Staying in touch in the digital era: New social work practice

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Jenny Simpson
Presence

Awareness of another person

Social presence

Connectedness

Rettie (2003)
The UK is now a "smartphone society"

Smartphones have overtaken laptops as the most popular device for getting online. Ofcom research has revealed, with record ownership and use transforming the way we communicate.

Two thirds of people now own a smartphone, using it for nearly two hours every day to browse the internet, access social media, bank and shop online.

Ofcom’s 2015 Communications Market Report finds that a third (33%) of internet users see their smartphone as the most important device for going online, compared to 30% who are still sticking with their laptop.

Read more...
Research Project

Aims

● To contribute to the knowledge and understanding of how a local authority could respond to central government policy direction of development and delivery of social care services via an integrated children’s services model.

● To work in conjunction with the local authority to develop a CPD model that begins with qualified social workers and non-registered social care staff and then broadens to the other members of the workforce within the Children’s Integrated Service.

● To develop a CPD model that will enable Southampton City Council to equip their staff to meet their statutory duties and enhance performance through its focus on development, staff support and retention.
The UK social work sector

Digital capabilities of the adult social care workforce

We recently conducted a survey of staff and managers. These are some of the results.

### Perception of skills
- **Staff** have confidence in their own basic online skills with over 90% feeling confident or very confident.
- But 52% of managers feel staff do not have sufficient basic online skills.

![45% and 8%](image)

- 45% have a tablet device at home compared with 8% having a work tablet. 9% use their personal tablet for work.

### Managers and most staff see the benefits of digital technology in:
- Improving efficiency
- Improving the quality of care services
- Offering benefits to people they support

### What is digital technology used for?
- Use digital technology to record/manage delivery of care (75%)
- Use digital technology with people they support (50%)

### What stops the use of digital technology?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Managers:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff access to digital technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of workforce development in this area</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concerns about online security</td>
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<th>Staff:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Concerns from a small minority that they would spend less time with the people they support</td>
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<td>Concerns about a small number</td>
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### What current learning opportunities are there for digital technology?
- 74% of staff have a personal smartphone.
- 20% of staff use their personal phone for work purposes.

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**Internet Technology: An Empowering or Alienating Tool for Communication between Foster-Carers and Social Workers?**

Jane Dodsworth*, Sue Bailey, Gillian Schofield, Neil Cooper, Piers Fleming, and Julie Young

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Journey to create CPD Models
Relationship and direct work with the social work practitioner was the most significant, as was communication:

But I have met good social workers who had actually good communication, you know, good, good bonding with the families, who wanted the best outcome possible. You know, the assessment was done absolutely brilliantly, and actually achieved the outcome set out, you know, really well for them, and there are some very, very good ones within the city and it’s nice to hear, it’s nice to know. (Parent/Carer A)

Because the other day I was on hold for 45 minutes trying to get hold of social services. And that’s from a pay as you go mobile. Yeah. I have now recently just got after three years their social worker’s mobile number, after three years of keep asking them. And it’s took three years to get a mobile number so I can get in touch (Parent/Carer E)

Yeah, like with my foster carer if there’s a incident, like if we have an argument or like something ends up happening, like I would expect a phone call from my social worker to asks me if I’m all right. Because obviously she’d hear about it, and like I wouldn’t hear from her. And it’s like well she clearly don’t care cos otherwise she’d be like phoning me to make sure I’m alright. (Young Person C)
Findings: Non-registered social care staff

Me personally, I’ve had my support worker, what, like well how many months. I’ve probably seen her more than I’ve seen my social worker since I’ve had her (Young Person B)

My support worker tells me there and then, and if she doesn’t know she says I’ll get back to you the next day, and she always gets back to me. (Parent/Carer E)

Yeah, like if we’re on Facebook and she sees a status up with one of us that have been hurt or whatever, she would kind of ring us and be like what’s going on type thing. Do you know what I mean? (Young Person C)
Social presence applied

Social Work and Social Presence in an Online World

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Human presence is a fundamental consideration of social work practices. The argument in this article is not to undermine such notions but to elaborate on them based on research into social presence, a type of presence projected when a person is associating with others. Communication and information technology support applications that develop social presence and enable sociality. Such forms of presence are not confined to face-to-face encounters but are necessarily relational. Underlying such a realization is the conclusion that all flows of social presence must and can be connected and directed in the conduct of social work practice.

KEYWORDS community, mobilities, social presence, sociality

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, the traditional view is that social work grew through two European roots in the mid-1800s: the Charity Organization Societies and the settlement movement. Shortly thereafter, by the end of the 19th century, social work classes were being taught at Columbia University in New York City. Roy Lubove (1965) was one of a number of historians who argued that social work developed in the United States as volunteers working in charitable roles became scarce. Lubove believed that the pressures of modernity contributed to the formation of both the occupation and “agencies,” formal organizations who acted as agents for the needy. For him, the origins of social work were moralistic and personal, but its movement forward was

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Figure 1: Two Senses of Social Presence
Rettie(2005)
Communication approaches that are personalised and promote dignity

‘We Don’t See Her as a Social Worker’: A Service User Case Study of the Importance of the Social Worker’s Relationship and Humanity
Peter Beresford, Suzy Croft and Lesley Adshhead

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Summary
This article draws on a large-scale UK qualitative research study of what service users want from specialist palliative care social work. The study included a diverse range of people with direct experience of such social work as patients with life-limiting illnesses and conditions and people facing bereavement. Service users included in the study generally valued such social work highly. The article focuses on two aspects of practice which were associated with the high value they placed on specialist palliative care social work. These are the relationships they had with the social worker and the qualities and skills that they saw the social worker as having. Service users highlighted the notion of ‘friendship’ as a key positive in their relationship with the social worker and human qualities associated with warmth, empathy, respect and listening. The article explores the tension between the characteristics of practice valued by service users and the direction of travel of social work influenced by policy and professional considerations. It suggests that it may be necessary to review political and policy judgements of what social work is and should do, if it is to be consistent with what service users value—traditional social work values and an increasing international emphasis on user-centred and individualized support for social care.
Communication approaches that are personalised and promote dignity

• Daily mobile encounters that are two-way

• Be prepared to employ flexible professional boundaries

• Express warmth, compassion and caring through other mechanisms like emoticons and posting encouraging comments on social media
Shortcomings

- The first such shortcoming is the small scale research study itself which was designed to answer an entirely different question that was concerned with CPD and not a sense of presence.

- A second major shortcoming at this stage is that the notion of presence makes a passing reference to social work practitioner workload and other organisational factors that might inhibit the nature and type of communication methods used.
Last word…..for now

Of significance is La Mendola’s own closing comments on the notion of presence which is that:

“an expanded notion of presence for the profession means blending face-to-face encounters with those that are not. It means accepting the premise that social presence is embodied but not contained by physicality. It is an appreciation that in all its forms, social presence is the carrier of relationships” (2010 p.117)
References


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