YouthWorkAndYou.org

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

Session 1

Youth Work in Digital World

What is Digital Youth Work?

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Introduction

What is Digital Youth Work?

Welcome to the Youth Work in Digital World module, which is designed to enhance your understanding of the dimensions about digital youth work. Digital Youth Work is not a methodology or a form of work, it is youth work which utilises the possibilities of new technology. This module encourages you to view Digital Youth Work as a way to undertake everyday youth work in our contemporary society, where the digitalisation is developing fast. This module consists of three units: The first is "What is Digital Youth Work?", followed by "Focus on Youth Workers" and finally "Digital Youth Work in Practice".

Setting the Scene

With technological advances having changed the way in which young people use the web, youth work that utilizes digital technology has reached a turning point. It is therefore no longer appropriate to distinguish digital youth work from face-to-face activities, or treat it as a separate method or branch in youth work. In fact, digital youth work should not be defined solely as youth work done online, but should cover all forms and methods of youth work. Digital youth work cannot indeed even exist without traditional forms of youth work.

The term 'digital youth work' first emerged in the Finnish youth work lexicon in the summer of 2012, when youth work organizations throughout Europe, invited by Verke, met in Finland to discuss the impact of digitalization on youth work and its practices. Already then, the central idea was that the goal of digital youth work must be to comprehensively strengthen the agency of young people in a technologized and digitalized world (Davies 2012; Taylor 2012). This idea is still easy to endorse. However, the concept of digital youth work was not firmly established until a few years later. This was partly because online and web-based youth work had gained a strong foothold in the professional terminology of youth work. On the other hand, only certain approaches to realizing the potential of the digital media and technology had become established in youth work.

Compared to many other countries, Finnish digital youth work has been characterized by work via online services, particularly the social media, while using a variety of chat tools to reach out to the young. In fact, many Finnish youth workers have found it difficult to grasp what 'digital media' might mean outside the social media. There was a demand for the concept of digital youth work in parallel with online and web-based youth work to describe the diversity of digitalization in youth work. (Lauha et. al 2017.)

Digital youth work has also been introduced as a concept in many international arenas. The term 'smart youth work' is used in some countries to refer to same kind of idea.

The EU expert group on Digitalisation and Youth (2017) has summarised the definition of digital youth work:

- Digital youth work means proactively using and or addressing digital media and technology in youth work.
- It should not be seen as a method – it can be included in any youth work setting (open youth work, youth work information and counselling, youth clubs, detached youth work...).
- Digital Youth Work has the same goals as youth work in general. Using digital media and technology should always support these goals.
- Digital Youth Work can happen in face-to-face situations as well as in online environments – or in a mixture of these two.
- Digital media and technology can be used either as a tool, an activity or a content in youth work.

(Kiviniemi J, Tuominen S. (eds.) 2017, 14-15.)

Digital youth work is an important part of modern-day techniques to council, contact and help the youth. Especially in rural and sparsely populated areas it's a way to get the youth participating.

What you will learn

What is Digital Youth Work provides you a short introduction to the theme with the information of the topic and a video that leads you into the Digital Youth Work atmosphere. This unit gives you a basic understanding how youth work and youth work practices are responding to digitalisation and changes in society and importance of Digital Youth Work.

This unit encourages you to meet Digital Youth Work as a way to commit every day youth work. It is not a form of work; it is not a method. Digitalisation is an essential part of our daily life and it is related in the all variations of youth work.

You will learn:

- Definitions of Digital Youth Work

- Ways to include Digital Youth Work in your own work

- Examples of Digital Youth Working practice

<u>Unit 1 Contents</u>

1.   An Understanding of the Nature of the Digital Youth Work.

This unit will provide an understanding of the nature of the Digital Youth Work, how it works and why it is so important to every youth worker to understand the digitalization as a whole as phenomenon. It also provides an understanding of to how to include digital elements in own work to achieve the goals of the youth work in general that you want to achieve. Youth Work is defined by Finnish Youth Act (1285/2016). Mentioned act defines the youth work in Finland, and it is guiding the content of the digital youth work as well. Digital youth work is not a method, no extra aim, it is taking benefit of new technology and committing it to youth work practice.

Please get to know the legislation defining the youth work in your country.

2.   An ability to see new technology as an additional part of youth work practice.

Digital Youth Work keeps up with the times and changes accordingly. It grows, adapts and adopts various trends and thoughts, which is why many descriptions of the practices and definitions of digital youth work become obsolete – some faster, others not so fast. This reflects the fact that the digital youth work field is energetic and dynamic (Kiviniemi J, Tuominen S. (ed.) 2017, *Digital Youth Work - a Finnish Perspective*, p. 15). Digital youth work can also be delivered as an activity and serve as the subject matter or content in a youth work setting. Digital youth work takes many forms and varies depending on the

organisation, the infrastructure, funding and resources available to youth workers at the time (NYCI 2017, *Screenagers: Guidance For Digital Youth Work* p. 3).

Please take a moment and think the importance of the new technology in your everyday life and in your experience in the youth work.

3.   Understanding why digital youth work is so important.

The most significant reason why social media should be included in youth work is because it's so huge part of teenager's life and even the existence of young people. Digital youth work is an important part of modern-day techniques to council, contact and help the youth. Especially in rural and sparsely populated areas it's a way to get the youth participating. There is also huge potential within the youth work sector to enhance and innovate practice through the use of digital technology and media and to use non formal and informal learning to help young people to create digital content and shape the digital world of the future.

It's important to get the knowledge how to use digital youth work in your daily work and where to find more ideas and information.

Please get to know more of the Digital Youth Work Guidelines that were developed in Screenagers project:
https://www.youth.ie/documents/digital-youth-work-guidelines/

Questions

What are some of the characteristics of digital youth work, is it a special type of youth work?

How can youth workers incorporate digital youth work in their practice, what sorts of abilities and attitudes are needed?

What does digital youth work look like, what range of activities and approaches are included under the term 'digital youth work'?

Engaging with the Interactive Video Content

1. Definition of Digital Youth Work

Digital Youth Work is about the digitalization of a society and how youth work and youth work practices are responding to that transformation in society. Digital Youth Work can use number of different methods, approaches and tools. It can be an activity or a tool. It can be a type of content that can be used in existing youth work or new types of activities.

One of the really important things about Digital Youth Work is that it's not a stand-alone piece of youth work. It's underpinned by the same ethics, values and principals as youth work in general.

Please read for more about definition of Digital Youth Work:
European Commission (2018): [Report of expert group on digitalisation and youth: Developing digital youth work: policy recommendations, training needs and good practice examples for youth workers and decision-makers: expert group set up under the EU Work Plan for Youth 2016-2018](#)

Also watch: "Digital Agile" produced by Youthlink Scotland
https://youtu.be/bU01pEDeKOg

2. Ways to include Digital Youth Work in your own work

'Digital youth work' is an emerging term to describe the area of youth work that uses digital media and new technology to enhance outcome focused youth development.

The term is used to describe work that can happen in face-to-face situations, social and group settings as well as in online environments - or in a mixture of these. It is relevant to all youth work pedagogies and can enhance all types of practice. Digital youth work should be defined in relation to youth work goals in general, not as a separate project with a separate goal. Digital youth work can be used as a tool for youth development, facilitated by a physical space or an online environment. (NYCI 2017, *Screenagers: Guidance for Digital Youth Work*.)

Read more about digital youth work and good practices:
https://www.digitalyouthwork.eu/good-practices/

3. Digital Youth Work is everywhere

Digital media and new technologies are now mainstreamed in youth culture. Young people do not perceive their online and offline worlds as separate entities and fluidly inhabit both worlds simultaneously. Because of this, digital youth work needs a whole organization, integrated approach and not to be regarded as a specialized service or a niche area (NYCI 2017, *Screenagers: Guidance for Digital Youth Work* p.4).

REFLECT: how many times have you used digital youth work?

READ: The National Centre of Expertise for Digital Youth Work in Finland Verke has developed guidelines for digital youth work. It is a helpful document if you want to develop your organization's digital youth work but don't know where to start:
https://www.verke.org/material/guidelines-for-digital-youth-work/

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.

Resources

Journal Articles, Books and Reports

Boyd, D. (2014). *It's complicated: The social lives of networked teens*. Yale University Press.
https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300199000/its-complicated

Burdick, B., Coakley, C., & Richardson, J. P. (2006). *The Internet Literacy Handbook*. Council of Europe.
https://rm.coe.int/internet-literacy-handbook/1680766c85

Connolly N. (2017), "Young people, youth work and the digital world", in *Thinking Seriously About Youth Work*, EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership.
https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/thinking-seriously-about-youth-work

Estonian Youth Work Centre (2017): *The Concept Of Smart Youth Work:*
https://entk.ee/nak-veeb/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Nutika-NT-kontseptsioon-ENG-web.pdf

European Commission (2018): *Developing digital youth work: policy recommendations, training needs and good practice examples for youth workers and decision-makers*.
https://publications.europa.eu/s/mKM3

Höylä S. 2012: *Youth Work in Finland*.
https://www.humak.fi/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/humak-verkko-hoyla-youth-work-englanti.pdf

Kiviniemi J., Tuominen S. (ed.) 2017: *Digital Youth Work - a Finnish Perspective*.
https://www.verke.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Digital-youth-work-a-Finnish-perspective_web.pdf

Lauha H., Nõlvak K. (ed.) 2019: *Digitalisation and Youth Work*.
https://www.verke.org/material/digitalisation-youth-work/?lang=en

NYCI (2017), Screenagers: guidance for digital youth work
http://www.youth.ie/sites/youth.ie/files/Screenagers-Guidance.pdf

Timonen P, Sinisalo-Juha E. (ed.) 2012: *Definition and Theory of Web-based Youth Work*.
http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-456-137-2

Using ICT, Digital and Social Media in Youth Work
http://www.youth.ie/sites/youth.ie/files/International%20report%20final.pdf

Website Links

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

Dublin Institute of Technology (2012): Digital Youth Project.
http://www.dit.ie/digitalyouth/project/

EU working group publication: *Developing digital youth work – An agile mindset is crucial*
https://ec.europa.eu/youth/news/developing-digital-youth-work-%E2%80%93-agile-mindset-crucial_en

Five inspiring videos of examples of digital youth work (Denmark)
https://cfdp.dk/blog/english/five-inspiring-initiatives-exemplifying-digital-youth-work/

Guide to using group chat in working with vulnerable youngsters online – for municipalities and organizations (Denmark):
https://cfdp.dk/guide-to-using-group-chat-in-working-with-vulnerable-youngsters-online-for-municipalities-and-organizations/

ITU (2017): *Digital inclusion for people with specific needs*
https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Digital-Inclusion/Pages/default.aspx

Michigan State University (2018): *DigitalYouth Research*
https://digitalyouthresearch.org/

National Agency for Erasmus+/Youth in Action Austria (2017):https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/european-training-calendar/training/conference-digital-youth-work.6839/

National Agency for Erasmus+/Youth in Action, Finland (2018): *Strategies for Digital Youth Work*
https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/european-training-calendar/training/strategies-for-digital-youth-work.6989/

National Agency for Erasmus+/Youth in Action Hungary (2018): *Developing Digital Youth Work*
https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/european-training-calendar/training/developing-digital-youth-work.7001/

Techspace
https://techspace.ie/

Verke The National Centre of Expertice in Digital Youth Work
https://www.verke.org/?lang=en

What on earth is digital youth work?
https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/develop/developing-knowledge/digital-youth-work/european-digital-youth-work-project/digital-youth-work-training-materials/

Youth Work Tipperary
http://youthworktipperary.ie/
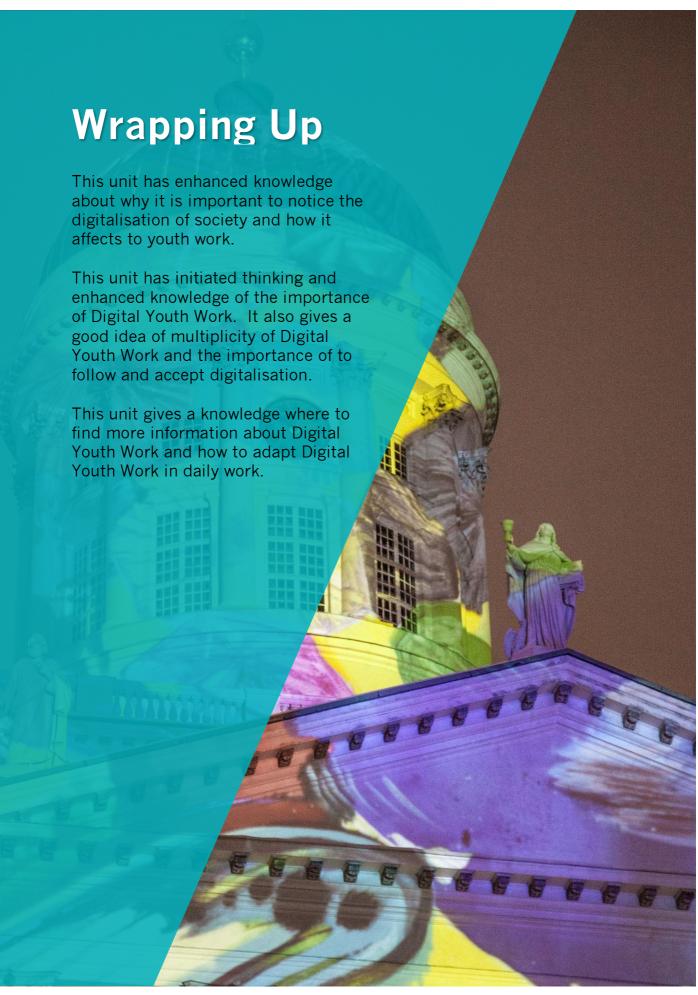
YMCA Ireland
https://www.ymca-ireland.net/

Wrapping Up

This unit has enhanced knowledge about why it is important to notice the digitalisation of society and how it affects to youth work.

This unit has initiated thinking and enhanced knowledge of the importance of Digital Youth Work. It also gives a good idea of multiplicity of Digital Youth Work and the importance of to follow and accept digitalisation.

This unit gives a knowledge where to find more information about Digital Youth Work and how to adapt Digital Youth Work in daily work.

Summary

Digital youth work is not a youth work method – digital youth work can be included in any youth work setting. It can happen in face-to-face situations as well as in online environments.

It is important to see technology as an additional part of youth work practice. Digital media and technology can be used either as a tool, an activity or content in youth work.

Digital Youth Work takes many forms and varies depending on the organisation.

'Digital Youth Work' is an emerging term to describe the area of youth work that uses digital media and new technology to enhance outcome focused youth development. Society is changing and the way young people act is changing. Digitalization is increasingly present in our daily lives. We may not even understand what digital youth work is and what it is not. Partly this is a good thing, because Digital Youth Work should not be a single method but it should always be a part of every youth work.

Technology is ever changing. As one tool is mastered a newer, more exciting one appears. Keeping up with today's young 'digital natives' can be a challenge. Each digital tool and activity present great opportunities for youth development but they also come with challenges and risks.

Young people are not only digital consumers, they are often the creators of online content and self-expression. Of course, not all young people are skilled in the use of new technologies including social media, and there are many different ways in which young people use social media.

It's important to understand the meaning of the digitalisation and the nature of digital youth work. As said digital youth work is not a method, it can be included in any youth work setting.

It's important to keep your knowledge updated, because digital world is changing all the time. Even though you don't have to expert in every part of digital world, you have to be aware of possibilities that it has.

Be creative and innovate. There are thousands of ways to include digital youth work in youth work settings.

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Unit 1

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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www.youthworkandyou.org

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