
The Office of Communication / Internet Matters Limited

TAKING CARE ONLINE – PROJECT EVALUATION

September 2024

Contract No ECM_1145

Executive Summary

In January 2024, Ofcom appointed Internet Matters to develop and deliver media literacy and online safety training for front line workers in the children's residential care sector. The training was called "Taking Care Online" and was co-branded Internet Matters and Ofcom.

Course content

The content of the course was based on an existing training course called "Fostering Digital Skills", which had been developed previously by Internet Matters in conjunction with The Fostering Network, supported by Nominet.

The existing content was significantly tailored for the specific audience and format of "[Taking Care Online](#)", and was further amended to reflect feedback from Ofcom. The 3-hour and 1-hour virtual training sessions included a mix of content delivery by media literacy experts and interactive breakout sessions where participants could interact and collaborate. The check-in sessions were designed to be fully interactive.

The learning objectives for the participants focused on enhancing media literacy. The training aimed to equip them with the knowledge and confidence to understand the benefits and risks of digital technology for young people, while supporting online safety. Participants were also encouraged to promote safe technology use to foster positive relationships, and were provided with tools to help develop essential digital skills in children and young people.

The 3-hour course was submitted for CPD Accreditation which was achieved. A total of 130 participants received CPD certificates to reflect their participation.

Recruitment of participants

Taking Care Online was promoted via a programme of email campaigns to a range of care sector organisations, to be forwarded on to their workforce and other organisations in their network. Additional promotion included the Ofcom Bulletin and Internet Matters social media channels. Across all events, 408 registrations were received. Once participants had registered, they received reminder communications ahead of each training session.

Training delivery

Between 26th February and 17th May 2024, Internet Matters delivered 6 x 3-hour live virtual training sessions, 2 x 1-hour mini training sessions and 1 x 1 hour check-in session, and a 1 hour recorded session was made available online. The training reached a total of 183 participants of which 146 attended the 3-hour sessions. All sessions were free of charge to attend. There was a significant variation between the number of registrations and participants, and more detail on this is covered below.

Evaluation

Quantitative and qualitative research conducted as part of the programme deliverables found that the impact of the training on those who attended has been positive and wide reaching. **The majority of participants reported an increase in their knowledge, skills and confidence regarding children's media literacy** following the training session. They stated that they had more knowledge, skills and confidence to support children and young people to develop their own media literacy skills, and that they left the sessions more confident in ensuring children and young people in their care have the media literacy skills to stay safe and flourish online. This includes gaining tangible skills they could implement directly after the training.

Focus groups revealed some of the ways that participants have implemented the training, with the most popular resource being the "[Digital Passport](#)" which is a tool used to support children and young people to enable them to talk to their carers about their online lives.

These positive findings are consistent with high praise for the content and delivery of the course. Focus group participants noted that the training was relevant, detailed and accessible. The delivery, especially the knowledgeable trainers and breakout rooms with sector peers, made it engaging and provided the opportunity to personalise their experience. **As a result, 97% of survey respondents said they would likely recommend the training to someone else in the residential care sector.**

Attendance was a challenge, with a high rate of dropout following registration. Barriers to attendance that emerged from the evaluation were, firstly, finding the time, for example wanting more flexibility to complete the training in their own time, and being unable to take time out for training during school holidays. Evaluation participants who had attended the training sessions hypothesized that technological issues (meaning that frontline workers were unable to connect to online training) and workplace related issues (such as staff absence and safeguarding incidents, which were often unexpected and needed to be dealt with immediately) were likely reasons why colleagues may have dropped out. A solution that was suggested by a number of participants in the evaluation was in-person training to eliminate the barrier of technology and this would also take people out of the 'day-to-day'. In-person training was also favoured by all in the focus groups to enable networking in their sector.

While participants said they enjoyed the interactive elements of the training such as breakout rooms, the check-in sessions, which were a chance for participants to share their experiences and get further support were not well attended. The reasons for this were not clear from the evaluation work but our hypotheses are that there was no CBD accreditation, or that insufficient time had elapsed since the original training (meaning that attendees had not had time to put their learnings into practice), beyond the broader barriers to attendance in general.

In the future, it may be beneficial to consider other methods of delivering training to front line workers to overcome attendance challenges, including face to face training. We also recommend that any future training maintains the same level of robustness of content and interaction in delivery, to ensure participants are fully informed and engaged, and able to apply the learnings.

Summary

In terms of delivery versus requirements, training was delivered to 183 front line workers, which was 73% of the desired 250 participants. The main cause of the shortfall was the high dropout rate, as outlined above. Another contributing factor may have been the lack of Ofsted's endorsement (who were due to support with promoting the course).

In order to meet the needs of those working in the residential care sector, the course content was developed significantly from the existing "Fostering Digital Skills" materials, which were originally developed for individual foster carers. This included adding statutory requirements, new and emerging online trends, and greater detail around available support services. In addition to the 3-hour course, a 1-hour version was also created, and a recording was made available online and promoted to registered people who did not participate in the live sessions.

Delivery ran into May 2024, versus the original target date for completion of end March, however this was agreed with Ofcom during the programme delivery period. As required, the training included two opportunities for participants to meet and discuss the course with each other and media literacy experts. A robust set of insight-gathering activities were conducted before, during and after the programme across participants, non-attendees and sector stakeholders.

Project Governance

Internet Matters and Ofcom worked in close partnership during the development and delivery of the "Taking Care Online" project. There was a weekly check-in, which alternated between Teams meetings and email updates. Ofcom were very supportive of Internet Matters' work on the project and shared learnings from other media literacy interventions being delivered via third sector partners. Ofcom attended one of the 3-hour training sessions and input ideas and suggestions on how the content could be improved, which, where feasible, were actioned for the remaining sessions.

Target Audience and Recruitment of Participants

Two possible target audiences were considered by Ofcom for the training programme, these being:

1. Ofsted children's social care inspectors (where Ofsted would provide contacts for all participants) and,
2. Front line workers in children's residential care homes (with support from Ofsted to promote the course).

Ofsted withdrew early in the project and their support in directly contacting residential care home workers about the course was lost, however Ofsted did provide contact details for key organisations in the sector.

The training sessions were promoted via a programme of email campaigns to a range of sector organisations, to be forwarded on to their workforce and other organisations in their network. Between 25th Jan and 1st March, a total of 8 promotional email campaigns were sent out. Additional promotion included the Ofcom Bulletin, Internet Matters social media channels and a press release. Across all events, 408 registrations were received. The Eventbrite platform was used to manage bookings, and once participants had registered, they received reminder communications ahead of each training session.

Attendance

Between 26th February and 17th May 2024, Internet Matters delivered 6 x 3-hour live virtual training sessions, 2 x 1-hour mini training sessions and 1 x 1 hour check-in session, and a 1 hour recorded session was made available online. The training reached a total of 183 participants (vs target 250) of which 146 attended the 3-hour sessions. All sessions were free of charge to attend.

The level of drop off between registrations and attendance was higher than anticipated, and reasons for this are explored further below. A full breakdown of participation is included in Appendix 2.

The 1-hour sessions and recorded sessions were introduced in response to the numbers falling short of target, however they did not attract a significant level of registrations. This may be because they were promoted later and separately from the initial 3-hour sessions, resulting in the promotional emails not being forwarded on due to recipients losing interest/repetition. There was a shorter lead time before the dates of the training so there was perhaps insufficient notice.

	Booked	Attended	% attended
3-hour sessions	361	146	40%
1-hour sessions	32	8	25%
Check-in sessions	15	3	20%
Total 'live' sessions	408	157	38%
Online recording		26	
Overall total	408	183	

Training content

Existing Internet Matters '[Fostering Digital Skills](#)' course content was significantly adapted for the target audience, to ensure a focus on driving media literacy and improving online safety specifically for children in care.

The content of the full 3-hour training session included 4 main topics:

- **Understanding:** insights into children and young people's online activities, as well as the benefits and risks of technology and digital inclusion, particularly for children in care. The section also introduced the concept of digital resilience.
- **Empowering:** practical tips on utilising online safety tools to help young people manage online risks (especially bullying), understand what they share online, and learn methods to report and block inappropriate content or interactions.
- **Nurturing Positive Relationships:** focused on nurturing children and young people to improve their media literacy, allowing them to use technology safely to cultivate positive relationships. How technology can be harnessed to maintain existing relationships and foster healthy ones was explored, as well as strategies to communicate potential risks of harm from inappropriate contact.
- **Flourishing Digital Skills Development:** The final part of the session delved into ways to promote the development of essential media literacy and digital skills in children and young people. Topics included recognising scams, dealing with misleading information, and fostering critical thinking skills.

Training was delivered using the Zoom platform. An online safety and media literacy expert hosted the sessions, in conjunction with a senior member of staff from Internet Matters. Additional Internet Matters staff were involved to facilitate the breakout sessions, ensuring an expert was present with participants at all times.

Throughout the course, content delivery from slides was interspersed with interactive polls, as well as case studies which were discussed in breakout groups.

The one-hour training session was a condensed version of the three-hour course. While it covered the four core areas, time was devoted to practical strategies for participants to better support the young people in their care and to highlight the most effective resources available.

The check-in session was designed to be fully interactive to engage participants on how they had been able to use the resources to support the young people they care for. The session included an update on the online safety landscape as well reflection questions directed at participants to reflect on the delivery of the training, the overall training material and anything they felt could improve the training in the future. Some of the attendees confirmed

that they had utilised the Digital Passport into their onboarding process and shared this resource more widely with their colleagues to do the same.

Some were keen to encourage their wider network to do the training because they felt it was invaluable in capturing the issues and resources available to support them in their role.

The online training session was a recording of the 1-hour training session held on 3rd May 2024.

For the live 3-hour and 1-hour training sessions, some participants experienced technology issues which limited their participation. However, overall, retention levels were good and most attendees completed the full session.

Impact and Insights

Impact evaluation and insights are based on both quantitative and qualitative research.

Before participants joined the initial training session, they were asked to complete a pre-training survey and, following the session, a post-training survey. The intention of the surveys was to gain quantitative and qualitative insights into the impact of the training on people skills, knowledge and confidence in relation to supporting children and young people's media literacy. An additional survey followed the check-in sessions, to help understand their value and impact. We also held focus groups with attendees of the training sessions, to gather deeper insights regarding the value and impact of the training, as well as understand barriers to attendance and areas for improvement.

As attendance at the training sessions was a challenge, we also sent a short survey to those that signed up but didn't attend to gain further insights. Alongside this, we asked sector stakeholders about values and attitudes to training in the children's care sector and what motivates people to attend training.

Method

- Participants who attended the training were asked to complete a pre-training survey. Respondents n=50, 32% response rate
- Participants who attended the training were asked to complete a post-training survey. Respondents n=67, 44% response rate
- Two focus groups were held with six participants who took part in the training
- Participants who signed up but did not attend the training were sent a survey, n=6 completed the survey
- The three participants who attended the check-in sessions completed a post-check in session survey
- An email with two questions was sent to residential care sector management, n=1 responded

Knowledge and confidence

- Participants self-reported knowledge, confidence and skills regarding children's media literacy improved as a result of the training.
- The largest change occurred in relation to the statement, *'I have the knowledge and skills I need to support children and young people to develop their digital skills (e.g., check the security settings of a social media app)'*. Prior to the training, 68% of respondents agreed with this statement, this increased by 28 percentage points, to 96%, following the training.
- Other areas where people's knowledge grew significantly were in relation to having more confidence *supporting children and young peoples' online safety needs and*

having more *knowledge and skills to support children and young people to develop their media literacy skills.*

- 94% of respondents agreed with the statement '*I have identified actions I can take to support children and young peoples' online safety*' following the training



Motivation for attending

What motivated you to participate in today's training, taking care online?

- 18 people said that they attended **due to the importance of technology in young people's lives and the need for skills and knowledge to support their media literacy.**
Reponses included:
 - "The training would help me to gain insight in supporting young people."
 - "To develop a greater understanding of how to support children staying safe online."
 - "Further education around use of the internet, in a massively evolving area of young people's lives."
 - "To support the young people I care for more effectively."
- A number of people (10) cited that it was **compulsory or recommended training by their employer**
- Other reasons** given were a mixture of updating knowledge and learning new skills, including advice on practical tools they can use.
 - "To learn more and to update my knowledge and understanding."
 - "To refresh & improve my knowledge to help keep up to date with technology."
 - "Need for more knowledge in this area."
 - "Better perception of on-line tools."

Content

The focus groups provided insight into the relevance and quality of the content delivered as part of the training, as well as how the training has been applied by participants. Key findings were:

1. Training was comprehensive and relevant

All focus group members commented that the training covered a wide variety of topics related to media literacy, with many emphasising that it was one of the most expansive and comprehensive trainings they had completed while still being digestible

"Really comprehensive... I've been on different training before, and I find that they are not as comprehensive, it really went into detail."

"Covered a lot of variety"

"Examples really landed the point."

"More extensive compared to other internet safety training including from the police".

"More in depth and interactive"

"Statistics were quite shocking but powerful."

"For example, the statistics were linked to contextual examples, so it made it more realistic and brought it to life."

"This particular training went into more depth and detail and had more group discussion and the breakout rooms."

2. Resources shared were helpful and easy to implement, especially the 'digital passport'

Participants talked about how they have used resources from the training in their day-to-day work. The most common resource being used by four participants was the [digital passport](#).

"Straight after the training I downloaded all the resources and shared it with my staff team."

The "[I wish my carer knew](#) resource, that I think will be a really good tool."

"Amount of resources set it apart [from other trainings]."

When talking about the digital passport participants said:

"Helped us have a better understanding of what sites they access, what types of social media they prioritise... And they became, in filling it out together, they were very open and transparent with us..."

"created a culture of open and transparency, it's almost like the barriers broke of 'these oldies don't know anything'"

"Digital Passport been incredibly helpful."

"The colour was good, the layout was good, they [young people] appeared to want to be interactive with it [Digital Passport]."

3. Training prompted conversations around media literacy

Since completing the training all participants said they were more aware of their role in supporting children's media literacy and had engaged in conversations about media literacy with both colleagues and young people.

"How important it is for us to have that media literacy and have those conversations with young people around safety online... and I have found myself having more of those conversations now than I did before and feeling a little bit more equipped to have those conversations."

"It can sometimes be scary to have those conversations when you think I actually don't know enough, but now I feel I know a bit more to start having those really open conversations."

"I found that I went away from it immediately after and saying did you know this."

"It's not about me understanding absolutely everything out there, all the platforms. It's about how am I going to teach our young people to become confident in keeping themselves safe."

"looking at our digital safety policy, incorporating the digital passports, sharing information..."

"I've shared with my colleagues and we have put together a plan of how we are going to share the information, including with volunteers."

"... put into our internet safety policy, over the next three months."

Format and expectations

- 84% said the training was about the right length of time, 15% said it was too long and 1% said it was too short.
- 96% agreed that their expectations for the training were satisfied.
- **"It's a brilliant course, the best I've done, it should be rolled out to local authorities, schools, colleges, youth clubs."**

When speaking to focus group participants we asked what elements of the training they thought worked, some of the most common comments related to:

Breakout rooms

"I would say the breakout rooms, being able to discuss scenarios with a multitude of professionals. I think that was quite eye opening for everybody."

"Really interactive and you could get a lot more out of it."

"Professionals must be working together, professionals must be sharing information."

"Break out rooms with residential staff, had all different experience... meaningful to have those discussions."

Presenters

"It was the best internet safety training, as managers, we've been able to access – there was so much information that was really, really well presented."

"Presenters really good at presenting and delivering and experienced."

"didn't come across like you were just being talked at."

"I've been working with CYP for a long time and been lots of different courses on online safety and that was the most informative and presented brilliantly, which made it interesting, and the pace was very good."

"A little bit too long. And for me, he [presenter] spoke very quickly. So when I was making notes, I was unable to make notes."

Attendance

As part of this evaluation, we sent out a survey to those that had enrolled but did not attend the training. Response rates were low (n=6) but some of the feedback we received included:

- One person said they were unable to attend because they were short staffed
- Four people said they would have completed the training if it was available online for them to complete in their own time
- Two people recognised that school holidays was a difficult time to conduct training
- No-one selected shorter training as a preference

We also asked focus group attendees about why they believe their colleagues may not have attended the training. Some of the common themes included:

Technology

"Technology... I get incredibly frustrated. If I'm on a course and I can't hear people, I can't engage. It's incredibly frustrating. I know colleagues of mine have chosen not to complete courses because they simply do not have the technology to go on Zooms."

"Internet problems"

Workplace challenges

"An emergency has cropped up in the workplace and their first priority is to deal with that emergency."

One participant talked about how you can have the "best laid plan", but you start working and "other things get in the way, such as safeguarding", so the first thing you will drop off the list is training, "because the training is free." The latter quote highlights an interesting insight that when training is free, people do not put a value on it and there is no commitment.

Technology and workplace challenges were the main reasons discussed. Other barriers mentioned were sickness and people preferring face-to-face training.

Future training and content delivery

- **97% of respondents said they were likely to recommend the training to someone else in the residential care sector. Of this number, 71% said they would be very likely to recommend it.**

In the focus groups, ways to improve attendance and different audiences for the training and modes of delivery were discussed.

- In order to increase engagement and overcome some of the barriers to attendance raised people suggested "having a variety" of delivery methods available including online 'live' sessions, pre-records and bite sized chunks that could be shared.
- People also highlighted that having access to the recording could have been helpful to refer back to.
- Five participants talked about doing a version of the training alongside young people.
- To improve participation, two focus group members suggest "going to where people are", for example, residential managers conferences.
- One participant discussed the idea of a regular newsletter as follow up which could highlight "new areas of concern or technology changes. This could then get shared with CYP at meetings."
- Many in the focus group commented that the training, or elements of the training would be appropriate for different groups including parents or local authorities: "Get this training out to parents, not just professionals."
 - All focus group attendees commented that face-to-face training would have been beneficial
 - "I understand it's [online training] the easy way round and why it's more cost-effective. However, I think there should be other options there. I think if you can do a face-to-face, your training was amazing but that would also benefit people face to face as well."
 - "I think it works better face to face because you get more interaction. When you are on Teams you got internet problems, like I had last week I couldn't join in because of my microphone, speakers playing up, whereas if you are altogether there is more group participation, interaction."

-
- o "If you are face to face you do get more of a learning experience, from talking to other people, rather than just sitting and listening to other people's views."

Check-in session feedback

NB: Due to small sample size (n=3) figures are displayed in numbers.

- All respondents had held a conversation with sector peers about children's media literacy following the training
- Two respondents said they had applied skills and/or knowledge from the training sessions in a residential care setting, two said they had applied skills and/or knowledge from the training session in another setting (such as with their own child) and two visited the Internet Matters website to access resources and/or learn more
- One respondent had noted issues and conversations relating to children's media literacy in the media, one had visited a website that wasn't Internet Matters to learn more about children's media literacy and one had advocated for new protocols in their residential care setting as a result of the training.

When asked why they attended the check-in sessions:

- Two said to hear how others had applied the training and get ideas
- Two said to share a positive experience that took place as a result of the training
- One said to share challenges they were experiencing in a residential care setting in relation to children's media literacy
- One said to network with other professionals
- One said to learn more about children's media literacy
- All who attended the check-in session said it was helpful, some of the reasons given for this included; hearing from others how they "had implemented what they had learnt" and an "opportunity to hear...any challenges they've had."
- They also said that there is nothing they would change about it, saying it was "excellent to have further updates" and "it was a positive' session."

Feedback from sector stakeholders

Just one response was received from sector stakeholders regarding how training is prioritised and valued in the residential care sector. They highlighted that even where training is free, there is a cost attached as they must cover staff while in training and as a result, the training needs to be good value for money. When considering optional training they noted that gaps in knowledge, an individual's professional development needs and the quality of the training are all considerations. They also noted that where there is buy-in from managers and learning leads, training is more likely to be undertaken.

Conclusions

Internet Matters was delighted to partner with Ofcom to deliver the "Taking Care Online" training. Whilst we were disappointed that we were unable to achieve the requirement to deliver training to 250 people, there were many positives and learnings for the future.

There was a clear need from the target audience, good engagement during the sessions, and the training was well received by participants. Participants self-reported that knowledge, confidence and skills regarding children's media literacy improved as a result of the training. 94% of respondents agreed with the statement '*I have identified actions I can take to support children and young peoples' online safety*' following the training, and 97% of survey respondents said they would likely recommend the training to someone else in the residential care sector.

Considerations for future training for this target audience:

- Delivery methods (could be used in combination):
 - Option 1: Bite size 'anytime' online learning modules, with option for a 'live' check in session mid-way through and/or on completion
 - Option 2: Face to face training to take front line workers out of their day to day environment
- For both methods of delivery:
 - Content and case studies tailored for the audience, delivered by expert trainers/facilitators
 - Charge at least a nominal fee so registered attendees place value on their booking, to reduce drop out
 - Partner with a care sector organisation (eg. Ofsted) or event (eg. Conference), providing a targeted comms channel
 - CPD accreditation
- For face to face:
 - Open bookings 2-3 months ahead of the training sessions (as the 3-hour sessions which were promoted first attracted higher registrations)
 - Half or full day training with opportunities for interaction, discussion and networking

Appendix – Attendance breakdown

3-hour sessions	Mon 26th Feb	Mon 4th March	Wed 6th March	Thur 14th March	Thur 21st March	Thurs 28th March	TOTAL
Booked	50	60	62	67	99	23	361
Attended	8	25	26	30	47	10	146
% attendance	16%	42%	42%	45%	47%	43%	46%

1-hour sessions	Fri 3rd May	Wed 8th May	TOTAL
Booked	15	17	32
Attended	4	4	8
% attendance	27%	24%	25%

Check-in sessions	Fri 17 May	Wed 22nd May	TOTAL
Booked	11	4	15
Attended	3	0	3
% attendance	27%	0%	20%