**Social Work VirtualPal App**

The VirtualPal App will primarily allow Social Workers to make a first connection with other social workers around the world. The aim is to create a Minimal Viable Product (MVP) so it has enough functionality to test user interest while allowing for future expansion.

There are essentially two parts to the project:

* a server that hosts the database and provides services
* an app that users download

Server services & database

Users profiles will be stored in a secure online database and accessed via the app. This is handled by a "backend" server that stores a database of user profiles, deals with synching of the app to the database and handles the connection requests. This server facility will be bought in from a 3rd party and will entail a monthly hosting cost (see below) and some ongoing administration.



App outline functionality

The main flow after downloading the app is:

* User registers & creates a profile
* Moderator approves user
* User profile becomes live
* User views other profiles
* User sends/accepts connection request

Registration & login

After downloading the app, users register using an email address and password. The app may do some basic checking for valid email format. These will become their login details and will be stored in the online database and also on their device, in an encrypted file, to allow automatic login when the app is launched. There will be a GDPR statement about the collection, storage and usage of user data with a consent option. We will need to develop an underlying privacy policy related to this app.

User profile

The user can create their profile to include things like:

* photo - upload a image from camera or image library
* job title - current position & employer (to aid moderation)
* keywords - to indicate areas of interest (select from list)
* their goals/special interests/what they're looking for
* what they have to offer other people
* how people can contact them - nominate preferred method and others (NB these are only visible when connection accepted - see below)
* other (to be specified during design)

As not all of this profile information will be needed for moderation we can, optionally, only collect what is needed at this point. Users can add to their profile when they are approved. All profile data is stored in the secure online database.

Moderation & admin panel

There will be a minimum amount of information required in order to validate the user. This information will be automatically sent to a dedicated email address which will be monitored by moderators. Each request will need to be manually reviewed and either accepted or rejected via a moderation admin panel. Until a new user is "accepted" their profile will not be visible to other users and they will have limited access to the app.

Browse & filter

Once validated, users can view the profile of others who have registered on the app (but not their contact details). This can be kept quite simple in the first instance and made more sophisticated as numbers grow (assuming there is budget for further development).

Basic user details can be in a scrolling list e.g. name, job title - user can then select a person from the list to see more details. We may also have the functionality that allows users to swipe (or prev/next arrows) through the profiles

* this may be useful in early piloting to help people engage with the app, particularly when there are not many users.

We will aim to provide a basic filter of the list on the keywords ...if budget allows. This needs to be assessed as we build the first version.

Connect

If a user finds someone they want to connect with they can send a request. The person ("connectee") they want to connect to will be notified within the app. For this pilot app, notifications will only be done when the app is open (i.e. not using “instant” push notifications as in facebook, whatsapp etc)

The "connectee" can view the profile of the person who has sent the request and either accept or reject the request.

Once the originator receives the ok, both parties will then be able to see the full user profiles which includes their contact details & preferred contact method. It should be possible to build email contact directly into the app but other methods (e.g. directly connect through facebook or linkedin) would be outside the scope of this version. User can be instructed to make these connections outside the app.

Settings

* + Edit user profile - to allow completion or editing of details
  + Remove profile

About the app

* + What is it and how to use it
  + Web links and further info
  + Feedback - allow feedback to inform future development - possibly a link to survey monkey or similar

Distributing the app for piloting

There are a few options to consider and discuss during the detailed specification of the project.

Android devices:

* + distribute outside google play store
  + published on Google play

iOS devices:

* + distribute adhoc outside app store
  + distribute using enterprise account
  + publish to app store

If distributing via app store, a decision needs to be made as to whether it is a free or paid app. See separate document for more detail on distribution options

Cost estimate

Our estimate is XXXXX based on the following tasks:

* + App specification & design
  + Identifying and commissioning server/hosting services
  + Prototype app build, server setup & trialling
  + Implementing changes, complete build of app and testing
  + Build v1 of the app for distribution
  + Attendance at focus groups/events
  + Licensing

Ongoing costs

Allow for approximately XXX per month for hosting costs & other server services. This cost will be determined during specification - there is a trade off between how much we develop on the server side versus how much we buy in - but buying in services is cost-effective. Consideration also needs to be given to ongoing costs associated with moderation and administration.

Outline schedule & tasks

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| March | specification of functionality, navigation/screen design, back-end hosting services, review and amends, sign off |
| April | Prototype build and server/hosting commissioning First user engagement - need to decide who and how many? |
| May | Review feedback & revise 2nd build |
| June/ July | Publish - this date is intentionally broad as it has various dependencies in terms of user testing and feedback |