Conclusion paper

RAN YF&C & RAN C&N online meeting on 'How to do digital youth work in a P/CVE context: Revising the current elements' 19 March 2020

HOW TO DO DIGITAL YOUTH WORK IN A P/CVE CONTEXT: REVISING THE CURRENT ELEMENTS

Digital youth work is becoming more and more important. However, many youth workers still find it difficult to do this, or even start with this. Following up on a previous meeting addressing this topic, the RAN YF&C and RAN C&N meeting on 19 March 2020 has further elaborated on which elements are key for youth workers who want to do their work digitally, including the expertise from the C&N working group communications experts in discussions. This conclusion paper focuses on four important elements identified: defining your goals and knowing your target audience, producing relevant content and adjusting this to the medium used, the necessary skills and resources needed and organisational & ethical considerations that need to be taken into account (including safety measures). This paper aims to educate youth workers who want to (better) incorporate digital ways in doing youth work, specifically in a P/CVE setting.

Introduction

There are several interpretations of what digital youth work specifically entails. In a [previous paper on this topic](#), the definition and exact scope of digital youth work has been examined in greater detail. Digital youth work basically means *"proactively using or addressing digital media and technology in youth work"* ([1]). In this definition, digital youth work can be included in any youth work setting, it supports the same goals as 'offline' youth work, and it is underpinned by the same ethics, values and principles.

Digital youth work has become increasingly important as a large part of the life of teenagers takes place in online environments. To them, this online environment closely resembles the 'real' world. In addition, it can be difficult to get involved in alt right groups in an offline manner and, as the current COVID-19 pandemic shows, to reach young people who live in remote areas. Online engagement with young people therefore offers a credible alternative to engaging with them offline. However, as many youth workers agree that online youth work can never replace in-person contact, it is recommended to try to have offline follow-up where possible. Online activities are also a way to follow-up on or reinforce offline activities and they can allow professionals to deepen and reinforce the contacts they make in an offline context.

Challenges that youth workers face

Although youth workers generally acknowledge the necessity of incorporating digital youth work into their daily practice, many youth workers encounter several challenges when wanting to do online youth work. Not knowing what digital youthwork entails exactly, how this should be approached, which platforms to be present on or choosing familiar platforms that are not necessarily the most suitable are some of these challenges. In addition, in P/CVE work, youth workers may encounter some challenges in not being trained in spotting online risk factors and changes in behaviour that require attention. Furthermore, an online connection with a youngster can be more fragile than an offline, face-to-face connection.

This paper aims to educate youth workers who want to (better) incorporate digital ways in doing youth work, specifically in a P/CVE setting. It provides a more extensive approach to doing digital youth work by combining knowledge gathered in the [previous YF&C meeting](#) with knowledge of the C&N working group on targeting an audience. It includes recommendations made in the [GAMMMA+ model](#) and practical examples of digital youth work practice.

Digital youth work and P/CVE

Since all youth work projects can be seen as forms of primary prevention ([2]), online youth workers can play a specific and valuable role when it comes to P/CVE. Digital youth work can contribute to preventing radicalisation processes, since it mirrors the same goals of offline youth work: guiding youth and promoting democratic principles. In this specific context, this means presenting alternative paths and narratives for youth who have not been radicalised to a certain extent, or offering them opportunities to return to other non-extremist environments if they have not gone too deep into this ideology already. Due to algorithms, the internet can entice individuals to remain in their 'filter bubble' or echo chamber and reinforce a certain perspective. This may lead young followers to believe that this perspective is mainstream. At the same time, the online environment can offer opportunities to see or hear different opinions outside the usual echo chambers. Being exposed to alternative narratives can be helpful in not crossing the bridge towards radicalisation. Therefore, in a P/CVE context, digital youth work may require some specific approaches, such as on how to reach the target group.

([1]) See: ['Developing digital youth work: Policy recommendations, training needs and good practice examples', European Union Work Plan for Youth for 2016-2018](#).
([2]) This is addressed in the Directorate-General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) toolbox, addressed in the [RAN YF&C ex post paper 'The role of youth work in the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism'](#).
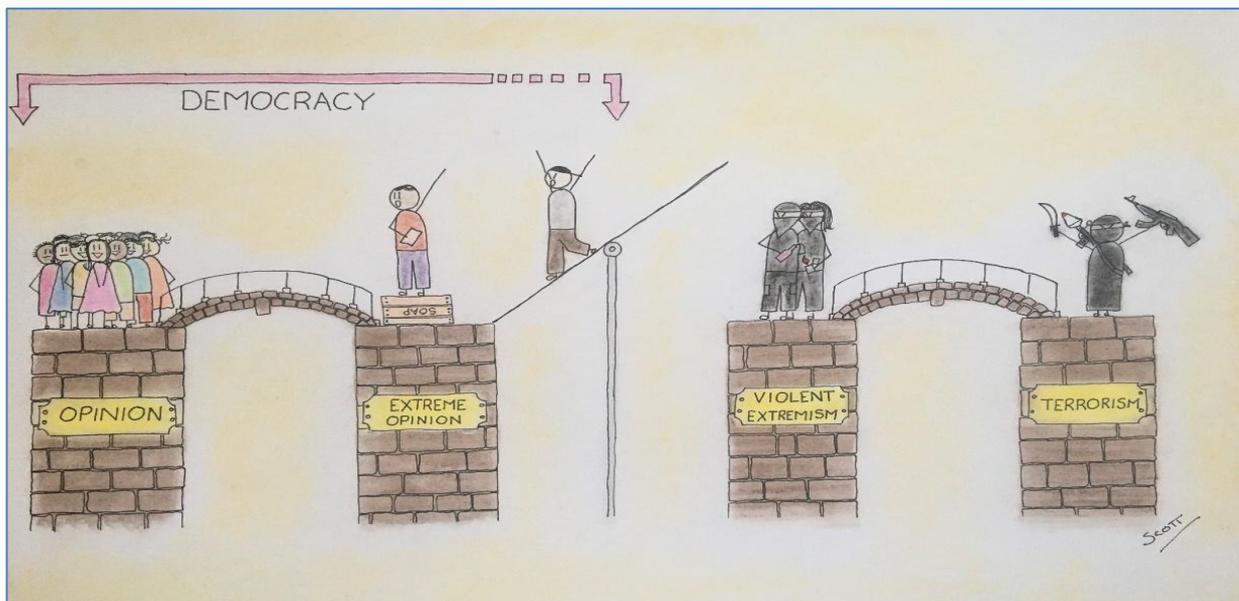
Figure 1: 'Who is your target audience?', Scott Goodwin

Scope of work for youth workers and for other parties

Social work in a P/CVE context that concentrates on prevention and focuses on youth who are still within the democratic framework is valuable. Therefore, it is key to identify the scope and focus of the youth worker, and make a clear distinction between which situations they should address and which cases should be transferred to third parties such as police and security services. In general, the latter should be involved in cases of people who are on the right side of the bridge of Figure 1. In this case it should be clear how and where this individual can be flagged to the appropriate authorities.

> *"I want to stress that we do not pass the data to the third parties except for the cases when there is a potential threat."*

Recommendations for practitioners

Approach youth in an online P/CVE context in the same way as in offline contexts. Youth workers are well equipped to deal with the issue of radicalisation: they are in the front line and have the skills to talk to young people and stimulate critical thinking. Early prevention of radicalisation might sound more complex to youth workers than it may be: if youth workers reframe it in terms of tackling social isolation, identity issues and other themes that are common within social work, youth workers may feel more familiar with it. Building up dialogue and building up trust are key to succeeding in both digital and general youth work efforts. Also, young people should be approached in a similar way as in offline settings, e.g. by planting seeds of doubt instead of directly counter-arguing their (radical) ideas.

Train youth workers in recognising and dealing with radicalisation online if they are less

experienced in this topic. Questions that should be addressed in such a training session are, amongst others: "How do I make a certain decision?" (e.g. on whether to inform other authorities such as security services), "How do I recognise radicalisation?", "How do I act if I believe someone may already be radicalised?". An explicit focus should be the online context in which one has to do digital youth work and understanding the relevant symbols and language used by extremist (youth) online. This is crucial to understand the context in which they are used.

Note that there is a difference in the extent to which a youth worker can respond or intervene in processes of radicalisation. The extent to which they can intervene depends on the assignment and purpose of the organisation, the available means, and knowledge and qualifications of a youth worker. Responses to processes of radicalisation vary similarly, and they can

include handing over cases to a more qualified expert in case of more extreme cases, intervening directly or intervening in a more indirect way.

Use tools that can signal and identify hotbeds of radicalisation on the internet, such as Talkwalker and Crawlr. By using specific words related to extremism, these tools can search for platforms where these words can be found most frequently (e.g. blogs, news items). However, these tools should be used with caution, since radicalisation is a complex process and the framework these tools offer is too simplistic to understand the reality of a young online user. They can

therefore be used to locate areas where youth workers can step in, but should not be taken as a suggestion on how to act. Entering an extremist community that can be found through such a tool requires sensitivity from a youth worker: 'lecturing' young people may for example work counterproductively. Furthermore, these tools may not find information that is exchanged in closed off networks as well as messaging apps and may therefore not be accessible to youth workers. Nevertheless, tools to identify hotbeds can be very helpful in providing a picture and giving direction on what is currently happening as well as key themes within extremist groups.

Inspiring practice: Streetwork@online

The prevention project streetwork@online counteracts Islamic-based radicalisation of young people in Berlin and young adults aged 16-27 years. They do so by seeking a conversation with the target group in order to strengthen their reflectivity and to support them in their formation of identity.

They have contact with adolescents and young adults in the social networks; e.g. on Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. Comments, explanations and questions are used to engage in dialogue with adolescents and young adults, for example, by means of contributions in the comment columns ("one-to-many" and "many-to-many") under existing posts in group chats, with the aim of continuing the conversation in single chat ("one-on-one"). Private conversations in the private chat allow a more direct relationship-building under the protective frame.

The goal of online street work is to help users to reflect on their own actions and views. They:

- Initiate and lead critical-reflection conversations

- Offer alternatives to radical Islam understanding

- Support the individual to develop skills for coping with life

In addition, through the Team Streetwork page (on Facebook and Instagram), young people can get in touch directly with the team of online street workers. The 'open ear' for young people and young adults allows low-threshold conversations and assistance at eye level. Team Streetwork also publishes information such as on counselling and leisure activities, events and self-created content ([3]).

To help them identify the groups in which they can approach their target audience, they monitor a large number of groups on Facebook and Instagram for a given period of time. Subsequently, they analyse which groups are active and what kind of messages are posted there. It helps them to identify the groups with the most extremist content and thus to identify in which groups they want to become active as youth workers.

([3]) See http://www.streetwork.online/index.html#waswirtun

Elements of a digital youth work approach

The following paragraphs describe some key elements and recommendations that should be taken into account when doing digital youth work. In addition to the specific recommendations for digital youth workers in a P/CVE context, the following elements apply for all digital youth workers, whether working in a P/CVE context or not.

Element 1: Defining your goals and knowing your target audience

Before reaching out to youth online, youth workers should ask themselves what it is they want to achieve with their online engagement, what is the goal? This also relates to if and how digital youth work combines with offline youth work. If offline youth work only has a digital component, then the goal might be different than if digital youth work is followed up on offline (or vice versa). Therefore:

Make your goals clear, realistic and measurable. A goal is not a vision: a vision is the long-term destination that you want to get to, and the goals are the steps to get towards this vision (the impact you want to achieve).

Develop a theory of change to understand why, how and for whom your digital intervention should work. Formulating an explicit theory of change requires empirical research and an in-depth understanding of the young people you are targeting, their priorities, how and where they communicate with each other online, and why they are likely to respond to you. What makes your online intervention stand out to them? Why would they want to change because of it? Testing your ideas with members of your target audience will help you understand your theory of change.

Knowing who you want to reach out to — your target audience — is key when doing digital youth work. When it comes to identifying your target audience, take the following things into account:

Ensure you have an in-depth understanding of your target audience. What are their characteristics? Can you narrow down and clearly identify their age range, gender, cultural background, 'group language' and place of residence? What is their way of thinking and behaving? How and where do they communicate with each other online? What platforms do they use? If you have both an online and offline component in your youth work, what are the differences between your online and offline audience? If you target the same youth online and offline, then ensure you know not only where they can be found offline but also online.
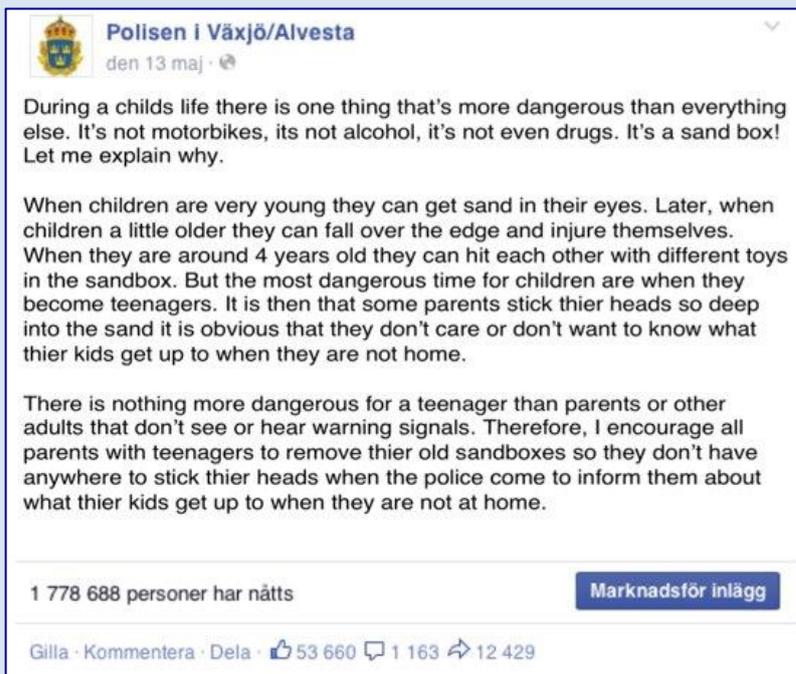
Hyper-target your audience. When trying to identify whether someone is part of your target audience, check their profile, what groups they are a part of, what messages they send out and what they responded to. This can help you to establish, for example, how far along they are in a possible radicalisation process and how likely it is that they have a cognitive opening to discuss this. Try to interact with them and even become part of their groups, although this may be difficult in groups that adhere to extremist content. Being honest, interested in what they have to say and open-minded can decrease the likelihood of being kicked out of these groups.

Inspiring practices:

- Police officer Scott Goodwin uses Facebook to reach his target audience in an indirect way. In his experience, the most effective way of getting a point across is to write to a different target group by formulating a message that addresses parents. By doing so, he wants youth to see the posts as well,

as 'onlookers'. An inspiring example of reaching the target audience in an indirect way is given below.

> **Polisen i Växjö/Alvesta**
> den 13 maj ·
>
> During a childs life there is one thing that's more dangerous than everything else. It's not motorbikes, its not alcohol, it's not even drugs. It's a sand box! Let me explain why.
>
> When children are very young they can get sand in their eyes. Later, when children a little older they can fall over the edge and injure themselves. When they are around 4 years old they can hit each other with different toys in the sandbox. But the most dangerous time for children are when they become teenagers. It is then that some parents stick thier heads so deep into the sand it is obvious that they don't care or don't want to know what thier kids get up to when they are not home.
>
> There is nothing more dangerous for a teenager than parents or other adults that don't see or hear warning signals. Therefore, I encourage all parents with teenagers to remove thier old sandboxes so they don't have anywhere to stick thier heads when the police come to inform them about what thier kids get up to when they are not at home.
>
> 1 778 688 personer har nåtts   Marknadsför inlägg
>
> Gilla · Kommentera · Dela · 53 660 1 163 12 429

- **Streetwork@online:** The project combines online and offline prevention work. To identify their target audience they monitor someone's profile on Facebook trying to find what he 'liked'. In many cases, this helps them to identify where this person comes from. They are members of many Muslim groups on Facebook and are trying to identify young people there who are probably supporting some extremist ideas. After identification, the second step is to build up trust and dialogue with them in order to meet them in reality. At the same time, they are trying to find the places like sport and youth clubs where their offline youth workers can potentially meet the target audience.

Element 2: Produce relevant content and adjust this to the medium used

By hyper-targeting and therefore knowing your audience, you can assess which tools, platforms, messages and activities your audience will adhere to. In this, take the following things into account:

- **Understand the language and social 'rules' of the youth.** When youth workers have understood the basics of digital youth work, the focus may turn to in-depth understanding of aspects of working in an online environment necessary for operating successfully. These in-depth elements can include understanding the language (e.g. use of memes) and social rules of the youth: using these leads can increase credibility and the possibility that the young people will reach out. Be careful in this: trying to adjust to social rules and the language of use on a particular platform can be a trap as some professionals tend to imitate young people and sound 'phoney'. Therefore, a choice can be made to stick to a professional tone of voice on platforms.

- **Involve young people in making content and seek their opinion.** It is fundamental to identify ways of formulating messages that appeal to young people. Testing your messages on members of your target audience can help you to find out which messages resonate with them.

Having a personal platform versus using existing platforms

Some youth workers find that having a personal platform is the easiest way of doing digital youth work, since you can facilitate the discussions, produce content and follow up on responses on content you published. This does leave the challenge on how to direct your target audience to your platform, which requires a different approach from directly approaching them yourself on platforms they already use. Some youth workers find that young people approach them by themselves because they are curious about the youth worker or the organisation; others find this still challenging. Successful marketing and a strong online presence can increase the chances of the target audience finding your platform directly.

Choosing a platform: Where to start?

It is not always possible for youth workers to be actively present on all social media their audience uses. What kind of social media is used amongst youth also differs per country. Therefore, it can be useful to ask around and to look up information and statistics on which platforms are used mostly in your country. Some platforms are easier to use than others, and usability also depends on your goals. Some platforms allow interaction, some can be used to get better insights into the world of young people, some allow early detection of (possible) problems and some allow more profiling of the youth worker ([4]).

Facebook offers a comment section that is very helpful for interacting with your target audience over a longer period of time. When using platforms where the comment section is public, keep in mind that you reach a larger audience than the ones you are targeting. This audience may not respond directly but will read your content. Although Facebook is not highly popular among young people anymore in certain countries, older audiences on the platform remain active. Youth workers in Europe indicated that they found more hate speech and extremist individuals on Facebook than on other platforms — this allows youth workers to step in more easily than on other platforms.

Snapchat is a platform that is mainly used by young people for pleasure, for example to send humorous photos to friends and by using funny filters. It allows you to watch stories of other friends, but also to follow celebrities or YouTubers. Following organisations and brands is possible but is not extremely popular among youth to a larger extent. Snapchat as a platform is more difficult to step into as a youth worker because it does not allow to trace content. Content on Snapchat disappears quickly and needs to be funny and catchy, which makes it more difficult to interact with your target audience. Furthermore, it can be more challenging to find your target audience on these platforms since Snapchat is mainly about gatherings of small groups that share content with each other, as opposed to platforms where major groups are more easy to find and get access to. Nevertheless, it can be a good medium to step into as a youth worker in order to remain updated about what is going on in the lives of young people (e.g. about harmful challenges such as the 'choking challenge' ([5])). Nevertheless, usage of Snapchat requires strict rules on what youth workers share and what not, precisely because of its lack of transparency.

Instagram is an important platform for youth where they can follow others (classmates, friends, famous YouTubers, artists, friends of friends, Instagram 'influencers') and be followed themselves. It allows you to post mainly photos and videos, along with which extensive captions and hashtags can be posted. Instagram is mainly used to look at and draw inspiration from others. Most young people do not necessarily post that much themselves; it is rather a place where youth can show themselves to others. Instagram is increasingly used by youth workers, since it allows to educate youth and spread awareness about topics and activities (e.g. from the youth centre they work for, about which times youth can reach them for chat sessions, important sources of information, etc.). It also allows youth workers to engage with youth via comments and personal chat, which makes it possible for a youth worker to read back messages at a later stage. Nevertheless, some find this chat function less user-friendly than, for example, a Facebook chat.

([4]) See: https://www.nji.nl/nl/Download-NJi/Online-Jongerenwerk-Werken-in-de-online-leefwereld-van-jongeren-Handvatten.pdf
([5]) See: https://time.com/5189584/choking-game-pass-out-challenge/

Some youth workers therefore only use Instagram for major announcements for which less interaction is required. Also, it allows youth workers to monitor what accounts and topics are popular and trending, and what youth comment on the platform themselves.

YouTube. Young people spend a significant amount of their time on YouTube, amongst other reasons for listening to music, watching TV (watching videos and news, following YouTubers and celebrities, etc.), socialising (sharing content, making comments, getting social recognition, co-viewing and co-creation), producing, creating and managing their own content, and for educational purposes (obtaining information and tutorials, learning by imitating, etc.) ([6]). As with other (social) media, it can be a good medium to step into as a youth worker in order to remain updated about what is going on in the lives of young people (e.g. about harmful challenges such as the 'choking challenge' ([7])), to monitor comments on certain videos (e.g. extremist content) or individuals, and to offer alternatives to these people (e.g. by reaching out to them). Furthermore, youth workers can create their own videos to spread awareness about certain topics or their services.

TikTok. On TikTok, people can post videos and use an array of soundtracks and Snapchat-style filters, which can morph faces or create other intriguing visual effects. People can follow other accounts and create a feed of new content from the creators they enjoy most. There is also a "For You" feed that shows a random assortment of videos from others. This mechanism offers an endless thread of new content to watch, such as videos about things that are 'oddly satisfying', fun (and less fun) challenges, do-it-yourself projects, karaoke and dancing videos, and many more ([8]). Most videos on TikTok are just for pleasure, but it also offers opportunities to spread awareness about more serious topics. An example of using TikTok in practice can be found in the case of the Dutch Red Cross. They use TikTok to spread awareness amongst youth about measures that everyone has to take with regard to the COVID-19 outbreak. They did so by making a funny video with easy instructions: washing your hands, sneezing and coughing into your elbow, and making sure you are informed via the official government channels. It reached an incredible number of Dutch youth. The video can be found here. As with other (social) media and YouTube, it can be a good medium to step into as a youth worker in order to remain updated about what is going on in the lives of young people, to monitor comments on certain videos and to create their own videos. Nevertheless, since TikTok is relatively new and not a particularly easy platform to create content on, this might require advanced expertise on the part of the youth worker.

Other tools and platforms that are used by digital youth workers that can help to get in touch with young people include the Steam community, Skype and the Discord tool.

An example of a helpful tool in that is used for youth work is Ninchat. Ninchat is an online customer service platform with many features, which makes it very useful for digital youth work. It allows, for example, powerful moderation of discussions, strong data security, readiness for chatbots, statistical tools and discussion logs.

Some additional recommendations to keep in mind when using (social media) platforms are:

Be cautious about ownership and rules of the platforms

Before starting your activities, find out what the privacy policies are of the platforms you intend to use. This can be important especially when it comes to ownership of the content. If you are creating content, platforms such as TikTok have stated ownership over it and could potentially use it for advertising, for example. For more information on how to be safe, social and secure on social media, look up information about this on websites such as these.

Making sure your platform can be found by your specific audience

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([6]) See: https://phys.org/news/2019-10-teenagers-youtube.html
([7]) See: https://time.com/5189584/choking-game-pass-out-challenge/
([8]) See: https://www.howtogeek.com/536434/what-exactly-is-tiktok-and-why-are-teens-obsessed-with-it/

Making sure your website or platform is known amongst your target audience can be one of the key factors in having a successful digital youth work strategy. It can be useful to make use of expertise in optimisation, for example by bringing in expertise on search engine optimisation (SEO). This is a method to actively optimise your website or platform (e.g. with the use of relevant keywords and content) to ensure that it will pop up high on the list of results when people search for relevant terms around digital youth work. This will increase the likelihood that a website will be found. Make use of tools such as Google Search Console and Google Ads Keyword planner, or ask Google for Ad Grants for a month to optimise your website. Google Search Engine Optimisation, however, is an advanced tool that may require skills and expertise that a regular youth worker does not have. Therefore, consulting a company to do this for you might be an option. There are many experts who can help with SEO; make sure to do research on the different options to ensure you will pick the most viable party.

Inspiring examples of using Instagram ([9])**:**

Examples of interaction

- *Direct Messaging with youth:* A young person reached out to a youth worker on whether he could help him with getting help for obtaining a certain certificate that he needs for a job. It can also be used for more serious matters: a young person reaches out to a youth worker because the person is involved in a group of friends that they might want to step out of, but they don't know what to do and therefore reach out for help.

- *Posting a video:* Together with a local restaurant in a youth worker's area, they made a video about the restaurant looking for new waiters. By posting this vacancy online, the youth worker could reach out to many youth in a way that was more appealing to them than an offline vacancy.

- *Posting a photo:* The youth worker shows parts of their work, for example attending the graduation of one of the youths they see regularly, being present at certain school activities or preparing activities for young people.

- *Asking the opinion of youth via a voting system:* In Instagram Stories, it is possible to ask questions that everyone can answer via a poll. A youth worker asks: "What gaming devices should we have in the youth centre?", to which youth themselves respond (non-anonymously). In this way, youth get involved in the youth work activities of the youth centre.

Getting insight into the world of young people and early detection of possible problems

- *Spotting opportunities for young people online:* The youth worker sees a post of someone showing a talent (e.g. soccer or something creative) and brings the young person in touch with a professional on this matter. In this way, the young person can further develop their talent.

- *Spotting online challenges or trends:* The youth worker sees that a harmful challenge or trend (such as listening to 'drill' music) is promoted online and now knows to step in on this as soon as possible. By analysing how young people comment on certain posts and which gain popularity, these trends and challenges can be monitored.

- *Spotting harmful accounts* that should be reported to the authorities as soon as possible, such as 'exposing accounts' where personal details of others are shared that should not be made public.

([9]) Many of these examples come from the Dutch report https://www.nji.nl/nl/Download-NJi/Online-Jongerenwerk-Werken-in-de-online-leefwereld-van-jongeren-Handvatten.pdf and have been translated to English for this paper.

Inspiring example of using Facebook

Police officer Scott Goodwin uses Facebook to reach out to his target audience. He makes sure the posts are interesting enough for his target audience and found that humour and irony work very well, as well as adding photos and links. He also found that short messages, told in stories, work better than messages alone.

In Goodwin's organisation, each local police area has an official Facebook account and a select number of police are 'Facebook police'. The Facebook police officer works in their ordinary duties and updates when they have time or a specific message they want to get out. The Facebook police officer decides themselves if they want to sign the update with their name or simply as "the police". According to Goodwin, it is extremely important that the organisation is fully behind and supports the 'digital worker'. It can get quite aggressive and hostile, and people will inevitably complain about things that are written, specifically when ideology or opinions are discussed.

Element 3: Necessary skills and resources

When planning on doing digital youth work, make sure the basic requirements for online engagement are in place. These include having enough resources secured to make sure activities can be continuous, which may vary depending on the objectives of the effort. As noted by Székely and Nagy ([10]), digital youth workers should be (like offline youth workers) identifiable, verifiable and trustworthy. In addition, not every youth worker in your organisation needs to start doing digital youth work; having a few youth workers in place who make the online contact can be enough. Youth workers should:

- Be accessible, listen actively and ask questions: (digital) communication is never a one-way process.

- Communicate low-level: give attention to the feelings and thoughts of young people, try to ask the proper questions.

([10]) Székely, L., & Nagy, Á. (2011). Online youth work and eYouth — A guide to the world of the digital natives. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*(11), 2186-2197. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2011.07.002

- Act with small steps and make sure to keep the attention of young people when interacting with them. If you act too fast there is a chance of losing contact with a person who is particularly vulnerable in certain stages of having contact. Building trust in an initial phase is important.

- Have social educational and cross-cultural skills and counselling experience.

- Be unbiased and sensible to stigmatisation and marginalisation.

- Have an affinity towards social media: there is no need to know all about the media, but it helps to have an interest in working with social media.

- Avoid making isolated contacts, and build up a network instead.

- Show empathy towards young people. Specifically in P/CVE contexts, this is a necessary component in communicating with young people.

Other recommendations include:

Make sure youth workers understand the importance of digital youth work. Emphasise that digital youth work is not very different from general youth work, and show youth workers that technology can serve as a way to make life easier. Show positive examples of digital youth work practice. It can help to emphasise that being in daily contact and being present online with the target audience is more important than having a big programme on this.

Provide youth workers with the right devices to engage with young people. This can be equipment such as smartphones, a proper laptop or computers with an internet connection. Make sure the security standards of these devices are up to date, as youth workers may work with sensitive data. Where possible, track the number of interactions that have taken place with young people. Working on VPN networks may be advisable.

Train youth workers to work in an online context. Provide them with mandatory training sessions and make sure the content is communicated in a clear and manageable way (e.g. in several training sessions and with supportive handouts). Some examples of what these seminars can focus on include:

- Provide information on the basics of doing digital youth work (how to set up a profile, how to use certain tools in social media, what opportunities it offers).

- Help them understand the economy of social media (which companies run the platforms, what an algorithm is and how it works, what threats they pose and the opportunities they offer).

- Provide information on the different platforms young people are active on (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok).

- Explain how, when and where information can be collected. This is useful for three reasons. First, it makes youth workers aware of what happens with the information they share on the platform itself. Second, it gives them the option of conveying this information to young people, so they become aware of this as well. Lastly, it enables youth workers to collect information about these young people.

Make sure youth workers know where to turn to with questions. Create a safe space where youth workers can share their knowledge, questions and possible insecurities with each other. This could also be a space for feedback on online activities between youth workers (e.g. peer-to-peer learning sessions).

Make sure youth workers know what the task of their team is. Make sure each team member knows what their role is, how they can assist the team, how to intervene and who to reach out to for help.

Inspiring practices: gathering professionals in local networks

Web Walkers (Promeneurs du Net) : The 'Web Walkers' programme, launched in 2016 by the National Family Fund agency (Caisse Nationale des Allocations Familiales, CNAF), is a national digital youth work programme based on primary prevention. Since 2019, the programme addresses online intervention in a P/CVE context. Thanks to a specific training, youth workers become better equipped to address radicalization and violent extremism in face-to-face and online workshops with young people. The aim is to help youth workers identify and address behavioural problems, encourage positive behaviour on the internet, work on media literacy and create better equipped cybercitizens. In this approach, professionals are gathered in local networks that offer collective training, best practice exchange and supervision with a psychologist. The local Web Walkers networks are organised around one coordinator or facilitator, usually from an association or local family allowance funds (CAF) whose role is to:

- welcome any new professional joining the Web Walkers programme,

- organise trainings, practice exchange sessions, seminars, group talks between Web Walkers,

- share tools, ideas, information useful to the Web Walkers professionals,

- assist professionals with their online practices,

- promote the Web Walkers programme to organisations, associations, schools and other parties that might be interested in joining.

These networks work offline through meetings, seminars, trainings, etc., and online through collaborative tools and social media (e.g. Facebook groups, Slack). The number of offline meetings can vary, but the idea is to have regular interactions. These networks play a crucial role in the Web Walkers programme: online practices are still new for many youth work professionals. Being part of a network allows them to develop new skills more easily and to be introduced to new tools and practices, and to get assistance from their peers or share doubts if needed. It is also an opportunity to meet with professionals from different fields or areas of work and to be able to coordinate their actions towards the youth both online and offline.

Element 4: Organisational & ethical considerations that need to be taken into account (including safety measures)

When working with youth online, several conditions need to be in place as well as safety measures, both for the youth worker and for youth themselves. Before starting with online youth work, these considerations should be thoroughly assessed and clearly conveyed to everyone in the organisation. Topics that should be discussed when setting up online youth work include:

Have guidelines for working on social media. When using social media, have some general (and, where possible, specific) guidelines on how to work on these platforms. Suggested guidelines of the Viennese Youth Centres include the following things:

- decide whether youth workers need to have separate professional and private accounts. Professional accounts should be clearly identifiable;

- establish which hours you conduct work on social media;

- ensure prompt and careful reactions to problematic postings;

- never act alone — work in social media is teamwork;

- content, opinions, etc. must agree with the <u>mission and the principles</u> of youth work;

- <u>postings from target groups</u> are to be handled professionally and pedagogically in accordance with the situation;

- be aware of the fact that communication in social media is always <u>direct, public and permanent</u>;

- after local incidents, do <u>social media observations</u> in the relevant platforms, groups and individual posts;

- in case of uncertainty regarding, for example, a post, <u>inform, communicate and check</u> this with your team;

- in serious cases, make sure <u>everything is documented</u> (screenshots; who, what, when, which measures were taken? Who was informed?).

Have a clear agreement and guidelines on data protection, rules of law and questions regarding confidentiality (e.g. on GDPR rules, privacy notifications, intellectual property). There is a risk of harming a relationship when you have not established some ground rules in advance regarding the boundaries of your conversations. Agree on how transparent youth workers can be about their conversations with young people (e.g. whether there should be one coordinator who has access to all conversations, or whether there is a buddy system). Make sure youth workers do have not sole access to conversations with young people. Also be aware of the laws in your country regarding the reporting of online incidents. Inform young people about the extent of openness of your conversations, the professional ethics that you have, and that what they say and do online have the same consequences as doing them offline.

☞ **How to encrypt emails for security.** A practitioner who counsels via email said: *"Any individual who reaches out to us, is informed that the information shared is confidential as most of the volunteers are doctors and are under medical ethics and sworn in under the Hippocratic Oath. In the technical sense, the emails are encrypted on a standard, Gmail uses TLS encryption to transfer your data and it protects your emails at rest with industry-standard 128-bit encryption."*

Agree on which personal details youth workers should (not) share. Do you refer them to the organisation and therefore let them know where you are based? Do youth workers set up a personal profile, or do they keep their professional and personal profiles separate? Do you use real profile pictures or pictures in which the youth worker cannot be recognised? Do you choose to use a real name or a different name that is linked to your name? Do note that most platforms require profiles to be genuine and may block profiles that seem fake.

Agree on availability. Especially when young people are in a crisis, youth workers may feel that they have to be available 24/7. Make agreements about a dedicated time that youth workers can be reached and communicate these clearly to the audience. A possibility available to young people in need of urgent contact is to set up a 'crisis line' on which a youth worker is always available, or establish key words that draw your attention in case of a crisis during off hours.

CONCLUSION

Especially in times when doing offline youth work is difficult, as is currently the case with the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of digital youth work is recognised more and more. Defining your goals and knowing your target audience, producing relevant content and adjusting this to the medium used, training necessary skills and providing resources, and taking into account organisational and ethical considerations (including safety measures) are important elements for setting up a sound digital youth work approach.

When it comes to P/CVE, doing digital youth work can be helpful in countering violent extremism, especially in primary prevention. There are various ways of doing digital work. All in all, it can be said that digital youth work offers a great potential for those youngsters who are still within the democratic framework but are triggered by extremism or on the brink of 'crossing' towards non-democratic radicalisation. Platforms such as Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram each offer opportunities for interaction and to get insights into the world of young people. Some allow early detection of (possible) problems and some allow more profiling options for youth workers. In order for youth workers to step in on these possibilities in a P/CVE context, youth workers working in this context require specific training on recognising radicalisation online. Furthermore, there are specific P/CVE tools that can signal and identify hotbeds of radicalisation on the internet, which is helpful in finding a target audience.

Despite advanced tools being available, it can be concluded that being in daily contact with and being visible online to the target audience is more important than having a very advanced digital youth work programme that includes advanced tools. By providing concrete recommendations, tips and tricks, and inspiring examples, this paper helps youth workers to work their way into the online environment that is currently more important than ever before.

ADDITIONAL READING

- Ex post paper RAN YF&C expert meeting 'Doing digital youth work in a P/CVE context', 29 November 2019, Copenhagen, Denmark.

- Ex post paper RAN C&N Academy 'How to create, implement and evaluate an effective P/CVE communications campaign', Effective Narratives: Updating the GAMMMA+ model.

- Digital Youth Work: 'European Guidelines for Digital Youth Work'.

- Report Verke & EYWC: 'Digitalisation and Youth Work',

- Report Salto Youth: 'How to prevent radicalization: Digital guide'.

- Report Screenagers: 'International Research Project: Using ICT, digital and social media in youth work' and the corresponding infographic.

- Report: Erasmus+, Virtual Youth Work Guidelines.

- Report: 'Developing digital youth work: Policy recommendations, training needs and good practice examples', European Union Work Plan for Youth for 2016-2018.

- Székely, L., & Nagy, Á. (2011). Online youth work and eYouth — A guide to the world of the digital natives. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*(11), 2186-2197.