



YouthWorkAndYou.org

**HUMAK University of
Applied Sciences, Finland**
in collaboration with
**Maynooth University,
Ireland**

Unit 2

Youth Work in Digital World

Focus on Youth Workers

YouthWorkAndYou.org is brought to you by the Youth Work eLearning Partnership [YWeLP], an Erasmus+ KA2 Strategic Partnership 2017-2019.

Introduction

Focus on Youth Workers

This unit provides an understanding of what is required of a youth worker in the world of digital youth work.

Digitalisation is an essential part of our daily life and it is related on youth work in many variations. The fast development of the technology offers abundantly new possibilities for youth work activities.

It is important to understand that not every youth worker needs to be an expert in technology in order to use digital youth work as a part of daily work. Moreover, the curiosity and the openness for new experiences are the elements which are required from contemporary youth workers.



Setting the Scene

Young people moved to internet. What did youth workers do? They did the same – the services for young people are more and more available in the web (detached youth work, outreach youth work, youth club activities). However, face-to-face meetings and human contact are important for all people still – so youth workers are acting actively in the youth clubs and in online services. All contacts with young people are valuable - youth can meet youth workers in the local youth club or in online services. How can we manage this dual situation and cope with new challenges?



This is not a moment for youth workers to be afraid, no, not at all. It is merely time to think about to take the benefits of new

technology and harness it for traditional goals. Of course those youth workers who are more skilled in new technology could be great peers and support the technological skills and knowledge of not-so-skilled youth workers. No fear – just more curiosity is needed, not necessarily experience in the technology.

In Finland the Ministry of Education and Culture is supporting digital youth work. Verke is one National Centre of Expertise for Youth Work nominated for developing and maintaining of digital youth work. Verke implemented the fourth survey for Finnish municipalities (according Finnish legislation the municipalities are responsible of youth work) about digital youth work. The results show that municipal youth workers use a wide range of digital tools actively. It was shown that municipal youth workers and youth work managers have an extremely positive attitude towards digitalisation.



“A total of 95% of the respondents wanted to stay abreast of digital and technological developments. Four in five (80%) felt that digital media and



technology should be used more extensively in youth work in their municipality. Almost half of the respondents (49%) also considered interacting with young people in digital environments to be just as real as face-to-face encounters". (*Digitalisation in Youth Work*, 2019.)

According to this survey, the most common way to use digital solutions in youth work is to share information. Communication and interaction are still the main uses of digital media or new technology.



"On average, a youth worker regularly uses seven different digital services in

their work with young people. The most popular services are WhatsApp (84%), Instagram (79%) and Facebook (79%). The popularity of digital games, YouTube, Snapchat and survey tools has increased considerably since 2017. A total of 91% of youth workers had interacted with young people via social media or messaging applications in the last three months. More than half (54%) said that they had counselled young people online." (*Digitalisation in Youth Work*, 2019.)

Although it is common to use digital technology in youth work for communication, there are an expanding variety for other choices.

Youth work is about working with all the holistic needs of young person. Youth workers should have the skills to be able to facilitate a conversation about young person's use of digital technology and digital spaces that they are in. The most important thing for youth workers is that they have an interest in technology and they see the potential and possible benefits of digitalization for young people. In digital youth work - like in all kinds of youth work - the respectful behaviour towards the other people is an essential guideline for the work. Especially when people can act anonymously in the web, it is important to remember to respect the values of the youth work. Youth work is



based on human rights and all individuals should be met equally, even though this meeting is taking place in the web or in social media.

Interest in the technology is more important than youth workers individual skills, because skills outdate quickly due to digital technology's rapid evolution. It is important that youth workers arouse interest in technology within young people more than teaching individual skills.



An international research project called *Screenagers* has stated that ICT and media are important tools for the participation of youth. The inspiration for the study came from the *Screenagers International Seminar* held in Ireland in 2014 (supported through Youth in Action) which provided a space for partners from across Europe to engage in a new dialogue regarding ICT in youth work and to identify opportunities to work together.



"Young people are increasingly engaging with new technologies and digital media. There is clearly a role for online youth work practice, in terms of exploiting a new space for youth work in a meaningful way, supporting digital literacy and enabling young people to deal with some of the associated risks. The practice implications for youth workers lie in new competencies required and new forms of boundary maintenance in relationships with young people"

(Declaration of the 2nd European Youth Work Convention, Brussels, April 2015)

Download the research findings from http://www.youth.ie/sites/youth.ie/files/Infographic_ScreenagersResearch_accessible.pdf



What you will learn

In this unit, you will learn about:

- The attitudes and abilities need to be a youth worker in the digital world.
- Some of the challenges and opportunities in digital youth work.
- Forms of digital youth work and examples of current projects and activities in the field.

Unit 2 Contents

1. How to be a Youth Worker in digital world?

It is important to understand digitalisation as a part of our society and surrounding world. Although digitalisation is not maybe our greatest interest, but it is important to understand digitalisation as part of a time continuum in history. It is so big and revolutionary that it affects every aspect of life. Youth work and digitalisation are a natural way for us to expand our knowledge and scope. It opens new doors and offers thousands of opportunities and new tools for youth work. When society change, also the way young people act is change.

Youth workers may feel that the knowledge of technology or the skills to use digital equipment is not enough to do digital youth work. But that is not correct. After all, youth workers have been making pottery, crafts, football, quiz with young people without being the qualified professional in that certain field. The strength (the attitude, the core skills and knowledge) of a youth worker is in youth work.

Non-formal and informal learning is essential part of youth work – and now we should take in consideration that in youth work there is that task to support young people to cope with new technology. It's important that youth workers raise the interest of technology to young people more than teaching individual skills or tricks.

The most important thing is to keep the principles and values of youth work in mind. Then it is possible to think how to include digital elements in own work to achieve the goals of the youth work in general that is expected.

Youth workers need to be open minded to avoid the fear of digitalization and doing something wrong. There are millions of ways to do digital youth work, and none of it is right or wrong, if just the normal guidelines and principles of youth work will be respected. Youth workers need only be open to what digital youth work can offer and develop their work and ideas further – like they have done more than the one hundred years.



2. Challenges and solutions.

The most common use for social and digital media in Youth Work is communication and information purposes with young people and colleagues. The importance of reliability is one of the core topics, when using digital media in youth work. The role of the youth work is to encourage youth to become critical consumers in current information flood.

Young people should be ensured to get safe place to act – there is no difference if it will take place in online or in face-to-face activities. This is one of the challenge for youth workers to solve.



In Digital Youth Work - like in all kind of youth work - the respectful behaviour towards the other people is essential guideline for the work. Especially when people can act anonymously in the web, it is important to remember to respect the values of the youth work.

Youth work is based on the human rights and all individuals should be met equally, although this meeting is taking place in the web or in social media. The basic values of youth work are following the principles of the Human Rights and especially the Convention of the Rights of the Child. For interpreting these guidelines the national youth work associations or equivalents in some countries have produced the ethical code of conduct or ethical guidelines for youth work and youth workers. Youth workers acting in digital youth work should be well aware of these ethical aspects. The safe environment in digital youth work should be guaranteed.

Please get to know if your youth work association or your country has the agreed ethical guidelines. Are you following them in your everyday work?

The Expert group set up under the European Union Work Plan for Youth 2016-2018 made a training needs list (You can find it in publication "Developing digital youth work – Policy recommendations, training needs and good practices examples for youth workers and decision-makers). These training needs can be used to inform training plans or programmes and develop new training including new methodology and issues. Youth workers and organisations can use them to assess individual and collective competence and identify training

needs.

Although digital youth work faces different challenges and changes, more and more research and developments are being done all over the world. Digital youth work is a fresh concept that evolves over time. As our society faces new challenges and changes, digital youth work should be reflected in our society as a whole.

We need to be ready for change and to learn new things. We need to be able to give up the old ways in order to allow room for new tools and methods. We need to be able to tell our young people and our own needs. Although the era of digital youth work is in its infancy, digitalisation is already a significant part of our society and especially of young people. Although we face challenges and failures, we must remember all the good that digital youth work can bring alongside normal youth work. The benefits of Digital Youth Work for young people are enormous. Using digital technology with in youth work is a fantastic enabler of these new 20th century skills that are said to be needed in future workplace and society. 20th century skills are known as four C's. They are Creativity, Critical thinking, Collaboration and Communication.

Using digital technology with in youth work is a fantastic enabler of these new skills that are said to be needed for 20th century workplace and society. Digital youth work is rapidly evolving and changing, making some of the practices and rules of digital youth work redundant. This is why we need to be ready to learn and try new things.

3. Screenagers and other projects

Screenagers International Research Project was one of the first projects focusing on digital youth work. It was a response to the need that was identified in youth work sector, there was a fear of technology and for example lack of capacity, investments and guidelines in digital youth work



Screenagers aims were to explore the extent, value and development of the use of ICT, social and digital media as a tool in youth work, and to provide an evidence-base for recommendations to promote the development of ICT in youth work at organisational, national and European levels.

A very common challenge across all countries participating in the study has been a perceived or actual deficit in media skills. Another challenge which has been highlighted through the study is

insufficient and a lack of ICT equipment. Funding constraints were highlighted as a barrier in accessing adequate equipment and availing of relevant ICT training to support and enhance the use of social and digital media in their work. All countries have identified a lack of infrastructure, stating that governmental and organisational guidelines are often lacking and

that youth workers have requested more frameworks and strategic direction in how to use technology to support their youth work.

There have been a lot response projects to Screenagers. Screenagers Research Project evolved in to the current digitalyouthwork.eu -project. The Digital Youth Work Project aims to build capacity to deliver digital youth work at local, national, regional and European levels. Project produces number of outcomes. The outcomes that the project develops are best practice videos which will inspire youth workers to do digital youth work, European guidelines that are targeted to policymakers, management of the youth work sector and youth workers. The project also offers training resources for youth workers.

So important work is being done on digital youth work across the globe. We have already received valuable information, research and results from these projects, but the future can bring a lot of new things. It is important that these projects also include a national and global perspective, as it is important for digital youth work to follow the same guidelines, practices and rules. It is important to consider people's needs and rights.



Questions

How to be a youth worker in the digital world?

What are the challenges and solutions associated with digital youth work?

What are some of the contemporary projects and activities that support digital youth work?

Engaging with the Interactive Video Content

1. Youth Worker in Digital Youth Work

Maybe you are reading this on your computer? And you are carrying some super-powerful computing device in your pocket (also known as phone). Thanks to digitalization and current technology, we have the opportunity to attend events around the world, book a hotel in seconds, or search for information on the things that interest us. In the old days, this would have wasted several hours, even days. Technology makes our work more efficient than before. Why not increase its possibilities also in youth work?

As a matter of fact, today's generations cannot to compare their everyday life with the world before the internet. Any 16-year-old in Europe nowadays grew up in a world where mobile devices and wireless connections were a standard already, or at least something to look for and ask for, or the ones still experiencing a digital divide gap.

Anyway, we will not fall into the trap set up by the expression "digital natives", implying that somehow youngsters know intuitively how to deal with technology, as we are aware that the very inventor of the expression, Marc Prensky, changed his vision and approach after many years of misuse of his metaphor .

We actually believe that it is the opposite: young people born with easy access to digital tools and media are maybe native consumers of these contents, but often with a poor knowledge of risks and opportunities which could come from the same digital tools and media that they joyfully consume

every day, as proved by a lot of different researches (Blassnig R, Di Paola M, Wronska J: "DIG-IT UP!").

Youth work is about working with all the holistic needs of young person. We should have the skills to facilitate a conversation about young person's use of digital technology and digital spaces they are in.

Youth workers should use these tools, spaces and places as an extension of the real world. This means that youth workers can be transparent about their presence in various spaces and places. Even though Digital Youth Work is important, it does not mean that every youth worker should be a technical expert, but rather a recognition that young people are growing up in a digital era and they need support to navigate the online aspects of their lives, critically analyse online information and that digital interaction is becoming increasingly central to youth work. Youth workers have a responsibility to make young people aware of what is wrong, what is not true and how to be critical.

You need to become a learner alongside young people. You don't have to have all the answers; you just really have to have an open mind. Be open for learning and failing alongside the young people. It is important that youth worker have an interest in technology and they see the potential and possible benefits of digitalization for young people.

Innovate and try:

There are no right and wrong ways to use digital youth work. Innovate and create something new!

This evaluation tool is helpful:

<https://www.digitalyouthwork.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2019/04/Digital-youth-work-resource-evaluation-tool-1.pdf>

REFLECT: your views and attitudes towards digital youth work.

Do section 1 and 2 on this self-assessment tool:

<https://www.digitalyouthwork.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2019/04/Digital-youth-work-self-assessment-form.pdf>

2. Digital tools, spaces and places

When we are talking about digital tools, we usually mean any system, platform or app where you can create and share content. So yes, your phone is also a digital tool, but is video editing software, Snapchat or YouTube.

Digital spaces can be defined as the digital “locales” where young people gather, with digital places giving meaning, memories and feelings. Spaces provide the arena or setting, whilst places represent attachment, belonging and significance. Belongingness for young people is usually associated with a physical sense of place created by meeting up with friends in spaces such as home, school, youth provision, shopping centres and parks, but also increasingly through digital places such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram or gaming environments. Young people, as part of their identity development, describe belonging as “fitting in” and “feeling accepted” and this is associated with

connections to specific spaces and places through friendship, “mates” that can be counted on, support, and intimacy (not necessarily of a sexual kind); for many young people, digital places provide a constant connection to their peers, a way of validating who they are becoming, and receiving emotional reassurance that they belong (Jane Melvin, *Digital Tools, Spaces and Places*).

When used safely and effectively, digital media and new technologies can be wonderful tools to ignite young people’s curiosity, creativity and confidence. They can enhance their social awareness and engagement as active citizens. They can also help to build their sense of agency and enable them to develop new knowledge and skills, and for their voices to be heard. Outcome-focussed youth development can uniquely support young people to navigate the digital world safely and become digital creators, inventors and makers – not just consumers of technology. Supporting young people to develop digital media literacy and 21st century skills is one of the most effective ways to achieve this.

Youth workers play a vital role in building young people’s capacity to consider risks and consequences, to make informed decisions and to take responsibility every day. With the right policies, infrastructure and training in place youth workers can simply enhance this work by helping young people to assess and negotiate risk when using technology. (Screenagers report)

READ: more on Digital tools, spaces and places, Jane Melvin

https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/coyote-magazine/digital-tools-spaces-and-places#portlet_56_INSTANCE_Vg0i2911Exij

3. Challenges and solutions

If youth work fails to embrace the use of technology and social media there is a risk of becoming outdated and irrelevant to young people who use youth work services. Youth work has the opportunity to fill the gaps which sometimes occur within the home and school in supporting young people to understand technology and the risks that might be involved. Digital youth work takes many forms and varies depending on the organisation, the infrastructure, funding and resources available to youth workers at the time.

One of the biggest challenges in digital youth work is knowing how and why to use digital tools, places and spaces. Youth workers are afraid to embrace digital youth work as part of the so-called normal youth work. As has already been said, digital youth work is not a method but a part of all youth work.

A very common challenge across all countries participating in the study of Screenagers has been a perceived or actual deficit in media skills. Another challenge which has been highlighted through the study is insufficient and a lack of ICT equipment. Funding constraints were highlighted as a barrier in accessing adequate equipment and availing of relevant ICT training to support and enhance the use of social and digital media in their work.

All countries have identified a lack of infrastructure, stating that governmental and organisational guidelines are often lacking and that youth workers have requested more frameworks and strategic direction in how to use technology to support their youth work. It was highlighted that there needs to be a changing of mind-sets amongst some of the policy makers and funders in order to truly embrace the technological world young people are growing up in. (Screenagers.)

Read: Screenagers

Listen: how to convince hesitant youth workers, how to train digital topics to youth workers and professional ethics in digital environments, Jane Melvin:

<https://www.verke.org/blog/digital-youth-work-sessions-session-5/?lang=en>



Links to other Information and Reading

Here is a list of additional information which will assist you to explore questions around the Digital Youth Work. The resources will help you further understand this topic and apply it to your own work. You will find books, articles, videos, podcasts and learning modules in the list. Please explore in the Digital Youth Work resources freely.

Journal Articles, Books and Reports

- ABC of Youth Work (2018): Young People in Digital Era
<http://abc-of-youthwork.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/R2-Deskresearch.pdf>
- Connolly N. (2017), Chapter: “Young people, youth work and the digital world”, in *Thinking Seriously About Youth Work*
<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/thinking-seriously-about-youth-work>
- European Commission (2018): *Report of expert group on digitalisation and youth*
<https://publications.europa.eu/s/mKNc>
- Guidelines for Digital Youth Work <https://www.verke.org/material/guidelines-for-digital-youth-work/?lang=en>
- International journal of open youth work <https://www.newman.ac.uk/knowledge-base/the-international-journal-of-open-youth-work/>
- Kiviniemi J, Kriauciunas N. (2016): *Taking Youth Work to the Digital World*
<https://www.verke.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Taking-youth-work-to-the-digital-world.pdf>
- Lauha H, Nõlvak K. (eds) 2019: Digitalisation and Youth Work. *Chapter Equality*, pages 93-113.
<https://www.verke.org/material/digitalisation-youth-work/?lang=en>
- NYCI (2016) Screenagers International Research Project: *Report: Using ICT, digital and social media in youth work*
<https://www.verke.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/International-report-screenagers.pdf>
- NYCI (2016) *Screenagers Guidance for Digital Youth Work*
<https://www.youth.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Screenagers-Guidance.pdf>
- Pawluczuk A, Hall H, Webster G, Smith C. (2019): *Digital youth work: youth workers' balancing act between digital innovation and digital literacy insecurity.*
<http://informationr.net/ir/24-1/isic2018/isic1829.html>
- Youth Work Ireland *Social Media & Youth Engagement Guidelines*
https://www.youthworkireland.ie/images/uploads/general/Youth_Work_Ireland_McAfee_Social_Media_Youth_Engagement_Guidelines_Final.pdf

Websites

Code of Ethics for Youth Workers in New Zealand
<https://arataiohi.org.nz/career/code-of-ethics/>

Convention of the Rights of the Child (UN)
<https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention>

Digital Youth Work
<https://www.digitalyouthwork.eu/info/>

Ethical Conduct of Youth Work, National Youth Agency UK
http://www.nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Ethical_conduct_in_Youth-Work.pdf

The Ethical Guidelines for Professional Youth Work FI [Nuorisotyön ammattieettiset ohjeet]
<https://www.nuoli.info/application/files/1314/8457/2406/Nuorisotyönammattieettinenohjeistus.pdf>

European Youth Information Charter
<https://www.eryica.org/european-youth-information-charter>

Techspace
<https://techspace.ie/>

Verke
<https://www.verke.org/?lang=en>

YMCA Ireland
<https://www.ymca-ireland.net/>

Youth work Tipperary
<http://youthworktipperary.ie/>

Online training materials

Digital youth work done the proper way! – [Training course of DIG-IT UP!](#)

SALTOs from the E+ programme have been developing MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) which give a groovy way to learn new stuff, if you like that kind of thing. Give 'em a go! The [partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission in the field of youth](#) is also working on [MOOCs](#)

Humak University of Applied Sciences, Finland (2016): [Distanssi – MOOC](#) (in Finnish)

National Youth Council of Ireland and five partners (2016): [Using ICT, digital and social media in youth work](#)

Verke (2017), Report on training course: [Makerspace in digital youth work](#) (Luxembourg, July 2017)

YouthLink Scotland: Liz Green - Digitally Agile: <https://youtu.be/bU01pEDeKOg>

Good practice: LGBT Youth Scotland Equality and Inclusion Network
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EwJ2jtFw_2g

Podcasts

Jane Melvin: The impact of digitalisation on youth work, how to convince hesitant youth workers, how to train digital topics to youth workers and professional ethics in digital environments. <https://digital-youth-work-sessions.zencast.website/episodes/5>

Future Labs podcasts: ideas for youth work
<https://futurelabs.humak.fi/output/>

Wrapping Up

This unit provides an understanding of what a youth worker needs to know and understand when working in the digital world.

It is important to understand that no one needs to be a technology expert to do digital youth work.

This unit encourages you to see the benefits of digital youth work.

Summary

One of the tasks of youth work is to understand how digitalisation is shaping societies and what impact it will have on young people and youth work. Technology is present in every area of young people's lives, which means that every young person is somehow connected to digital cultures, whether they use digital media actively or passively. If youth work is to keep up with the times and social changes, it must be curious, adaptive, flexible, open-minded, bold and experimental with new technology.

As stated in the Screenagers International Research Project Report in 2016, "...if youth work fails to embrace the use of technology and social media there is a risk of becoming outdated and irrelevant to young people who use youth work services" (Harvey 2016).

It would therefore be important to have a continuous debate on the future of youth work: how will artificial intelligence, for example, affect cultural phenomena associated with young people and youth work practices?

Also, the key role of youth work is to support the empowerment of young people and their capacity to be active in a society that is becoming more digitalised and technologized. To achieve this, youth work must reach into the world of young people's experience, and operate in the environments inhabited by young people, including digital cultures and environments.

An even more important role for youth work involves preventing a digital divide between young people, by ensuring that they have access to digital technology, and by enhancing their technology-related skills. (Lauha H, Nölvak K. (eds) 2019: *Digitalisation and Youth Work*.)

Digital youth work has the same goals as youth work in general, and using digital media and technology in youth work should always support these goals.

Even though you don't have to be expert, you have to understand that young people are growing up in a digital era and that they need support to navigate the online aspects of their lives and critically analyse online information and interaction is becoming increasingly central to youth work.

Acknowledgements

All those who participated in the making of the videos:

Hilary Tierney and Saoirse Reynolds from Maynooth University, Janice Feighery from Camara Ireland Education, Suvi Tuominen from Verke, Mikko Holm, Jean-Marie Cullen from National Youth Council of Ireland

To the organisations who kindly contributed resources:

Youth Work Ireland Tipperary, National Youth Council of Ireland, Virtual Youth Work – Ireland, Verke - The National Centre of Expertise for Digital Youth Work in Finland, Camara Ireland Techspace Programme, TG4, Center for Digital Pædagogik – Denmark, digitalyouthwork.eu - project, Young Irish Film Makers (Freddie Greenall and Garry McHugh)

Photography by:

Kirtuu, Gerd Altman, Mike Renpening, Thomas Ulrich, Tapio Haaja

Unit 2

Höylä, Sari and Reponen, Emilia (2019) *Youth Work in the Digital World Units 1, 2 and 3*. Youth Work eLearning Partnership (YWeLP). Available at

<https://www.youthworkandyou.org/ywelp-module-five/>

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Supported by:

Estonian Association of Youth Workers, The Kanuuna Network, National Youth Council of Ireland, YouthAction Northern Ireland, Youth Workers' Association, Victoria

This document was provided by the YWeLP Project.

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