and extent of use of social and digital media in youth work.
2. Purpose for using social and/or digital media in youth work practice.
3. Types of social and digital media used.
4. Reasons identified for not using social and digital media.
5. The challenges identified by youth workers in using social and digital media in their youth work practice.
6. The contribution social and digital media makes to youth work practice.
7. The supports required to enhance the use of social and digital media in youth work practice.

1. Nature and extent of use of social and digital media

The nature, extent and scope of the use of social and digital media varies considerably throughout the youth work sector in Ireland. The survey results indicate that 77% of respondents use social and digital media in their work with young people and 23% of respondents do not use it. Although 77% usage of social and/or digital media would suggest that social and digital media is an integral part of current youth work practice, the qualitative research reveals that the nature and extent to which it is used depends, to a large extent, on the youth organisation and on the individual youth worker.

The issue of familiarity and competency in use of social and digital media was raised during the focus groups with youth workers. Some youth workers identified as 'very knowledgeable' others 'less knowledgeable.' The former tended to have IT backgrounds or IT experience prior to working as a youth worker. Many youth workers, when asked how they acquired their knowledge and skills in the use of social and digital media described themselves as 'self-taught.' Most of the youth workers, unless they had previously studied

or worked in IT before becoming a youth worker, had never received any sort of formal training in use of social or digital media in youth work practice.

Youth workers spoke at length about some of the ways in which they used social and digital media 'to engage and connect' with the young people they work with. Some participants in the focus groups said their ignorance of some of the newer forms of social media served as a talking point between them and the young people. The youth workers said that they felt the young people liked to feel they knew more than the adults (a point reinforced by the youth people during the focus groups with young people). They also said that learning about social and digital media from the young people, served as a useful way of forging a relationship between the youth worker and the young person.

In incidences where high end use of social and digital media was used in youth work, the youth project or programme tended to be designed specifically for that purpose and the youth workers were trained in use of social and digital media. A good example of this is Foroige's Computer Clubhouse which is profiled as a case study in section 7 of the report. The Computer Clubhouse works with 10 to 18 year olds and introduces the young people to high end technology in an out of school environment. The Computer Clubhouse gives participants the opportunity to become designers and creators, not just passive consumers of technology.

There is no specific training on the use of social media in youth work. The training available focuses solely on the use of digital media. Currently there is a gap in training provision dealing specifically with the use of social media. Youth workers felt that the training on social media and training on digital media should be designed and delivered separately. Many youth workers felt specialised training and additional supports were required to equip them with the knowledge, skills and competencies to use ICT effectively in their youth work practice and to keep up to speed on the new and emerging forms of social and digital media.

2. Purpose for using social and/or digital media in youth work practice

The survey results indicate that respondents used social and/or digital media for a wide variety of reasons. Fifty nine per cent of respondents stated they use social and digital media to recruit young people to their work/activities. Sixty per cent of respondents stated they use social and digital media to arrange meetings/activities. Sixty nine per cent of respondents stated they use social and digital media to provide information/advice to young people. Four per cent of respondents stated they use social and digital media to provide counselling, while sixty percent of respondents used social and digital media as part of their youth work.

Ten per cent of respondents stated that they used social and digital media for a variety of different reasons. Of these ten per cent, one respondent stated it was used to provide

young people with new skillsets. It was also used to highlight the work being done by young people and *“to safely allow parents, guardians and other family members to stay up to date on their children's activities by post updates and pictures”* on the youth organisations' private Facebook pages. It was also used by youth workers to communicate with co-workers about planning. It was used for capacity development and for workshops. 'Sharing photos of activities and events', 'marketing' and 'research,' 'using messenger to communicate with some people instead of using emails' and 'using it as a mechanism to recruit volunteers,' were also identified by respondents as reasons for using social media in youth work practice. One respondent said it was used to give *“recognition of young people's achievements.”* Another said it was used to give advice to young people on how to stay safe online. Another youth worker stated that he used it to suggest postings for clubs to put on their pages and for promotion of upcoming events. Another respondent stated that they used 'TechSpace'⁵ in particular as a group work activity for young people. Another youth worker stated that they used it to deliver FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council) Level 4 in Digital Media. It was also used for evaluation purposes and for 'international networking.'

The primary purpose for using social media cited by many youth workers in the focus groups was as a means of communications.

“That's what they are living on and it's the quickest and easiest way to get the information to them and to remind them” (Youth Worker).

“They'd usually have free internet or they're connecting to wifi around town. They'll always have their Facebook whereas they mightn't have text messages... But at least for a group chat everyone can feedback and say, 'oh that doesn't work for me' and you can have more of a discussion based thing rather than if you were texting everybody. You'd be getting a million texts back. You'd be sending a million more out. It's just a much more fluid way to talk to them like” (Youth Worker).

Sometimes a young person in a vulnerable position uses social media to contact a youth worker to broach a difficult subject or to seek help. One youth worker stated that often she found that some young people find it easier to speak to an adult via social media initially. She said:

⁵ TechSpace is a not-for-profit organisation hosted and managed by Camara Ireland. It has charity status and it provides most services (including training) at heavily subsidised rates and some free of charge. TechSpace is a creative space within a youth service or project where young people are inspired to create, produce and have fun with digital technology. Each day the young people work on their own projects and get one-to-one assistance, guidance and support from the TechSpace Coordinator/Educator and volunteers. Young people work on both individual and group projects on themes chosen by the young people about issues that are important in their lives. For more information about TechSpace please see www.techspace.ie

“I find sometimes with young people if they want to say something to you, if they haven’t got words for it, they find it a lot easier to say it through a message and personally I don’t like talking to somebody about something serious over the phone or on Facebook because you can’t see the facial expressions. But that is the way they do it now so what I usually do is go ‘can you come in and have a cup of tea’ and they usually will come in and have a cup of tea” (Youth Worker).

Some youth workers felt that using social media particularly for communication purposes had actually increased face to face time with young people by enhancing attendance. Other youth workers said they had to actively manage and maintain a balance between online time and offline time in youth work, otherwise it would impact on ‘face to face’ time with the young people.

The added value of using Facebook and other forms of social media to engage with young people, however, was deemed by youth workers to far outweigh the negative aspects of its use.

In instances where social media was used in youth work, youth workers used it in many different ways. One youth worker described how it was used in the youth café where she worked. The focus of the work she does with young people aged between 12 and 18 years of age, centres around the teenage health programmes delivered. She stated that the youth setting had a lot of computers and that while internet use was one of the most popular activities, young people also used digital media and music as well.

Another youth worker stated their organisation’s philosophy is:

“To encourage the young people to become creators of digital media rather than consumers and that they question the media that is there in front of their eyes. We challenge them and ask them to think outside the box and to come up with their own ideas about local issues and community issues...and become creators either through photography, graphic design, film production, websites or whatever medium they want to use. Maybe even write and record a song.”

The youth workers from organisations where social and digital media has been embraced as part of their youth work practice, acknowledged that it is a relatively recent phenomenon.

“Well I’ve probably been only using it for the last 3 years really but it’s something that’s come into youth work I think in the last 3 or 4 years. Most youth workers sort of use it - strive to anyway...” (Youth Worker).

Other youth workers said that while they used social media in a limited way, its use in youth work was more ad hoc than strategic. It would not form a key component in their work practice.

There was a very strong sense that there has been a shift from more traditional youth work practice towards youth work that incorporates the use of new forms of social and digital media. Youth workers stated that there was a growing acknowledgement within the sector that the use of social and digital media was becoming an important tool in youth work. Overall, most participants felt this was something that had evolved in response to the young people's use of social and digital media and a growing awareness of the need to "keep up to date" with what has become a key aspect of young people's lives.

"It has become a key part of their lives and this means that youth work has to adapt to reflect this change and to remain responsive and relevant to young people" (Youth Worker).

As the following quotes from youth workers reflect, incorporating the use of social and digital media into youth work practice is not easy. To be able to facilitate and empower young people to achieve their potential in specific areas of ICT, many youth workers said they were often learning about new forms of social and digital media on the job or learning alongside the young people.

"I suppose a big base for us is about empowerment of the young people. So it is whatever mode or medium they want to use, we try to facilitate that to a core...so like 3 years ago film-making was the whole thing with them and I had to get my head around that. Now its website development..." (Youth Worker).

"A lot of our youth projects are independent, so the social and digital media dimension has kind of evolved over a 5 year period rather than developed through a formal structure or development process, it's been interesting..."(Youth Worker).

"...in terms of my own experience of digital media...over the last 2 years we've begun to use it a lot more in terms of sort of recording our activities through videos and uploading them on to YouTube and things like that and we use a lot of social media campaigns, things like that..."(Youth Worker).

“...a lot of what we do is action projects, awareness raising action projects and programmes. So that has jumped to the fore in the last 2 years. A lot of them are now engaging social media as the format for a lot of the awareness raising campaigns and platforms for raising awareness on campaigning. So we’ve had to come to the forefront of that (Youth Worker).

“In the last year now it’s sort of turned up, just very quickly, we deliver FETAC accredited courses. One of them is a peer education programme and as part of that is they have to develop a sort of a format for promoting peer education. In the last 2 years the kids themselves came up with the concept of developing websites. So I’ve had to quickly do all that sort of stuff as well. So I suppose they’d be the main elements of the digital technology involved in our work at the moment” (Youth Worker).

3. Types of social and digital media use

In exploring the nature and scope of the use of social and digital media in youth work, it is important to distinguish between the two. Social media refers to online social networks (such as Facebook, Google Plus, and LinkedIn), as well as information and media sharing sites (such as Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and Tumblr) (Madden et al., 2013). Digital media refers to forms of electronic, often Web-based, media and communications, including websites, apps and games. The research found that social media tends to be the main medium used by the most youth workers.

The survey of youth workers suggested that Facebook continues to be the most commonly used social media channel for communicating with young people and to promote events or disseminate information to young people. Ninety two per cent of survey respondents used this medium. The qualitative research findings, however, highlighted that Facebook, while used, is used in many instances, only as a means to communicate with young people and to promote events that are happening.

Use of Facebook

Participants in one of the focus groups with youth workers talked about the inherent risks associated with using Facebook in their work. Many youth workers did not have a personal Facebook account and if they have a personal social media presence, spoke of the importance of keeping a clear distinction between their personal and professional life, to ensure there is ‘no blurring of boundaries.’

“You have a role or a job or people perceive you as somebody with a role or a job in the community. You have to be aware that that’s in the public domain and whether you want it to be or not, it crosses over because there isn’t a young person that can’t access my Facebook...” (Youth Worker).

Some youth workers also stated that they had experimented with iphotos, or had a few different accounts on social media such as Instagram, twitter, and snap chat for work.

“We’ll create group chats, you know we’d have a particular group who are working on the project and that’s our group chat and then any time we want to add something to that, it’s available for them to communicate with each other. Then we upload our music on to social media or our films, any kind of media we create we upload it. We’re sharing it, we’re looking for feedback you know. That’s how we put our stuff out there...” (Youth Worker).

“...we have a Facebook page...now some of the young people have the passwords to that and

they can upload stuff as well, you know, but I will sit with them when they’re doing that, you know” (Youth Worker).

Some youth workers said they focused a lot on staying safe online when talking to young people about using social media. Some of the youth workers had received McAfee training and said that they used the presentation they had received during this training, in their work with young people on ‘staying safe online.’ The McAfee training includes messages about the importance of privacy and ensuring that one is conscious of what they post on line and the implication now and in the future.

Using social media in a youth work setting ensures that young people are surfing the net or using social media under supervision. The point was made that many young people use social media at home in an unsupervised setting. When they are using social media on computers in the youth centre, they are being supervised.

“...we keep an eye on what they’re doing and there are sites that are blocked, that they wouldn’t be able to get on to...” (Youth Worker).

In one particular organisation, the youth workers in the organisation never corresponded via Facebook with young people without including another youth worker in the online correspondence. One youth worker spoke about the vulnerable position youth workers can find themselves in, if a young person contacts them outside work hours via their personal social media presence. He said he would never ignore a request from a young person in need but would try to invite the young person to contact them in the youth work setting during working hours, when there were other colleagues present. It does, however, present challenges for the youth worker – these challenges are discussed in greater detail on pages 37-41 of the report.

Other types of social and digital media used

Of those surveyed, fifty three per cent of survey respondents used 'YouTube' in their youth work practice. Fifty two per cent used 'digital photography' and forty nine per cent of youth workers used 'video/filming making' in their youth work practice. Thirty per cent of survey respondents used 'twitter' in their youth work practice while ten per cent used 'Instagram.' Five per cent of youth workers used 'Tumblr' and five per cent used 'Snapchat' in their youth work practice. Thirteen percent of youth workers stated that they used 'E-learning,' eight per cent used 'coding' and two per cent used 'App Development.' Eleven per cent of youth workers surveyed stated that they used 'Gaming' and thirteen per cent used 'Blogs' in their youth work practice. Five per cent of survey respondents stated that they used 'other' forms of social and digital media in their youth work practice such as 'Pinterest,' email, 'Online Guide Manager,' Viber Groups, WhatsApp Groups, for google/web searches, photo editing, texting and website updating, and for research and evaluation. It was also used for teaching children through videos and slideshows.

One youth worker stated that they use digital media to show good examples of good quality media and to address interesting topics related to young people's lives. It is used to try and challenge the young people to think about what is important to them. In terms of teenage health, a youth worker stated that they use a manual programme for teenage health and young people use websites to research about contraception. She said the use of social media and the internet was positive in this regard, as long as young people are accessing the correct information.

Use of Instagram

Instagram was found to be useful. A youth worker described how she used Instagram effectively in her work with young people to run a rights-based campaign using pictures. The young people involved in the campaign took pictures in the centres and put them on Instagram.

Use of Snapchat

The use of snapchat by youth workers was deemed to be 'dangerous' and not advisable because, it was felt, it left the youth worker very exposed. As one youth worker put it *"you're leaving yourself wide open... and you're going to have to act on stuff that you're going to see"* (Youth Worker).

Concern was expressed by youth workers about how young people use and perceive 'snapchat.' It was argued that young people are largely oblivious to the potential risks and long-term repercussions of using snapchat. The use of snapchat is concerning because of its 'instantaneous nature.' Images can be saved through screenshot and circulated so they 'go viral.' The main concern the youth workers had with snapchat was the growing instances of

'sexting'⁶ amongst young people. The youth workers felt that many young people didn't realise the implications of 'sexting' both in terms of the impact on their image and in terms of the legality of sharing images of other minors.

"...snap chat is probably used a lot for that (sexting). Sending inappropriate pictures and then you can screen shot the image and it can be shared with other people. So we're kind of aware of that and we're aware it goes on and I've done training with the Rape Crisis Centre and we've done a little bit of training with small groups where we do it as an add on to teenage health. But I do know it goes on, just from conversations but at the same time I think we're probably in the dark a little bit to the extent of it" (Youth Worker).

Youth workers also felt parents needed to educate themselves about new forms of social and digital media to be able to supervise young people using it.

The issue of 'vamping' was raised as a concern by youth workers. Vamping is a term used to describe the behaviour of a person when they stay up all night on social media. Clearly this has implications for one's health and well-being and their productivity the next morning or the next day. It was proposed that in the same way that there is a clear health promotion agenda around healthy eating and nutrition, there needs to be the same type of information targeted at young people about the importance of staying safe online. It should also include health guidelines on recommended screen time to guard against negative health impacts.

4. Reasons identified for not using social and digital media

The survey found that twenty three per cent of respondents did not use any form of social or digital media in their youth work. When asked why they refrained from using social or digital media, twenty one per cent stated they didn't have the relevant knowledge or skills. Ten per cent stated that it was due to poor connectivity and lack of adequate broadband in the area was also cited as a barrier to use of social and digital media. Not only does it inhibit online communication between youth workers but it also limits the capacity to engage with youth workers in other countries. It was felt that if there was investment in a decent infrastructure, then it would be more cost effective and would greatly support and enable the use of social and digital media in youth work, particularly in rural parts of Ireland.

Twenty per cent of youth workers stated that they did not use social and digital media because of lack of resources, while forty nine per cent of youth workers said that they did not use social and digital media because they preferred 'face to face' work with young people. Eight per cent of youth workers surveyed stated that they lacked the capacity to use

⁶ 'Sexting' is sending and receiving sexually explicit messages, primarily between mobile phones. The term was first popularized in the early 21st century, and is a portmanteau of *sex* and *texting*, where the latter is meant in the wide sense of sending a text possibly with images.

social or digital media while twenty eight per cent cited other reasons for not using social or digital media. One survey respondent stated that *“social media is a bit of a minefield in terms of proper boundaries & youth work best practice.”* Another said they didn’t use social or digital media because their *“PR Manager dealt with it on behalf of the organisation.”* Another survey respondent felt there was *“no need”* to use it as they were not a national organisation. *“Lack of resources to maintain a page”* was also cited as a barrier to use. Other reasons identified by survey respondents for not using social or digital media, ranged from concerns about confidentiality, to restrictive organisational social media policy guidelines which prohibited use. Respondents also stated that they did not use social or digital media because it was neither relevant nor appropriate to the age group of the young people they worked with.

Age and status a factor inhibiting use of social and digital media

Some youth workers felt the use of social and digital media in youth work depended a lot on the background of the youth worker in terms of their knowledge, competency and confidence to use it. They also felt that there was a different approach to its use in youth work depending on the age of the youth worker, how long they had worked in youth work and whether they were paid youth workers or volunteers. They prefaced their comments by saying that this was just their perception but in general they felt that the slightly older youth workers and volunteers were less likely to embrace social and digital media unless they had an IT background.

One youth worker said:

“...at the moment with our volunteers, the older volunteers see Facebook or social media as a taboo and will not go near it whatsoever and it’s hard for us to contact their youth club without using it and without having Facebook as an outlet...”(Youth Worker).

Another youth worker stated that he felt it was a very individual thing and was really down to the attitude of the youth worker. He said that he knew youth workers who had been in the profession for over 20 years and that although they didn’t feel particularly proficient in the use of social media, they still used it as part of their youth work practice. He argued that it is the responsibility of the youth work sector to continually support all of its workers irrespective of their age or how long they have worked in the profession.

Another stated that although she and her colleagues used social media, in a limited manner, that some of the volunteers were less likely to do so. She stated that she often tried to encourage volunteers to use social media more proactively in their work with young people but she felt they were reluctant to do so because of a ‘fear of the unknown.’

One of the main barriers identified in both the quantitative and qualitative data, is the issue of lack of skills and knowledge as a key barrier to using social and digital media in youth work practice.

Lack of specialised training

In exploring the issue of barriers to use of social and digital media in youth work in the focus groups, lack of specialised training was cited as a major barrier by youth workers. In fact, according to the survey, less than a quarter of youth workers (24%) had received training on the use of social and digital media in youth work. A significant seventy six per cent of youth workers surveyed stated that they had never received training on the use of social or digital media in youth work.

In relation to formal training on the use of social and digital media for youth workers, there appears to be a gap in training specifically focusing on social media. Some youth workers had received training prior to working in youth work but youth workers without a background in the use of social media admitted that often they learned about using social media through YouTube or from the internet.

“I was lucky enough when I was in college, I ended up doing a film course but in terms of actual youth work experience, no I’ve never received any formal training. I suppose that’s sort of one of the benefits of social media with all the apps, you know and one of our philosophies is learn by doing” (Youth Worker).

“So the young people will come in and they’ll say they want to use a 3D printer and they want to learn how to build a website. You know it could be anything, any day it could be anything. So I don’t have all the answers. I will try and engage mentors, volunteers, students from the local college to be those experts, but if they’re not there we have to learn by doing. So we have to go on the internet. We have to look up YouTube and we have to problem-solve how they can do that...” (Youth Worker).

Training Received

Of the 24% of respondents that had received training on the use of social and digital media, the type of training received varied. Survey respondents were asked to provide details of the training they had received. The following types of training supports were identified by respondents and give an indication of the nature and extent of sector specific training available to support youth workers:

- Internet Safety organised by Youth Work Ireland in Galway.
- Degree Multimedia Applications Development. Honours Degree Project management & Software Development.

- TechSpace Network.
- International web seminars on health, education, sexual health training, human rights framework development, media training and social media training.
- McAfee Online Safety for young people and Foroige's Policy.
- A programme called 'Digital Creator' through Foroige.
- ECDL, Word, Powerpoint, photography.
- Intel Computer Clubhouse Network Training (Induction training plus yearly conferences in the USA (linked to MIT in Boston, Adobe Youth Voices Training, Camara TechSpace training).
- Online safety for young people training (McAfee) around child protection, bullying and privatising accounts.
- Digital creator training.
- Trained in the adobe youth voices programme.
- McAfee online Security: use passwords, GPS tracking, etc.
- Online course marketing and reputation management.
- NYCI Internet safety for youth workers 1 day course.
- Policy training re social media, digital photography.
- NYCI one day workshop on film.
- Leargas Prezi workshop.
- Adobe Youth Voices training.
- Adobe TechSpace Educator.
- Spunout training.
- Internal digital focus groups, local film centre training.
- Child Protection training.
- Intro to Social Media - The Wheel.
- Brief training on editing through Xhale Media project.
- TechSpace Training (AYV).
- Cork Film Centre - workshops on film making.
- Foroige.
- Health & safety.
- In house bespoke training.
- Mostly safeguarding training.
- Local training on Facebook and twitter.
- IT Consultant, Spun Out.
- Intermediate social media skills course in UCC.
- Xhale workshops.
- Training received through No Hate Speech Movement Ireland.

TechSpace training emerged as the most popular type of training received by the 24% of respondents who stated that they have received training in the use of social and digital media in their work with young people.

Most of the youth workers said that they didn't let their lack of training and knowledge or competency inhibit them from *trying* to incorporate new forms of social and digital media into their work. Many felt, however, that specialised training for youth workers and networking and information opportunities for them to meet to share and exchange ideas

and practice on the use of social and digital media in youth work, would be of great value. It would also help to enhance the use of social and digital media in youth work practice in Ireland.

Organisational Policies on Use of Social and Digital Media

All of the youth workers who participated in focus groups stated that the organisations they worked for had a social media policy in place. When asked about the nature of the policy, some policies were much more rigid than others in how social media could be used to communicate with young people. The issue of child protection was a fundamental principle overriding the organisations policies on use of social and digital media. Most of the social media policies described by participants referred to stipulations in policies that youth workers did not use their personal profiles for work and only use their youth work accounts. Policies also placed the onus on the youth worker to ensure that there was no cross over or link between their personal online presence and their professional on-line presence. Sanctions were in place, if employees breached the organisation's policy.

In terms of the use of Facebook in youth work, some youth workers stated that if they receive friend requests to join the youth work Facebook account, the decision to accept the invitation is at the discretion of the youth worker.

5. The challenges identified by youth workers in using social and digital media in their youth work practice

The youth workers identified a myriad of challenges that they had encountered or continue to face in using social and digital media in their work. Barriers to use of social and digital media identified by research participants relate to issues around lack of training, lack of knowledge, skills, competency and confidence to use social and digital media. They also identified concerns about managing time, managing the 'boundaries of technology' and dealing with young people's expectations that they will be responsive via social media outside working hours. They cited concerns about their vulnerability working in the social and digital space in relation to the appropriateness of the communication with the young person or young people they are communicating with. They also mentioned the challenge of managing the 'boundaries of technology.' Budgetary constraints were highlighted as a structural barrier in terms of access to equipment and availing of relevant ICT training (as part of their continuous professional development) to support and enhance the use of social and digital media in their work. The issue of poor broadband and connectivity was also highlighted as a significant structural barrier, particularly in rural parts of Ireland.

Some youth workers felt the use of social and digital media was in many ways "a double-edged sword." While it had many benefits, it also had inherent risks in terms of the potential to impinge on one's privacy and to be open to abuse. Concerns were expressed about young people contacting them after hours or in an inappropriate manner. Other concerns related to privacy settings being too rigid or too loose and the problems that could arise from both scenarios. The youth workers stated that there is a desire to create an open and inviting social media presence to ensure that young people come to youth work, but at the same time ensuring that it isn't too open to be subject to abuse. Managing the openness versus the privacy restrictions on social media was described as 'challenging' by youth

workers. For example one youth worker said that she used Facebook as a means to communicate with parents of juniors because the juniors do not have their own accounts but then you are friends with adults too and this has to be monitored. Monitoring its use was described by one youth worker as being like a newspaper:

“...if you’re putting an article in a newspaper anyone can read that and I think you know your public Facebook pages have to be treated the same way because even with the best will in the world with privacy settings, I don’t think anything is fully private...you have to be very careful in terms of what you say (on-line). But the whole area of Facebook friends and privacy, you just have to treat it like you’re standing on a street and that’s where you put your safeguards in place.”

The importance of managing the separation of professional and personal roles was discussed in the focus groups and described as a significant challenge by many youth workers. Although they recognise that social media is the world that young people live in, it was argued that working in this very fluid and ever changing world creates difficulties for youth workers. The difficulties referred to, relate to the need to negotiate where to draw the lines of communication with young people through social media. This can have implications for the relationship with the young person, particularly a young person who is using social media as a first point of contact to seek help. Although all of the youth workers subscribed to the importance of ensuring the separation of work and personal time, some youth workers expressed a concern that being too rigid in terms of use of social media, could result in losing the confidence of a young person who may use social media to contact a youth worker (outside of work hours or through social media).

The following quotations from the focus group discussions reflect the nature of some of the challenges expressed by youth workers in this regard:

“So you’d have a private Facebook group or a public one or a secret one. It would all have a purpose and there again, you have to, I guess be very acutely aware of how you manage yourself within that setting and even how you operate, when work starts and work ends” (Youth Worker).

“It’s a massive challenge because there’s something about whose job it is to draw that line or to negotiate that. I would be lying if I didn’t say a young person hasn’t contacted me through Facebook in the context of needing support and needing to have a conversation, that they don’t have a comfort zone for having face to face maybe or that it’s a first contact connection. So they’re expressing a need but as a professional you have to kind of draw the line straight away and to give them a context for how the conversation might happen and be up front about that. Again there’s the risk of saying I can’t talk to you, this isn’t going to happen...” (Youth Worker).

“I mean when you’re working, as a support base you’re trying to throw out hooks and if someone needs it they should be able to hook on. If you cut the line, you have to do that in a very sensitive way and they have a right to have a conversation about that and again it depends on the age of the young person but I think the biggest challenge is giving young people the scope to be able to say, this is what we need or this is how we see it, instead of adults always deciding these are the boundaries of social media” (Youth Worker).

“...managing the expectation that you’re constantly responsive at the end of it, is difficult. It is important to keep those boundaries so that you’re not Facebooking them at 11 O’clock at night and if they have Facebooked you, that they understand that you operate to your hours of work and that Facebook is the same” (Youth Worker).

Another focus group participant stated that personal Facebook use as a form of communication with a young person was deemed inappropriate and would be regarded by his employers as a serious child protection issue. He said:

“If it’s found that you’re having a conversation on your personal Facebook account with a young person we would take that as a child protection issue, very seriously. It is very clear that actually your personal account is your personal account. Like your personal life is your personal life, you don’t cross the boundaries. So it’s your responsibility to hold that boundary for the young person” (Youth Worker).

In many respects the ‘boundaries of technology’ set or imposed by the youth workers or the organisations they work for, are in place to protect the youth worker and the young person. A youth worker in one of the focus groups said that although such boundaries are necessary, it creates a paradox in many ways, in that adults are dictating to young people how they should use the social media space to communicate with youth workers. He said this generates many challenges which the youth work sector is currently grappling with.

“These are the boundaries of technology. We decide for you even though at the same time we’re saying that’s the space that they exist more in and they live in. So they have views on that and I guess for us the challenge is to take their views on board and then to see how they influence policy and how they impact on how a professional behaves or fulfils their role in their job...”(Youth Worker).

One youth worker said, although challenging, it is the role of the youth worker to manage the situation sensitively and appropriately to ensure they are protecting themselves (against accusations of an inappropriate relationship with the young person) and protecting the young person as well.

Other concerns about using social media in youth work

The other concerns related to the fact that the types of social and digital media that young people are using changes so quickly and this presents difficulties *'keeping informed and up to date with the new fads.'* It also means that it is harder to monitor what the young people are posting.

"If we hear about something that we don't know about, we would try and find out more or again use our networks. But there's stuff like Yik Yak, which came on the scene in a burst which is literally the space where it's an app and when you go into the app there are conversations happening within a radius of where you are" (Youth Worker).

Yik Yak operates with someone liking or voting for a comment. The comment then appears on a league table. According to a youth worker in one of the focus groups, the comments are 'abusive' and create a space for extreme on-line bullying.

"So for us it's about finding those trends and then transmitting a message. So our mental health group would put a message on its Facebook page to say if you're going to use Yik Yak here are the things you should consider and that's our view of it. That kind of presents a challenge and also a message, it gets parents and young people to say, well if you're choosing to use it to abuse, then that's a choice you're making so to be conscious"(Youth Worker).

"I don't think we can keep ahead of it, you know I think you're nearly wasting your time trying to keep ahead of it with the kids, but it goes back to initial training and initial workshops we're doing with them around why they're using it, what it is they're using it for, privacy and basic respect"(Youth Worker).

Negative experiences

When asked if any of the youth workers had encountered negative experiences using social media in youth work, they stated that there has been a couple of instances in the past when young people had said things about youth workers online that were untrue. Fortunately these matters were resolved but the point was made that these incidents demonstrate the vulnerability of the youth worker in such a situation and the need for safeguards to protect the youth workers from false allegations. Such safeguards require constant monitoring and the need to be vigilant to ensure against abuse of social and digital media.

Youth work methods are changing

There needs to be greater recognition that the youth work model is changing and that there needs to be more training and support to reflect this changing need. It was highlighted by a focus group participant that sometimes the need to support youth workers to enhance their skills competency in work is not always recognised by management.

“...it’s a new element to youth work that we’re still catching up on in terms of policy and structure and managing it and everything like that. I’m not too sure if that is thought out strong enough, like do we have, even something as simple as, do we have a separate social media policy to our child protection policy, to our health and safety policy or is it slotted in amongst them all...what realm of the organisation structure and organisation does it lie? Or do we even have it in staff induction training now? (Youth Worker).

“...it’s a feature that has landed in youth work but is also simultaneously landed in our personal lives...I think it’s vital that the sector kind of steps back away from itself and has a conversation about it (use of social and digital media in youth work) and looks at all the best practices...how do we maximise that...how do we also kind of draw the lines that need to be drawn? (Youth Worker).

6. The contribution social and digital media makes to youth practice

Most of the youth workers who participated in the focus groups acknowledged the value of integrating social and digital media into youth work practice. Some of them spoke about how they currently used it and the outcomes they had observed from using it. Overall, the use of social and digital media it was felt, had contributed significantly to youth work. As already mentioned, use of social media has helped to enhance communication with young people and to increase attendance. It has also helped to build rapport with young people. Some youth workers said that not knowing a lot about use of social and digital media sometimes served as an advantage in their work with young people in that the young people liked the feeling of knowing more than the adults. It also contributed to a sense of camaraderie and team-building amongst the youth workers and young people where everyone learns together. Many youth workers interviewed, felt that there was more scope to enhance its use in youth practice in Ireland.

The following quotations reflect the way in which youth workers perceive the value of using social and digital media as an effective tool in youth work. They capture the main elements of the discussion in relation to how social and digital media can be used to develop young people’s analytical skills and to enhance youth empowerment and participation:

“...it is up skilling them in various skills but also soft skills, like you’re talking about critical thinking which I think is missing out of our education system at the moment”(Youth Worker).

“We’ve actually moved into an information era where we’re bombarded with information, we don’t need to retain it. It is at our fingertips but we’re not skilling the young people actually how to analyse it critically and evaluate it...I think in terms of actually working in digital media and stuff like that, that is one of the skills you do subconsciously, you deliver subconsciously to them. And they pick up on it very, very quickly” (Youth Worker).

“It is for empowering them as well to take action, you know especially in terms of campaigning and you know campaigns and everything, wanting to get messages out there. It is an easy way for them to do it and feel that they’ve done something really constructive” (Youth Worker).

“You know you can do a post but not necessarily see the impact that it has. You put a film up on YouTube and you get the comments and you get the likes and the watches and everything. You know there is great ownership. Even in terms of their contribution to you know National Youth Strategy...”(Youth Worker).

The need to include young people in the decision-making about resources and investment in social and digital media equipment in youth work, where possible, was also emphasised as important, by the youth workers.

“It is about supporting and empowering them and learning from them but you know sometimes some of the challenges I’ve found when there are young people who do like music production and they really want to take it to a level, and they’re challenging the youth project to support that....I mean we found that even when it comes to the point where you’re deciding on what resources to invest in. I remember very vividly the point where laptops became not needed anymore in a youth project because everyone had a smart phone but if you’re going to buy something, the young people I worked with, said lets buy IMacs because they have so much more.”

During the focus group discussions, youth workers were positively disposed to the use of social and digital media. In spite of the challenges they identified and problems they had encountered using it in their work, in general they felt it made a positive contribution to youth work. Some youth workers and organisations are already very much committed to the use of social and digital media in youth work. For those who had just scratched the surface, or who described their use of it as limited, there was a real appetite for additional

specialised training to equip and support them to use it more in their work with young people.

Youth workers felt that the use of ICT and new and emerging forms of social and digital media has the potential to play a key part in the youth work experience. If it is embraced, youth work can support young people by enabling them to learn new skills around digital media such as graphic design, music production and video production. Youth work can be the place where young people can learn more about industry standards, software and hardware, using green screen and using cameras properly.

For youth work to be able to offer young people these learning opportunities and to empower them to learn new ICT skills either as a hobby or for their future careers, the youth work sector needs to adapt to a new and ever evolving world of social and digital media. It also requires organisations to support their youth workers by investing in specialised training to develop their skills and equip them with the skills and competency required to support the young people they work with.

7. The supports required to enhance the use of social and digital media in Youth Work

Recommendation 1: Develop a National Digital Plan for the Youth sector.

In the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (BOBF), outcome 2.7 identifies the promotion of “*the use of technologies and support acquisition of digital skills of young people*” as an outcome. To achieve this outcome, a National Digital Plan for the youth work sector should be developed and resourced to support the sector (in collaboration with the Department of Children & Youth Affairs and other stakeholders), to embed social and digital media in youth work practice. It should incorporate supports to promote continuous training and professional development for all youth workers. It should also include measurable actions to:

- encourage and support youth workers to embed social and digital media in their youth work practice,
- enhance ICT capacity and awareness in youth work in partnership with relevant Government Departments and stakeholders,
- encourage a culture of innovation and creativity,
- increase investment in the ICT infrastructure to support and enhance the use of social and digital media in youth work and improve broadband infrastructure throughout the country particularly in rural regions and
- provide information, advice and tools to promote safer, more responsible and more effective use of social and digital media.

Recommendation 2: Design and delivery of bespoke or specialist training on the use of ICT, social and digital media for youth workers.

There is a general deficit across the board in the youth work sector in relation to knowledge, skills and competency of youth workers on the use of social and digital media and its application in youth work practice. The only training currently available to youth workers in the Republic of Ireland focuses on the use of digital media. Youth workers felt bespoke training on the use of social and digital media needs to be developed to support youth workers to incorporate new forms of social media into their youth work practice.

Training on the use of social and digital media for youth workers should include ‘mindful’ use of technology in the youth work sector. It should also encourage a critical analysis of the use of ICT. Such training should form part of the third level curriculum for youth work students and should also be available to youth workers as part of their continuous professional development.

Recommendation 3: Create networking and information opportunities for youth workers to include annual and regional events

The investment in the establishment of networking and information opportunities for youth workers where they can meet periodically to share and exchange best practice on ICT use in youth work, is extremely important. Such opportunities could be organised on a regional, sectoral and thematic basis.

Youth workers in the focus groups said it was hard to *'keep on top of the new and rapidly changing forms of social and digital media'* that young people were using. Creating a space where they can network and have the opportunity to both contribute to active learning and professional skills development, receive advice on how to overcome challenges in using ICT in their youth work and share examples of quality media youth work practice, is essential. This must be adequately resourced and will require sustained and appropriate investment.

Recommendation 4: Establish an ICT Support Unit for the Youth Work sector

Establish an ICT Support Unit for the Youth Work sector. The Support Unit would function to provide support for youth workers in all aspects of ICT use in their youth work practice. The Unit would have responsibility for implementing the National Digital Development Plan for the Youth Work sector. The Unit personnel would be responsible for the design and co-ordination of bespoke training to youth workers in all aspects of their professional career (as outlined in Recommendation 1) and the creation of networking and information opportunities for youth workers (as outlined in Recommendation 3). The unit would also respond to information enquiries, provide specialised training to address skills and competency deficits (as outlined in Recommendation 2), offer on-line safety guidance and assist youth organisations to develop organisational policy on the use of ICT. This must be adequately resourced and will require sustained and appropriate investment.

7

CASE STUDIES

7. Case Studies of Good Practice

Section 7 profiles 3 case studies collected during the research process. Each case study included in the report is an example of an innovative and creative use of social and digital media in youth work in the Republic of Ireland.

Case study 1 is an example of the use of social media within a youth work setting in Ballymun Regional Youth Resource in north County Dublin.

Organisation	Ballymun Regional Youth Resource (BRYR)
Name of Social Media Project/Programme	Haunted Asylum
Aims/Objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To realise an ambitious large-scale environmental theatre piece in the Reco building. • To repurpose the building for creative aims. • To manage a large multi discipline piece that will incorporate performance/art/technology.
Were there young people involved in the design of the project/programme?	<p>Yes, this project has been solely originated by a group of 10-12 year olds.</p> <p>They continue to brainstorm the project and we make them aware of any inherent risks or disruptions to their plans. We facilitate the project development by illustrating suggestions relating to the ideas that they come up with and also make sure that everyone feels comfortable and confident contributing.</p>
Description:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age group of young people participating - 10-12 • How long has it been in place? – 3 weeks • Estimated numbers of young people who have participated - 12 • Methodology/Activities - Brainstorming/liaising with duty staff and management. Storyboarding and mapping the project / drafting to-do lists / building costumes and props / filming and editing video inserts for the project / recording and editing audio effects for the piece. • Is it evaluated? No, not yet. There is a CDYSB evaluation inputted after and before each session but the whole project has not been evaluated as it is still ongoing. • What are the intended outcomes? <p>The intended outcomes of the programme is to:</p>

- Enshrine strong communication between each other and the staff body in realising this large scale project.
- Encourage youth workers to participate and develop confidence with each suggestion that is being considered.
- Learn to work as part of a big team to realise a collective vision.
- Gain a greater understanding of the function of the building and the importance in being considerate to others in relation to issues of health & safety, appropriate content etc.
- Learn and share new skills.
- Challenge participants to become more ambitious in a healthy and fun way.

Any challenges encountered?

Managing young people’s enthusiasm and the growing number of excited participants is the key challenge. Breaking the whole vision down into structured tasks and to-do lists is the next step.

Training provided for youth worker (s) involved – please give details

The youth workers are very proficient in events management / arts / performance-based work and digital media technologies required to assist the learning and execution of the project.

Case study 2 is an example of the use of high end technology using social and digital media within a youth work setting in Foroige.

Organisation	Foroige
Name of Social Media Project/Programme	Computer Clubhouse in Blanchardstown, Tallaght and parts of Galway.
Aims/Objectives	Working with 10 to 18 year olds. Introducing them to high end technology in an out of school environment. The Computer Clubhouse gives participants the opportunity to become designers and creators, not just passive consumers of technology. They use the latest design, communications and information technology to create projects in video, music, design, robotics, animation and much more! Dedicated volunteer mentors and professional staff

accompany the young people in their projects. The Computer Clubhouse is part of the Intel Computer Clubhouse Network (a worldwide community of over 100 Computer Clubhouses). The Clubhouse provides an opportunity for students to work alongside adult mentors on creative and exciting projects which involve Information Technology. The Clubhouse is open to young people in the greater Blanchardstown area between the ages of 10 and 18. They are involved in:

- Designing and making web pages. Students have the opportunity to learn about the language of HTML, how web pages are put together, what looks good and what doesn't work when designing web pages.
- Working with Lego robotics, learning how to programme the robot so that it moves, using touch sensors and working through issues of how to make the robots do what they are told.
- Working on creating their own movies using computer software to put together a sequence of photos, video clips and sound files to make a digital movie.
- Working on animations, students learn about creating the figures, moving each frame slightly and then putting all of the frames together to create an animation.
- The Computer Clubhouse offers a range of exciting learning opportunities for students who are interested in learning skills and techniques which will serve them in the future.

Were there young people involved in the design of the project/programme?

Yes, the Clubhouse programme invites young people to be a 'Clubhouse Mentor.'

Young people with an interest in mentoring young people and who also have an interest or are involved in IT related fields, creative or visual arts can apply to be mentors.

Being a Clubhouse mentor means being involved in an exciting, fun, engaging and personally (and professionally) rewarding programme. Having skills in software, designing, creative production, animation, 3D, music or photography is desirable but not essential. Being a willing learner and sharer is very important. Mentors help young people express themselves through technology. Experienced mentors learn that it is better to follow the interests of the members instead of having the members follow the mentor's interests. Successful mentors also become mutual learners. They empower young people by encouraging members to teach them about technology.

Mentor Activities include:

- Work with members on a specific project or activity
- Help with technical systems
- Offer a workshop

- Contribute to the Clubhouse-to-College/Clubhouse-to-Career Programme
- Develop themes for group projects
- Recruit other mentors
- Work on your own projects, invite feedback or assistance from members
- Participate in the Clubhouse Village

Description:

The Clubhouse is guided by four principles:

- The Clubhouse focuses on "constructionist" activities, encouraging young people to work as designers, inventors and creators.
- The Clubhouse encourages young people to work on projects related to their own interests.
- The Clubhouse aims to create a sense of community, where young people work together with one another with support and inspiration from adult mentors.
- The Clubhouse is dedicated to offering resources and opportunities to those who would not otherwise have access to them.

Training provided for youth worker (s) involved:

Any staff with an interest in digital media can apply to go to do the tech space training.

Information, photos or diagrams of relevance:

For further information on the Computer Clubhouse programme, please see Foroige website - <https://foroige.ie/our-work/computer-clubhouse>

Case study 3 is an example of the use of digital media within a youth work setting.

The project was called Global Voice for Change and was completed by Youth Panels in programme countries. It was a Plan ‘Federation’ initiative.

<p>Organisation Plan International</p>
<p>Name of Social Media Project/Programme Global Voice for Change (GVC) – ‘Supporting young people around the world to connect, learn and advocate together’.</p>
<p>Aims/Objectives The goal of GVC is to <i>“create a structure that enables children and young people to engage with each other for peer to peer learning and for bringing together their voices from a local, to national, to regional, to international level, on issues that affect their lives, thus enabling them to be active global citizens.”</i></p>
<p>Were there young people involved in the design of the project/programme? A learning process took place across four countries with 27 youth groups, 33 partners and 40 staff. The findings are in a youth friendly poster (quantitative) (see Appendix C for a copy of the poster) and video (qualitative) format. The young people involved identified three specific goals for the project:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Share information about the situation of young people in other countries. b. Share experiences and learn from each other about the work they do. c. Sensitise, mobilise and advocate together around a common goal.
<p>Description:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Youth Steering Committee form GVC launched Plan’s <i>10 Days to Act</i> campaign during a Youth Take-Over of the African Union on the Day of the African Child in June 2014. 2. The young people involved in the project connected regularly using a mixture of Facebook, WhatsApp, Skype, email, conference calls and physical meetings. 3. During the Ebola outbreak, the young people from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Norway connected and worked together to produce 9 blogs and 2 videos which were: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Picked up by the national, regional and international media and partners. b. Used as part of Plan’s G20 and Brussels donor conference advocacy material. c. The most viewed blog on Plan’s International website in 2014. 4. The process used to develop the blogs and videos has been scaled up for the Millennium Children (MC) videos, blogs and supporting content. 5. The learning from involving young people in the Ebola response, including GVC, is being published in May’s edition of the Overseas Development Institute’s Humanitarian Practice Network’s magazine. 6. A Global Voice for Change feature page on the multi-lingual Voices of Youth website (supported by UNICEF with over 300,000 followers online), has been created to

publish GVC's videos and blogs and facilitate discussions between young people around the world.

7. A Youth Advocacy Toolkit training and GVC learning and evaluation workshop was held in Dakar in March. The training was funded by the UN's Global Education First Initiative and included partners from The Scouts, World Visions, Amnesty, CONAF and Youth in the Media in The Gambia. Additional partners engaged in GVC include Kids News Network, Children's Radio Foundation and West Africa Democracy Radio.

Any challenges encountered?

Based on the learning identified from the GVC learning workshop, improved coordination and information sharing between young people in different countries, is required.

Please include any other information, photos or diagrams of relevance

Most viewed Blog <https://plan-international.org/blog/2015/05/forced-marriages-rise-time-ebola?searchterm=christiana%20ebola>

Real Stories of Ebola video http://www.plan-uk.org/news/news-and-features/real-stories-of-Ebola/#_blank

8

CONCLUSION & REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

8. CONCLUSION AND REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth workers felt that there needs to be more creativity and innovative thinking around how social and digital media is used and applied in the youth work setting. Youth workers also felt there was scope for ICT to contribute significantly in how youth work is monitored, evaluated and reported on to funders.

Currently the use of social and digital media in the youth work sector in Ireland is inconsistent and varies considerably throughout the country. The nature and scope of its use in youth work depends largely on the youth workers and the organisation. In general, there is a dearth of training and support available to youth workers to develop their skills, knowledge, and competency in this field.

If youth work wants to continue to be a space that is an open, welcoming, enabling and supportive environment for young people to develop, there needs to be increased investment to support the use of social and digital media within the sector. Such support requires a shift in ideology to embrace the use of social and digital media as an integral part of youth work now and in the future. The barriers to use of social and digital media identified by youth workers need to be addressed. It also requires financial support, training for youth workers and the implementation of the recommendations made by youth workers contained in this report.

As one youth worker very eloquently argued during a focus group:

“I think if we’re growing new youth workers or youth leaders then we can’t deny the reality of the context of their lives....social media is now a topical issue for young people in every sense. It’s up there with drug use and other kinds of societal topical issues. So a youth worker that doesn’t get a chance to reflect on that...and be able to frame that in how they approach their work...isn’t fully equipped then.”

Summary of Report Recommendations

Arising from the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data, NYCI recommends the following 4 recommendations. These recommendations, if implemented, would help to support, enhance and embed the use of social and digital media in youth work practice in the Republic of Ireland.

Recommendation 1: Develop a National Digital Plan for the Youth sector.

Recommendation 2: Design and delivery of bespoke or specialist training on the use of ICT, social and digital media for youth workers.

Recommendation 3: Create networking and information opportunities for youth workers to include annual and regional events.

Recommendation 4: Establish an ICT Support Unit for the Youth Work sector.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“...if we’re growing new youth workers or youth leaders then we can’t deny the reality of the context of their lives.... So a youth worker that doesn’t get a chance to reflect on that...and be able to frame that in how they approach their work...isn’t fully equipped...”(Youth Worker).

This report presents a summary of the key research findings of the ‘Screenagers International Research’ project undertaken in the Republic of Ireland between May – August 2015.

Report Structure and Contents

The report is structured in 7 sections and each section addresses the following:

Section 1 provides an introduction to the report.

Section 2 outlines the research strategy adopted by NYCI to undertake the study and to investigate the 5 key research questions (which were defined and agreed by the 5 project partners at the start of the research process):

1. What is the extent of the use of i) social media and ii) digital media in youth work?
2. What types of digital media are used in youth work, and for what purpose?
3. What is the value / contribution of the use of social and / or digital media in youth work for young people, and for youth work practice?
4. What are the challenges of the use of social and / or digital media in youth work and how can these challenges be overcome?
5. Is there training available to the youth work sector, and what supports are required to enable youth workers to apply social and digital media as a tool in their youth work?

Section 2 elaborates further on the rationale for undertaking the research, outlines the research aim and outlines the mixed method research approach adopted. Section 2 also provides details of the profile of research participants and the recruitment process employed. **Section 3** provides an overview of the youth work context in the Republic of Ireland providing information on the youth demographics in the Republic of Ireland, the number of young people participating in youth work and the number of volunteers supporting youth work. Section 3 also provides the legislative background in which youth work is defined and recognised and funded by the State.

Section 4 provides information on the ICT policy context in the Republic of Ireland.

Section 5 presents the findings of the survey component of the study.

Section 6 analyses the quantitative and qualitative data collected during the focus groups and discusses the key research findings.

Section 7 profiles 3 case studies collected during the research process. Each case study profiled is an example of an innovative and creative use of social and digital media in youth work in the Republic of Ireland.

Case Studies

Case study 1 is an example of the use of social media within a youth work setting in Ballymun Regional Youth Resource in north County Dublin. The name of the social media Project is called *Haunted Asylum*. The objectives of this programme are to realise an ambitious large-scale environmental theatre piece, repurpose the building for creative aims and manage a large multi-discipline piece that will incorporate performance/art/technology. The *Haunted Asylum* programme uses a variety of methodologies to engage with young people, such as the use of storyboarding and mapping the project, drafting to-do lists and building costumes. It also involves creating props, filming and editing video inserts for the project and recording and editing audio effects for the piece.

In terms of the skills required by youth workers to work on a programme like *Haunted Asylum*, the research found that the staff were very proficient in events management/art/performance-based work and in the use of digital media technologies required to assist the learning and execution of the project.

Case study 2 provides information about '*Computer Clubhouse*' which is a Foroige project. Through the use of high end technology using social and digital media in a youth work context, the *Computer Clubhouse* gives participants the opportunity to become designers and creators, not just passive consumers of technology. The project uses the latest design, communications and information technology to create projects in video, music, design, robotics, animation and much more. Dedicated volunteer mentors and professional staff accompany the young people in their projects. The Computer Clubhouse is part of the Intel Computer Clubhouse Network, a worldwide community of over 100 Computer Clubhouses. The Clubhouse provides an opportunity for students to work alongside adult mentors on creative and exciting projects which involve Information Technology.

The third case study profiled in the report, is called *Global Voice for Change*. It aims to support young people around the world to connect, learn and advocate together. The programme includes the development of a youth-friendly poster and the development of a video. The programme was completed by Youth Panels in programme countries including Ireland.

Section 8 provides a summation of the research findings and proposes 5 recommendations arising from the research findings, to support and enhance the use of social and digital media in youth work practice.

Research findings

It is important to state that while the research study in the Republic Ireland adopted a mixed-methods approach, the main research methodology used to respond to the 5 research questions was qualitative. The survey, although not statistically significant, provides a useful insight into the practice of youth workers surveyed in relation to their use of social and digital media. It also served to inform the qualitative component of the study.

Qualitative Data

The study explored the use of social and digital media in youth work practice through the use of focus groups with youth workers and revealed the following qualitative research findings:

1. Nature and extent of use of social and digital media

- The nature, extent and scope of the use of social and digital media varies considerably throughout the youth work sector in Ireland.
- Some youth organisations are very advanced in their use of social and digital media, while other youth work organisations only used social and digital media in a limited manner.
- Most of the youth workers, unless they had previously studied or worked in IT before becoming a youth worker, had never received any sort of training in use of ICT, social or digital media.

2. Purpose for using social and/or digital media in youth work practice

- Social and/or digital media was used in the youth work sector for a wide variety of reasons.
- The primary purpose for using social media cited by many youth workers in the focus groups was as a means of communication. The communication could be to disseminate information or to recruit young people to a programme. Sometimes a young person, who may be in a vulnerable position, might contact a youth worker as a means of broaching a difficult subject or looking for help.

3. Types of social and digital media use

- Facebook tended to be used by youth workers mainly as a means of communication with young people, to promote events or disseminate information to young people.

4. Reasons identified for not using social and digital media included:

- Lack of relevant knowledge or skills.
- Lack of broadband in the area or poor connectivity.
- Lack of training in the use of social and digital media in youth work.
- A preference for more 'face to face' work with young people.
- Some youth workers felt the use of social and digital media in youth work, depended a lot on the background of the youth worker in terms of their knowledge, competency and confidence using it. They also felt that there was a different approach to its use in youth work depending on the age of the youth worker, how long they had worked in youth work and whether they were paid youth workers or volunteers.

5. The challenges identified by youth workers in using social and digital media in their youth work practice

- Barriers to the use of social and digital media identified by research participants related to issues around lack of training, lack of knowledge, skills, competency and confidence to use social and digital media.
- Youth workers expressed concerns about managing time, managing the ‘boundaries of technology’ and young people’s expectations that youth workers will be responsive via social media outside working hours.
- Youth workers were concerned about their vulnerability working in the social and digital space in relation to the appropriateness of the communication with the young person or young people they are communicating with.
- Financial constraints and access to equipment, and availing of relevant ICT training (as part of their continuous professional development) to support and enhance the use of social and digital media in their work is also cited as challenging.
- The issue of poor broadband and connectivity was also highlighted as a significant structural barrier, particularly in rural parts of Ireland.

6. The contribution social and digital media makes to youth work practice

- Youth workers were positively disposed to the use of social and digital media. In spite of the challenges they identified and problems they had encountered using it in their work, in general they felt it made a positive and valuable contribution to youth work.
- Social and digital media was regarded as instrumental in enhancing communication with young people and in increasing young people’s attendance at youth services. It also helped to build rapport with young people and contributed to a sense of camaraderie and team-building amongst the youth workers and young people, where everyone learns together.
- The use and application of social and digital media has contributed significantly to youth work practice in the Republic of Ireland. Youth workers highlighted a number of high quality and innovative social and digital media uses and applications in youth work throughout the country. Excellent models of best practice taking place in the youth work sector in Ireland are demonstrated in a wide range of youth work programmes, including youth health, youth advocacy and campaigning and development education. It also forms an integral part of a young person’s critical thinking skills and reinforces the model of ‘learning by doing.’
- It is important to acknowledge, however, that such practice is not universal, largely as a result of the lack of an overall plan, support structures and practical measures such as training and spaces to share learning and experiences.

7. The supports required to support and enhance the use of social and digital media in youth work practice

- Arising from the research, the report proposes 4 recommendations, which if fully implemented, would help to support and enhance the use of social and digital media in youth work practice in the Republic of Ireland – see report recommendations.

Key statistics of interest

The following statistics are from the survey of the **283 youth workers**. The survey was administered through social media channels and by e mail through NYCI's database in May 2015.

Use of social and digital media in youth work practice

- 77% of respondents use social and digital media in their work with young people.
- 23% of respondents did not use social and digital media in their work with young people.

Proportion of youth workers who have received training

- 76% of respondents had not receiving training.
- 24% of respondents had received training.

Purpose of using social and digital media in youth work practice

- 68% of respondents stated they use social and digital media to provide information/advice to young people.
- 60% of respondents stated they use social and digital media to arrange meetings/activities.
- 60% of respondents stated they use social and digital media as part of their youth work.
- 59% of respondents stated they use social and digital media to recruit young people to their work/activities.
- 10% of respondents give other reasons for using social and digital media in youth work. These reasons are presented in the main body of the report on pages 26 - 30.
- 4% of respondents stated they use social and digital media to provide counselling.

Top five types of social and digital media used by youth workers

- 92% of survey respondents used 'Facebook' in their youth work practice.
- 53% of survey respondents used 'YouTube' in their youth work practice.
- 52% of survey respondents used 'digital photography' in their youth work practice.
- 49% of survey respondents used 'video/filming making' in their youth work practice.
- 30% of survey respondents used 'twitter' in their youth work practice.

Conclusion

Youth workers felt that there needs to be more creativity and innovative thinking around how social and digital media is used and applied in the youth work setting. Youth workers also felt there was scope for ICT to contribute significantly to how youth work is monitored, evaluated and reported on, to funders.

Currently the use of social and digital media in the youth work sector in Ireland is inconsistent and varies considerably throughout the country. The nature and scope of its use in youth work depends largely on the youth workers and the organisation. In general, there is a dearth of training and support available to youth workers to develop their skills, knowledge, and competency in this field.

If youth work wants to continue to be a space that is an open, welcoming, enabling and supportive environment for young people to develop, there needs to be increased investment to support the use of social and digital media within the sector. Such support requires a shift in ideology to embrace the use of social and digital media as an integral part of youth work now and in the future. The barriers to the use of social and digital media identified by youth workers, need to be addressed. It also requires financial support, training for youth workers and the implementation of the recommendations contained in this report.

Report Recommendations

Arising from the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data, NYCI recommends the following 4 recommendations. These recommendations, if implemented, would help to support, enhance and embed the use of social and digital media in youth work practice in the Republic of Ireland.

Recommendation 1: Develop a National Digital Plan for the Youth sector.

In the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (BOBF), outcome 2.7 identifies the promotion of “*the use of technologies and support acquisition of digital skills of young people*” as an outcome. To achieve this outcome, a National Digital Plan for the youth work sector should be developed and resourced to support the sector (in collaboration with the Department of Children & Youth Affairs and other stakeholders), to embed social and digital media in youth work practice. It should incorporate supports to promote continuous training and professional development for all youth workers. It should also include measurable actions to:

- encourage and support youth workers to embed social and digital media in their youth work practice,
- enhance ICT capacity and awareness in youth work in partnership with relevant Government Departments and stakeholders,
- encourage a culture of innovation and creativity,
- increase investment in the ICT infrastructure to support and enhance the use of social and digital media in youth work and improve broadband infrastructure throughout the country, particularly in rural regions and
- provide information, advice and tools to promote safer, more responsible and more effective use of social and digital media.

Recommendation 2: Design and delivery of bespoke or specialist training on the use of ICT, social and digital media for youth workers.

There is a general deficit across the board in the youth work sector in relation to knowledge, skills and competency of youth workers on the use of social and digital media and its application in youth work practice. The only training currently available to youth workers in the Republic of Ireland focuses on the use of digital media. Youth workers felt bespoke training on the use of social and digital media needs to be developed to support youth workers to incorporate new forms of social media into their youth work practice.

Training on the use of social and digital media for youth workers should include ‘mindful’ use of technology in the youth work sector. It should also encourage a critical analysis of the use of ICT. Such training should form part of the third level curriculum for youth work students and should also be available to youth workers as part of their continuous professional development.

Recommendation 3: Create networking and information opportunities for youth workers to include annual and regional events.

The investment in the establishment of networking and information opportunities for youth workers where they can meet periodically to share and exchange best practice on ICT use in youth work, is extremely important. Such opportunities could be organised on a regional, sectoral and thematic basis.

Youth workers in the focus groups said it was hard to *'keep on top of the new and rapidly changing forms of social and digital media'* that young people were using. Creating a space where they can network and have the opportunity to both contribute to active learning and professional skills development, receive advice on how to overcome challenges in using ICT in their youth work and share examples of quality media youth work practice, is essential. This must be adequately resourced and will require sustained and appropriate investment.

Recommendation 4: Establish an ICT Support Unit for the Youth Work sector.

Establish an ICT Support Unit for the Youth Work sector. The Support Unit would function to provide support for youth workers in all aspects of ICT use in their youth work practice. The Unit would have responsibility for implementing the National Digital Development Plan for the Youth Work sector. The Unit personnel would be responsible for the design and co-ordination of bespoke training to youth workers in all aspects of their professional career (as outlined in Recommendation 1) and the creation of networking and information opportunities for youth workers (as outlined in Recommendation 3). The unit would also respond to information enquiries, provide specialised training to address skills and competency deficits (as outlined in Recommendation 2), offer on-line safety guidance and assist youth organisations to develop organisational policy on THE use of ICT. This must be adequately resourced and will require sustained and appropriate investment.

An additional requirement of the study (as part of Erasmus+ funding) was to consult young people engaged in youth work, to get an insight into their thoughts and experiences of how social and digital media is used in a youth work setting. Although this aspect of the study is not specifically relevant to the core research questions, the findings from the interviews with young people are extremely interesting and provide a fascinating insight into the use of social and digital media amongst young people and their aspirations to develop and expand their ICT interests now and in the future. The findings from the focus groups with young people are presented in Appendix A of the report.

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APPENDICES

Two focus groups were conducted with young people from rural and urban areas. One focus group was conducted with a group of young people from Munster and the other focus group was with young people from Leinster. Interestingly there was a lot of commonality in terms of the discussions in both groups and the issues emerging were very similar.

Some of the young people had been involved or engaged in youth work for 3 or 4 years, others had been attending for a shorter period of time. The age of the participants ranged from 13 – 19 years of age.

What did they enjoy most about attending the Youth Service?

When asked what they enjoyed most about coming to and engaging in the youth service, the young people said they enjoyed ‘the banter,’ ‘the craic’ and the opportunities the service afforded them. One young person said “it is really cool here, like there is no pressure and you are able to get involved in different things.” The Annual Recognition Awards and the Young Person’s Awards were also cited as very appealing aspects of participation at the youth service. The service has its own in house awards and there are also awards which feed into the Community awards like the ‘Junior Leader’ Award. The food provided at the youth service was also cited as an attraction.

Familiarity with Social and Digital Media

In terms of how familiar the young people are with social and digital media, it is very obvious that the young people were very familiar with various forms of social and digital media and were very much ‘digital natives.’ Their reliance on social and digital media in all aspects of their lives was very evident from the discourse with young people. Social and digital media usage is undoubtedly an integral part of the life of a young person and incorporates all facets of their lives. All the young people who participated in the focus group understood the distinction between social and digital media. The older young people were extremely familiar with social and digital media techniques.

Iphones were used regularly throughout the day by the majority of young people who participated in the focus group and were most frequently used late at night and first thing in the morning. One young person said checking their Facebook account was the last thing he did at night and the first thing he did in the morning.

Types of Social and Digital Media Used By Young People

The types of social and digital media used by young people varied and ranged from use of Facebook, snapchat, Tumblr, twitter, instagram, YouTube, wizards, reddit (which was described by the young people as another type of instagram), playing games and gaming, and for ‘international conversing.’ International conversing’ was explained by the young people as talking to people in other countries about a topic or issue

Frequency of Use

The young people used social and digital media every day, both at home and when participating in youth work. Facebook was the most popular form of social media that young people identified with and used the most. From the discussions with young people, it was apparent that social media was used more at home and in their free time than it was when they were engaging in youth work. Many young people said they used it a little bit in youth work. The use of social and digital media was used predominantly during the times when they were either on their iPhone or at home.

The use of social media was perceived by a young person in one of the focus groups as not an integral part of the youth work practice they had experienced to date. They said they used it sometimes but it wasn't a core part of the activities. Time spent in the youth centre was 'busy' and full of interesting activities. Later it emerged that the same young people, had been exposed to workshops with external consultants organised by the youth workers using a variety of social and digital media, like photography and hip hop music sessions. It seems they didn't associate this with their experience of youth work, possibly because the sessions were delivered by consultants in collaboration with the youth workers.

When the issue of time spent on social media was discussed, the young people acknowledged they spent considerable periods of time online. One young man stated that if the weather was bad, he would spend longer periods of time online using social media – *"4 or 5 hours a day on occasion, depending on the day"* (Young Person).

Another young person agreed that the weather determined the amount of time he spent online. He said:

"...For me it very much depends on the weather. If the weather is good I will just go outside for the whole day. If it's bad I'll stay inside and play with play station."

Another young person said *"my wifi doesn't get turned off, so I'm on it 24/7."* It was not uncommon for young people to use social media for considerable periods of time during the day. Many said they would check it first thing in the morning and last thing at night and some said they would stay up late at night to 4am in the morning online.

A few young people didn't use social and digital media at home. The reasons why they refrained from using it were varied and ranged from not being allowed by parents or not being able to access their home PC regularly because their parents were using it.

Time of the day social media is most commonly used

The following quotes from young people reflect the extent to which they use social media and the time of day it is most commonly used by many of the young people who participate in the focus groups.

"In the evening – I use it as soon as I come in after the youth club..." (Young Person).

"Even when I am with my friends, we are all just on our iPhones" (Young Person).

“I use it all day. The first thing I do is check my phone. Even if I’m eating breakfast I’d be scrawling down my phone” (Young Person).

When asked if they didn’t have their iPhone for a day, if they would miss having access to social media, the responses were mixed. Some young people said that they would, while others said they would be fine and that they found not using it constantly was healthier.

“I feel free, when I don’t have it (their iPhone)” (Young Person).

“I find when I’m not using my iPhone, I get the most contact time with my family” (Young Person).

Reasons why young people use social media

The young people who participated in the focus groups used the following words to describe why they used social media – ‘entertainment,’ its ‘good craic,’ and ‘exhilarating.’ Another young person, *“it’s interesting in a different way.” “I enjoy it especially when I discover something new and I get it right and it’s a really good feeling.”* While another young person said they used social media to talk to other young people in different countries.

As the discussion progressed one young person said that using social media filled a void. He said *“what else are you going to do when there is nothing on...”*

Facebook was used mostly to ‘chat to friends,’ while other young people had a preference for using Netflix to view new releases or box sets. The females in the group said they liked ‘to follow’ celebrities on Twitter or view blogs of celebrities, in particular beauty blogs. When asked what type of celebrities, the young people said ‘the inspirational ones.’ ‘Pippa O’Connor,’ was identified as a popular celebrity figure that a young woman in one of the focus groups liked to follow. ‘Joanne O’Riordan,’ the young advocate from Cork, was also referred to as someone the young people followed on social media.

One participant in a focus group stated, *“I would scrawl and read down all her tweets and quotes mainly because you identify with her and because she has amazing stuff to say” (Young Person).*

Another young woman said she liked to follow celebrities on Twitter or on Facebook as they put up ‘inspirational quotes’ and YouTube links as well. Other young people said they liked to follow the model, ‘Gisele BÜNDCHEN.’ OTHERS PREFERRED TO FOLLOW THE FOUNDER OF FACEBOOK, ‘MARK ZUCKERBERG.’

THE GAME ‘GRAND LEE AUTO THEFT’ WAS ALSO MENTIONED BY A NUMBER OF THE YOUNG MEN. ONE SAID “IT WAS HIGHLY ADDICTIVE.”

One young person said they found social media useful for learning because they could look up anything that they needed and that it was useful for finding information that they required.

Positives of using social and digital media

There was a lot of discussion about the value of using social and digital media. Young people, particularly those from rural areas, recognised the benefits of having access to groups and individuals outside their communities and being able to share, exchange and discuss information around common topics or issues of interest.

One young person stated, *“it’s really handy because you don’t meet these people every day to discuss stuff so you have access to them on Facebook in closed groups.”*

Another young person said that using social media is a *‘good way of communicating and for sharing events or entertainment.’*

“It is also good for school work as almost all our school work is done online” (young person).

Another young person stated that she likes to go online to draw and that often she will get ideas from others you may have posted a link to new software which she wouldn’t have found otherwise.

Negatives about using social and digital media

Overall the young people described using social and digital media in a very positive manner and highlighted a long list of advantages to using it. There were also negatives to using social media that the young people identified too. These ranged from difficulty learning about some of the types of media and the consequences of exposing oneself on-line with a comment or a picture. The impact on one’s privacy and the inherent dangers of one’s digital footprint were also mentioned. Vulnerability to on-line bullying as a potential negative associated with social media, was highlighted by the young people. In particular, reference was made to the creation of ‘hate pages’ attacking an individual online. The feeling of inadequacy as a result of viewing other people’s Facebook timelines, was also mentioned. The following quotations from young people in the focus groups captures some of the negatives thoughts and feelings around use of social media.

“ Sometimes when you are on social media, it can be depressing, like, if you are looking through someone’s instagram and then you see someone has made a hate page on that page. I find that so bad” (Young Person).

When asked to elaborate on the sorts of bullying they had viewed on-line, many said that it was very common and websites with an anonymous nature contained the worst forms of bullying. They referred to offensive and vicious comments made on images that a person had posted of themselves. These comments and images could often go viral. Another young person referred to Ask.fm and snapchat as channels where a person could be vulnerable to ‘serious on-line bullying.’

Many young people said they were conscious of their privacy settings and of the importance of staying safe online. Some young people said they had been contacted online by someone they did not know and were conscious of the importance of staying safe online.

CSI Cyber was suggested by one of the young people as *“a very good programme to educate yourself on the internet and staying safe online. It is based on personal experience and everything they tell you is completely true”* (Young Person).

Knowledge and Learning

When asked about how they learned to use social and digital media, they said they either learned themselves, friends or older siblings showed them or in one case a young person said that their mum had taught them how to use it. Another young person said that she taught her mum how to use it.

Transfer of Knowledge to Adults

The subject about young people having more knowledge around the use of social media than adults emerged during the focus groups. When asked if they had shown many adults how to use various forms of social and digital media, the vast majority of young people said they had. Most of the young people said they knew more about using social media than the youth workers – a point that was reaffirmed in the focus groups with youth workers.

“They (youth workers) ask us how to use it. We know more than them. It’s quite funny – most of them are clueless.”(Young Person).

“They ask us ‘anyone good with computers’ and you tell them all the different types of shortcuts and they still can’t do it and its really frustrating, because you are doing everything” (Young Person).

Interestingly in the focus groups with young people almost half of the participants had ambitions to work in social and digital media in the future.

Views on Youth Workers’ Knowledge and Use of Social and Digital Media

The young people found it amusing and enjoyed the fact that, for the most part, they knew a lot more about forms and use of social and digital media than their youth workers. Many stated that they would like to know more about how to use their PCs and about how to build and develop coding, in particular.

On young person stated, *“some of us do know about website construction and various forms of javascript from participating in CoderDojo, but we’d like to know more.”*

The young people felt that most of their youth workers were neither comfortable nor knowledgeable about using social and digital media in their work. They offered a number of suggestions on how to support youth workers to use more social and digital media in youth work.

One young person suggested that youth workers should undertake training on ICT, social and digital media prior to commencing work with young people. *“I think there should be a class they should take before they start to work in youth work”* (Young Person).

Training for youth workers in the use of social and digital media was cited by the young people as essential, with some suggesting it should be mandatory in nature.

One young person stated, *“...they (youth workers) are scared because they have no idea how to use it and if you have no idea how to use something you are usually very on the edge.”*

Another young person felt that the main reason social and digital media wasn’t a key part of the youth work practice she had experienced, was simply because the youth workers did

not have the knowledge or competency. With others acknowledging that it could be a generational issue and age may be a factor. One young person stated, *“They weren’t brought up with it (ICT, social and digital media) as kids, unlike us. We were using stardoll (a form of social media) at 8 years of age.”*

Others felt that youth workers were so busy with paper work and group work, that they didn’t have time to dedicate to social and digital media work with young people.

Young people stated that they would like to have access to some of the more technical forms of digital media such as coding and developing apps. They also said that it would be great to have more time to spend on computers in the youth centre.

Some of the young people who participated in the focus groups spoke of their experience of learning more about photography and digital media in the youth work setting. They had the opportunity to participate in activities organised by the youth workers, where a professional photographer came in to the youth centre and worked with the young people. They were shown how to use the ‘mac’ properly and how to take proper pictures to maximise how they used their camera phones and how to achieve proper lighting in pictures.

The young people acknowledged that they were fortunate to have access to ‘mac’ computers and ipads. For those who lived in rural localities poor broadband and connectivity was regarded as problematic. When asked if they had a suggestion as to how this could be resolved, one joked and suggested that one way to resolve this problem was to ‘move to Dublin!

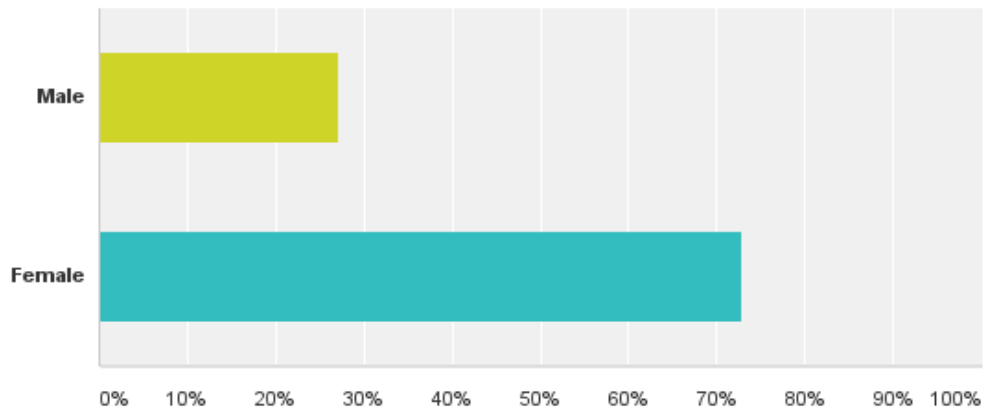
Conclusion

Overall, the young people in both focus groups had similar perspectives and experiences in the use of social and digital media. Social and digital media is an integral part of their lives and was used daily as a means to communicate with their peers and for a variety of activities from gaming, to following celebrities on twitter and Facebook, to using it to advance their learning and study. Many had aspirations to pursue careers in ICT in the future and would like to have greater access to particular types of digital media in the youth work setting.

There were many parallels between the focus groups with youth workers and young people in relation to the use of social and digital media in youth work. The young people felt that they knew more than the youth workers about social and digital media and they enthusiastically proposed a number of measures that could be adopted to enhance the use of social and digital media by youth workers. Interestingly the reasons young people identified for youth workers *not* using social and digital media in youth work and the proposals they made to support youth workers to use more social and digital media, correspond with the findings from the focus group discussions with youth workers. Young people suggested that many youth workers lacked the skills and knowledge to apply social and digital media as tools in youth work practice. They also suggested youth workers should be obliged to undertake specialised training to equip them with the skills and competencies required.

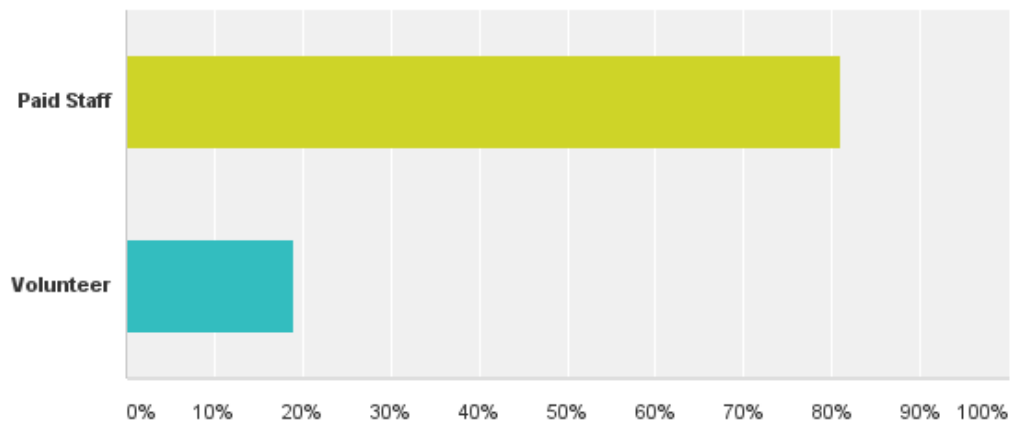
Q2 What is your gender?

Answered: 281 Skipped: 2



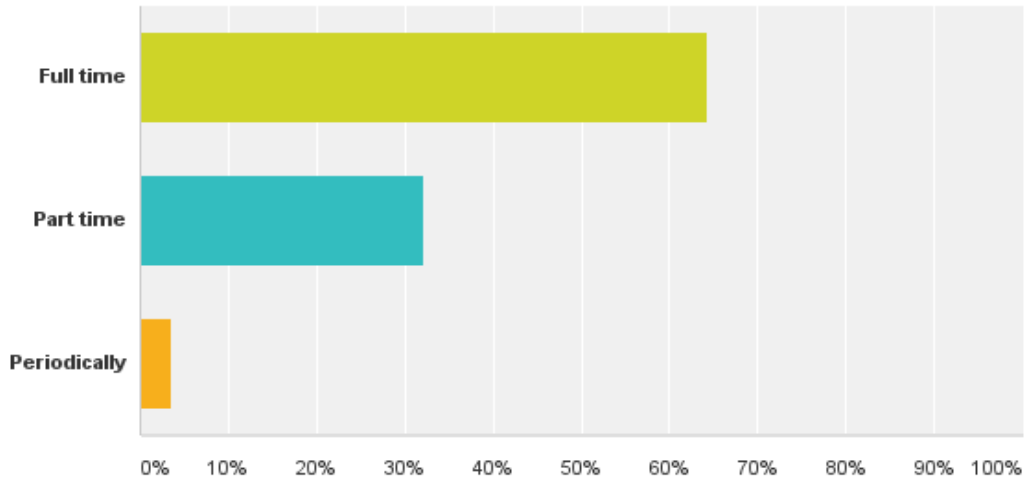
Q4 In what capacity do you work with young people?

Answered: 283 Skipped: 0



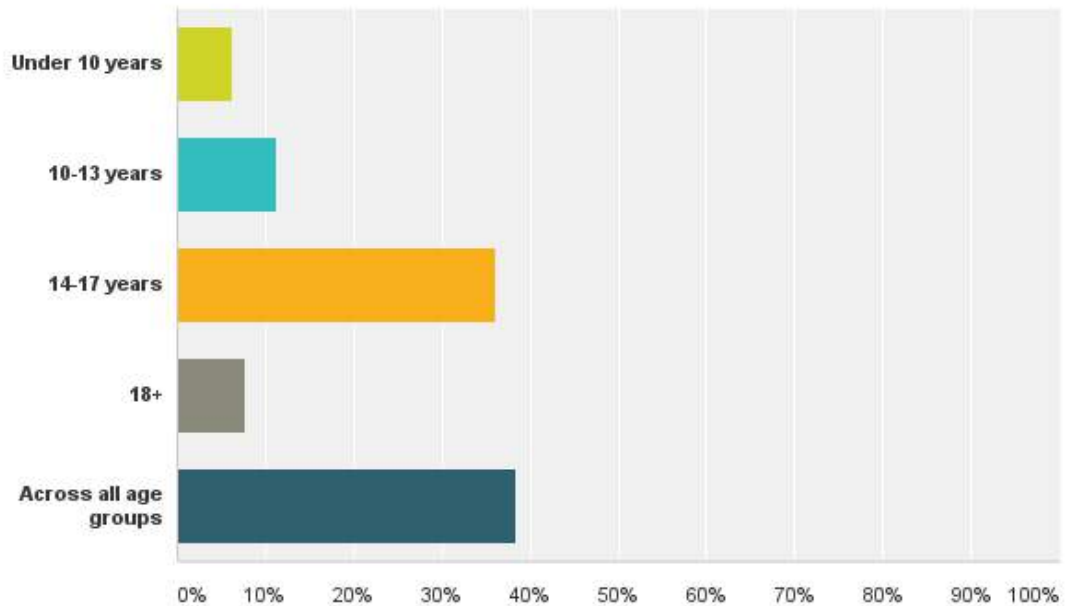
Q5 Do you work full time or part time?

Answered: 283 Skipped: 0



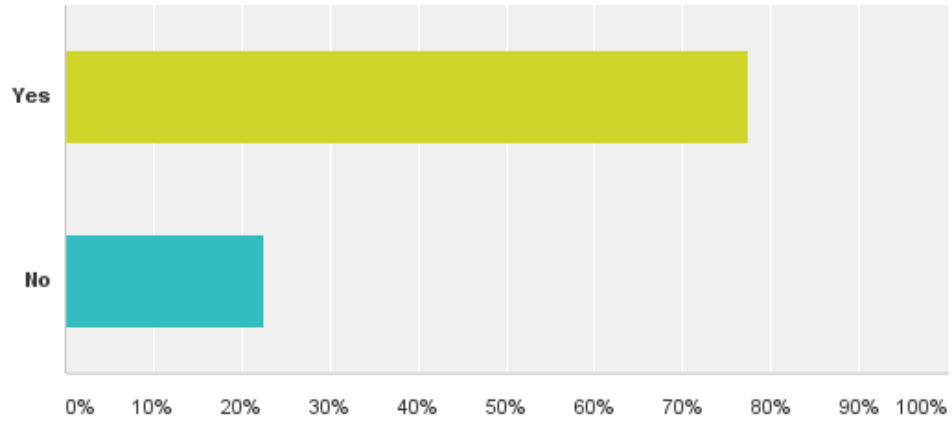
Q6 Which age group do you mainly work with?

Answered: 283 Skipped: 0



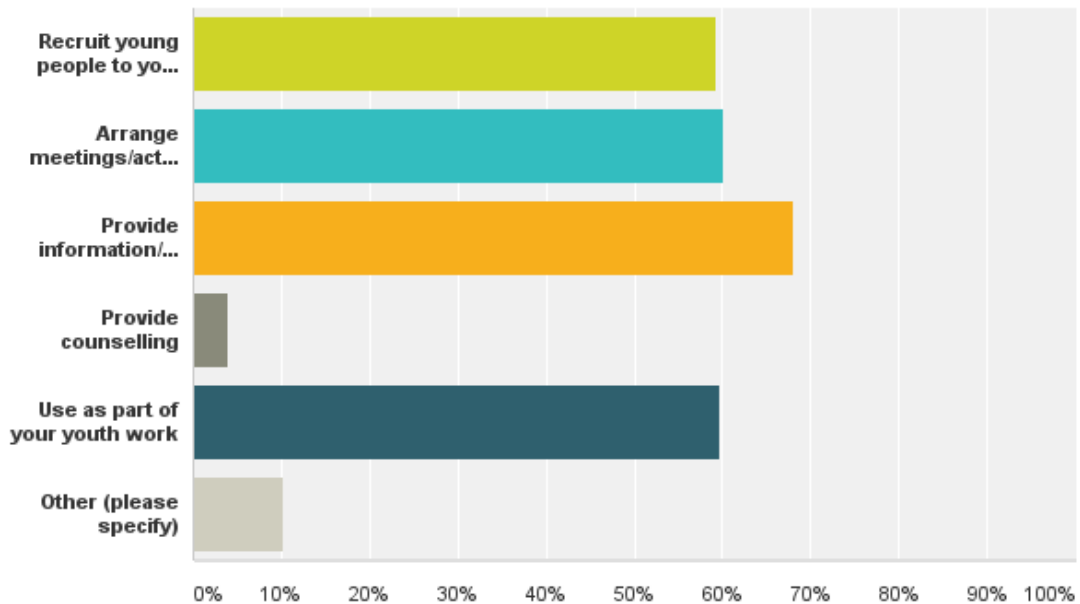
Q7 Do you use digital/social media in your work with young people?

Answered: 283 Skipped: 0



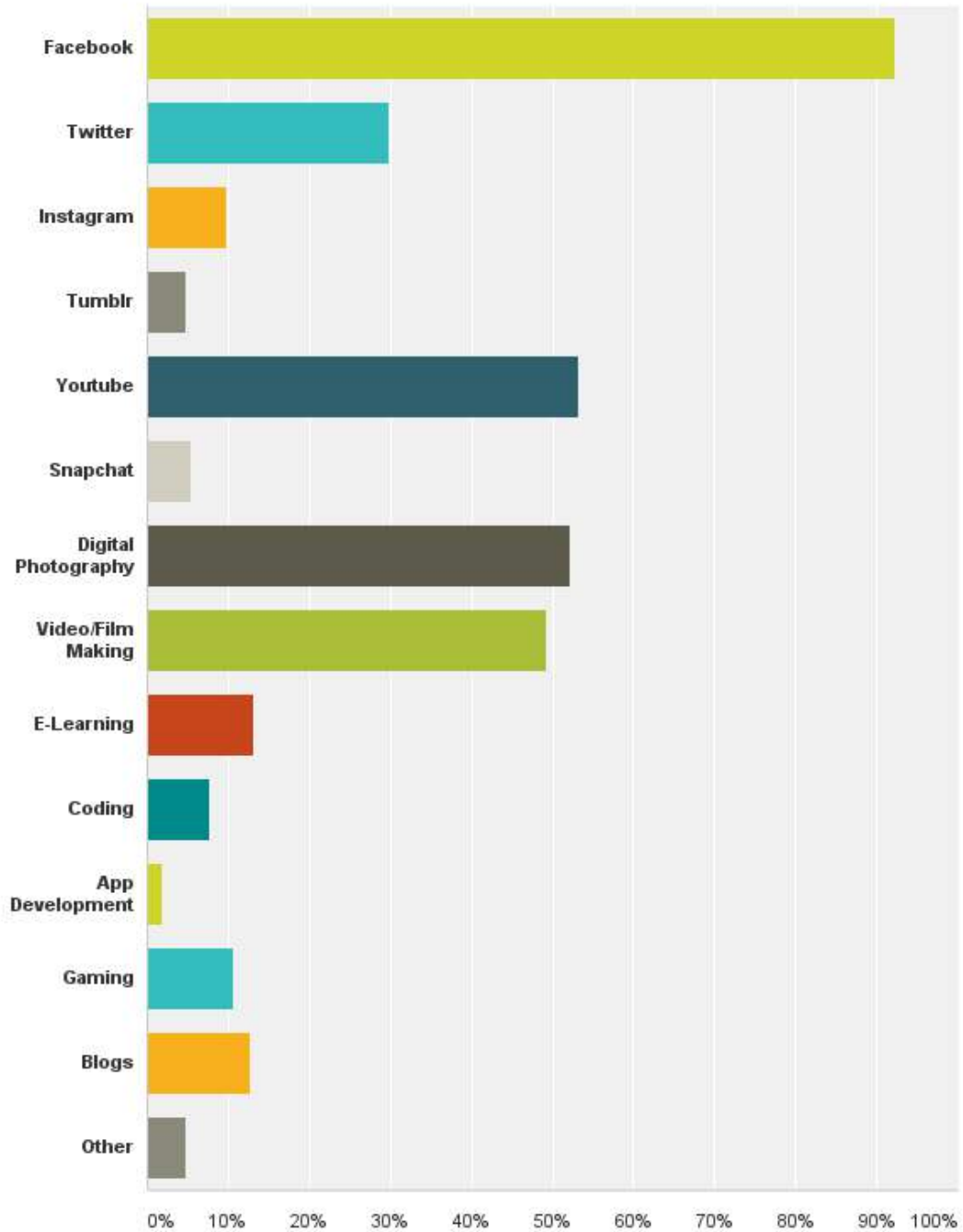
Q9 For what purpose do you use digital media/social media in your youth work?

Answered: 206 Skipped: 77



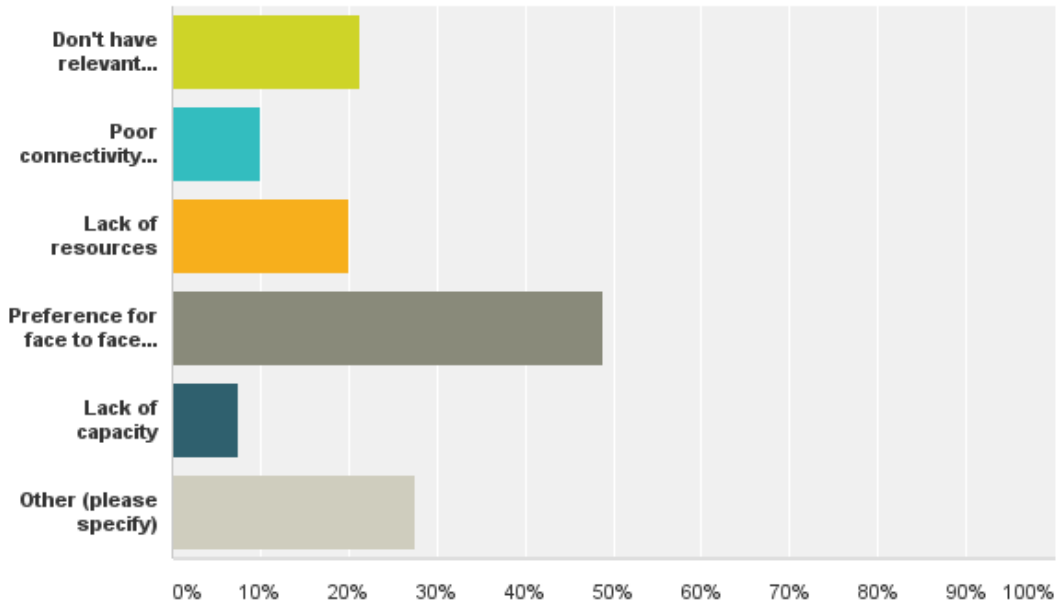
Q10 What tools and type of digital media/social media do you use?

Answered: 205 Skipped: 78



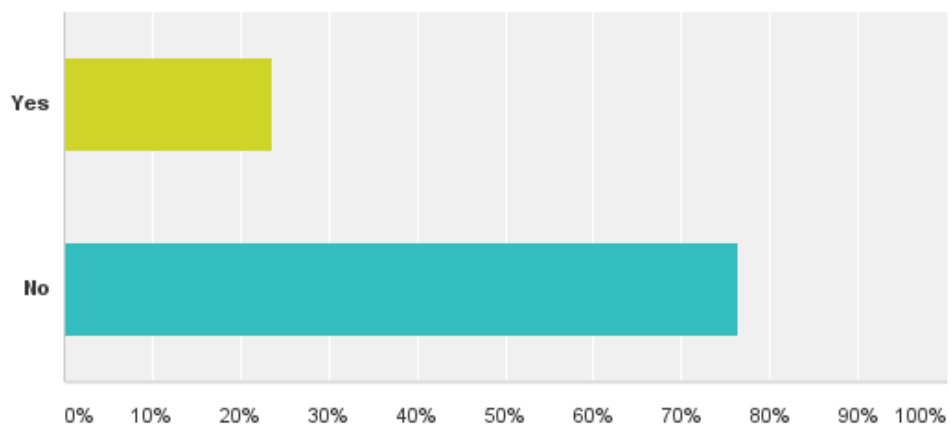
Q11 If you don't use digital media/social media in your youth work, why not? (Only answer if No to Q5)

Answered: 80 Skipped: 203



Q12 Have you ever received training in the use of digital media/social media in youth work?

Answered: 268 Skipped: 15



Joining the Youth Conversation

Plan spoke with the young people we work with across West Africa to understand how they are communicating and share information with each other.

Countries: Burkina Faso, Liberia, Senegal, Sierra Leone. Age: 9–30.

Girls: 163

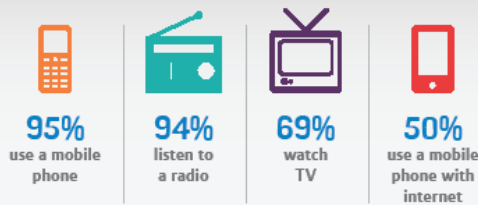
Boys: 140

Workshop: 27



Young people provided answers as a group during workshops. Here is what they said:

Everyday...



84% have their own mobile phone.

Once a week...



75%
meet as a group

Barriers to using...

Mobile phones with the internet		Computers	
Cost:	45%	Cost:	33%
Access:	35%	Access:	41%
Knowledge:	13%	Knowledge:	21%
Other:	6%	Other:	18%

Top 5 Risks and Dangers

1. Distraction or waste of time
2. Health risk
3. Inappropriate content
4. Harassment or Protection Risk
5. Criminality

Top 5 most popular Radio and TV programmes

- 1 News
- 2 Documentaries / Educational
- 3 Movies
- 4 Sport
- 5 Music

In cities 67% use mobile phones with internet once a day. In villages 38% have never used one.

Top 5 most popular things used on the internet:

- 1 Research
- 2 Facebook
- 3 Download music & videos
- 4 Email
- 5 WhatsApp

Top 3 Topics of Interest

- 1 Children's Rights and Responsibilities
- 2 Culture
- 3 Trading and Business

Key Actors Needed for Success

- 1 Young People
- 2 NGOs & the UN
- 3 National & Local Government

Partners with Existing Experience

- 1 UNICEF
- 2 Kids News Network
- 3 Didier Awadi
- 4 African Movement for Working Children and Youth
- 5 Amnesty International
- 6 Oxfam
- 7 World Vision
- 8 The Scouts

Top 3 things young people would like to do...

if they were connected to each other around the world

1 Share Information
About the situation of young people in other countries.

Share Experiences & Learn **2**
From each other about the work they do.

3 Sensitise, Mobilise & Advocate
together around a common goal.

Plan Staff Think:

This can support young people to organise, speak out and advocate on their own.

This can add value, without additional work by incorporating it into current activities including:

- Project & Programme consultation with Young People
- Partner & Media engagement
- Sponsorship processes
- Advocacy Meetings
- Youth-Led research.

We want to hear from marginalised children.



Global Voice for Change



1. Welcome and brief introductions of who is in the room – 5mins

2. Brief outline ‘reminder’ of NYCI research process – 5mins

The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) functions to represent the interests of young people and youth organisations. NYCI’s role is recognised in legislation (Youth Work Act) and as a social partner. The NYCI aims through its member organisations and its representative role to empower young people to participate in society as fulfilled confident individuals. The work of the NYCI is based on principles of equality, social justice and equal participation for all. In achieving these aims the NYCI seeks the emergence of a society in which young people are valued citizens who can make a meaningful contribution to their community.

Research Rationale

NYCI is undertaking research with youth workers on their use of digital and social media in working and engaging with young people in the youth work setting in partnership with organisations in four other EU countries. The aim of the research is to develop a better understanding of the nature and scope of social and digital media in youth work practice in Ireland. It is also envisaged that the research will help to inform NYCI’s policy and campaign work to resource and build capacity in youth work services to work with and support young people.

A key aim of the research is to explore the extent of social and digital media use in youth work practice and capture examples of best practice currently taking place. The research also seeks to explore the supports in place to assist youth workers to use social and digital media in their work with young people and identify any challenges that may exist in this regard.

This research is also being undertaken in Northern Ireland, Finland, Denmark and Austria, and the findings will be compiled in an international report to inform our policy and advocacy work and to enhance youth practice.

3. Assurances of confidentiality/anonymity, how data will be recorded, process for focus group discussion – leads into section 4 (4) should take 10mins in total.

4. Before we start the discussion, do a post it exercise on a flip chart to establish expectations for the session and the group discussion

- What do you expect?
- What we expect from you, throughout the discussion?

Respect, session is being recorded so no talking over each other, what is said in the room stays in the room (confidentiality), etc., To participate as much as possible...

5. Roundtable; (going round in a circle initially) can you tell me a little bit about yourselves (Very brief background to kick start discussion)? 5mins

- Name, job title and organisation?
- How long have you been working as a Youth Worker?

6. Familiarity with social and digital media 15mins

- How familiar are you with social media and digital media?
- Do you use it in your work?
- If you use it in your work, how often would you say you use it?
- How did you learn how to use it?

7. Purpose of use of social media and digital in youth work (e.g. communication, interaction, information, counselling etc.,) - 20mins

- For those of you who use social media and/or digital media, can you tell me why you use it?
- That's interesting and has it been useful in engaging with youth people? *How?*

For example, to record and edit podcasts, make phone apps, edit digital photos, shoot and edit films, stop motion animation, Facebook, twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, YouTube, snapchat, digital photography, video/film making, e-learning, coding, app development, gaming, blogs, any else?

- What types of social/digital media have you used or do you use in youth work?
- And how has that contributed to your work with young people? *In what way?* And for what purpose (eg developmental, inclusion, counselling, health awareness, peacebuilding etc.,)
- Did using ICT add value to your work?
- How? Why do you think that? Can you elaborate a little more...
- Do you any of you evaluate the work? If you do, can you tell me a little bit more about that? How does that work – what model to you use? And is it showing positive outcomes?

8. Negative experiences of using ICT? – 20mins

Did anyone feel that it impinged in an adverse way on your work as a youth worker? Did everyone, who uses it, find it valuable or did any of you find it inhibited the work?

Interesting and can you tell me why?

9. Reasons for not using ICT in youth work – 20mins

Some of you mentioned that you don't use ICT much or at all in your work with young people?

That's very interesting and can you tell me why you don't use it please?

Are there barriers or obstacles you can identify that have prevented you from using it?
Really, and would they be structural/attitudinal or both? Can you tell me more about that?

10. Challenges – 5mins

Now we are going to talk a little bit about challenges.

Do you think there are specific challenges in using ICT in youth work?

Can you tell me about those?

11. What are the challenges of the use of social and digital media in youth work? 5 mins

Open this question up to the wider group for discussion.

12. Solutions or recommendations to addressing some of the perceived challenges - 10 mins.

Do any of you have any thoughts on how some of the barriers to usage of ICT can be addressed?

Have you any thoughts on the sort of supports required to enable youth workers to apply social and digital media as a tool in their youth work?

And currently are you aware of any training for youth workers to support them to use ICT in their work with young people.

Thank you for your participation today. Your contribution has been invaluable and will contribute significantly to the study.

APPENDIX E: DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUP WITH YOUTH PEOPLE

1. Welcome and brief introductions of who is in the room – 5mins

2. Brief outline ‘reminder’ of NYCI research process – 5mins

The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) functions to represent the interests of young people and youth organisations. NYCI’s role is recognised in legislation (Youth Work Act) and as a social partner. The NYCI aims through its member organisations and its representative role to empower young people to participate in society as fulfilled confident individuals. The work of the NYCI is based on principles of equality, social justice and equal participation for all. In achieving these aims the NYCI seeks the emergence of a society in which young people are valued citizens who can make a meaningful contribution to their community.

In partnership with organisations in four other EU countries, NYCI is undertaking research with youth workers on their use of digital and social media in working and engaging with young people in the youth work setting. The aim of the research is to develop a better understanding of the nature and scope of social and digital media in youth work practice in

Ireland. It is also envisaged that the research will help to inform NYCI's policy and campaign work to resource and build capacity in youth work services to work with and support young people.

A key aim of the research is to explore the extent of social and digital media use in youth work practice and capture examples of best practice currently taking place. The research also seeks to explore the supports in place to assist youth workers to use social and digital media in their work with young people and identify any challenges that may exist in this regard.

As part of the study, the research is conducting 2 focus groups with young people who participate in youth work to get their thoughts on the use of social media and digital media in youth work.

This research is also being undertaken in Northern Ireland, Finland, Denmark and Austria, and the findings will be compiled in an international report to inform our policy and advocacy work and to enhance youth practice.

3. Assurances of confidentiality/anonymity, how data will be recorded, process for focus group discussion – leads into section 4 (4) should take 10mins in total.

4. Before we start the discussion, do a post it exercise on a flip chart to establish expectations for the session and the group discussion

- What do you expect?
- What we expect from you, throughout the discussion?

Respect, session is being recorded so no talking over each other, what is said in the room stays in the room (confidentiality), etc., To participate as much as possible...

5. Roundtable; (going round in a circle initially) can you tell me a little bit about yourselves (Very brief background to kick start discussion)? 5mins

- Name and age?
- How long have been involved in youth work or attending this youth service?
- What do you enjoy most about it?

6. Familiarity with social and digital media in the youth work setting - 15mins

- How familiar are you with social media and digital media?
- Do you use it in the youth work setting? Do you use it at home or outside the youth work setting?
- If you use it in youth work, how often would you say you use it?

7. Purpose of use of social media and digital in youth work (e.g. communication, interaction, information, counselling etc.) - 20mins

- For those of you who use social media and/or digital media, can you tell me why you use it?

For example, do you use it for creatively, to play games with others and upload and download, for interactive communication with others (who?), mass media – to watch videos, or to play games alone?

- What types of ICT do you use?

For example, to record and edit podcasts, make phone apps, edit digital photos, shoot and edit films, stop motion animation, Facebook, twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, YouTube, snapchat, digital photography, video/film making, e-learning, coding, app development, gaming, blogs, any else?

- How did you learn about how to use it?
- Do you feel supported to use ICT (social/digital media) by your youth worker(s)?
- If yes, how?
- If not, why not?

8. Feelings about using ICT

- Do you enjoy learning about social and digital media and how to use it?
- What do you like about it?
- What would you say are the benefits of using in youth work? *Really?*

Probing questions

Has it improved your self-confidence, your personal and social skills, made you more ambitious to find out more and develop your skills? Do you aspire to have a career in digital media? Has it helped or hindered your school work?

- Or is the opposite true? Are there any disadvantages to using it? And what are they?

9. Reasons for not using ICT in youth work – 20mins

Some of you mentioned that you don't use ICT much or at all in your interaction with youth workers in the youth work setting.

Why do you think this is the case?

Are there reasons why you think the youth workers don't use it in youth work?

How knowledgeable or comfortable would you say youth workers are with social and digital media? *And why do you think that?*

10. Limitations of using ICT in Youth Work and solutions or recommendations to improve use of ICT in Youth Work 10 mins

Earlier some of you said that you would like to have access to more social and digital media techniques and opportunities to learn more about these forms of communications. *Are there aspects of ICT you would like to use more in the youth work setting?*

What types of social or digital media would you like to see used more by Youth Workers in the Youth Work setting?

Do any of you have any ideas on how ICT could be used more in youth work?

Have you any thoughts on the sort of supports required to enable youth workers to use more social and digital media in working with you in youth work?

Thank you for your participation today. Your contribution has been invaluable and will contribute significantly to the study.

Further resources and reports available at youth.ie/screenagers



The Screenagers International Research Project is a collaborative study focussing on the use of ICT, digital and social media in youth work. It is a partnership between agencies in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Finland, Austria and Denmark.



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