New Approaches to Training and Safeguarding Using Serious Games

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The Centre for Child Protection at the University of Kent incorporates research and innovation to develop diverse learning opportunities for professionals involved in child protection, including social workers, police, probation officers, lawyers, and clinical and educational psychologists. The vision of the Centre is to provide inspiration and motivation for staff to raise organisational standards through confident practice and empowerment of children and vulnerable people through innovative research and development.

The Centre is known for its development of innovative serious games, which allow participants to reflect on their practice skills within complex scenarios using virtual reality technology. One of the latest serious games created by the Centre focuses on the safe and effective management of sexual offenders in the community. Based on a partnership between University of Kent, Police and Probation Service ‘Visiting Elliot’ represents a home visit to a sexual offender who has just been released on licence. This simulation will be used to train Kent Police, Kent Probation and other staff required to conduct home visits.

Furthermore, the Centre is currently in the process of developing a unique educational tool designed to be used by health professionals and young people. This tool aims to educate users about the risk factors associated with child sexual exploitation, as well as the warning signs victims may display, and the devastating impact such exploitation can have. The tool, “Looking for Lottie”, tells the story of a 14 year old girl, who is groomed online by a young man of 18 years old with him she believes she is in a loving relationship with. As the story develops, Lottie starts to display worrying signs and risk factors that are associated with child sexual exploitation. As users work through the storyline, they interact with various elements to fully immerse themselves in the online world of this 14 year old girl. The second part of the simulation represents the groomers on line life, and explores how he came to be involved in a gang who distribute indecent images.

The work of the Centre epitomises the conference theme of “Transforming Research into Practice”, as all of the Centre’s serious games are all based on research evidence, and have been developed inter-professionally in consultation with partners such as the police, probation, health care providers, and education institutes. This paper describes both the sex offender management simulation “Eliott”, and the child sexual exploitation simulation, “Looking for Lottie”, and describes how both tools can be used to enhance community safety, reduce sexual recidivism, and protect victims, all of which are key aims of ATSA and its membership.
As a workshop, delegates will be introduced to these two new simulations, or serious games, allowing delegates to get valuable hands on experience. During the workshop we will discuss the development of each simulation, the research evidence each is based on, and the learning outcomes. Delegates will receive training on how to use the simulations effectively, and will be able to record their interactive experience, so they can revisit it after the conference. A poster presentation would explain the learning outcomes of each simulation, and the research evidence used to develop them, alongside screen shots of the simulations themselves, to introduce delegates to the unique and innovative method of learning.

Workshop Goals and Objectives:
- Shared learning in the safe management of sexual offenders in the community, and to help practitioners evaluate evidence that may contribute to risk when conducting home visits to sexual offenders.
- To educate and inform health practitioners and young people on child sexual exploitation, specifically the sexual grooming of young people by perpetrators who have been caught in the web of sexual violence themselves.
- To highlight the usefulness of innovative, interactive computer simulations, or serious games for the purpose of education, in order to enhance community safety, reduce recidivism, protect victims, and enhance key workers skills in these areas.