



Social Work and the Social Media: a missed opportunity?

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A changing world

- Web revolutionised the way we use and share information
- Growing awareness of value of social networking
- Social networking is two way process about connecting
- Empowering people using services to understand how the systems work
- Good practice in social networking no different to good practice in other forms of communication ie: letters, emails etc
- Not been widespread adoption in social work profession

What are the drivers?

- Cost effectiveness
- Value of social media for engaging with specific groups
 - young people to working parents
- Variations in use: value of social media as a broadcast tool, and conversational tool
- Increasing demand for social media engagement from service users

Equipped to Engage? LGIU 2011

- Are local authorities equipped to engage with social media?
- 130 local authorities
- Less than half of organisations are actively using social media tools such as Skype, Facebook and Twitter
- Just 25% of organisations are using social media in youth work and/or social work contexts
- Social media has gained popularity as a broadcast tool, but there are gaps in policy frameworks, training and support available to staff.

Equipped to Engage? 2011

- Social networking sites remain blocked in around half of all local authorities.
- Just 25% of organisations have social media training and support available to staff
- Under 20% have clear policies on the use of social media for youth engagement
- Organisations see the importance of social media, and plan to use it more, but there remain a range of developmental needs

Barriers

- A lack of understanding
- Fear
- Restrictive IT policies
- Risk Aversion
- Perception that social media can only be used by a 'select few'

Challenges: Reamer 2009

Ethical issues:

- Communicating with other team members through Facebook – comments about other workers
- Service user had visited site of social worker's wife –
- Private practitioner. Did not fully understand privacy settings. Service user became obsessed by social worker, wanted to find out more about personal life.

Ethical issues

Boundaries:

- Social workers postings on social networking sites may constitute an inadvertent form of self-disclosure.
- May complicate the professional relationship
- Learning personal details ie: service user in recovery from alcohol sees social worker drinking.

Privacy:

Create adequate privacy settings

Discussions on work related controversies, complaints may expose to allegations of unprofessional behaviour

Lack of clarity?

- May 2011 – Scotland. Worker banned from practising after a conduct committee heard she had breached professional boundaries on several counts, including befriending the mother of a service user on Facebook
- Scottish Social Services Council issues guidance warning ‘blurring the lines between your personal voice and your professional life as a registered social service worker.’
- Clear guidance needed

Dangers?

- US foster family filmed visit by Child Protection worker whom they blamed for splitting up siblings they wanted to adopt.

Ethics Vs Safety: Niven 2012

- Is there a role for social workers in monitoring what service users are posting online?
- Obtain information from various online sources that might help when forming judgements about risk?
- Look into all sources of information. What people post publically is no longer confidential?
- Baby Peter – duty to investigate under The Children Act 1989.

Child protection concerns?

- Where children adopted or long term fostered, can be traced by natural families, abusers.
- If a child's profile not set to private then all their information is completely viewable to anyone who searches for it.
- If a child's information is private, then their name and profile (plus basic information such as town of residence and profile image) are able to be searched for and contact can be attempted via private message
- If a child's personal profile is made private their information and postings are still viewable on friends' profiles which may not be private.

Insights into the use of Facebook among service users- University of Keele 2011

- Lack of understanding by practitioners
- Adopted children using social networks to track birth families
- Build own positive support networks which may exist outside practice structures.
- The Care Leavers Association – online forum.

Where to start? Ayres 2011

- Check out if organisation has an online presence (Facebook, Twitter etc).
- Mobile phone technology. (Keep in contact with young people- text messaging to remind people of appointments)
- Systems overload! Using social media could be viewed as an additional burden rather than a potential solution.

Some initiatives:

- ‘Moodscope’: capturing daily updates on well-being and mood. Data captured can be shared in consultations
- ‘Patchwork’: Connecting workers around a service user. Good way to improve multi agency working
- SW VirCamp: ‘virtual campus’ brings together academics and students mainly from Russia and Africa planning a course in on line help, which will look at how social media can be used to deliver services to service users.
- Engaging youth in sexual health promotion and risk reduction

Mental Health Care www.mentalhealthcare.org.uk:

- information for family and friends of those with psychosis. 'Ask a Social Worker' and other professionals questions and answers online
- Mental Health Foundation has Facebook page to raise awareness of self directed support for people with dementia through videos on YouTube.
- Blogs: frontline social worker shares day to day experiences of practicing social work and impact of government policies and actions – better understanding of social work?
- Twitter: 190 million users. 65 million tweets a day (2011). Healthcare – weekly chat about how can benefit patients in NHS

Twitter: Liberating or destructive? Hall 2013

- People with mental health difficulties finding ways to connect with others with similar difficulties across the world.
- ‘Tweetchats.’ Planned chat particular subject at particular time, questions and answers service users, carers, members of public, health and charity groups, 2,600 followers in January 2013 and rapidly increasing

Downside:

- 140 characters- not always possible to get message across
- Can people be exploited through these mediums?
- Alarmist?
- Confidentiality?

What do you need to consider before using social media? Claudia Megele 2012

- Involves the online persona of the individual based on the meaning of their online postings and interactions, blogs, images, videos, tweets etc.
- Service user tweets to ask something about your visit the following day?
- Good e-professionalism: for anything that has privacy implications use private channels – email, phone
- Service user wants to follow you on Twitter or connect with you on Facebook?
- Potential problems? Adverse implications?

What do we need to consider in relation to e-professionalism? Claudia Megele 2012

- Decide on the reason for your social media engagement
- Define your activity and audience
- Named or anonymous?
- Avoid situations where your interaction can infringe on your employers policies, undermine agency's position or create liability.
- Even if account is private or closed, what we say and do is still public and can be copied to open Web.
- Social work students should be reminded about their digital 'footprints.' Guidance in first year?

What is needed? (LGIU 2011)

- Training for practitioners and managers
- Case studies from similar organisations
- Local policies and guidance on procedures, including from central government and organisations
- Access to social networking tools should be the norm in social work
- Better research on the benefits and cost savings
- Regular briefings on new developments
- Awards ceremonies for good practice?

- Ayres S, 2011, *The social media we need not fear*, Professional Social Work September 2011 pp 20-21
- Guse K et al, 2012, *Interventions Using New Digital Media to Improve Adolescent Sexual Health: A Systematic Review*, Journal of Adolescent Health, 51, (2012) 535-543
- Hall S, 2013, *Getting Connected*, Mental Health Today, 28 Jan/Feb 2013
- Megele C. 2012 *Social care in the e-professionalism era* Guardian Professional
- Niven D, 2012, *Ethics Vs Safety*, Professional Social Work, July/August 2012
- Reamer F, 2009, *Novel Boundary Challenges; Social Networking*, Social Work Today, Eye on Ethics
- www.iriss.org.uk (digital engagement, social media)
- Equipped to Engage? 2011, Local Government Initiative Unit (LGIU)

What users need is starting point

Small Groupwork:

- What tools can be pulled together or created to achieve outcome that suits working practice and cultures?
- Are participants using social media in their practice?
- What is your experience?