

Social Work Community ‘Should social workers be on social media?’

Sharmeen Ziauddin:

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It’s 2024, and social media is a massive part of many of our lives, so on this episode I’m asking the question, ‘Should social workers be on social media?’ Joining me to discuss are two guests who are both social workers and YouTubers. Firstly, we have Yewande. Yewande is an experienced social worker and manager in child protection. Her YouTube channel, *Young Black Social Worker* focuses on social work content for students, newly qualified and experienced social workers.

Joining her we have Kayleigh Rose Evans, a social worker who has experienced working in various different adult services across some of the most deprived areas of England. She shares all her insights on her YouTube channel.

Both started their YouTube channels in the beginning of the pandemic back in early 2020, and both have thousands of subscribers on YouTube and followers on Instagram, and they’re both on TikTok too.

Some of the questions I asked them were, ‘Why did they create a public social media profile about their work as social workers? What are some of the positives and negatives of having a presence on social media?’ They talk about confidence and also give advice for students and newly qualified social workers on how to use social media personally and professionally in a safe way.

So let’s have a listen. [0:01:59.8]

Kayleigh Rose Evans:

Hello.

Yewande:

Hello.

Sharmeen Ziauddin:

Hi. So let’s get straight into it. Why did you start a YouTube channel dedicated to social work? [0:02:08.5]

Yewande:

So I guess I started YouTube, as you say, during the pandemic as a way to provide relatable content to social workers. I started an Instagram account, @youngblacksocialworker, where again I spoke

about all things related to social work. I gave advice, I spoke about various different topics, and also just provided, you know, emotional support for social workers, student social workers who needed that, really. And what I felt at the time was that there wasn't really a platform for social workers, and especially for creators who, in a way, looked like me.

When I first started my Instagram page, I didn't actually show myself. So I was very anonymous. No one knew who I was, and most of the communication that I had with people was in direct messages, so sort of private messages. And a few months later I guess kind of thought about, 'How can I take this content, how can I take my conversations with people to the next level?' And part of that was around revealing myself, just making people know who I was, who they were talking to. And again, being able to provide that more relatable content for people.

So yeah. That's kind of where my YouTube channel came about. Why I decided to dedicate it to social work is just mostly because...so I'm eight years' qualified. At the time of creating my YouTube channel I was probably about three or four years' qualified. And what I felt at the time was that there wasn't a lot of content around there for child protection social workers. And when I was looked at social media there were a lot of things that were tailored for, say, social workers in America, social workers in various other countries. I couldn't really see social work content that was in the UK. So yeah, making a YouTube channel in one part was a way of kind of reaching the masses, in a way. Yeah, creating content for social workers.

But also from a personal, selfish point of view, it was also a way of me putting myself out there, being a bit more confident, being a bit more...pushing myself out of my comfort zone really because, yeah, for about six to nine months I'd kind of been hidden behind an Instagram page and people didn't really know who I was. So yeah, it was kind of, yeah, it was making sure that I was able to do things that I hadn't done before, really.

Sharmeen Ziauddin:

And Kayleigh, can you relate to that? [0:04:40.2]

Kayleigh Rose Evans:

Oh yeah, I definitely relate to quite a few things that you've been saying, especially around how there was a lot of representation of other countries but not necessarily the UK. And I'm the opposite end to you 'cause I'm adult services, and I know there's a lot of crossover. But yeah, I started at a similar time. And I just really enjoy podcasts and videos and things. I find that I learn a lot from conversation. I'm definitely a people person. And I just felt that the platform of...those sorts of platforms of video content and things really helped me so much. But then when I looked at finding social work-related content there wasn't much out there. And it kind of made me realise that it would be good to have more prominent social workers speaking and sort of representing the field.

So I just felt that there was a gap there. And I also feel like university's really helpful and really sets you up, but there could be sort of a collaboration between people in practice and then also people who are coming from a theoretical side as well. So I was doing

a Master's in professional development and I told them about my ideas and I ended up submitting a video as part of the course. And that went well and it kind of gave me the confidence to start, because it was just about actually starting it. Because at first it was very daunting to put myself out there, especially on video where you're very exposed. So I started doing public speaking classes and things and I thought, 'I know this is something I really want to do and I feel like there's a gap and it's something I personally want to do for myself,' but I also felt I could help other people and I'd struggled with my own confidence, especially with interviews. And I felt that when I was first coming into social work I was quite surprised by how hard the interviews were. And I'd been collecting information on that and I felt that putting that into a video format would be super helpful. So that's kind of some of my first videos were focused on that. And getting some positive feedback really kept me going to continue, really.

Sharmeen Ziauddin:

So you both mentioned confidence. Other than confidence, what other positives have sort of come out of you both kind of putting yourself out there and talking about social work? [0:06:59.9]

Yewande:

So I would say there have been a lot of students, practitioners who have, through creating content, have been able to reach out and say, you know, 'What you posted on YouTube, what you posted on Instagram is really relatable. I'm a student. I'm trying to interview or I'm looking for... I don't know what to do on my placement and seeing your videos have been really helpful.' I've had students say that my videos have been shown in their lectures. I've had people say that they've used my videos for when they're interviewing, and just given them some tips and advice, really.

And the other thing that I did as well, during the pandemic, was that I...there was another app that a lot of people were on at the time, and I created sort of a weekly check-in for practitioners where they could all...where we could all meet. We had a space to meet and just talk about some of the struggles that we were going through during the pandemic. And I think given that the pandemic was such an unprecedented time for everybody, and so sort of...yeah, no one knew what was going on, no one knew what was happening. And I think for social workers, we felt a bit alone during that time. So creating that space for social workers to just come together and say, 'This is how I'm feeling at work. This is how I'm feeling. This is how I'm doing with the pandemic. This is...,' you know, 'cause a lot of people weren't receiving that from their work. And I think it was also another space as well, given that everything kind of moved to virtual, it was also a space or a forum for students to link in with those who were in practice. So that was a positive for me in terms of social media.

But yeah, just knowing that I'm able to give relatable content to social workers and they can see the realities of the profession as well. Especially coming from a child protection background. If people don't talk about the realities of child protection or safeguarding then, you know, you can go in quite blindly and quite naïve to what the pressures are, what the stresses are. So that's been a positive for me.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Okay, what about you, Kayleigh? [0:09:07.7]

Kayleigh Rose Evans: Yeah, I just feel like it creates a space where you can have reflection and discussion about things that sort of are affecting social workers and students, really. And I find that that's something that you don't always get time to do day to day, but I can create my own time, you know, to do that. And sometimes when I'm putting together ideas for content or answering questions that people have asked me, it kind of keeps me going with my knowledge as well because I'm always having to research things. So I feel like it keeps me on the ball with what's going on.

And that also gives me...it actually helps my wellbeing in my job as well because I feel so interested and invested in it, and it kind of develops me more as a professional. And then if I'm struggling with something in the day and it may be to do with, like, a system that I'm working in, it sort of...this is something that's just what I've created and I have full control over it, like creative control, and I enjoy that. And I just found that I enjoy helping people on a day-to-day basis in my job but it's interesting to see how you can actually impact loads of different people from these platforms. So people who are going for jobs, like you said, and people with their confidence, students as well. So that makes you feel good as a person and it's good to have that impact on people.

And I think as well, the career opportunities that you get off the back of it can be really good. So I've been offered opportunities to do things that I would never have been offered if I hadn't have been putting myself out there. And I think that's kind of cool because you think, 'Well, anything could happen!', you know? And something these opportunities, it's almost like they're perfectly crafted for you because the content that you share is unique to what you're particularly interested in. And then you can connect with like-minded people.

And it definitely has taught me a lot about thinking about things in different ways. Like it's given me a real critical look on resilience in social work, for example, from sort of engaging in discussion with people and what works and what doesn't in social work. So yeah, I think there's a lot of positives to doing it.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Okay, so we've spoken about positives.

Kayleigh Rose Evans: Yeah.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: What about the negatives? Have you, both of you, experienced any negatives and what are they? [0:11:32.4]

Kayleigh Rose Evans: Yeah. So I have had some of the negative sides. I think a couple of times I've been trolled sort of online. It was on Twitter actually, but also there's been times where I've sort of found myself feeling a bit vulnerable on YouTube from strange messages and also repeated sort of messages on lots of different videos that have made me think, 'Oh, I'm not really comfortable with this person watching my videos.' And I think it's about learning how to protect yourself when that does happen.

So I think especially when you're putting yourself out there on video, you're very out there. So I think it's about sort of creating a space that makes you feel safe still, and learning how to use the 'block' function so that you're keeping the right community there.

But I think it's also about allowing that conversation, you know. I'm always open to people disagreeing with the things that I say. Like, I'm absolutely fine with that. But I think it's just when it becomes intense. And it can be hard to know how to navigate that, especially when maybe there's not too many people in social work that are doing the same sort of stuff. So it's nice to develop a network of support of people doing similar things so you can ask, you know, 'Have you ever had this situation happen to you?' or, 'What would you do?'

And then I think another downside as well is it's so fast-paced. Sometimes you can get a comment and you think, 'Ooh, I don't quite know how to reply to that.' And I think you do have to be really careful not to knee-jerk your reaction because there's such a permanence of information online. So you might think that you've put something out and then you've deleted it, but it could still be there and it can be found. And obviously we're regulated so we have to be careful.

And things can affect your future job prospects as well. So I think it's just sometimes the negative is that you think, 'Oh, I do have to be careful that I'm not putting the wrong things out there.' So just monitoring that, really.

Sharmeen Ziauddin:

Yewande? What about yourself? Have you experienced any negative comments or just general disadvantages of having a YouTube channel? [0:13:46.6]

Yewande:

Not mostly related to YouTube but other platforms. So similar to Kayleigh when you put content out there, obviously you control what you recorded and edited and uploaded, but you can't control where that information goes, where that video goes, where that picture goes or whatever. And it can be difficult when...especially given social work, you know, when people hear 'social work' there's many different connotations attached to the title. You know, I always tell myself that I'm not here to change anybody's public opinion about social work or try and minimise anybody's experiences that they may have had with social workers. And I think again, coming from a child protection background, you know, it can be a challenge. So yeah, it's just when your content goes on certain platforms that you weren't anticipating for it to be on, and it's just how do you manage that, because as much as I'm...it's a bit strange 'cause it's a bit of an internal battle. Because you've put yourself out there in terms of videos and your voice and your image, but for me personally I'm still quite a private person. So I'm not someone who...I can still be quite shy. So yeah, that can be a challenge.

In terms of other sort of challenges that I've had with social media and YouTube and things, it's just sometimes it can be quite overwhelming, especially when you're doing a full-time job and then some. So, you know, more than a 9-5 and, you know, you've created a platform that you want to be really beneficial for practitioners. And I guess sometimes it's that balance of, 'I've still got my day job that I'm

doing but I also still want to create content for people,' and it's that difficult balancing, trying to be as consistent as you can be. And I guess also when you put yourself out there and people are in need of what you're putting out there, they want sort of the information, they want the content there and then, they want it fairly quickly. So when you tell people, 'I'll put a video out next week,' or, 'I'll put this out next week,' and you know, for whatever reason you're not able to meet it, it can be a bit of, yeah, an internal battle for yourself to think that you're failing people and a bit of imposter syndrome as well. So that's been something that I've struggled with, with social media.

The other thing as well that I thought about recently was people knowing you but you not knowing them. So I'm still very much in practice and it's...because again I'm quite a shy person, private person, it still feels quite awkward knowing that people know...watch the videos and you don't know what their perception is about you. And you know, if people that you work with know what you do on social media, you know, I can't be perfect every day and there are going to be some days where...I have good days and I have bad days, but it can also be that internal battle of, you know, trying to keep up a certain image online but also in your day job knowing, or not knowing, who is watching you and who is seeing your highs and your lows, basically.

Sharmeen Ziauddin:

Let's talk about service users. How do you maintain your privacy from service users or have you ever had any experience, good or bad, from somebody you have worked with and they've seen your content online or they've Googled you or looked you up? Or when you talk about your work, do you have certain boundaries that you've put in place when you talk about service users or particular cases? 'Cause obviously you have to talk about the work you do, but how do you keep that private from your audience? What have you got in place to make sure you don't sort of cross that line? [0:17:49.1]

Kayleigh Rose Evans:

So I keep it very separate. So I have a professional account and a personal account and I don't follow social work-related content with my private account. So my Facebook's locked down. I would never accept sort of a friend request on there from a service user if they were to find me on there. But I wouldn't have a problem with people that I've supported following me on YouTube 'cause it's opensource and I'm happy that everything I share on there is really professional, 'cause I'm careful with what I put out and I would never sort of share any identifiable details.

So I don't feel sort of nervous around that. And I do know that someone that I was supporting followed me on my YouTube channel, 'cause you do get notifications each time someone follows you, and I just happened to notice. But this was someone that I'd had a really positive work relationship supporting them, and they sort of wanted to follow what I was saying. And I just felt that that was positive.

I think the only issue you may have is that if they're then commenting and they make it known that, you know, they've been involved with social services, other people could maybe see that. I think that's the only issue. But I think that, you know, people could do that anywhere.

And I think that in terms of the privacy of it, I think that I'm careful not to follow...so for example, if I was following an Instagram page or a Facebook group that was full of people, if I then follow it with my personal account there may be a way that they could see all of my friends in my private life, and I don't want to expose all of them or any details about my family. I may have, like, things in the background that'd show where I lived, whereas when I'm putting my YouTube videos up I use the same background, I don't have anything identifiable in the background, so I keep things like that safe, really.

Sharmeen Ziauddin:

Yeah, so you've given it quite a lot of thought, clearly, and having a private and a professional account is a good idea. Yewande, what about yourself? [0:20:09.9]

Yewande:

Yeah, so similar to Kaleigh. I make sure that any content that I upload onto YouTube, onto Instagram, wherever, I've planned and I've planned again. So for my YouTube videos I pretty much have a bit of a script that I follow, that I make sure that, you know, I'm very confident of what I've written and what I'm uploading. And I'm also not thinking about just now, not just thinking about, 'Oh, I've uploaded it. How is it going to be received now?' I'm also thinking about how it could potentially be received in the future as well. And given that, you know, all our registrations are...you know, we're still practising, active social workers, it's being mindful of that and making sure that, you know, you're considering data protection.

And in terms of talking about anything related to people that I might have worked with, so service users, I wouldn't talk about any personal families, children or families that I've worked with. And if I did, it would be very, very...it would be such that I...it wouldn't be easily identifiable to that family. Because I have to be mindful also that, 'Has that family consented to me talking about their personal situation online?' No, they haven't. So I have to think about, with each thing that I'm putting out there, what is my aim? What am I trying to achieve from what I'm uploading? What do I want people to receive from what I'm uploading? I don't just kind of talk on the internet for talking's sake. That's not me. So I have to think about, 'This particular thing that I'm putting out there, is the reward greater than the risk?' Because if it isn't, then there's no point in me talking about it. And I've done well so far, for the past four years. I haven't had anybody find me on social media or make it known that they know me from social media. I only go by my first name. I don't go by my first name and my second name on social media. As I said earlier, when I first started Instagram, I was very private, and again it was because of the fact that I was still a practising social worker at the time. And I was just worried about, you know, if your content gets into the wrong hands, how would that be received? So that's why it took a lot of thought and effort for me before I then thought, 'Okay, so the next thing that I will disclose is my name, my first name, and my first name only.' I mean, if people want to find you, I'm sure there are means for people to find you. But for the things that I can control, you know, those are the steps, those are the measures that I've put in place.

Sharmeen Ziauddin:

Yeah, that makes total sense. Kayleigh, you touched upon this earlier and Yewande, you mentioned it now in terms of future-proofing. Do you think local authorities look up candidates on their social media

platforms? Do you think they Google them when they're interviewing for social workers? [0:23:00.8]

Kayleigh Rose Evans: I think you've have to be careful 'cause I think people could. And I think, you know, some people probably would. And I think that, you know, I had to sign a form with the local authority I work for just to say that I was representing myself in everything that I was putting out. So I think that people need to think about that, you know, 'cause you are working for someone and it's not worth sort of risking your job, really. So yeah, they are things to consider.

But I also feel so sort of attached to my YouTube channel now that it would actually make me consider whether I'd work for an employer that wouldn't let me continue in doing this, because I feel like it's part of my professional identity as well. So I think it goes both ways, really.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: Yewande, what do you think? Does your employer know about your YouTube channel? [0:23:54.3]

Yewande: In two ways they know, yes. So the first way was when I actually interviewed, I mentioned that I do social media and, you know, 'Is there anything within your policy that will potentially prevent me from...that would make that an issue, really?' And similar to Kayleigh, I think if they turned around and said, 'We don't want you doing social media,' I would have really thought about whether or not I wanted to stay there.

And the second part of that is, as I said earlier, people know me anyway, so there have been people that I've come across – managers, colleagues, social workers that I'm managing – who know me before they make it known that they know me from social media. So yeah, there's two parts to that, really.

Sharmeen Ziauddin: What do you think is the nicest platform for social workers, or the most informative, nice community for social workers to be on? We have an Instagram account, as you guys know, and there is a bit of a community there. What do you both think? [0:24:54.3]

Kayleigh Rose Evans: I think that Instagram is supportive, and I think I've found YouTube really supportive. I've not had...I've been quite surprised by how little issues I've had on YouTube, really, 'cause you are putting yourself out there. I think they're the ones I've found. Facebook as well. But I think you can only manage so many accounts, so they're the ones I place my focus on.

Yewande: Yeah, similar to me. It would be Instagram and YouTube. I did try TikTok at the beginning of the year but TikTok is a completely different space and it is so quick. So you can upload something one day and an hour later, two hours' later it's gone viral. And that is something that I do not have any preparation for. I do not have any preparation for going viral, especially if most of the feedback is then very negative. There was an occasion that I'd uploaded something onto TikTok and I remember driving to work and I could see all these notifications sort of popping up on my phone. I thought, 'What's going on on TikTok?' And when I got to work I could see that people were, yeah, there were very interesting conversations going on in my comments, and it became quite nasty because then people were

talking about their personal experiences with children's services, and then you've got other people sort of, yeah, not being very nice about the situation. And I'm not opposed to people sharing their views and people have their experiences with children's services. Like I said earlier, I'm not here to change public opinion. Or that's not my primary aim of my content, to change public opinion. But when it gets quite nasty then yeah, I thought, 'There's no way I can be part of that.' So I've kind of taken a bit of a backseat with TikTok and I'm mostly active on Instagram and YouTube.

Sharmeen Ziauddin:

Fair enough. So TikTok is not the nicest place to be. I think, yeah, that's a fair opinion. The next generation of social workers have grown up with social media. What advice would you give them about using social media in a safe and professional way? And should they...I mean, what precautions should they take? Because it's kind of second nature to younger people now, isn't it, that it's kind of a given that you're going to be on social media? Any advice?
[0:27:24.8]

Yewande:

I mean, what I would say is know the reasons why you're on social media. You know, what are your aims? What are you trying to achieve from being on social media? Are you there to create community? Are you there to provide support? Are you there to provide guidance? Are you there to kind of soak up what's going on around you because, as you say, there are a lot of content creators and influencers on social media talking about Instagram, so do you want to create a bit of a gateway to meeting them? Do you want to be networking? Is that why you're on social media? What I would say is not to get swept up in very rapid conversations and kind of things that are happening...yeah, not to get swept up in conversations that are happening very rapidly. And if you're going to respond to things that are happening in the news, in policies, just make sure that you're again maintaining your professionalism, because not only have you got your face and your name attached to your social media, but you don't know who's watching you. Your lecturer could be watching you, your employer could be watching you. So just make sure that you're being really professional and really quite safe about the way that you're putting yourself out there because if you're just thinking about the here and now and you're not thinking about your future prospects, as Kayleigh says, potentially you're impacting on, you know, any future job prospects that you have or just any personal relationships that you could have with people.

And also thinking about, you know, the world is very small at the moment, so in terms of, you know, coming across people in the community and things like that. You want to be safe emotionally, physically as well. So yeah, just make sure that you're aware of the reasons why you want to be on social media.

Kayleigh Rose Evans:

Yeah. I just think that, yeah, I agree with everything you said. And I think, yeah, you have to be careful about politics and sort of...you have to be aware of what we stand for as social workers as well. So there are some debates that you can get really in trouble for being part of or expressing certain views. And I think social media is a public arena, like real life is a public arena. If we say the wrong thing in public we can get in trouble for that, and it's just the same. I don't

think that even the most locked-down accounts are ever really private. I really just don't think that's possible right now with how things are. So I think you just have to be more aware than you maybe were before about what you're doing and how you're coming across even on your personal accounts. I just think that you need to take a step between your immediate response to something and not sort of be carried by your emotions and try and put a step between that. I think where people go wrong is when they just write something too quickly in the heat of the moment and it's about giving yourself space to think about whether you really want to have that said, what you've written.

And I think that it's just, you know, there are things that you can do to keep yourself safe. So some people decide not to use their middle name or their last name. They maybe change those. Some people are careful with what they're sharing about their personal information, so sort of what they have in the background that's identifying where you live or your children live. Things like that are important, especially on your profile picture, because a lot of people, even if they're not your friend, can see that Facebook profile picture, for example. And I think that you may think that you've got your account locked down but sometimes platforms like Facebook, every time it has an update your privacy settings can go back to the automatic things. So it's just about keeping abreast of, like, whether you are as locked down as you think you are, and checking on those things every now and again, just to make sure it's safe. And I think if you ever do feel threatened, because there are a lot of social work hate sites, aren't there, now? It's quite scary. And people turning up to people's workplaces. I think it's about finding out exactly what support is available in those situations, and making sure that your employer's taking it really seriously, 'cause people can be at risk. So I think that that's something that's going to be a growing concern in social work, and something that people need to take seriously. So get the help you need if anything bad happens out there.

Sharmeen Ziauddin:

Yeah, that's really good advice. Thank you, Kayleigh and Yewande, for joining us on the Social Work Community. I hope you enjoyed listening to that episode. Do join us on www.thesocialworkcommunity.com or check out the work we do at www.communitycare.co.uk. And if there is something you want us to cover here on the Social Work Community podcast, or if you just want to say hi, you can get in touch with us on www.thesocialworkcommunity.com. Also, if you haven't listened to some of our other episodes on this podcast then do check them out. That's it for now. Bye.