



commissioned by **Ofcom**

Positive Action Project

Evaluation Report 2024



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328
young people supported



92%
young people said they can
now identify online harms

60+
Social Action
projects facilitated

1,968
hours delivered
(cumulative)

209
participants in receipt
of Pupil Premium

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Salford Foundation, commissioned by Ofcom as part of their Making Sense of Media (MSOM) programme, undertook a project focused on improving media literacy skills among young people aged 10-14 in Salford, which is an identified at-risk area. The initiative aimed to equip participants, with enhanced media literacy skills in order to help them navigate the online world safely. Over a 12-month period, the project engaged 328 young people across 8 various settings, including schools, community centres, and summer schools. It covered a combination of five key themes, cyberbullying, digital footprint, online safety, Instagram vs. reality, and fake news.

These themes were explored through the delivery of six one-hour sessions across a six-week period. These sessions incorporated educational modules, group discussions and debates, peer collaboration and participant-led social action projects. When delivering in a summer school setting, the delivery was altered slightly to accommodate the shorter time frame and the same content was delivered over a three-week period with three two-hour sessions. The project targeted nine outcomes for young people, including improving critical media analysis skills, knowledge of online harms and behaviours relating to online media and self-esteem. It also sought to raise awareness of online safety issues among service providers (schools and youth groups) and help them to plan new ways to support young people's online activity.

Most participants started the project with a good understanding of online safety principles, but only 57% could accurately identify online harms. However, by the end of the project, 92% of participants expressed that they could now identify online harms, as well as possess new knowledge of how and why to report these harms. Focus group discussions highlighted an improvement in participants' critical analysis skills which aided them in discerning fake news. Finally, the survey found that 68% of participants reported a sense of feeling less influenced by online media as a result.

Moreover, evidence indicates that the project helped to facilitate greater empathy towards other online users, a more positive attitude towards online media navigation, and improvements in collaboration and teamwork skills among participants. Notably, using a mixed learning style approach appeared to appropriately cater to primary, secondary, and SEND groups, which in return aided their learning experience. The integration of a participant-led social action project also appeared to encourage learning outcomes as a result of participants exercising their new or improved knowledge and skills in a practical context.

Moving forward, recommendations include implementing a long-term participant tracking strategy to measure sustained impact development, developing a hybrid questionnaire for comprehensive assessment, and extending the project's duration to allow for more extensive participant engagement. Overall, the project demonstrated a number of useful learnings about how to engage young people in Salford in media literacy activities that have the potential to improve their confidence online, enhance their skills and provide a foundation for continued growth and empowerment in navigating the digital landscape.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This report is a comprehensive response to the Media Literacy Intervention tender commissioned by Ofcom, presenting evidence of outcomes resulting from the project which was conducted by Salford Foundation. This initiative was designed to address concerns regarding online safety and media literacy among young individuals in areas where there appeared to be less accessible education on this subject.

The project was part of Ofcom's Making Sense of Media (MSOM) programme of work to help improve the online skills, knowledge and understanding of UK adults and children. This project was one of thirteen projects commissioned in December 2022 as part of the Initiate strand, 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 MSOM programme Initiate strand underscored the significance of understanding and addressing the challenges faced by young people in navigating the digital landscape, requiring a targeted project aimed at 10–14-year-olds. This project particularly focussed on those from vulnerable backgrounds and/or areas - including recipients of Pupil Premium and those identified as 'at risk.' The project was also strategically implemented during school hours, after-school and summer clubs, and within community and youth centres.

The initiative revolved around achieving these outcomes:

Young People based outcomes:

1. Increased awareness, knowledge and understanding of online harms
2. Increased beliefs, and attitudes, related to online media
3. Increased empathy for the needs and experiences of others accessing online media
4. Increased ability to identify and report harmful media content
5. Improved media skills
6. Improved critical media analysis skills
7. Improved collaboration skills
8. Improved behaviours related to online media
9. Increased self-esteem in navigating online media content

Service Provider Outcomes:

10. Raised awareness of online safety issues
11. Plan new ways to support young people's online activity

The structured project encompassed six one-hour sessions conducted weekly, comprising a blend of educational modules, peer-to-peer collaboration, group-based discussions and a youth-led social action project.

The project worked with a total of 328 young people aged 10-14 in 8 different school and community settings, including a SEND school, a rugby club and dance summer school. 17 cohorts completed the project sessions and there were over 60 different resources produced as a result of the social action element, these ranged from PowerPoint presentations, assemblies, T-shirts, tote bags, board games and others. Out of the 17 cohorts, 64% of participants were in receipt of Pupil Premium, 41% of participants identified as male, 59% identified as female, of which 98 participants were secondary aged and 230 were primary aged.

1.2 Background to Project

Online challenges facing young people.

In the broader Salford area, Salford Foundation staff identified several significant areas of concern while engaging with young people. Salford Foundation is a social inclusion charity with over three decades of experience working with youth across all age groups and offers a range of universal and targeted youth services throughout Greater Manchester. These areas of concern were gathered from discussions with young people during various project deliveries. For instance, during a school-based session addressing risk-taking behaviours, young participants candidly shared their personal experiences and apprehensions when navigating the digital landscape. Additionally, Foundation staff engaged in both formal and informal dialogues with parents, educators, and community workers, revealing similar apprehensions expressed by the young demographic. These concerns were:

- **Young people being bullied and harassed:** Instances involving indecent images captured and involuntarily shared over messaging platforms have resulted in young individuals being bullied and harassed, leading to significant distress and psychological harm.
- **Grooming and radicalisation:** Social media platforms have become breeding grounds for grooming and radicalisation, posing severe threats to the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable youths within the community.
- **Gaming addiction & gambling:** The prevalence of gaming addiction and exposure to gambling-related content online has raised concerns about the impact on the mental health and behaviours of young individuals.
- **Normalisation of soap-opera dramas:** The normalisation of content, such as soap-opera dramas, depicting sensitive or inappropriate themes, influences young viewers' perceptions and behaviours.
- **Distrust of the press:** Growing distrust of traditional media sources among young people contributes to their susceptibility to misinformation and disinformation propagated through online platforms.
- **Increased belief in conspiracy theories:** Exposure to misinformation online has led to an increased belief in conspiracy theories, affecting critical thinking and discernment among young individuals.
- **Access to graphic and insensitive content:** Easy access to graphic and insensitive content online poses risks to the mental health and emotional wellbeing of young users.

- **Sourcing harmful information:** The ease of sourcing harmful or non-conductive information online poses threats to positive mental health and overall wellbeing among youths.

The impact of Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic and the impact of subsequent 'lockdowns' on young people's educational attainment and aspirations is evident, as recorded by local schools. Decreased attainment levels in Key Stage 2 (Year 6) pupils and patterns of decreased aspirations and attendance among Year 7, 8, and 9 pupils in secondary schools have been linked to the disruptions caused by lockdown schooling.

Parental concerns

Parents have expressed growing concerns about online safety and the detrimental effects of misinformation and disinformation on their children's development. The increased time spent online has highlighted challenges related to social communication platforms and conflicting messages absorbed by young people.

Online celebrity culture

The prevailing "celebrity pressure" media outlets exacerbate the need for additional support in distinguishing 'social media Vs reality', particularly among the most vulnerable Salford young people residing in one of the most financially deprived local authorities in the country (Indices of Deprivation 2019).

1.3 Our Approach

The logic underpinning our project

Empowering young people to become agents of social change not only enhances their aspirations and educational attainment but also contributes positively to wider society. It fosters increased awareness of online safety and positive engagement with technology among the broader population, leveraging related social media posts.

These are the assumptions we set out to test through the design, delivery, and evaluation of our project.

Needs assessment at different levels:

The decision to adopt a needs-based approach in designing and evaluating the project stems from the recognition of the diverse knowledge levels, skills, and challenges faced by the participants. This approach prioritises addressing specific gaps in understanding and proficiency, ensuring that interventions are tailored to meet the unique needs of each group.

- **On a Local Level:** The local context of Salford revealed distinct needs concerning online media literacy. An examination of the community underscored a lack of comprehensive education and support for young individuals navigating the digital landscape. Limited access to resources and guidance concerning online safety and media literacy was observed, particularly among marginalised and vulnerable groups within the Salford area.
- **On an Individual Level:** At an individual level, young people often demonstrate varying degrees of digital literacy, often lacking sufficient awareness regarding online risks and appropriate behaviours. There exists a clear need for tailored

interventions to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate online platforms responsibly and safely.

- **National Picture and Initial Requirements:** The national landscape echoed concerns about the rising challenges posed by the digital realm, indicating the imperative need for localised interventions addressing online safety and media literacy. Ofcom's initial requirements highlighted the urgency for targeted projects tailored to the needs of specific communities, aligning with the national agenda to enhance digital literacy among young demographics.

The Delivery Model

The chosen delivery model for this project adopted an in-person, face-to-face approach. The structured project comprised six individual one-hour sessions conducted over the course of a single term, ensuring consistency and sustained engagement. These sessions were meticulously designed to cater to specific learning objectives and engagement strategies.

Session Breakdown

The six sessions were divided into two primary phases to maximize the learning experience and engagement of the young participants. The initial three weeks focused on education-based modules aimed at empowering young individuals with comprehensive knowledge and understanding of online media and safety issues. During this phase, participants explored key topics such as fake news and conspiracy theories, Instagram vs. reality, cyberbullying, and digital footprint, among others (see Appendix 1 for a full list of the content covered in the sessions). These sessions were strategically designed to facilitate active engagement and aid a greater understanding of online safety and media literacy issues among young individuals in Salford. There was a deliberate emphasis on equipping them with the skills necessary to maintain personal safety online and respond appropriately to various media platforms.

The subsequent three sessions were student-led and revolved around social action-based learning, providing participants with the opportunity to practically apply their learning in a hands-on, peer-to-peer educational setting. These sessions were introduced early into the project in order to give more purpose to the initial learning and discussions and to help promote motivation and engagement from the participants. These social action projects created resources ranging from PowerPoint presentations, online safety themed T-shirts, mobile phone charms, tote bags and even cakes topped with tips on how to be safe online (See Appendix 5 for picture examples).

1.4 About this evaluation

The data collection for the evaluation of the project utilised a mixed-methods approach, guided by an evaluation framework, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative techniques to comprehensively assess the outcomes, and utilising a quiz-style questionnaire, a follow-up survey, session observations and a focus group.

See Appendix 2 for further details of the methods used.

The evaluation was structured around four Key Evaluation Questions, as follows:

Impact evaluation

- Were participants better able to identify reliable online content by the end of the project?
- Did participants have a better understanding which has improved their behaviour online?

Process evaluation

- What did we learn about effective ways to help young people to spot misleading information online?
- What did we learn for the future about effective ways to approach and educate children about these issues in a way that is engaging, and which connects with their experiences?

This report serves as a synthesis of both qualitative and quantitative data, summarising key findings pertaining to the nine identified outcomes in online media literacy.

The final section of this report presents recommendations for future improvement and development, rooted in empirical data, gathered from questionnaires and discussions conducted during the project.

FINDINGS

During the data analysis phase of this evaluation, it became evident that several outcomes exhibited significant overlap in their findings. As such, to streamline the reporting process and avoid unnecessary repetition, similar outcomes will be consolidated and discussed within the same analysis section. This approach ensures a cohesive presentation of the results while maintaining clarity and conciseness in the evaluation report.

2.1 Enhanced Online Safety Awareness and Attitudes

- [Increased awareness, knowledge and understanding of online harms](#) (Outcome 1)
- [Increased ability to identify and report harmful media content](#) (Outcome 4)

The evaluation revealed significant overlaps in participant experiences and perceptions relating to outcomes 1 and 4 so the evidence is presented together in this section.

Participants expressed that they entered the project with a foundational understanding of online safety, having been previously introduced to basic concepts such as cyberbullying prevention and password security in school. However, after finishing the project, participants reported, via the survey and focus group, that they had a heightened awareness of nuanced online risks, including catfishing and trolling.

In the initial quiz questionnaire, when asked to identify terminology and the actions of things like 'catfishing' and 'trolling', only 57% of participants were able to do so. However, when asked at the end of the project via the survey about these same types of online harm, 92% expressed that they felt they could now identify them. When asked again, during the focus group, they were able to correctly use the terms, provide a definition, and

an example of how it may appear online. They also expressed that they felt more able to critically evaluate online information, emphasising the importance of fact-checking and verifying content authenticity.

“I think I feel the need to double-check what people post or say online now because I never did before, but I want to look after how I think, so I always try to double-check information which I think has helped my attitude to media.”

Male, Aged 14

Moreover, participants noted a more positive shift in their attitudes towards online media consumption. With an increased understanding of digital platforms, they spoke about reduced feelings of addiction and a more balanced approach to media engagement during the focus group. This change in their understanding appeared to encourage participants to adopt a more discerning approach to online content and therefore, a potential reduction in the possible negative impacts of excessive media exposure.

“I think that some people, when they don't know much at first, they might have a bad attitude or not think about something properly but then, the more they use it or know, like social media, the more they get obsessed and addicted, and it can change them. I think I felt that way at first, like really addicted, but I'm not the same because I know more now.”

Male, Aged 13

Furthermore, the project appeared to help encourage a sense of responsibility among participants regarding identifying and reporting harmful online content. Participants acknowledged the role of individual actions in preventing the spread of harmful content. They expressed a willingness to report negative encounters to mitigate potential harm to others, particularly younger users.

“Yeah, I learned about what to interact with online, like if I see something harmful then commenting, sharing or liking it just spreads it further and someone younger could see that because harmful content can be found anywhere online. Also, if we don't fact-check stuff then we could be sharing really harmful information.”

Female, Aged 13

In summary, the evidence suggests that the project helped to enhance participants' online safety awareness, promoting critical media literacy, and encouraging responsible online behaviours.

2.2 Enhanced Beliefs, Attitudes, Empathy, and Behaviours in Online Media Engagement

- Improved beliefs, and attitudes, related to online media (Outcome 2)
- Increased empathy for the needs and experiences of others accessing online media (Outcome 3)
- Improved behaviours related to online media (Outcome 8)
- Increased self-esteem in navigating online media content (Outcome 9)

Outcomes 2, 3, 8, and 9 were assessed using a combination of the quiz questionnaire, the follow-up survey, session observations and the focus group discussion. Through these methods, participants' beliefs, attitudes, empathy, and behaviours related to online media engagement were examined.

At the beginning of the project, participants could demonstrate a foundational knowledge of the basic principles of online safety. This was highlighted in the quiz questionnaire when asked about ways to stay safe, 93% of respondents were able to answer correctly. Similarly, when asked about what online safety means 99% of responses came back correct. However, as previously stated, only 57% were able to identify specific types of online harms. Prior to data analysis, this finding was also highlighted during session observations, where participants were able to describe online safety methods, and online harm relating to cyberbullying but were unable to articulate further harms or the importance of identifying them. However, by the end of the project, 86% of participants articulated, through the survey, that they could recognise the importance of identifying and reporting harmful content. This suggested a possible heightened awareness and therefore, a possible shift towards a more proactive attitude to online media.

While participants noted incremental changes in their attitudes towards online media, they expressed a heightened ability to critically assess information and not blindly accept it. They recognised the impact of their digital footprint and the potential consequences of their online actions, leading to the possible shift in the development of a more cautious and reflective approach to media consumption as well as a possible reduction in their susceptibility to online media influence, reflected by 68% reporting feeling less influenced when asked in the survey.

Moreover, participants demonstrated awareness in their empathy towards others accessing online media, acknowledging the potential impact of their words and actions on others. They highlighted the importance of considering diverse perspectives and the potential for misinterpretation in online interactions which could lead to more thoughtful and empathetic online behaviours, further demonstrated in the survey where 89% of participants expressed that they now feel they're more able to use online media in a positive way.

“I now know it's important to be nice to people online because they can't hear your tone of voice so it's hard for someone to see or read it the way you really mean it and you could hurt someone.”

Female, Aged 12

Participants also reported more practical changes in behaviour, such as intentionally trying to avoid interactions with strangers in online chats, using stronger passwords, and fact-checking information before sharing. They expressed that confidence in their ability to navigate online platforms safely and responsibly had improved slightly and therefore could suggest a possible increase in their self-esteem when engaging with online media.

“We all enjoy being online still and although we already know a lot, we feel like we are a lot safer now. My confidence level is probably the same so I wouldn't say I feel more confident, but I feel more aware of harmful things or ways to be safer.”

Another added:

“Yeah, I feel impacted by what people say or post, but I know other people get influenced a lot more than me, it can change their viewpoint and the way they see things, it can change how they see their looks and what things they need. Social media and influencers can change your attitude, you can mirror their actions which can be really harmful sometimes. I see this happen a lot but because I've now learned to question, I don't feel as easily influenced or bad about myself as before.”

Female, Aged 13

In summary, the evidence for outcomes 2, 3, 8, and 9 indicates the project had some success in fostering positive beliefs, attitudes empathy and behaviour among participants. This should help them to navigate the digital landscape with confidence and resilience.

2.3 Critical thinking

- [Improved critical media analysis skills](#) (Outcome 6)

Outcome 6, focusing on improved critical media analysis skills, was assessed exclusively through session observations conducted throughout the six sessions of the project.

At the project's start, participants displayed minimal engagement and curiosity regarding critical questioning when exploring media subjects. However, as sessions progressed and topics such as fake news, disinformation, misinformation, and conspiracy theories were discussed which contained relatable examples, participants appeared to demonstrate an increased interest and a more active approach towards involvement.

Notably, participants began asking probing questions about the reliability and authenticity of online information, which suggested a growing awareness of potential manipulation and/or bias within media content. They expressed a desire to understand how to discern credible sources, question narratives, and safeguard themselves against harmful media influences.

By the end of the project, around three-quarters of participants demonstrated some ability to ask critical questions about media content. They displayed a more inquisitive approach and articulated the importance of fact-checking and critical analysis in navigating the digital landscape. Moreover, participants could acknowledge the potential consequences of their online actions, suggesting that they could recognise the significance of their digital footprint in shaping their online presence and future opportunities.

2.4 Media skills and collaboration

- [Improved media skills](#) (Outcome 5)
- [Improved collaboration skills](#) (Outcome 7)

The evaluation of the project outcomes, focusing on improved media skills (Outcome 5) and enhanced collaboration skills (Outcome 7), revealed notable progress among participants, facilitated primarily through session observations.

Initially planned to be assessed through a combination of session observations, quiz questions, and surveys, it became evident that participants' self-assessment of media and collaboration skills primarily pertained to content creation and social media usage. Consequently, the evaluation approach was then refined to solely rely on session observations, allowing for a more nuanced assessment of participants' capabilities and interactions.

At the start, some participants appeared more reserved and insular, showing some reluctance to engage with peers or media-related tasks. However, as the project progressed, collaborative project tasks encouraged participant interaction and teamwork. Participants who initially appeared hesitant gradually became more integrated into group activities, which implied an increase in their confidence and active participation.

Notably, while many participants lacked access to personal media devices outside of school, and some schools had limited media facilities, participants demonstrated commendable adaptability and resourcefulness in acquiring new skills. Despite varying access levels, around three-quarters of the participants showed some improvement in media skills such as creating presentations, and digital posters, editing documents and conducting online research. The collaborative nature of the tasks encouraged peer learning and support, with technologically proficient participants willingly assisting others in skill acquisition.

Overall, the project appeared to have helped facilitate some development of both technical competencies and collaborative behaviours among participants. Through active engagement and mutual support, participants could demonstrate improvements in their proficiency levels in media utilisation and collaboration, suggesting an enhancement in their digital literacy and teamwork abilities.

2.5 Service Providers

- [Raised awareness of online safety issues](#) (Outcome 10)
- [Plan new ways to support young people's online activity](#) (Outcome 11)

The project outcomes concerning service providers were intended to be assessed via interviews after the project's conclusion however, we were unable to gain sufficient traction with staff involved to provide meaningful data. These outcomes, 'Raised awareness of online safety issues' and 'Plan new ways to support young people's online activity', generated mixed results. While the intention was to achieve a satisfactory standard, several challenges hindered the success of meeting these objectives.

Engagement with teachers, community workers, and volunteers responsible for overseeing the cohorts proved challenging, as they were not always readily accessible, and productive two-way communication was often lacking. Limited face-to-face interaction and their absence from sessions also hindered our efforts to raise awareness

of online safety issues and collaboratively plan new approaches to support young people's online activity with them. Additionally, these staff members often lacked decision-making authority, limiting their ability to effect changes in online safety education practices going forward. However, instances where teachers and staff actively engaged in sessions and dialogue led to constructive discussions around online safety issues which suggested some increase in their awareness.

“Sitting in on these sessions has been helpful because even I didn't realise how widespread my digital footprint was or how easy it is to just accept the information I see online and I'm an adult; I think I'm a bit more gullible than I thought, but not now eh!”

Year 8 Teacher

These interactions suggested a broadening in understanding and knowledge, they also facilitated the exchange of valuable resources, engagement strategies, and age-appropriate content. Despite these positive exchanges, the extent to which staff members implemented the shared learnings remains unclear. While some elements of these outcomes could be considered as partially met through discussions with staff, overall, we cannot confidently assert that the objectives were satisfactorily achieved by the end of the project.

DISCUSSION, LEARNING & NEXT STEPS

3.1 Impact

Overall, there is evidence the project had a positive effect on participants' awareness, knowledge, skills, empathy, and behaviour online. In addition to the findings reported in the previous section, the survey found that most participants (84%) felt as though the project had a positive impact on them. Some of those who did not think it had an impact, or who did not know, mentioned that the project information wasn't new to them or that they weren't actively using online media.

Were participants better able to identify reliable online content by the end of the project?

The evidence would suggest that there had been some improvement in participants' ability to identify reliable online content by the end of the project. Through the implementation of educational activities and practical discussions focused on media literacy, participants were able to demonstrate a level of improvement in critical thinking skills and a heightened awareness of the factors contributing to reliable content. By providing them with tools for fact-checking and encouraging them to outwork a more discerning approach to online information, we observed a positive shift in their ability to distinguish between credible and misleading sources. These findings highlight the potential effectiveness of this type of project in empowering participants with the skills necessary to navigate online content more responsibly.

Did participants have a better understanding which has improved their behaviour online?

Our evaluation suggests that participants developed a better understanding of online behaviour, leading to positive changes in their online interactions. By engaging in discussions and activities focused on responsible online conduct, participants could

demonstrate an increase in their awareness of the potential consequences of their actions and could comprehend the importance of respectful behaviour online. Through the reinforcement of key concepts such as digital citizenship and online etiquette, we observed some positive changes in participants' behaviour, such as displaying a greater willingness to report harmful content and a heightened sensitivity to the impact of their online interactions on others. These findings imply the potential positive impacts a project of this type could have on participants' online behaviours and attitudes.

3.2 Process

Qualitative responses to open-ended survey questions about participant experiences and satisfaction paint a broadly positive picture:

- All respondents said they were satisfied with the project.
- The majority identified the Social Action Project as the most enjoyable element. The remainder cited teamwork and learning about conspiracy theories.
- The only improvement suggested by participants was to extend the project duration.

What did we learn about effective ways to help young people to spot misleading information online?

Through the evaluation process, we discovered several effective strategies for helping young people identify misleading information online. The combination of interactive sessions, real-life examples, and open discussions appeared to be particularly impactful. By engaging participants in critical thinking exercises, such as debates and offering them the opportunity to create their own conspiracy theories or examples of 'Fake News', as well as providing them with practical tools for fact-checking, we observed an improvement in their ability to discern between reliable and misleading content. Additionally, incorporating relatable content for their age and based on platforms they regularly use, as well as addressing contemporary issues, helped to engage and add to their understanding and awareness of online misinformation. Overall, our findings highlight the importance of interactive and engaging approaches in educating young people about spotting misleading information online.

What did we learn for the future about effective ways to approach and educate children about these issues in a way that is engaging, and which connects with their experiences?

Our evaluation process provided some valuable insights into effective approaches for engaging and educating children about online safety and media literacy. We found that incorporating interactive activities, real-life examples, and age-appropriate content was crucial in capturing participants' interest and promoting meaningful learning experiences. Additionally, creating a supportive and inclusive environment where participants could feel comfortable discussing their online experiences and concerns appeared to be beneficial for promoting engagement and retention. Furthermore, our findings highlight that continued dialogue and collaboration with the participants, educators and other stakeholders when tailoring interventions that will resonate with children's experiences and address emerging challenges is invaluable. Overall, our learnings helped highlight that an adaptable and participant-centred approach is effective when trying to educate children about online safety and media literacy.

When comparing project delivery across primary, secondary, and SEND aged participants, fewer differences were observed than expected. The project's flexible structure and content, incorporating various learning styles and adapting to participants' knowledge levels, helped to facilitate positive engagement across all ages and abilities. However, SEND participants appeared to show a greater inclination towards discussions and having a slightly deeper exploration of content. This led to slightly less coverage of material but provided a more thorough evaluation of the content.

When considering the differences between session environments, community settings presented additional considerations to a more formal classroom setting. Occasionally, community workers would provide a larger participant group than anticipated which could also include participants outside the target age range, (these were excluded from data collection), and therefore required extra attention in order to refocus attention. Content also needed to be tailored slightly in order to maintain the appropriate level for the participants. Additionally, summer school sessions that were held in sports facilities lacked technical resources, prompting a shift towards more hands-on, creative projects. While distractions were higher in these environments, they did not appear to significantly hinder learning, but they did require additional effort and time to manage behaviour and maintain focus.

The project also encountered a number of challenges during planning and delivery, which we addressed as follows:

Ethical Considerations: Addressing sensitive topics such as cyberbullying, grooming, or online radicalisation demands a careful and ethical approach, ensuring information shared is appropriate for the age group while avoiding causing distress or anxiety. Strategies such as using age-appropriate content, relatable examples, providing supportive resources, and facilitating open discussions were successfully implemented to foster understanding while minimising potential distress or anxiety among participants.

Technological Limitations: Access to technology, internet connectivity, or digital devices may vary among participants, impacting their ability to fully engage with the project content or activities. Bridging the digital divide is essential. To overcome technological limitations, we offered alternative offline materials and collaborated with the service providers to provide access to digital devices or community resources. This meant that laptops from Salford Foundation were brought in for participants to use, where possible community venues and schools would allow the use of their digital facilities, nontechnological based Social Action projects and activities were introduced, and no digital based work was required outside of session time.

Engagement and Retention: Maintaining consistent engagement and retention of young participants throughout the project can be challenging, especially considering attention spans, varying interests, and external distractions. To address engagement and retention challenges, we incorporated interactive and diverse activities tailored to the interests of participants. This involved debates, group discussions, participant-led Social Action projects, challenges or tasks which involved winning sweets and using energiser games to maintain attention.

Teacher/Staff Support: Ensuring teachers or staff members engaged in supporting or facilitating the project do so effectively is essential for project success. We maintained

regular communication with teachers/community workers/volunteers throughout the project and often welcomed them to sit in on sessions. However, we did find two-way communication was not always reciprocated which made practical elements, such as room allocations, feedback, and timetabling harder to navigate.

Evaluation and Measurement: Accurately evaluating the impact and effectiveness of the project requires robust evaluation methods. Ensuring the collected data truly reflects the changes in participants' behaviour or knowledge can be challenging. In the first term of the project, we re-evaluated the data collection methods, such as the pre-quiz questionnaire and post-survey. We observed, from participants and teacher/community worker feedback, that the quiz questionnaire was too easy, and some survey questions needed clarity, therefore were adjusted for the remainder of the project. Additionally, we considered participant feedback when refining content, ensuring that sessions were tailored to their existing knowledge levels, thereby ensuring the accuracy of the final data. Input from staff members attending sessions was also gathered to mitigate the risk of bias.

Adapting to Changing Trends: Online media trends and platforms evolve rapidly. Keeping the project content and discussions updated and relevant to address emerging online safety concerns presents an ongoing challenge. We regularly discussed social media activity and current trends with the participants as well as teachers/community workers to ensure the project content remained updated. We also prioritised updating our knowledge by researching trends, concerns, and any online safety protocol updates to keep discussions relevant and effective.

Cultural Sensitivity and Diversity: Acknowledging and respecting diverse cultural perspectives and backgrounds among participants is crucial in developing content that is inclusive and culturally sensitive. When participants' first language wasn't English, we facilitated language accessibility by providing translation options. Additionally, we ensured cultural inclusivity by offering kosher and halal sweets and considered other dietary requirements such as allergies or veganism. We maintained awareness of language use, both among participants and staff members present during sessions, to ensure cultural sensitivity and inclusivity.

3.3 Ideas for Action

The insights gained from the project evaluation offer some valuable lessons and avenues for future development, ensuring that subsequent initiatives are even more impactful and tailored to the evolving needs of young people in navigating the digital realm safely and confidently.

1. **Variation between Primary and Secondary Participants:** The discernible disparity in online safety knowledge between primary and secondary participants demonstrates the importance of age-appropriate and tailored interventions. Future projects should consider customising content and delivery methods to suit the differing levels of understanding and technological proficiency among primary and secondary school students.
2. **Styles of Questionnaire:** The efficacy of different questionnaire formats highlights the necessity of employing a nuanced approach to data collection. Moving

forward, a hybrid questionnaire integrating both quantitative and qualitative elements could provide deeper insights into participants' experiences and perceptions, thereby enhancing the evaluative process and refining project outcomes.

3. **Long-term Participant Tracking:** Tracking participants' knowledge and behavioural changes over time would be beneficial for understanding impact development and informing future learning initiatives. Follow-up focus groups, featuring carefully crafted questions on behaviours, attitudes, and self-esteem, would provide further depth to participant experiences. Extending the data collection period over the long term would offer a holistic view of impact, ensuring a balanced reporting approach that incorporates both self-reporting and objective measures.
4. **Outcomes:** The alignment of project outcomes with local socio-economic conditions, participant demographics, and identified online concerns remains crucial. However, ongoing assessment and adaptation are imperative to ensure that outcomes remain relevant and responsive to the evolving digital landscape and the unique needs of participants.
5. **Technology:** Recognising the varying levels of technological resources across participating service providers shows the need for flexibility in project design and delivery. Future initiatives could explore strategies to mitigate disparities in technology access, such as providing supplementary resources or offering alternative collaboration methods to accommodate diverse technological environments.
6. **Session Planning:** Responding to participants' expressed desire for extended social action projects and a balance between structured learning sessions and interactive activities, future projects could consider revising session planning to accommodate these preferences. This may involve extending project duration, incorporating more interactive elements, and offering flexibility in session formats to optimise engagement and learning outcomes.
7. **Participant-Centric Approach:** Taking the time to seek participants' knowledge and input before designing project content is crucial. Avoiding assumptions about participants' existing knowledge and involving them in the ongoing development of project content can enhance relevance and effectiveness, ensuring that initiatives are tailored to meet the specific needs and preferences of young people.

Finally, leveraging the insights gained from this evaluation, future projects have the opportunity to refine approaches, address identified challenges, and further empower young people to navigate the digital landscape safely, critically, and confidently. By embracing flexibility, innovation, and a commitment to ongoing evaluation and adaptation, we can continue to enhance the effectiveness and relevance of digital literacy initiatives, ultimately fostering a safer and more empowering online environment for young people.

3.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the evaluation of the online safety and media literacy project gathered some insightful findings regarding effectiveness in empowering young participants with essential knowledge and skills to navigate the digital landscape safely and responsibly. Through a comprehensive mixed-method approach, encompassing quiz-style questionnaires, follow-up surveys, focus groups, and session observations, key outcomes were assessed, revealing beneficial insights.

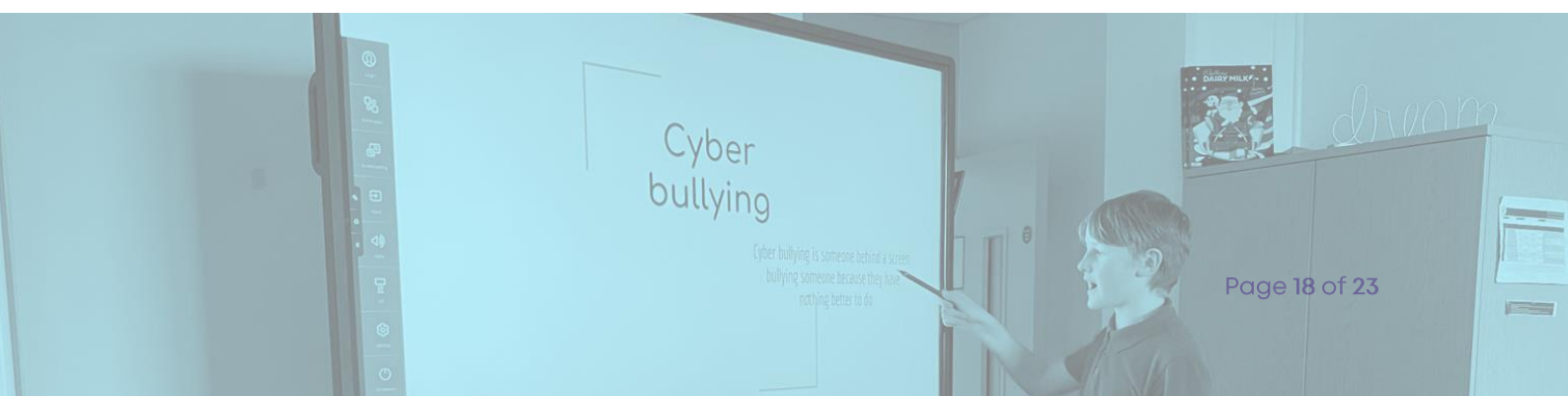
The evaluation found evidence that the project helped to enhance participants' awareness, knowledge and understanding of online harms. This included improvements in their ability to identify misleading information, report harmful content and critically analyse media. Participants demonstrated some positive shifts in their attitudes towards online media, expressing they felt more empathy towards others and a slightly heightened sense of responsibility in their online interactions.

Moreover, the project fostered tangible improvements in participants' media and collaboration skills, facilitating their adeptness in creating and utilising various digital media formats. Notably, the collaborative nature of the sessions help facilitate the integration of reserved participants into group activities, creating a more supportive learning environment.

While some challenges were encountered, such as variability in access to media devices and facilities among participants, the project engaged young people in a positive way. Participants expressed satisfaction with the project's content and delivery, highlighting the project-based learning approach, particularly the social action projects, as a standout feature.

When comparing differences between primary, secondary and SEND aged participants, the evidence suggested that all groups could demonstrate a good baseline knowledge of online safety principles. Noting, however, that primary participants displayed a lower awareness of online harms, potentially due to increased parental monitoring. SEND participants showed misconceptions despite their trusting nature online. Project delivery was effective across all groups, with flexibility in accommodating diverse learning styles. However, SEND participants favoured discussions, leading to deeper exploration but less coverage of content. Community settings posed additional challenges to standard classroom environments, including larger groups and limited resources, requiring the need for additional attention to manage distractions.

Moving forward, the evaluation findings provide some valuable insights for refining future iterations of the project, including the development of targeted interventions to address knowledge gaps and enhance participants' confidence in utilising online media positively. By continuing to adapt and innovate, we can ensure that young people receive the necessary education and support to navigate the ever-evolving digital landscape safely and responsibly.



APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Session content overview

Content for the sessions was broken down into five main categories, strategically derived from the original issues outlined and addressing the core concerns identified within the Salford community:

1. **Instagram vs Reality:** Unpacking the discrepancy between online portrayals and real-life experiences, encouraging critical thinking about curated online content.
2. **Fake News:** Understanding the dissemination of false or misleading information online, promoting media literacy skills to discern credible sources.
3. **Digital Footprint:** Exploring the concept of digital footprints and their lasting impact, highlighting the importance of responsible online behaviours and data privacy.
4. **Cyberbullying:** Addressing the prevalence and consequences of cyberbullying, equipping participants with strategies to prevent and respond to online harassment.
5. **Online Safety:** Comprehensive sessions focused on maintaining personal safety online, emphasising proactive measures and appropriate responses across diverse media platforms.

Appendix 2 - Evaluation methods

The methodology encompassed four main components: a quiz-style questionnaire, a follow-up survey, a follow-up focus group, and session observations, plus monitoring of social media engagement. We triangulated evidence from multiple sources to validate and cross-reference findings.

- 1. Quiz-Style Questionnaire:** The quiz-style questionnaire served as the primary tool for gathering quantitative data on participants' knowledge, awareness, and understanding of online safety and media literacy. It comprised 12 multiple-choice questions covering key topics such as online harm, digital footprint, cyberbullying, fake news and general online safety. This standardised questionnaire provided a baseline assessment of participants' pre-existing knowledge to serve as the basis for measuring the projects impact. A total of 309 participants completed this questionnaire. (See Appendix 3 for quiz questionnaire.)
- 2. Follow-up Survey:** A follow-up survey was administered post-project to gather additional quantitative and qualitative data on participants' experiences and perceptions of the project. The survey consisted of 11 questions, focusing on participants' overall experience, perceived importance of project components, changes in behaviour, and resilience to online media influence. This survey provided insights into participants' subjective experiences and helped assess the project's effectiveness in achieving its objectives. A total of 309 participants completed the follow-up survey. (See Appendix 4 for survey questions).
- 3. Follow-up Focus Group:** A single follow-up focus group was conducted six months after participants completed the project. This qualitative component aimed to delve deeper into participants' experiences and explore more nuanced outcomes, including behavioural changes, attitude shifts, and empathy towards others in media interactions. Participants engaged in reflective discussions facilitated by open-ended questions, allowing for qualitative insights into the project's long-term impact. It is important to note that the participants who took part were in Year 7 and Year 8 when they were initially involved with the project but had since moved up a school year when taking part in the focus group. A total of 15 participants took part in the focus group.
- 4. Session Observations:** Session observations were conducted to assess participants' engagement, interaction, and behavioural responses during project sessions. The project coordinator, also the facilitator, made detailed notes focusing on participation levels, content comprehension, and peer interactions. To mitigate potential bias, consultation with teachers, colleagues, and staff members provided diverse perspectives on participants' experiences.
- 5. Wider Audience - Byproduct:** Examining the indirect impact or byproducts of the project on the broader community or audiences. This might involve monitoring social media engagement, content dissemination, or community awareness events generated because of the project.

Appendix 3 - Baseline quiz questionnaire



Positive Action Project Quiz!

Please follow the instructions next to each question and circle the answer/s you think is right, make sure to hide your answers so your friends don't see.

Name: _____ D.O.B: _____

School: _____ Postcode: _____

1. Do teachers have the right to discipline you if you're caught cyberbullying someone outside of school time? (Circle one answer)
 - a) Yes, but only if it's impacting someone else's ability to learn
 - b) Yes, but only if it's actually during school time
 - c) No, my activity online has nothing to do with my teachers at all
 - d) No, only my parents can discipline me for things like cyberbullying
2. What percent of people between the ages of 8-17 say they've been bullied on social media, over text message or on another online media platform? (Circle one answer)
 - a) 91%
 - b) 84%
 - c) 52%
 - d) 26%
3. Which of these terms are not considered to be types of cyberbullying? (Circle all the answers you think are right).
 - a) Catfishing
 - b) Gaming
 - c) Vlogging
 - d) Trolling

4. Are you more likely to be cyberbullied by a stranger or someone you know? (Circle one answer)
 - a) By someone you know
 - b) By a stranger
 - c) I think it's equally likely
5. Your digital footprint: (Circle one answer)
 - a) Isn't as important as what people who know you in real life think of you
 - b) Something you should be aware of and make positive efforts to control
 - c) Doesn't matter too much because the internet changes too quickly for anything to stick around for very long
 - d) Isn't a big deal as everyone has something embarrassing posted about them online now
6. Which of the following statements is an example of a conspiracy theory?
 - a) Aliens exist, there have been lots of sightings by people all over the world
 - b) Aliens exist but the government are hiding their existence from us
 - c) Aliens are fake but people claim they have seen them because they want to spread fake news for fun
7. You're angry with a friend or at something that happened in school and you want to post about it on social media, what should you do: (Circle one answer)
 - a) Post how you feel but don't mention anyone else's name
 - b) Post how you feel but make sure everything you say is true
 - c) Don't post about it, call, text or wait to talk to the person about it
 - d) None of the above answers are correct

8. Fake news is:
 - a) Usually just something that has been said as a bit of fun
 - b) Something that doesn't really apply to us unless we watch the news
 - c) Potentially harmful to us and those around us
9. To keep safe online, what information should you not post publicly? (Circle all the answers you think are right).
 - a) What you've had for dinner
 - b) Where you live
 - c) Which school you go to
 - d) Passwords
 - e) A cartoon image as a profile picture instead of a photo
10. You meet someone online and they tell you that they're the same age, you live in the same area and they know a friend of yours. Do you think it's safe to share personal information? (Circle one answer)
 - a) Yes it's safe
 - b) No it isn't safe
 - c) It's safe to share some personal information like your school
11. What does online safety mean? (Circle one answer)
 - a) Wearing safety gear when playing games online
 - b) The act of staying safe online
 - c) Making sure your phone has a password on it
12. Circle all the things you can do to keep yourself safe online:
 - a) Set your social media to private
 - b) Post personal information on your social media
 - c) Block or report people/videos/images who make you feel uncomfortable
 - d) Turn your location settings off on social media
 - e) Use social media platforms suitable for your age
 - f) Have conversations with people you don't know

Appendix 4 - Follow-up survey

1. Do you feel satisfied with the project?	7. Do you feel comfortable in knowing how to report harmful content online?
2. What was your favourite part?	8. Do you feel that you are less influenced by online media then you were before?
3. How do you think the project could be improved?	9. What part of this project do you think is most important to share with your friends and family?
4. What do you think was the most important/impacting part of the project to you?	10. Do you feel like you can now use online media in a positive way?
5. Do you feel as though the project has had a positive impact on you?	11. Do you feel like this project has helped you to be safe when using media online?
6. Do you feel as though you know what harmful and inappropriate content looks like online?	

Appendix 5 - Images



T-shirt designed by participant aged 11



Cakes, made and decorated by participants aged 13



Notebooks and keyring designed by participant aged 10



T-shirt designed by participant aged 10



Tote bags designed by participants aged 11



Football designed by participant aged 10