myplace support team

Media and IT Facilities

Introduction

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Technology marches on apace but today's generation of young people take it in their stride and computers and digital media terminology are a universal language for most. The opportunities a media centre provides for work around information and communications are huge. This briefing provides a few pointers and advice on what to consider if you're including information technology (IT) as part of your **_myplace_** facilities.

How to use media and IT

Media centre, computer room, IT suite – call it what you will, it's still just a room with a bank of computers and ancillary equipment in, as many of them as you can and as high a specification as you can afford.

The more important consideration is what activities are you going to use them for? There are lots of possibilities, and the challenge is to provide creative learning opportunities that take participants beyond the role of being just passive observers. Projects can engage young people in everything from video production and digital imaging to live and internet based performances. Or they can be information based, sourcing advice and guidance using the internet to track down appropriate sites on a range of youth issues from alcohol and drugs through to the environment and volunteering opportunities. However they're used, the learning should be active, and the benefit is showing how it is created – it certainly shouldn't be top down.

Within the youth work sector there are huge opportunities to engage young people and stimulate their interest, and it's easy to get excited about the applications and tools available. It is important to think about how you can work together with young people to make the most of the creative opportunities offered by technology. This is important because, used well, it can re-engage, excite and spark young people to learning, prompting skills and behaviours that will be beneficial throughout their lives, enabling them to be active decision-makers, risk takers, problem-solvers, imaginative, creative and reflective.

Having said that, it's essentially about having fun with computers in a safe environment, probably the most simple and effective way of learning about these complex technologies.

So, as well as using the internet for information, advice and guidance, you could use it to enable young people to research activities and opportunities in the local area that they are interested in attending. Or you could network your group with a peer group or other young people's group in this country or further afield to share news and views and widen horizons, perhaps using Skype, a software application that allows users to make voice calls over the internet.

You could support members of the group to create a website promoting opportunities at the centre and encouraging others to join in with these. Or run an online campaign to change something that they feel strongly about in the community. And whilst they're doing this they could design and publish posters using desktop publishing or graphic design softwares to help highlight the activity and promote it to others or produce a centre newsletter or information sheet to keep everybody informed.

But this barely scratches the surface of the opportunities that are available or the longer-term projects they could get involved with. What about, for example, film and video editing and online publishing on YouTube, where you can upload and share videos? This is a great way to give young people a voice and for them to express themselves. And, who knows – their film could go viral and be seen by other young people all over the world. Another popular programme might be a digital still photography project. After taking photos these can be manipulated on the computer and an exhibition staged in the *myplace* centre of the young people's work.

There's all sorts of musical applications too or you could choose to engage them in interactive animation.

So, one of the first things to do is to find out from the young people what sort of applications and uses appeal to them and how they would like to use the facilities. You will then need to either brush up your own skills or find someone locally who can run these sessions. Be aware though that you will need to have some careful guidelines and protocols in place for the use of your media centre. Otherwise, you may find the use of

games and time spent on social networking sites tends to predominate. It's fine to allow some supervised time for these sorts of activities, but perhaps this should be as a reward for attendance and good work during the formal session, rather than as an activity in its own right. Remember that the activities undertaken in the *myplace* centre are intended to be both positive and educational.

Other protocols and guidelines you will need to consider include young people's online safety – there's a wealth of information available on this and perhaps running some starter sessions will be a good introduction for young people to discuss, understand and make sense of the online and digital world before they're allowed wider use of the facility. Access to the suite is also a consideration. You may not want to restrict this too heavily outside of formal sessions but clearly no-one should be able to use it unaccompanied or without appropriate supervision, both for their own safety and to make sure the equipment is not mistreated or used inappropriately.

Again, there's lots of advice out there online and many *myplace* centres that have already been down this path will also have tips they're able to share. Pick their brains, and also those of the local IT specialists. Meanwhile, here's a question to start with – are you going to go the Mac or PC route?

Action planning

Young People

Make sure young people play a full part in deciding which technologies and tools to use in the *myplace* centre, but ensure all groups have the opportunity to participate and the consultation is not monopolised by one group to the exclusion of others.

Making a Difference

Over the past few years, career opportunities in the digital media sector have increased dramatically. The interactive media industry is reaching maturity and needs qualified professionals able to offer a diverse range of expertise. Learning a new skill at a *myplace* session could be the start of a lifetime career.

Vision and Values

Don't lose sight of your wider vision for the *myplace* centre. Of course, taking part in any digital activities should be fun, but it should also serve an educational purpose. It's not all about providing a platform to play games.

Practicality

Constraints of size of room, cost of equipment and software, maintenance, repair and replacement costs, staff costs and finding appropriately trained leaders to run sessions will all impact on the ambition of your plans. Walk before you run.

Tools, ideas, exercises:

Arrange a showing of Exposed – an awareness raising film and supporting activites aimed at 14 to 18-year-olds, dealing with the issues of sexting and cyberbullying, which is on the Thinkuknow website. Discuss any issues and questions raised. Have trained and trusted adults available to deal with any emotional issues the film may raise.

Links and Further Guidance

Youth Work Online is a space where you can share your questions about the impact of digital technologies on work with young people, about the policy or practice of digital youth work and update colleagues about new developments and share your latest work. New members are welcome in the network, whether looking at policies for digital youth engagement; practical tips on e-safety; or ideas on the latest or best digital tools to use. Digital and social media skills are rarely part of standard training for practitioners working with young people and policies can often focus on blocking access, rather than promoting positive use of the technology. The network held a 'month of action' between 14 March and 8 April 2011, culminating with a national conference. See network.youthworkonline.org.uk/?xg_source=badge

Register your centre as a UK online centre. This network of thousands of community based ICT centres across the UK provides information, access to a wide range of experience and information on funding. See www.ukonlinecentres.com/centre-partners.html

Online safety is paramount. Before running any computer sessions at your centre it's probably worthwhile familiarising yourself with 2010's safer children in a digital world report review by Professor Tanya Byron. The full report, an executive summary and action plan can be found at webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/tna/+/http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/byronreview/

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre has a Thinkuknow (TUK) teachers and trainers area with resources for professionals working with young people. There are films, presentations, games, lesson plans and posters covering a range of issues from grooming by child sex offenders to cyberbullying. All of these resources encourage young people to have fun with new technology, whilst staying in control of the risks. The organisation also runs free half-day training sessions which you'll need to attend to access some of these activities. See www.thinkuknow.co.uk for more details.

See also the Nominet Trust website at www.nominettrust.org.uk and www.saferinternet.org.uk for a range of practical resources focusing on the safe and responsible use of new technologies.

WISE KIDS is a not-for-profit company providing training programmes and consultancy in new media, internet and mobile technologies, internet proficiency, literacy and safety. Individuals and communities need the knowledge, skills and tools to use these technologies to access information, learning, participate online, create and share content and services, and network online. See www.wisekids.org.uk for more.

Hi8us is a national media and arts charity producing innovative media with young people in their communities. Its work is bound together by a common ethos based on the production of ground breaking film, television and media; the collaboration between experienced film and media makers, young people and their communities; and the belief in using media as a catalyst for changing lives. Its core aims include reaching young people at risk of social exclusion and enabling them to articulate their experiences and tell their own stories; enabling young people to employ their talents to create media and to, in turn, use this experience as a catalyst for change in their own lives and in their communities; and creating groundbreaking television, film and new media through a unique collaboration between professional filmmakers, web-designers and non-professional participants. More information at www.hi8us.co.uk