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# Whose risk? The mobile phone, risk and the Looked After Child

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# Context

- Interviews with social work practitioners working for a Independent Fostering agency about Looked After Children and their use of mobile phones and social media
- The interviews revealed that the social work practitioners were able to easily identify risks but not the benefits of associated with mobile phones and their use by Looked After Children



## Context

- The interview extract is concerned with a young teenage girl who absconded from her placement for seemingly no apparent reason.



# Benefits and risks associated with the mobile phone

- communication via mobile phones fulfils both emotional and functional needs (Bond, 2010);
- communication via mobile phones enables ongoing connectedness to social networks of friends, family and acquaintances (Jamieson, 2013)
- the mobile phone supports multifaceted relationships that sees a greater disconnect between members of an individual's social network (Bond, 2010)



# Benefits and risks associated with the mobile phone

- Mobile phones enable young people to control their communication with others by turning their devices off, ignoring texts or claiming that their battery died (Weisskirch, 2009)
- Texting for adolescents is equated with social ease and offers a level of privacy that is seen as equal to that of a letter (Kaseniemi and Rautiainen, 2002)
- Adolescents view their mobile phones as 'keys to safety', seeing them as useful in situations that are either threatening or harmful (Devitt and Roker, 2009)



# Benefits and risks associated with the mobile phone

- Adolescents are subject to surveillance and control via their mobile phones i.e. parents and care givers are able to access the adolescent's spatial location



# Challenge for social work practitioners

- A lack of awareness regarding the social network of the Looked After Child
- Ongoing social and emotional connectedness with birth parent(s) and relatives that cannot be easily monitored or controlled
- The nature, level and frequency of communication Looked After Children have with different members of their social network



## Possible solutions

- Ecomap (Hartman, 1995) which identifies the strength of familial relationships
- Social network map recognises the informal social network(s) that surrounds a Looked After Child, and helps identify those individuals that may be able to provide support and counteract stress, as well those who do the entire opposite
- Social work practitioners developing meaningful relationships with adolescents (Winter, 2011)
- Provide Looked After Children with the opportunities to make decision about matters that affect their lives



# Possible solutions

- Possible solutions supported by:
  - United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Articles 3 and 12)
  - Review of child protection by Munro (2010 and 2011) which highlighted the need for the child protection system to be more child centred

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