Social Media Use by
Children's Advocacy Centers
Midwest Regional Children's Advocacy Center

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Introduction

Over the past decade the Midwest Regional Children's Advocacy Center (MRCAC) has been a leader in training and technical assistance for Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) professionals. Through the implementation of innovative trainings and technical assistance and the utilization of cutting edge technology, MRCAC effectively supports CACs within the Midwest and nationwide. MRCAC measures the effectiveness of their programming through a combination of surveys, evaluations, and site visit. Moreover, MRCAC believes strong collaborative partnerships are a key component of the CAC model and demonstrates this through relationships with State Chapters, other Regional CACs, and the National Children's Alliance (NCA).

MRCAC examined how CACs can best conduct themselves on social media in light of the serious confidentiality and legal concerns related to the heart of their work, child abuse investigations. This survey gathered information about how CACs are currently using social media to inform the development of a social media guide that will focus on the top two social media tools and how best CACs can use them to further their work – keeping in mind the special considerations that CACs have.

> "Social media is the most relevant communication technique for many in today's society. We believe that in using it, a greater number of users will gain information."

Methodology

The Children's Advocacy Center Social Media Survey was developed using the 2010 Minnesota Nonprofit Social Media Survey as a foundation and building on the questions to ensure relevancy for the Children's Advocacy Centers. The structure was primarily comprised of closed-ended multiple choice questions, but also included several open-ended questions. There were 46 questions on the survey; the number of questions respondents answered depended on whether they used social media in their work.

The National Children's Alliance (NCA) provided the primary contact e-mail address for approximately 750 Children's Advocacy Centers. On July 30th, 2012 each contact was assigned a unique link to the survey tied to its agency's operations. Respondents were asked to complete the survey within 2 weeks. A reminder email was sent out on August 6, 2012. The deadline was extended by one week to give responses more time to complete the survey, and data collection ended on August 20, 2012. Three hundred and forty-six respondents completed the survey; a little over half of the Center's contacted. This response rate is typical of previous MRCAC surveys

which have achieved response rates averaging 50%.

Findings & Discussion

<u>Respondent Information</u>

Survey respondents were primarily from the Midwest (35%) and South (38%). Of the 346 respondents, 14% were from the West and 12% were from the Northeast (See Appendix A for full map of CAC survey respondent locations). Almost half were located in rural areas (48%), with the remainder being located in urban (23%) and suburban (19%) areas. Over half of CACs were 501c3 nonprofit organizations (63%), with the remainder being government based (15%), under a 501c3's umbrella (12%), or hospital based (8%). Most respondents were accredited

Table 1. Respondent Demographics

	N	%
Regional Representation		
Midwest	105	35%
Northeast	36	12%
South	113	38%
West	42	14%
Geographic Location		
Rural	125	48%
Suburban	49	19%
Urban	61	23%
Other	26	10%
Population Size		
Less than 25,000	13	5%
25,000 – 49,999	28	11%
50,000 – 99,999	48	18%
100,000 – 499,999	119	46%
500,000 – 999,999	33	13%
More than 1 million	19	7%
Number of Children Served Annually		
Less than 99	19	7%
100 – 199	63	24%
200 – 499	102	40%
500 – 799	33	13%
800 – 1,199	15	6%
1,200 – 1,999	17	7%
More than 2,000	9	3%
CAC Structure		
501c3 Nonprofit	165	63%
Government Based	38	15%
Hospital Based	21	8%
Under the Umbrella of a 501c3	32	12%
Other	5	2%
CAC Annual Budget		
$99,999 or less	33	13%
$100,000 - $250,00	89	35%
$251,000 – 499,000	76	30%
$500,000 – 750,000	14	5%
$751,000 - $1 million	11	4%
More than $1 million	34	13%

(78%), but some were associates (20%), affiliates (1%), or nonmembers (1%). About half of respondents reported having budgets of less than $250,000 (48%) and less than five staff members (53%). 30% of respondents reported their organizations had a budget of $250,000 - $499,999, 9% reported a budget of $500,000 - $1 million, and 13% reported having a budget of more than $1 million. Almost a quarter of respondents indicated they had nine or more staff members (22%) and another quarter of respondents reported having 5-8 staff members (25%). The survey respondent demographics are reflective of the CAC population as represented in the Project Access data and recent MRCAC Forensic Interviewing and Medical Evaluation survey.

"The need for increased community awareness regarding child abuse, specifically child sexual abuse, dictates that every opportunity be utilized to engage as many people to recognize the signs and know how to be part of the solution that mitigates the trauma endured. In silence, abuse is its strongest. People need to understand that children DESERVE TO BE HEARD, SEEN and BELIEVED.
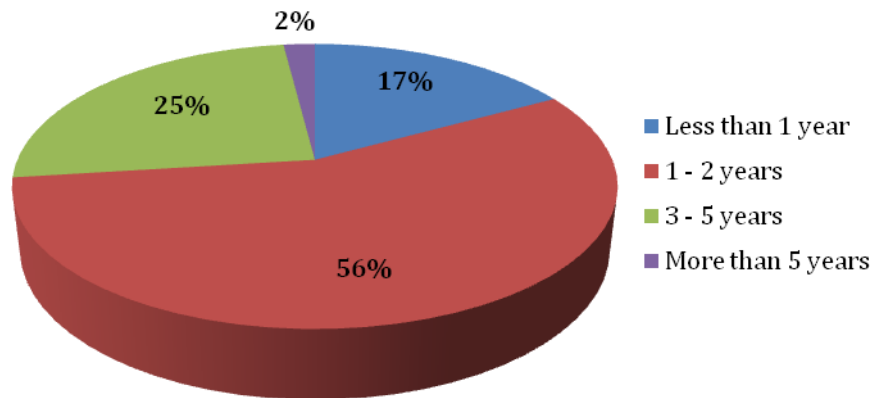
CAC's Using Social Media

The vast majority of CACs currently use social media (72%). Interestingly, when comparing CACs that are government based, hospital based, and nonprofit based, social media use varies drastically. 86% of nonprofit based CACs that completed the survey are currently using social media – but only 37% of government based CACs and 38% of hospital based CACs are

Percentage of CACs Using Social Media
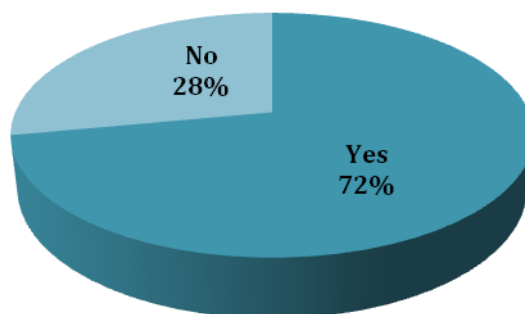
currently using social media. Little information was provided to explain this phenomenon, but it is likely due to stricter regulations and policies surrounding internet and social media use in government and hospital based CACs.

Length of Time CACs Have Used Social Media

The survey revealed that social media use in CACs is a relatively new phenomenon with 17% using it for less than a year, and more than half only having used it for 1-2 years (56%). As the budget increased, the average length of time using social media also increased. Organizations with budgets less than $500,000 were twice as likely to have less experience with social media, with 16% having used it for less than a year – but only 8.6% of CACs with a budget of over $500,000 had used it less than a year. With social media being so new, it isn't a surprise that the vast majority of respondents reported that their organization did not have a policy regulating how social media is used and social media etiquette (83%). Respondents were not asked why they did not have a policy in place, but several did share their reasoning. One organization suggested proper social media etiquette was assumed, and shared, "The same standards of conduct that apply while performing one's job responsibilities also apply regarding social media activities." Several others indicated that all social media content had an approval process and only things approved by the designated person could be posted on social media. The survey revealed that a template social media policy for staff could be useful for many members.
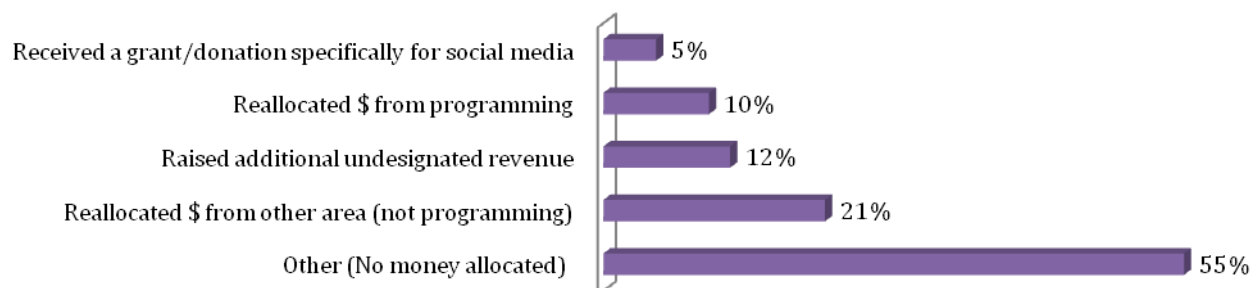
CAC Social Media Uses
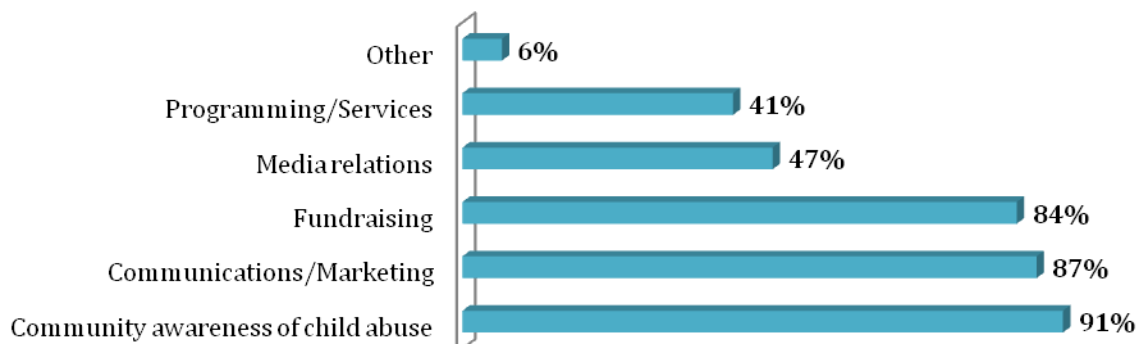
Most CACs used social media for community awareness of child abuse, fundraising, and communications/marketing. 6% of survey respondents reported having "other" uses for social media, which included volunteer recruitment, legislative work, and job announcements. Social media was most commonly managed internally by the executive director and/or leadership staff (57%), but a notable percentage of respondents also reported they managed social media internally by program staff (27%) and communications/marketing staff (16%). Some CACs shared the social media responsibility among multiple departments (11%), while others used interns to manage social media (6%). A small percentage had an external public relationships company manage their social media efforts (2%). It was slightly more likely that the executive director/leadership staff managed social media in organizations with small budgets – which is likely due to fewer staff at the CAC. Organizations devote little time to social media with only 3% devoting at least one half of a FTE (or more) to social media. Most commonly, organizations devoted less than one fourth of a FTE towards social media, with some organizations devoting no staff time to social media (17%). Additionally, few CACs have a budget for social media. The vast majority of CACs have budgeted $0 for social media and only 4% have "social media" as a line item in their budget. Of those that budget for social media, 7% budgeted $1 - $500 and the remaining 9% had social media budgets ranging from $500 to over $25,000 per year.

Interestingly, 55% choose "other" when they were asked how they paid for their social media work. In the written responses for other, the vast majority stated that social media was free and didn't cost them anything. It seems as though their use of staff time on social media was not taken into consideration in this instance. Of those that do fund social media, 21% indicated they reallocated the money from another area of the organization (not programming), 12% raised additional undesignated revenue to help pay for social media, 10% reallocated the

Funding Source for Social Media

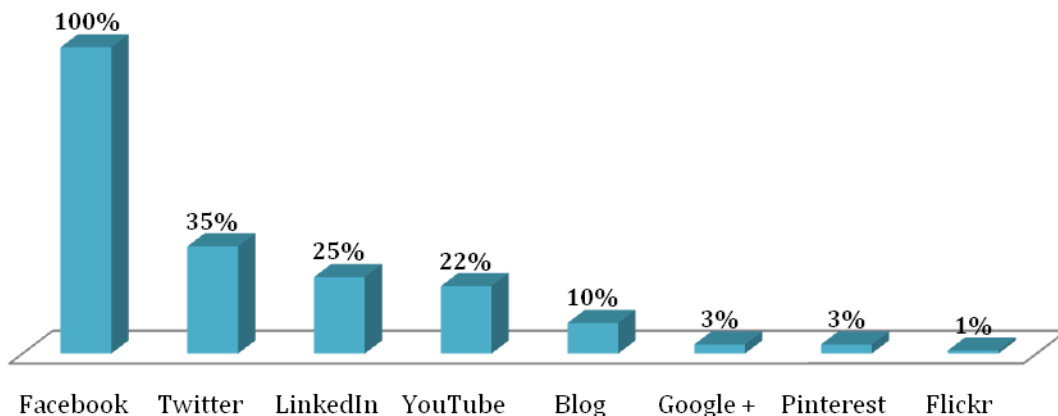| Funding Source	Percentage
Received a grant/donation specifically for social media	5%
Reallocated $ from programming	10%
Raised additional undesignated revenue	12%
Reallocated $ from other area (not programming)	21%
Other (No money allocated)	55%

money from their programming budgets, and 5% received a grant or donation specifically allocated towards social media. The remaining 55% indicated "other" for how they funded social media, and almost all of the written responses for those that selected "other" indicated that the organization did not have any money allocated to social media and that it was managed in-kind by a volunteer, intern, board member, or firm. CAC spending on social media in the future is unclear. Forty-five percent do not plan to increase spending, 35% are unsure of their plans, and 20% plan to increase their social media spending.

"Facebook has more range and flexibility in terms of length of posts. It's more widely used and really allows an organization to establish a personality within the community."

Every single CAC that completed the survey and used social media indicated that Facebook was one of the social media tools used in their work. Twitter was the next most common, with a little over a third of respondents using it (35%). CACs were asked to share why they chose the social media tools they did. Responses most commonly related to the fact that "most people use Facebook or Twitter." While many organizations used more than one tool, only handful shared that they are targeted about the tool they use and the purpose for which they use it. One CAC shared, "YouTube is used for messaging and training; Facebook for volunteers, alerts, and attempts at fundraising; Twitter for news." CACs primarily shared that they either only use Facebook at this time – or they do not have the resources/time to be strategic about how they use the different social media tools.

CAC Social Media Tools Used

Tool	Percentage
Facebook	100%
Twitter	35%
LinkedIn	25%
YouTube	22%
Blog	10%
Google +	3%
Pinterest	3%
Flickr	1%

With so few CACs being strategic in their social media work, it makes sense that only 18% have a plan for their social media efforts and 6% have written goals and objectives for their social media work. Although, it is important to note that a large number of organizations shared in the survey that they are planning to develop a social media plan – or are already in-process. Several organizations shared how they were going about developing a social media plan, which included working with the marketing staff, board member assistance, and hiring a marketing consultant. While only 2% have logic models for their social media work, 35% do evaluate their

social media efforts. There was significant variation between CACs with large and small budgets in terms of evaluation, with 31% of CACs with budgets of less than $500,000 evaluating their social media work in comparison to 50% of CACs with budgets over $500,000. Within the category of CACs with budgets over $500,000, there was another significant jump when looking at CACs of budgets over $1 million, with 62.5% evaluating their social media work. A deeper look into how CACs evaluate their social media efforts reveals superficial evaluation primarily looking at statistics provided by the social media tool such as comments, likes, and insights. One CAC shared, "We do watch our social media results but do not have a formal evaluation tool." This suggests that CACs would benefit from more insight into how best to evaluate their social media efforts. In tight financial times, it is vital that resources are used in effective places. To understand effectiveness of social media evaluation should be done to ensure the organization is meeting its goals for social media. At a minimum, CACs should develop written measurable goals for social media. These goals should be tracked to ensure social media continues to be a positive return on investment.

Slippery slope of social media

The nature of CAC work holds privacy and confidentially as foundational tenets – but these things may be difficult to meld with social media tools which are based in being open and sharing with everyone. Most organizations shared they have been successful at maintaining this delicate balance with few issues. The vast majority of CACs allow clients to like their page

(88%) and almost three-quarters allow clients to post and like things on their page (71%). Of those that do allow clients to post/like things, most have not encountered any issues (79%). The 21% that have encountered issues shared examples of the issues they have faced. Most commonly, organizations shared that the issue they encountered was a client or parent thanking them and/or mentioning case-specific details on their page. CACs reported that they deleted the post and messaged them privately about the matter. Rarely, CACs reported the issue they encountered was a negative comment on their page. CACs that do not allow comments shared the reasons behind that decision. Two key themes surfaced behind the decision not to allow comments, one CAC explained, "We have explained to clients that it would be best for them not to friend us on Facebook, since it could make it easy for an offender to find their personal information. However, it is up to their discretion and sometimes it is best to seek legal advice on what is best." The other most common theme behind not allowing comments was time-related, a CAC shared that "Time constraints do not permit us to monitor our site consistently enough to filter out negative responses."

CACs Not Using Social Media

The vast majority of CACs currently use social media (72%). There were a variety of reasons CACs are not currently using social media. The most common reasons were:

- Not enough resources
- Privacy/confidentiality concerns
- Not enough understanding of social media/how to use it

The confusion about how to use social media and how exactly it worked suggests a greater need for information and resources. MRCAC's Social Media Guide will be particularly useful for

Do Non-Users Plan to Use Social Media in the Future?
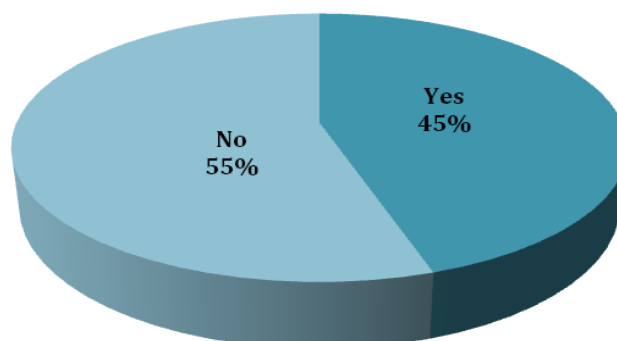
CACs as they embark on social media efforts. Privacy concerns played a large factor in many CACs decision to forgo social media, with 84.3% agreeing with this statement; "We are concerned about privacy issues relating to the use of social media in our work." This large percentage is notably higher than the sentiments of those currently using social media. In comparison, 55.6% of CACs using social media agreed with that statement. One CAC elaborated and shared, "We decided not to use it for confidentiality concerns, as well as ethics (how to control what someone else might post)."

"Together, we stand better poised to impart positive change to the lives of vulnerable children who are at risk or have, sadly been abused. Sharing vital information that our colleagues have gleaned and promoting best practices for prevention and intervention is paramount, and social media is a convenient and easy forum for which this can occur -- and, what's more, it's far reaching, and that matters."

Even though there are concerns and barriers for CACs in using social media, 45% shared that they do plan to use social media in the future. Most commonly, CACs plan to use social media for community awareness of child abuse (75%) and fundraising (74%). Facebook was the future social media tool of choice, with 88% of CACs indicating that Facebook would be used when they do use a social media tool.

Conclusion

The Social Media Use Survey of Children's Advocacy Centers revealed several important insights about social media use. Many CACs are currently using social media successfully without issue. Those that have encountered issues have indicated they have been minor and easily handled without issue. Findings suggest that of bigger issue is the need for CACs to develop more structure around their social media use in terms of defining goals/objectives, developing a social media plan, and a staff-use policy for social media. Taking these steps will ensure that time spent is worthwhile and will help prevent any future issues that may be encountered that could breach confidentiality and privacy.

Future surveys on social media use by CACs should delve further into the potential impact – either positive or negative – that social media use has had on organizations. By gathering additional information on the benefits and pitfalls of social media, CACs can learn what to do and what not to do to ensure their continued success.

Social Media Survey Children's Advocacy Center's Location

• Surveyed Center

Center for Urban and
Regional Affairs (CURA)

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Map made by CURA Staff, Sept 2012
Data Source: Kristen Cici