

in care who frequently report feeling worthless, depressed and isolated.

Dr Hammond said: "Stigma and shame are described by many young people in state care. We found that social media provides a window to life before being in care and a way of distancing themselves from it.

Avoiding homelessness

"The risk of homelessness is a problem for young people transitioning from state care but it's an area where using social media could help.

"If young people can reconnect with, create and maintain networks, they have a better chance of accessing supportive networks when it comes to things like finding accommodation."

Organisational support

Social media also gave young people the chance to [network](#) with organisations that could help them with opportunities for personal progression. However, they were not always keen to 'like' or 'follow' organisations that highlighted their experience of state care because it left them vulnerable to stigma.

"Communication via social media carries risks for all users. However, these risks do not stop their usage. Understandably, from the perspective of staff at residential care homes, there was a lot of concern about how best to monitor internet use but we need to be engaged in this digital space to help protect society's most vulnerable young people."

"A digital resilience informed approach, which recognizes digital vulnerabilities and seeks to empower the susceptible to navigate toxic elements of using digital and social media in the context of supportive relationships, enables social care professionals to support young people to engage in this digital space.

This is important as our research reveals that social networks need to be viewed as an important resource for psychosocial support and that the risks shift as young people mature and progress towards

independence."

"Social work policy and practice needs to start to look at how connections created or maintained via social media can have benefits beyond the young peoples' time in care. This longer-term view is vital, as the outcomes for young people do not stop once they leave care.

"We are not advocating a social media free-for-all or presenting social media as a magic wand. But there are positive ways to encourage [young people](#) to engage."

Commenting on the new findings, NSPCC associate head of Child Safety Online, Andy Burrows, said: "At the NSPCC we know that the internet opens up the world for children and gives them a space to play, learn and connect.

"This valuable piece of work makes clear the benefits of social media for looked after children and we welcome this contribution to the understanding of the impact of online. However, social networking carries risks as well as benefits and there is a responsibility on [social media](#) sites to make their platforms safe for their young users, including looked after children who can often be particularly vulnerable, so that they are free to enjoy the online world."

More information: Simon P Hammond et al. Social Media, Social Capital and Adolescents Living in State Care: A Multi-Perspective and Multi-Method Qualitative Study, *The British Journal of Social Work* (2017). [DOI: 10.1093/bjsw/bcx144](https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcx144)

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