YouthWork.io

Digital Youth Work:

A Practical, Non-Techie Guide

We couldn't have expected this.

At the end of 2019, when I was reflecting on the year that was and planning for the year ahead, I never could have anticipated the drastic changes that COVID-19 would bring. Let alone anticipating such a drastic change happening in the short space of time that it did. It is time for me to use the most cliche but apt word that sums up the current situation; unprecedented.

I have been a youth worker since 2008, and have been heavily involved with digital engagement of young people. In 2019, I thought it was great that there were small groups of people making leaps and bounds to online engagement of youth. I never could have guessed that nearly the entire sector would be online, even if only for a short period, within a matter of weeks.

This guide is my attempt to distill insights from my work in digital engagement, through the lens of youth work, into a practical, non-techie guide.

I have made this non-techie because for many, this time has such a steep learning curve, and right now there are young people who all of a sudden are isolated, and we need as many youth workers picking up new tools as possible.

(Side-note: If you wanted a techie guide, feel free to get in touch in our Facebook group and we can talk chatbots, APIs & automation 😆).

By the end of this guide you will:

1. Be clear on what you are trying to achieve with digital youth work during this time
2. Have some inspiration about activities you could run
3. A framework for organising your digital youth work activities
4. Receive practical tips on tools for digital youth work

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Getting clear on what you are trying to achieve

Before we get into the practical online tools for youth work, I feel it is important to reiterate the most important part of that phrase; for youth work. Although the world has radically shifted since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and though we need to learn new skills and master new tools, the core focus remains the same.

As youth workers we are strengths-based practitioners, looking to build up protective factors in the lives of young people.

We don't need to reinvent youth work. We are just doing it with a new vehicle.

Now, let's take a moment to consider the life of a young person. We'll call him Jimmy.

Jimmy loves to play football. He is the goalie in the local team and loves the rush of jumping in the air as a ball flying towards him, even if it means that he thuds right down on the ground after. He gets on really well with his team mates.

He doesn't like being at home very much, so when he isn't playing or training for football he hangs out at the local youth centre. He spends afternoons playing FIFA with other youth there and with the youth workers. They give him a big feed when he arrives, which is awesome, because there isn't always a full cupboard at home. "You are a part of the family Jimmy." The youth worker told him, "And everyone in a family needs to pitch in to clean up." Jimmy does feel like a part of the family at the youth centre, so he happily cleans up.

Jimmy is the reason why I am so concerned during the pandemic and the reason that I am taking the time to create this guide. Because as a youth worker when I hear a story like that I am trained to take mental notes of all of the protective factors in a young person's life. Lives for football, tick. Physical exercise, tick. Gets on well with his team mates, tick. Feels at home at the local youth centre, tick.

You get the picture.

As youth workers we know the power of protective factors. It is this strengths-based lens that guides our practice.

In a matter of days, hundreds of thousands of young people like Jimmy, millions even, have had those protective factors removed. The scales of risk and protective factors that was once tenderly balanced thrown right off.

We don't need to reinvent youth work. We are just doing it with a new vehicle. That is why before you start picking up the tools, you need to get clear on what it is you are trying to achieve.
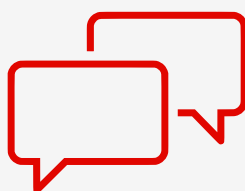
For me, there are three clear aims for digital youth work during this time:

1	2	3
Maintain fun & engaging, regular activities for young people as a protective factor for youth during lockdown	**Maintain positive, therapeutic youth work connections with young people as a protective factor during lockdown**	**Provide positive, healthy spaces for peer-to-peer connection during lockdown**

For you and your organisation there may be different aims, or variations of the same. Either way, it is important to be clear on what you are trying to achieve from the outset. From there, the activities and tools needed to make it happen can fall into place.

4 Creative Ideas for Digital Youth Work

1. Run an online drop-in centre

Drop-in youth centres were where I cut my teeth as a youth worker. I love drop-ins because every time a young person walks in the door they are choosing to be there, and choosing to join in a culture that you are setting. This should be the same online.

How could this look? Have a regular time that your 'Doors Open'. This could be a daily Zoom call that people can pop into, or be hosted on an alternative like Google Hangouts. I like Zoom because you can create 'Breakout Rooms'. This means, like an in-person drop-in, youth can join, be welcomed and hangout with a youth worker in the main space, and then some could choose to go join an activity in a break out room.

Running an online drop-in centre can be a simple and easy way to meet the aims

1. Maintaining fun & engaging regular activities for young people as a protective factor for youth during lockdown;
2. Maintaining positive, therapeutic youth work connections with young people as a protective factor during lockdown and;
3. Providing positive, healthy spaces for peer-to-peer connection during lockdown.

2. Share your screen and play Drawful together

Drawful is an excellent game by Jackbox TV. You can download it onto your computer and in a group call share your screen. If Pictionary and Balderdash had a baby, it would be Drawful.

How it works:
- Everyone gets a room code and they sign in on their device.

- Once everyone is signed in they receive a prompt on their device of something to draw.
- One-by-one people's drawings go up on the main screen (the one you are sharing) and people try to guess what it is.
- Then everyone's guesses go on the screen and people need to try to guess the real one.
- People get points for choosing the right answer and for having people choose their answer.

Drawful is a one-off $14.99 (AUD) to purchase but they are offering it for free during the COVID-era. Another option is to use Google Jamboard for free and play pictionary over a video call (further details in the Tools section).

Pro-Tip! This could be a game you play in a breakout room at an online drop-in

3. Host a lockdown photo challenge

Keep young people engaged, having fun and reflecting on meaningful things in a Facebook or Messenger group. Post a different prompt each day. Here are some ideas below.

1. The weirdest thing you can find in your house
2. Your favourite pair of socks and why
3. Something you are grateful for today
4. Someone you are excited to see after lockdown
5. A photo that sums up your besties personality
6. Draw a self portrait and post the results!
7. A photo that shows why you love this group of people

We are also a huge fan of the Flare Project's Self Care Challenge. Check it out!

Pro-Tip! When your objective is to engage young people, use a Facebook Group over a Facebook page.

Facebook pages have an organic reach of around 3% of your audience. This is so that you will pay to advertise instead. That means if you have 100 followers, on average only 3 will see a post! However, Facebook announced in 2019, that groups will be prioritised in the algorithm above other content.

4. COVID Time Capsule: Write A Letter to Your Future Self

We were inspired by LONG Creations, a mother who created 'My COVID-19 Time Capsule' for her young children, and the classic youth work activity of writing a letter to your future self.

Taking that inspiration we created a digital platform where young people are asked a couple of questions, and can write a letter to their future selves, which will be sent as an email a year after they wrote it.

It is a great resource for young people to take a moment and be mindful.
Have a play! Write yourself a letter to see how it works!

www.youthwork.io/covidtimecapsule

Find more activities and/or add the Crowd-Sourced Digital Youth Work Activities Database here

Create your digital youth work activity plan in 3 simple steps

By the end of these three steps you will have a clear visual picture of the month ahead, knowing what activities are going to take place on each day, plus what digital tools you need to for them.

Step 1: Fill in the Digital Youth Work Activity Matrix

As we create an activity plan to meet the three aims outlined in section 1, the Digital Youth Work Activity Matrix makes it easy for us to decide what activities to plan - and when.

We know that we want to schedule regular activities that engage youth during lockdown, we want to keep up positive therapeutic relationships with youth, and we want to create spaces for positive peer-to-peer engagement. What the matrix does is help us place activities based on what we are trying to achieve.

The matrix breaks up activities on two axis: 1-on-1 or group, and engagement or connection.

	1-on-1	**Group**
Engagement	Online chess	Drawful
Connection	Messenger Chat	Video call

For this exercise, we define **Engagement as interactions that are *activity* based** and **Connection as interactions that are *conversation* based.** If you are playing chess with a young person online you are definitely connecting. However, the matrix helps us distinguish the primary basis of an activity and ensure we are covering multiple mediums with our Digital Youth Work Activity Plan.

Activity Matrix Worksheet

	1-on-1	**Group**
Engagement		
Connection		

Think of this as a structured brainstorm! We suggest printing a copy of the Activity Matrix Worksheet and doing this by hand with coloured pens. This is proven to get our creative juices flowing - and at this stage of the process you want to be using creative, divergent thinking.

Tip: Focus on the activity, not the tool at this stage.

What activities did you regularly do face-to-face? How do these fit in this matrix? How can you do those now? Were there any games you would regularly play?

Step 2: Input your matrix into the Digital Youth Work Planning Guide

In this step we begin to operationalise your brainstorming from the Activity Matrix Worksheet. Time to put your convergent thinking-cap on!

1. Add each activity into its place on the matrix under the Activity column.

2. Then next to it add what digital tool you will be used. For example, for a Group Video Call you might put Zoom.

3. Now decide the frequency of the activity from the dropdown menu, either Daily, Weekly, Monthly or One-Off.

	1-on-1			Group		
	Activity	**Tool**	**Frequency**	**Activity**	**Tool**	**Frequency**
Engagement	Online chess	www.chess.com	Weekly	Drawful	Jackbox TV & Zoom	Weekly
	Words with Friends	Words with Friends	Weekly	COVID Time Capsule	www.youthwork.io/covidtir	One-Off
			Daily			
			Monthly			
			One-Off			
Connection	Chat messages	Facebook Messenger	Daily	7 Day Photo Challenge	Facebook Group	Monthly
				Video Call	Zoom	Weekly

As you do this you will begin to have a picture of what activities you will do, when, and what tools you will need. In the last step we will bring all of this into a monthly planner.

Get a copy of the Digital Youth Work Planning Guide here.
(You will need a Gmail Account for this).

3. Populate the Monthly Activity Planner

	Daily Activities			
	Activity	**Tool**	**Frequency**	**Team** (Who is responsible)
1-on-1 Engagement	Words with Friends	Words with Friends	Daily	Jeff
1-on-1 Connection	Chat messages	Facebook Messenger	Daily	

The Planning Guide spreadsheet has four new tabs that will have **automatically pulled in data from the Activity Matrix.** These sheets are Daily, Weekly, Monthly and One-Off activities.

One-by-one add these into the Monthly Planner tab. Do you have a Group Call listed as a weekly activity? Choose what day and add it in. Have you got the COVID Time Capsule as a one-off? Pick a day and schedule it in.

As an additional extra, while you are getting the info from the different tabs you can assign who from your team into the will do this to help get a picture of spread of activities across your team.

	Monday	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**
Week 1:				
1-on-1 Connection	Chat messages	Chat messages	Chat messages	Chat messages
1-on-1 Engagement	Chess	Words with friends	Words with friends	Words with friends
Group Connection		Group call		
Group Engagement				Drawful
Week 2:				
1-on-1 Connection	Chat messages	Chat messages	Chat messages	Chat messages
1-on-1 Engagement	Chess	Words with friends	Words with friends	Words with friends
Group Connection		Group call		
	Photo Challenge	Photo Challenge	Photo Challenge	Photo Challenge

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(You will need a Gmail Account for this).

By now you will have a clear visual picture of the month ahead, knowing what activities are going to take place on each day, plus what tools you need to use them.

In the next section of the guide we will give suggestions on digital tools you can use and provide links to relevant setup and help articles. Plus, we will give our top tips to get the most out of each tool!

As a side note, before we get into tools:
Have you join the 'Youth Work Mastery' Facebook group yet?

We share lots of models and frameworks in there.

If you have found this guide helpful, make sure to get on board.

Join Facebook Group

Youth Workers Quick-Guide to Zoom

Since the onset of social distancing Zoom has shot to popularity as the go-to video calling platform. The company added 2.2 million monthly active users within the first three months of 2020.

Here is a Quick-Guide for Youth Workers.

Overall, Zoom is a great platform and is our number one choice for video calls with both big and small groups. This is for a few reasons:

1. Due to it's recent popularity people are accustomed to it
2. People can join a call without an account, and by following a URL for the meeting (comparatively, Skype, you need an account and to be added to a call)
3. Youth can join calls without downloading software
4. Breakout rooms! Great for running games or multiple activities, you can put your call into multiple "rooms". This is a great feature for youth work.

Here are some things to consider:

"Zoom-bombing" has unfortunately become a trend during the COVID-19 pandemic. Essentially, people joining a call through the URL or meeting ID, many times that they have guessed, and purposefully disturbing the call. Though this can often be relatively harmless attempts at humour, there have been disturbing and racist content displayed during these Zoom-bombings.

Thankfully this is preventable. Access a guide on how to prevent Zoom-bombings here.

Some Options for Video Calls

Zoom	Free (Basic)	Up to 100 participants Join by URL No download or account required Breakout rooms! Free meetings only up to 40 mins (though currently this has been put on hold)	For big groups
Skype	Free	Up to 50 participants Must download software/app Must create account	For big groups
Google Hangouts	Free	Up to 25 participants Join by URL No download or account required	For big groups
Facebook Messenger	Free	Up to 8 participants Join in app Account required	For small groups
Whatsapp	Free	Up to 4 participants Join in app Account required	For small groups

Digital Youth Work Activities

In 1965, Gordon Moore, the CEO of Intel stated that computer power would double every year. Now dubbed 'Moore's Law', we know that he was correct, however, it has double every 18 months.

This exponential growth means that every 18 months we grow in leaps and bounds. The first iPhone came out just over 10 years ago. Think about that for a second.

All of this is to make one point: 2020 is a great time for digital youth work. There are countless resources available to us that weren't available 10 years ago. Additionally, young people have a lot more access to technology than at any other point in human history.

Rather than provide a list of digital youth work activities, we think it is better that we come together and crowd source these activities. So we have created a Googlesheet that you can access and edit without an account. Glean the goodness from others and add your top tips and ideas.

View and add to the Crowd-Sourced Digital Youth Work Activities Database here

We hope that you have found this valuable.

YouthWork.io is committed to training and resourcing youth workers worldwide.

Join our community of youth workers in the **'Youth Work Mastery'** Facebook group.

Join Facebook Group