

Mencap NI



Youth

Be safe online project

Evaluation report

March 2024

Making
sense
of media

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1. Executive summary

Mencap's Be Safe Online project was commissioned through Ofcom's Making Sense of Media programme to:

- build the capacity of young people with a learning disability to engage in online activity
- develop their skills and knowledge about how to stay safe online.

Mencap defines learning disability as a reduced intellectual ability and difficulty with everyday activities, which affects someone for their entire life. Young people with a learning disability are keen to do the same things as other young people of a similar age, which in today's world includes engaging with online media, but they face a range of additional challenges in doing so, including: limited access to equipment and connectivity; strict parental controls; difficulty understanding and operating technology; poor social skills.

While Ofcom's children and young people's programme was originally intended for young people aged 10-14, our experience of working with young people with a learning disability, and the available evidence, suggested that they tend to access online media later and require support to access it for longer than most young people. We are therefore extremely grateful to Ofcom for accepting our proposal to extend the age range of the Be Safe Online project to age 18.

Given the relatively short timescale of the project (12 months), we decided to offer a series of online literacy programmes to groups of young people aged either 10-12 or 13-18 who were already participating in our FIVE health and wellbeing programmes. Since these young people and their families had already built trust and relationships with our youth team, and since the youth team was already aware of their additional support needs, this allowed us to make the best possible use of the time available.

Overall, we provided online literacy programmes to 10 groups of young people, 5 in Belfast and 5 in the Fermanagh/Omagh area of Northern Ireland, as well as an additional online safety event in the Mencap Centre in Belfast. A total of 74 young people took part in the online literacy programmes, with an additional 10 young people from other Mencap services and projects participating in the online safety event.

Delivery of the project confirmed our initial sense that there was a greater need for these programmes among the older age groups. The pre-programme surveys carried out with the young people showed that many of the younger 10-12 age group had very limited online access, and that where they did participate, it tended to be through online gaming using a PlayStation or X-box.

The lack of online awareness and access among this age group made it quite difficult to engage them meaningfully in the programmes.

In contrast, the 13-18 age group were much more active on phones or iPads/tablets, and although a high proportion of them took part in online gaming, they were also more likely to talk to friends online, or to use social media. Their higher levels of access to and interest in these areas made them much easier to engage, and more likely to benefit from the programmes.

Although we experienced some difficulty in making direct 'before and after' comparisons of the data, most of the young people who engaged in the programmes experienced improvements in their confidence, skills and knowledge, both to engage in online activity and to stay safe online. This was evidenced through the young people's self-assessments, as well as through feedback from parents and reports from the youth team. The programmes were limited, however, by a lack of IT equipment, meaning that we were not able to offer as much hands-on, interactive experience of accessing online activities as we would have liked.

In addition to online literacy programmes for the young people, Be Safe Online offered information sessions to the parents, to help ensure that they had the knowledge and skills to support their young people to access online activity safely. Feedback from parents attending the sessions was generally positive, with most reporting increased confidence and ability both to access online activity themselves and to support their child/young person to access it safely. Unfortunately, the sessions were not as well-attended as we hoped, possibly due to the very limited exposure to online activity of some of the young people, meaning parents did not feel this was a priority for them, although it may also have been due to other factors such as lack of childcare.

Areas for further development identified from delivery of the Be Safe Online programmes include:

- developing more practical, hands-on, interactive activities for use within the sessions
- sourcing additional IT equipment to support the sessions through fundraising or seeking sponsorship from businesses
- offering the programmes to young people taking part in other Mencap projects or services, or those involved with other organisations
- developing additional programmes for young people aged 16-24
- creating online safety 'pop ups' targeted specifically at young people with a learning disability
- organising 'expert' sessions delivered by IT specialists, both for young people who already have basic skills and for parents.

2. Background to the project

Mencap exists to support people with a learning disability and their families. We define learning disability as a reduced intellectual ability and difficulty with everyday activities, which affects someone for their entire life. Our vision is to make this the best place in the world for people with a learning disability to live happy and healthy lives.

Within Mencap NI, we provide a range of activities and services to children, young people and adults with a learning disability and their families, including: our early years service for children aged 2-3; family support services for families with a child aged 0-7; employment services for people of working age; housing support services for adults; information services; advocacy support; and campaigns and policy support. We offer a range of projects and programmes to young people aged 10-25, such as our FIVE health and wellbeing programmes; HEROES and Transform peacebuilding projects; summer schemes; and our Youth Forum.

Delivery of our youth and employment activities has highlighted the growing importance of online literacy to both children and adults with a learning disability, as online platforms become increasingly vital for everything from staying in contact with friends and family to searching for and securing employment, accessing benefits, education and healthcare, finding information and shopping for goods and services.

Young people with a learning disability are keen to do the same things as other young people of a similar age, which in today's world includes engaging with online media. For some young people, this can be liberating, allowing them to participate in activity without identifying as being disabled. However, many of the young people we work with, and their parents, are fearful of going online, and many have had negative experiences which compound their fears.

In our experience, young people with a learning disability face a number of challenges, which can act as barriers to their safe and effective use of online services, including:

- limited access to devices, reliable broadband or phone data
- strict parental controls
- lack of fine/gross motor skills necessary to operate digital devices
- difficulty understanding technology and content
- limited attention spans
- difficulty understanding the 'rules of engagement' for digital content
- difficulty making and sustaining friendships.

We were therefore delighted to be commissioned by Ofcom in December 2022 to deliver online literacy training to children and young people through their Making Sense of Media programme. Be Safe Online was one of thirteen projects commissioned in December 2022 to improve media literacy skills across four cohorts:

- older adults
- people living with disabilities, learning disabilities or cognitive impairment
- children and young people
- communities experiencing financial disadvantage.

The Be Safe Online project aimed to increase the online presence and visibility of young people with a learning disability by:

- building their capacity to engage in online activity
- developing their skills and knowledge about how to stay safe online
- providing parents/carers with information about online access and safety to help support them.

The project was designed to deliver the following outcomes for young people with a learning disability and their parents/carers:

At least 70% of young people with a learning disability will:

- be more confident to engage in online activity
- have improved skills to engage in online activity
- increase their knowledge about how to stay safe online
- increase their knowledge about how to identify and report harmful content.

At least 70% of parents/carers will:

- improve their skills and knowledge about how to support the young people's online access
- increase their skills and knowledge about how to support the young people's online safety.

Our approach involved working with young people with a learning disability to help to design, develop and pilot resources supporting the development of their online literacy, in particular in the areas of:

- successfully using devices, platforms and online content
- awareness of how to stay safe online
- identifying and reporting harmful content.

The Be Safe Online project was targeted at young people with a learning disability aged 10-18 from the Belfast and Fermanagh/Omagh areas and their parents/carers. We planned to deliver the project to approximately 80-90 young people in these areas, which were identified by Ofcom as Priority communities, due to high levels of financial disadvantage.

Although the initial tender from Ofcom specified work with young people aged 10-14, we were keen to include young people up to age 18, since both our experience of working with young people with a learning disability and the available evidence suggested that they tend to access online media later, and require support to access it for longer, than their non-disabled counterparts. We are grateful to Ofcom for agreeing to extend the target age range to 18 for the young people we worked with.

Given the relatively short timespan of the project (12 months), we decided to offer the online literacy programmes as an add-on to young people already participating in our FIVE health and wellbeing programmes. Since it can take quite some time to build relationships with young people with a learning disability, this helped to ensure we made the best possible use of the available time and budget to pilot and test our approach to developing and delivering online literacy training for young people with a learning disability in this age range, as well as allowing us to offer added value to the young people participating in these programmes.

Delivery was designed to include eight 4-6 week programmes of online literacy in each area (eight programmes in Belfast and eight in Fermanagh/Omagh), to be delivered in a fun, interactive way tailored to the needs and interests of the young people, and supporting them to build their online skills, knowledge and confidence. This tailoring was informed by the pre-project survey of young people, which asked about: their use of different devices; where they used the internet; what they used it for; what social media they used (if any); and what online games they played (if any). This helped the youth workers to identify the main areas to focus on for each group, depending on their interests and internet usage.

PlayStations/Xboxes were the main devices used by the junior groups, while phones and iPads/tablets were more popular with the senior groups. Most of the young people used the internet at home, with a sizeable proportion also using it in school, particularly in the senior groups. Only a small proportion of the young people (10.9%) said they used it in the library, although this increased to 17.9% in the post evaluations.

Playing games and watching videos were the most popular uses for the internet, although doing homework increased from 28.3% in the pre-evaluation surveys to 51.2% in the post-evaluations. You Tube, TikTok and SnapChat were

the most popular social media used, and Roblox, Minecraft and Fortnite were the most popular games.

The project design also involved providing parents/carers with information about online access and safety via parents' information sessions to approximately 50-80 parents across the two areas.



Creative activity used during one of the sessions

3. Evaluation aims and scope

The overall aims of the evaluation were to assess the impact of the project and to gain a better understanding of what works in supporting young people with a learning disability to develop online literacy.

In addition to assessing the project's delivery against the outputs and outcomes identified in the evaluation framework (Appendix 1), this evaluation addressed the following key evaluation questions:

Impact:

1. Were the young people engaged in the project able to navigate online spaces safely?
2. How effective was the project in encouraging parents to support their young people to be active in online spaces?

Process:

3. How adaptable was our resource/toolkit for working with young people with a learning disability?
4. What did we learn about using youthwork methods to deliver media literacy to young people with a learning disability?

We used a variety of tools and approaches to gather evidence for the evaluation, which we considered to be manageable, proportionate and appropriate for our target groups:

- **Project records:** details of all sessions and participants were recorded on our online monitoring system, allowing us to capture output data such as: number of programmes and sessions delivered; number of participants per programme/session; number of parent information sessions; number of parents participating in sessions.
- **Surveys – young people:** we used surveys to gauge young people's confidence and knowledge before and after participating in the programmes. The surveys combined a range of questions asking them: about their current online activity; to rate their confidence and skills in relation to different aspects of online activity; about their knowledge of online safety. A total of 46 young people completed surveys pre-evaluation, and 56 completed them post-evaluation.
- **Surveys – parents:** parents' surveys were used after the parent information sessions, since these were one-off events. The surveys were used to: gauge their learning from the sessions; identify areas for improvement; and ask about the impact of the programmes on their child/young person. Of the 19 parents who attended information sessions, 10 completed post-evaluations.
- **Surveys – youth team:** as well as asking about the impact on young people, the youth team survey asked them to reflect on their experience of

delivering the programmes, and to provide at least one example of a young person's progress on the project. A total of 4 youthwork staff completed the surveys.

Evaluation considerations

We did not ask for names on the young people's survey responses to preserve anonymity. This was partly to remain consistent with Mencap's policy of making surveys confidential, and partly to ensure the young people felt confident to say exactly what they thought in them.

This had two main implications for the evaluation:

- We were unable to identify which young people completed both surveys, as opposed to which young people only completed a survey at either the start or the end. This limits the extent to which the post-project surveys can be compared to the pre-project results, as we cannot guarantee the results are from the same groups of young people (although there was an overlap).
- We were unable to compare, track and report on progress at an individual level, to understand whether outcomes were common across all young people, or more prominent for some than others.

As a result, we cannot directly attribute any changes highlighted in the post-project survey to participation in the programme on the strength of that data alone. However, we have been able to compare the pattern of results from the young people's surveys with the findings from the parents' and youth team surveys, which gives us confidence that changes evident in the post-project surveys have some validity, even if we cannot be certain of the extent.

While a number of longer-term outcomes were identified in the evaluation framework, there was limited opportunity for follow-up research activity due to time and other practical constraints, and so these are not covered in the scope of this report.

4. Findings

Project delivery: young people's programmes

What was planned	What was delivered
16 online literacy programmes for young people aged 10-18	10 online literacy programmes for young people aged 10-18 (25 sessions) 1 special online safety event
80-90 young people participating in the programmes	74 young people participating in the programmes 13 young people participating in the special online safety session

We originally planned to deliver 8 x 4-6 week online literacy programmes, each targeting 5-6 young people with a learning disability, in two areas – Belfast and Fermanagh/Omagh. Each programme was to be delivered in a fun, interactive way tailored to the needs and interests of the young people and supporting them to build their online skills, knowledge and confidence.

We actually delivered a total of 10 programmes to young people, 5 in Belfast and 5 in Fermanagh/Omagh. These were delivered as an 'add on' for young people accessing our FIVE health and wellbeing programmes in each area. The lower than planned number of programmes was mainly because it took longer than anticipated to develop the online literacy 'toolkits' and to train the project staff in their use, leaving less time than expected for programme delivery.

In total 74 young people participated in the programmes, 37 in each area. Programmes were divided between 'junior' and 'senior' groups, with the junior groups aimed at young people aged 10-12, and the senior groups aimed at young people aged 13-18. While the Be Safe Online programmes proved popular with the senior groups, the junior groups proved harder to engage, as many of these young people had little or no access to online activity. However, as the average group size was slightly larger than anticipated, at around 7-8 participants, the overall number of participants was close to what was planned, despite the staff delivering fewer programmes.

In addition to the 10 programmes delivered, the youth team organised a special Online Safety session for a total of 13 young people on 5 October 2023. Three of these young people had previously taken part in Be Safe Online sessions, but the other 10 had not. During this session, the young people took part in a Jenga activity where they were asked about their online use, and did internet safety quizzes and puzzles. They also took part in a creative activity where they

created a robot with special powers to help them when they were online, and had a discussion about using the internet and keeping safe. Appendix 2 includes samples of the activities completed during the session.

Outcomes for young people

Confidence to engage in online activity

Most young people (76%) told us they were confident about engaging in online activity when they completed the pre-evaluation survey. The post-evaluation survey found that more young people rated their confidence as good or very good (88%), an increase of 12 percentage points on pre-engagement levels.

This increase in confidence was also recognised by parents /carers: 80% said their child's confidence to use the internet was improved (40%) or much improved (40%); the remainder said it was no different.

Skills to engage in online activity

Most young people (83%) said they were good/very good at doing the things they wanted to do online in the pre-evaluation survey. In the post-evaluation survey this increased to 86% (good 27%, very good 59%), an increase of 3 percentage points. Most (52%) also said they were good (21%) or very good (31%) at connecting with people online, an increase of 4 percentage points on the pre-evaluation survey (48%). Although 61% rated their ability to find information online as good (23%) or very good (38%) in the post-evaluation survey, this was actually a decrease of 4 percentage points from the pre-evaluation survey (65%), although it is not clear why.

Most parents /carers (80%) also noted improvements in the young people's ability to do the things they wanted to online, with 50% saying their child's ability was improved (50%) or much improved (30%): 20% said it was no different. Similarly, 60% said their child's ability to connect with people online was improved (40%) or much improved (20%): 40% said it was no different. In contrast with the young people, 80% of parents/carers said their child's ability to find information online was improved (40%) or much improved (40%): one person said it was no different and one did not know.

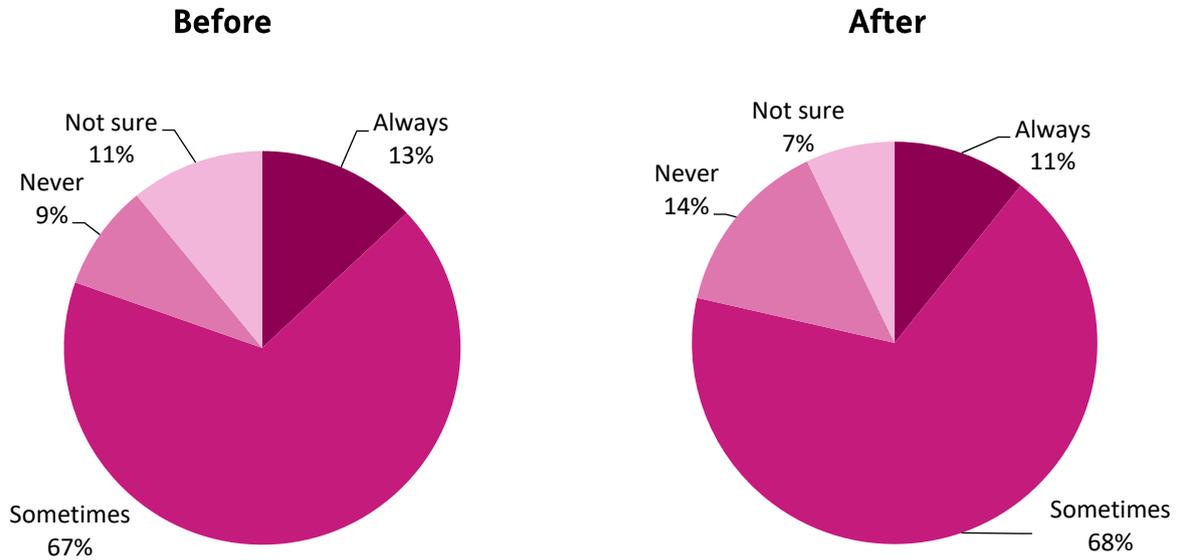
Knowledge about how to stay safe online and how to identify and report harmful content

Most of the young people (84%) rated their ability to stay safe online as good (43%) or very good (41%) in the post-evaluation survey, an increase of 14 percentage points on the pre-evaluation survey (70%).

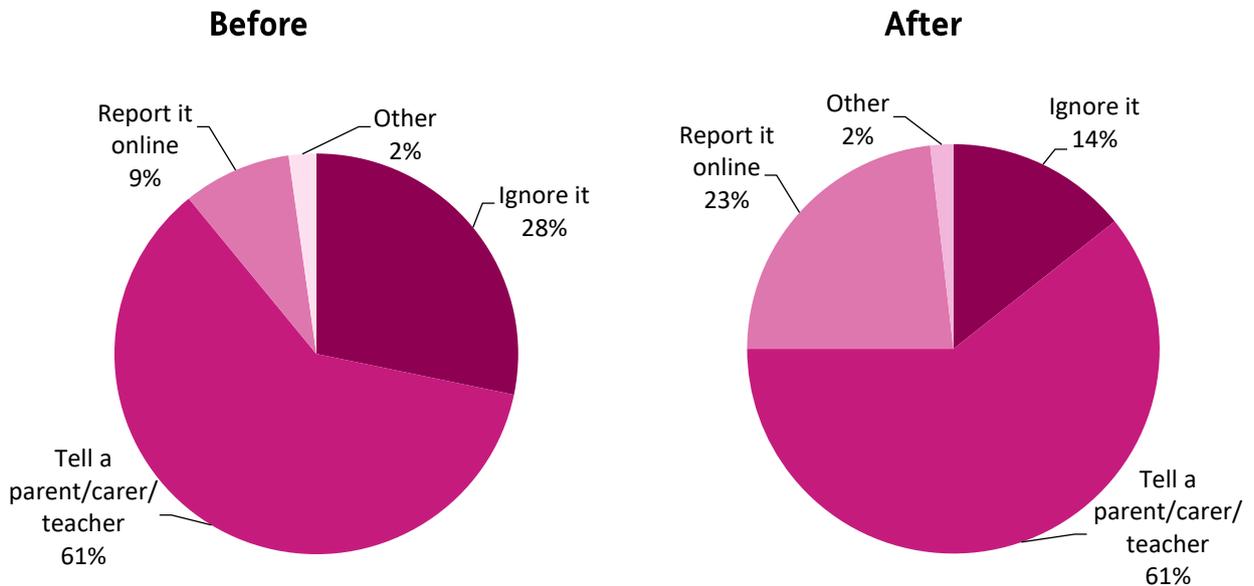
Most parents/carers (80%) also thought their child's ability to stay safe online was improved (20%) or much improved (60%). One person said it was no different and one did not know. Most (80%) thought their child's ability to identify and report harmful content was improved (50%) or much improved (30%). 20% did not know.

We also asked the young people a series of practical questions about online safety and harmful content in the pre and post-evaluation surveys. Their responses changed as follows:

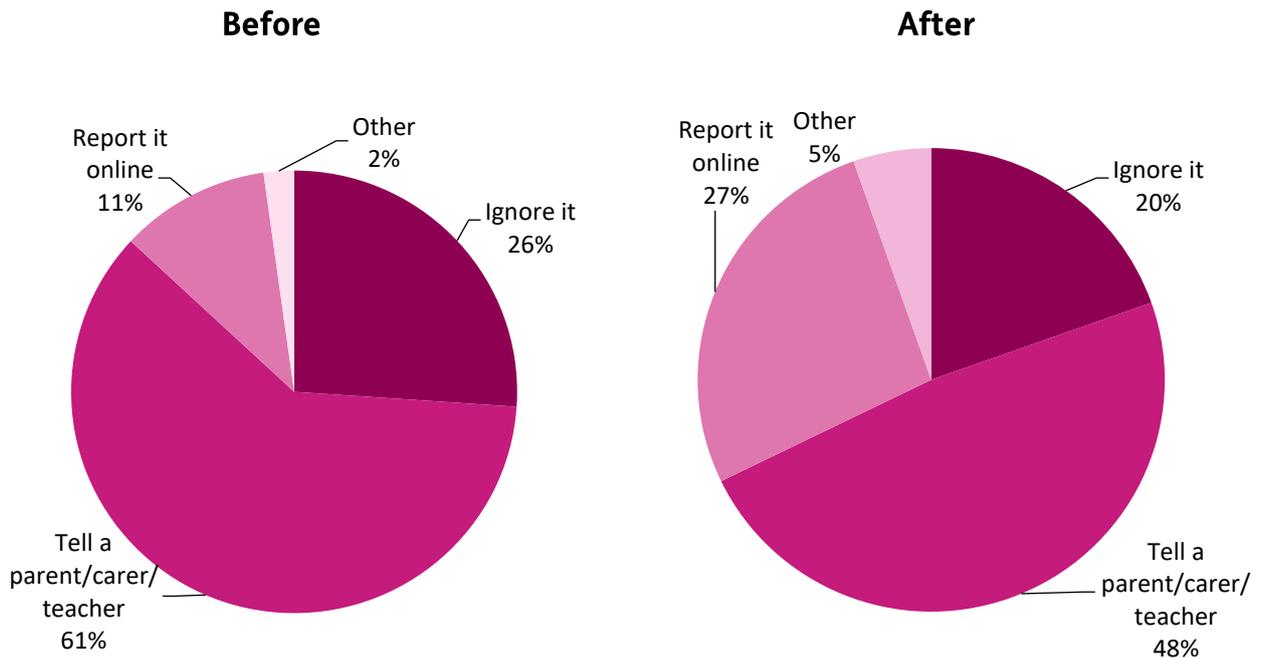
Do you think the things you see online are true?



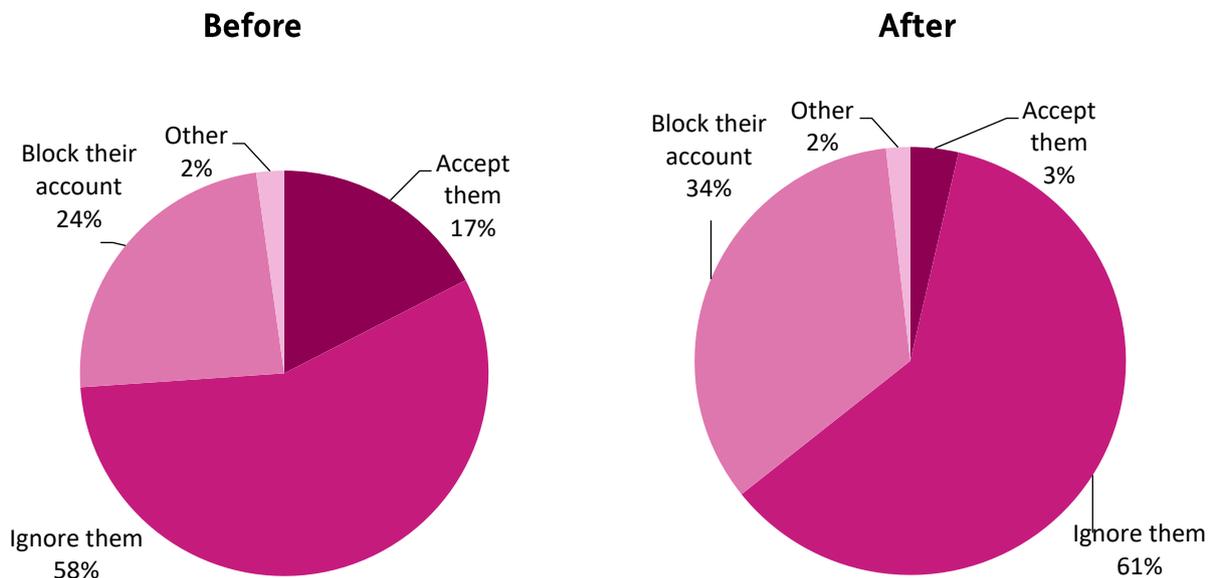
What would you do if you saw something that upset you, or made you feel uncomfortable or scared online?



What would you do if someone said something rude/nasty about you online?

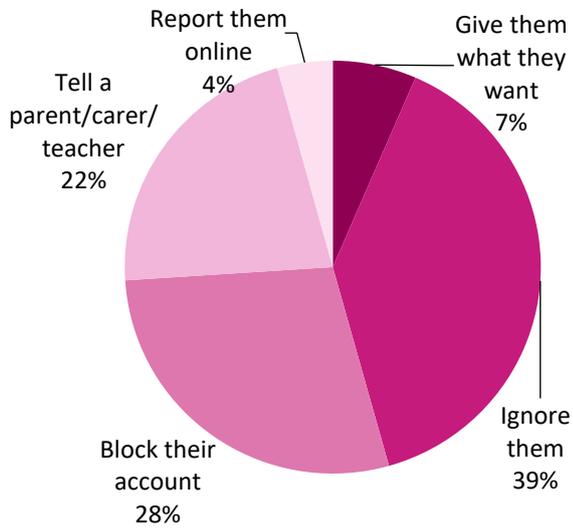


What would you do if someone you don't know asks to be your friend online?

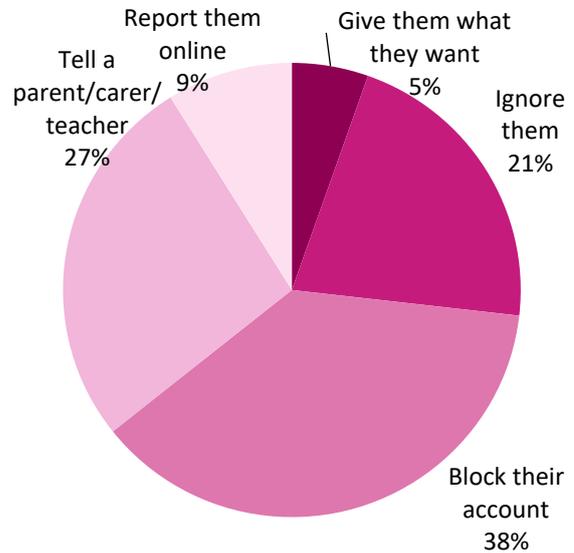


What would you do if you were asked for your address or other personal details online?

Before

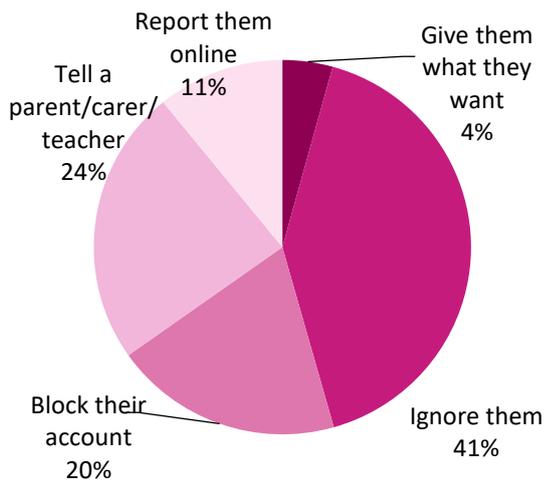


After

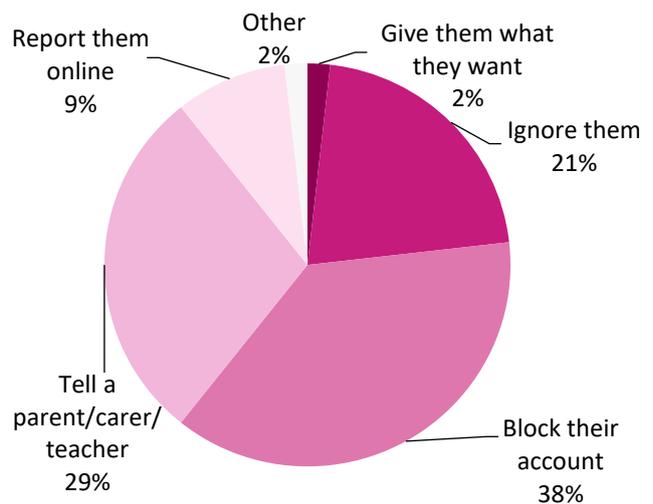


What would you do if someone online asks you for money/gifts?

Before



After



Were the young people engaged in the project able to navigate online spaces safely?

Based on the responses from both young people and parents discussed in the previous section, it appears that there was some improvement in the young people's skills, confidence and knowledge to use the internet safely.

We also asked the youth team for their reflections on the impact of the project on the young people. There was overall agreement that the project had increased the young people's confidence and improved their skills to engage in online activity, and that they had become more knowledgeable about how to identify and report harmful content.

'Young people were able to develop their understanding and awareness around how to keep safe online especially on how to report it and the young people were able to tell staff who their trusted adult would be.'

Youth team member

'it was much more relevant for the older age group, so the need was much more for the older age group.'

Youth team member

However, the general feeling among the team was that the

sessions tended to be more appropriate for the 13-18 age group. Many young people in the 10-12 age range were not active online, although there were a small number who were, and quite a number chose not to engage in the project.

'Some of the young people who took part in the Ofcom session, did not engage in any sort of online activity. This made it hard to measure what they have learnt as they had no hands on experience of being online, especially for the younger age of 10-12 year olds'

Youth team member

The youth team told us about the impact of the project on two of the young people who took part, one from each area:

'N was in the older age bracket of age 13-18. When they started on the project they were very quiet and anxious about taking part. They didn't really use social media, but used the internet for videos and music. From taking part in the project, they became much more aware about using the internet, and had an increased understanding of what the dangers meant and what to do if they ever came across these dangers online.'

'One young person in the 13-18 age range was actively using the internet for researching history. This young person is now more aware that there are things on the internet that are not real, and not to believe everything they see online.'

Project delivery: parents' programmes

What was planned	What was delivered
8 parents' information sessions	2 parents' information sessions
50-80 parents participating in the sessions	19 parents participating in the sessions

We originally planned to deliver 4 parent's information sessions per area, aimed at building their skills, knowledge and confidence to support young people with a learning disability to access online activity safely.

We actually delivered 2 parents' sessions to 19 parents in the Belfast area. Although sessions were also organised and promoted in the Fermanagh/Omagh area, as well as further sessions in the Belfast area, these had to be cancelled as not enough people registered their interest. The 2 sessions that were relatively well attended were delivered at times when we were able to provide activities

for the young people, suggesting that it may have been difficult for parents to attend at other times due to childcare issues and/or work commitments.

Outcomes for parents/carers

Unfortunately, the numbers of parents participating in the information sessions were much lower than anticipated, and not all the parents who attended completed an evaluation survey. Of the 19 parents who attended information sessions, 10 completed post-evaluations. However, those completing evaluations were generally positive about their impact, with only one person responding as either 'no different' or 'don't know' to most of the questions.

Improved skills and knowledge about how to support the young people's online access.

- 9 out of 10 parents/carers said their confidence to use the internet was improved (6) or much improved (3): 1 person said it was no different
- all said their ability to find information online was either improved (8) or much improved (2)
- all said their confidence to support their child to use the internet was improved (5) or much improved (5)
- 9 out of 10 said their ability to support their child's online access was either improved (3) or much improved (6): 1 said it was no different.

Increased knowledge about how to support the young people's online safety

- 9 out of 10 said their knowledge of how to report inappropriate online content was either improved (4) or much improved (5): 1 person did not know
- all said their ability to support their child to stay safe online was either improved (5) or much improved (5)
- 9 out of 10 said their knowledge of tools they could use to keep their child safe online was either improved (4) or much improved (5): 1 person did not know.

The main things parents said they learnt from the sessions were around:

- restricting access and using parental controls (4 people)
- the different apps young people use and how they work (3 people)
- tools to limit and/or filter the information the young people could access (2 people)
- the risks of online access to the young people (3 people).



'Learnt how easy it was for people to speak to children online'

Parent/carer

How effective was the project in encouraging parents to support their young people to be active in online spaces?

'Interesting to share experiences with other parents about what implications the use of new technologies have for our children with learning disabilities.'

Parent/carer

improving their confidence, knowledge and ability to support their child/young person to access online activity safely.

It seems that the parents who participated in the information sessions improved their own confidence and knowledge about online safety, as well as

'It was a very informative evening. I learnt to set parental controls through my router and was given lots of information on the different social apps.'

Parent/carer

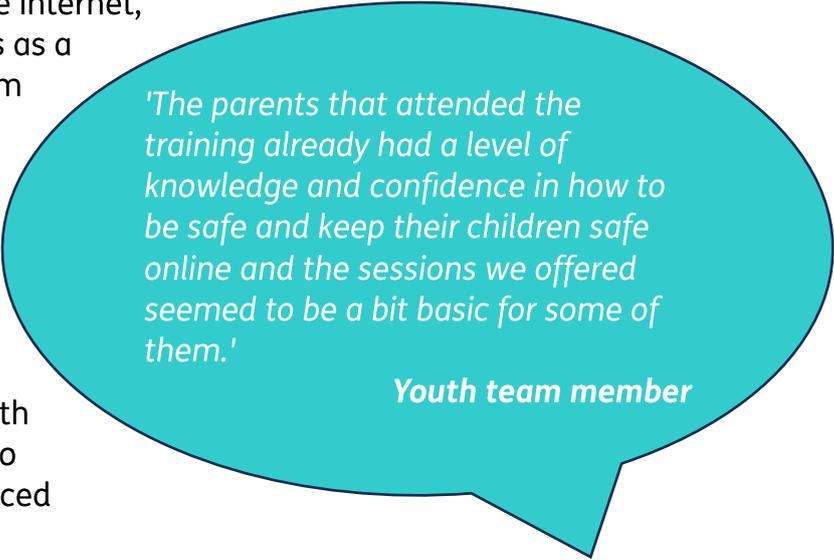
'The parents that did attend the parents sessions thought highly of them, but it was hard to get parents to attend a session on internet safety, this seemed like it was not a priority for them.'

Youth team member

Unfortunately, the uptake of these sessions was much lower than anticipated, meaning that the overall numbers of parents reached was quite limited. This may have been a reflection of the fact that many of the children in the younger age group were not active online, meaning their parents had not yet experienced some of the issues arising for the parents of the older age group and so did not view it as a priority.

However, given that the 2 sessions where more parents attended were sessions where the youth team was able to provide activities for the young people at the same time, other factors, such as lack of childcare, may also have influenced parents' ability to participate.

In addition, the low uptake may have been a reflection of the parents already being quite proficient in using the internet, and therefore not identifying this as a need. Although the feedback from parents attending the sessions was generally positive, the youth team thought that some of the participants were already quite confident in using the internet, and would have benefited more from a session delivered by someone with specific expertise in the area, who could have provided more advanced content and support.



'The parents that attended the training already had a level of knowledge and confidence in how to be safe and keep their children safe online and the sessions we offered seemed to be a bit basic for some of them.'

Youth team member

5. Project learning

How adaptable was our resource/toolkit for working with young people with a learning disability?

There were mixed feelings about the toolkit, with half the youth team saying it was useful and adaptable for working with young people and the others being unsure.

While staff acknowledged the difficulty of creating a resource that was useful for a range of ages and abilities,

'Using the Role Play / Discussion part of the Tool Kit worked really well and encouraged great discussion between young people.'

Youth team member

'The team delivering the project felt that the powerpoints were too advanced, and a lot like school. We tended to use hands on activities instead, such as art, games, group conversations to help promote the learning.'

Youth team member

one of the biggest issues seems to have been the reliance on PowerPoint presentations, and the lack of interactive activities within the toolkit.

'The knowledge amongst the young people was very diverse so staff had to continually adapt sessions to suit the young people they were working with.'

Youth team member

'The powerpoints were used during the parents sessions, and these worked well although we did have to adapt them to suit the younger age ranges.'

Youth team member

They also commented that the sessions could have been more interactive, and that the information provided may have been too basic for some of the parents who attended.

Although the team thought the PowerPoints were more useful for the parents' sessions than for the young people, their responses were similar for working with parents, with half saying the toolkit was useful and adaptable, and the others being unsure.

'The parents one was good but again on reflection it probably didn't meet the needs of the parents who attended and could have been a bit more interactive.'

Youth team member

What did we learn about using youthwork methods to deliver media literacy to young people with a learning disability?

'What worked well was hands on approach to the learning, by playing games where they can move, group conversations and even art that focused on the media literacy learning.'

Youth team member

interactive activity for the young people, making them seem more fun and less like school.

The youth team reported that the sessions seemed to work best when they included a lot of informal,

'The Role Play session was probably the best one as it encouraged interesting dialogue.'

Youth team member

One person also highlighted the benefits of using a 1:1 approach for some of the young people:



'1:1 conversations also worked well, and this is where we could sit and chat to a young person around the subject, and help them to use the internet more safely.'

Youth team member

Summary of what worked well

Toolkits for the young people's sessions

The Powerpoint toolkits developed by DigiSkills contained a lot of useful information on a wide range of online safety topics such as:

- scams
- cyber-bullying
- identity theft
- fake news
- catfishing.

This provided the youth team with scope to develop and build sessions appropriate to the age, ability and level of understanding of the young people they were working with.

Creative delivery methods

'The team worked well and were creative in developing sessions to deliver the information to young people.'

Youth team member

information from the toolkit creatively to develop interactive games and activities that were

The young people's sessions seemed to work best when the youth team used the

'Particularly with the younger groups learning about internet dangers and their definitions was a good session – I did this by printing out names of different dangers and definitions and then [the young people] trying to match them up worked really well.'

Youth team member

'Using youth work methods to deliver the training you are able to gamify a lot of the topics to suit the needs of the group and to make it engaging and are able to adapt each session to be person centred.'

Youth team member

tailored to the specific needs and interests of each group.

Toolkits for the parents' sessions

Although the PowerPoints for the parents required less adaptation by the youth team, they did need to consider the age range of the children whose parents were attending, since some of the slides were less appropriate for the younger groups.

Summary of what could be improved

Development of the toolkits

The primary focus of the PowerPoint toolkit was online safety, possibly leading to an over-emphasis on this aspect of the project at the expense of building the young people's capacity to benefit from engaging in online activity. The toolkit could be further developed with resources and activities to promote and support online engagement, thus ensuring a similar emphasis on the potential advantages of online literacy for young people with a learning disability.

The parents who responded to the survey suggested the following improvements to the parents' information sessions:

- having more practical, hands-on activities during the sessions (5 people)
- having more information about online access for young people with very limited literacy (2 people)
- having a whole session around social media
- the sessions could have been slightly longer as there was a lot to get through (2 people).

'A lot was centred around those young people who read and use chat rooms. It is the content of YouTube that non-reading children watch is our concern.'

Parent/carer

Access to IT equipment

Limited access to IT equipment such as smart phones, laptops or games consoles limited the scope of the youth team to offer hands-on, practical activities to both the young people and their parents. Having access to 'IT kits' containing a range of hardware would enable the staff to organise more interactive sessions where young people and families could try out newly acquired skills, look for information, explore different sites of interest to them and find out how to set up effective security measures.

Online access

'It would be better delivered if the young people taking part in the project were online to some extent.'

Some of the young people in the groups were not online or had very limited access to online activity. This made it quite difficult for them to participate in the sessions, and caused some of them to disengage from the project.

Had there been greater access to IT equipment, making it possible to include more practical, hands-on activities, as well as greater emphasis on promoting and supporting online engagement in the sessions, this may have been less of an issue.

'Some of the young people had more access to the internet and technology than others which made it difficult for some of them to engage fully.'

'Expert' sessions

Given the higher than expected level of IT capability among the parents, it might be better to outsource the parents' sessions to organisations such as DigiSkills, who already have expertise in this area. Alternatively, we could organise some more in-depth training for the youth team to build their confidence and capability in this area.

'Expert' sessions could also have been beneficial to some of the young people who were already more active online, and whose IT skills were more advanced.

Analysis of surveys

Using a system of individual identifiers for each young person completing the survey would enable us to match pre- and post-evaluation survey results, in order to track changes over time while still preserving the young people's anonymity.

6. Conclusion and ideas for action

Overall the project was successful in engaging groups of young people with a learning disability in both the Belfast and Fermanagh/Omagh areas in online literacy programmes. The evidence suggests that the majority of young people who participated experienced improvements in both their confidence and skills to engage in online activity and their knowledge and ability to do so safely.

The young people reported increases of 12 percentage points in confidence to engage in online activity, and 3 percentage points in their ability to do the things they wanted to do online. Most parents/carers (8 out of 10) completing the survey agreed. The young people reported an increase of 14 percentage points in their knowledge about online safety, while 8 out of 10 parents also felt this had increased.

The youth team also saw improvements in the young people's online confidence and skills, and their ability to stay safe online, although they felt that the programmes were better suited to the 13-18 age group due to the limited online experience of young people with a learning disability in the 10-12 age group.

Although the majority of the parents who took part in the parents' information sessions reported improvements in their skills and knowledge to support their child to engage in online activity safely, the project was less successful in encouraging parents/carers to take part, meaning that some sessions had to be cancelled due to lack of interest. The very limited uptake of the sessions suggests that for most parents/carers they were either not required or not pitched at the right level, or that there were other barriers to engagement, such as lack of childcare, that need to be addressed.

Ideas for Mencap

Build on the existing toolkit:



'I think next time it would be great to co-produce the training with a group of young people (the youth forum) as they are the experts on what young people need and it would be youth led.'

Youth team member

As discussed above, while the PowerPoint toolkit provided a useful knowledge base for the youth workers, it required substantial adaptation and tailoring to make it accessible and engaging for the young people we worked with. The use of co-production methods to further develop the toolkit would help ensure it was relevant and engaging to a range of young people.

Developments could include more interactive activities and exercises, and consideration of the needs of young people with additional disabilities.

'It also would be good to create either an online game or a board game around online safety and creating more scenarios that young people can relate to.'

Youth team member

'Expose young people to real life scenarios and the consequences that it has had (both positive and negative) for the people involved in the use of social media and other online tools. Discuss these cases and allow them to share their own experiences'

Parent/carer

'If I was doing this again I would make a braille version available to include anyone in the group with vision difficulties.'

Youth team member

More use of practical, hands-on sessions

'Have a hands on session with the young people using devices so that young people can have tutorials.'

Youth team member

There was general agreement that both the young people and their parents would have benefitted from more practical, hands-on sessions, where they could try out activities and learn how best to set up protections.

The lack of 'IT kit' to make these possible could be addressed by seeking additional funding to purchase a range of devices, or by partnering/ negotiating sponsorship with businesses to source such equipment.

Alternatively, Mencap could develop an IT club where young people bring their own devices and the youth team support them to take part in a range of online activities. To prevent the exclusion of young people from particularly disadvantaged backgrounds, funding or sponsorship could be sought for a small number of devices that could be loaned out to young people without access to their own equipment.

Extend the learning to other groups of young people

'Incorporate elements of the projects into wider internet-based programmes or other areas of work.'

Youth team member

The training could be offered both to young people involved in other Mencap projects and services, and to young people involved with other organisations.

'Look at how we can make it into a 6-8 week programme that can be rolled out across the wider NI region through schools and youth clubs'

Youth team member

'Continue delivering these sessions to young people and staying up to date with online trends by asking young people what they think. Young people with a learning disability are among the most vulnerable young people online and these types of projects are vital in spreading awareness and understanding'

Youth team member

This work was seen by the youth team as particularly important for young people with a learning disability, who tend to be especially vulnerable online.

Provide training for older groups

'It would be really useful to have the training for 16-24 year olds as we as a youth team have seen a big need for online safety training for this age range in terms of scams, catfishing, cyberbullying and inappropriate content.'

Youth team member

Given their experience of working with young people with a learning disability up to the age of 25, and of delivering the programmes to the 13-18 age group, the youth team felt there was a clear need for this type of training among older young people, who tend to be more active online than the younger age groups, but who still lack the skills and knowledge to keep themselves safe.

Promote safety messages online

Initially we had hoped to support the young people to create safety resources for other young people that could be promoted online. Although the limited access to IT equipment during the programmes made this difficult, the youth team felt this was an important area of work and were keen to pursue it further.

'Work with young people to create and develop short online safety advertisements that will pop up online when young people are using the internet.'

Youth team member

Have 'expert' sessions

'Bring in outside facilitators to facilitate sessions to parents/young people who are experts in the field.'

Youth team member

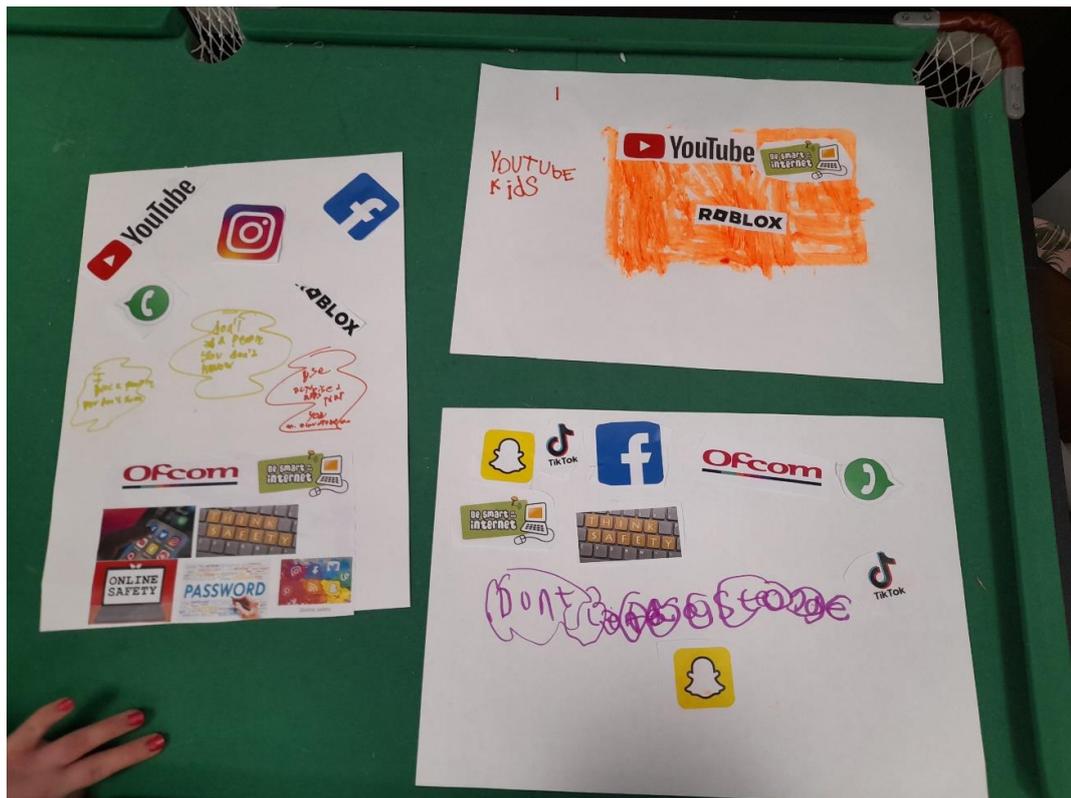
As discussed above, there was limited engagement of parents/carers in the parents' information sessions, possibly because they were pitched at too basic a level. We could offer more advanced sessions, delivered by people with specific skills and knowledge in the area, for parents/carers and for young people who already have basic skills and knowledge of IT.

However, before doing so, it would be advisable to undertake further research into what topics would be of interest, as well as into any potential barriers to participation, such as lack of childcare.

Ideas for involving other organisations

Mencap could work with other organisations to promote and support the rollout of online literacy training to more young people with a learning disability. This could include:

- building partnerships with organisations supporting young people's development, such as schools, youth clubs or other community and voluntary groups
- seeking support from businesses in the form of technical advice, 'expert' sessions or equipment for the young people
- lobbying government departments to make funding available for this area of work, given the vital importance of online literacy for young people as they move into adulthood, and the potential benefits to the economy of ensuring that more young people with a learning disability develop these skills, making them more likely to become active members of the workforce and less dependent on benefits.



Samples from creative activity

Appendix 1: Evaluation framework

1 Define the 'problem'	2 What are you doing about the problem and with whom?	3 What differences will your intervention make?	4 How could these differences contribute to wider societal change?
<p>Young people with learning disability/additional needs (ypwld) face a number of challenges which act as barriers to their safe and effective use of online services, including: limited access to devices, reliable broadband or phone data; strict parental controls; lack fine/gross motor skills necessary to operate digital devices; difficulty understanding technology and content; limited attention spans; difficulty understanding the 'rules of engagement' for digital content, and difficulty sustaining friendships.</p>	<p>ypwld will help to design, develop and pilot resources supporting development of their online literacy, in particular in the areas of: successfully using devices, platforms and online content; awareness of how to stay safe online; identifying and reporting harmful content.</p> <p>Parents will be provided with information about online access and safety to help support ypwld.</p>	<p>ypwld will be more confident and have improved skills to engage in online activity, be more knowledgeable about how to stay safe online and how to identify and report harmful content.</p> <p>Parents will have improved skills and knowledge about how to support the young people's online access and safety.</p>	<p>ypwld are more present and visible online, improving the inclusivity of online services.</p> <p>ypwld and parents' lives are enriched by greater and safer use of online services.</p>

	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Short/medium - term impact	Long-term impact
<p>A Details of inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project staff • Ofcom commission • Royal Mencap organisational support • IT systems and tools • DigiSkills input to resource design etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 x 4-6 week online literacy programmes involving a challenge activity to create a resource on the topics of online safety/access for distribution to other ypwld (e.g. a video). Delivery will be face-to-face and online, and will conclude with a celebration/evaluation session. • 4 x parent's information sessions per area, aimed at building their skills knowledge and confidence to support ypwld to access online activity safely. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of online literacy programmes • Number of ypwld taking part in programmes • Number of resources developed by ypwld • Number of other ypwld to take part in resource piloting • Number of parents information sessions • Number of parents taking part in sessions 	<p>At least 70% of ypwld will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be more confident to engage in online activity. • have improved skills to engage in online activity. • increase their knowledge about how to stay safe online. • increase their knowledge of how to identify and report harmful content. <p>At least 70% of parents of ypwld will:</p>	<p>Ypwld are more active and capable online, engaging in a broader range of services, and are safer than before</p> <p>Parents are better able to support ypwld</p>	<p>The resources created by the project are widely adopted by other ypwld and parents, helping extend the benefits of safer online engagement across the UK.</p> <p>More ypwld make an active</p>

	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Short/medium - term impact	Long-term impact
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve their skills and knowledge about how to support the young people's online access. • increase their knowledge about how to support the young people's online safety. 		contribution to online platforms, which is positively valued by society.
B Who are the relevant target groups?		Target audience = <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ypwld aged 10-18 from Belfast, Fermanagh/Omagh and their parents/carers. • Parents 				
C What relevant data do you need?	Project records, including budget	Project records	Project monitoring records, including programme attendance / parent session attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitudinal • Skills aptitudes • Knowledge and understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitudinal • Behavioural 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource usage data
D What methods will you use to collect the data?				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-engagement and post-engagement quizzes • Case studies using youth worker testimony 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups with ypwld • Post-evaluation of parents' sessions • Case studies using youth worker testimony 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examination of the resources created by the young people for distribution to others. • Analysis of resource usage data. • Content analysis of online

	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Short/medium - term impact	Long-term impact
						platform use by ypwld.
E What factors beyond your control might influence this stage?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff vacancies/absences • IT failure – tools or systems • Failure of DigiSkills to provide appropriate resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty recruiting participants • Staff vacancies/absences • Lack of appropriate resources/ staff skills • IT failure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty recruiting participants • Staff vacancies/absences • Lack of appropriate resources/ staff skills • IT failure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of participant engagement 		

Appendix 2: Samples of work from online safety event



S Safer Internet Day 

The best things about being online are

Talking to my friends
watching things
playing games, going
using

I use the internet on:

my iPad, phone, laptop



What advice would you give to someone who has never used the internet?

Be nice to people

Tell your parents if you have a bad experience on the internet

do not share personal information to people you do not know

What do you do to be safe online?

You should:	You should never:
<i>Be kind</i>	<i>be mean to people</i>

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Safer Internet Day

Name: [Redacted]
Date: [Redacted]

The best things about being online are

Using it in school

I use the internet on:

Computer

What advice would you give to someone who has never used the internet?

Stay safe

Don't give out private information

What do you do to be safe online?

You should:	You should never:
	<p><u>Add someone you don't know</u></p> <p><u>Never give personal details</u></p>

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Safer Internet Day

The best things about being online are

- YouTube
- Games
- Video Games
- Facetime
- Shake bottoms
- Party
- Play

Name: [REDACTED]

Date: [REDACTED]

I use the internet on:

Phone

What advice would you give to someone who has never used the internet?

tell parents

talk friends

talk boyfriend

What do you do to be safe online?

You should:	You should never:
only pictures to friends tell parents	never talk to strangers

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