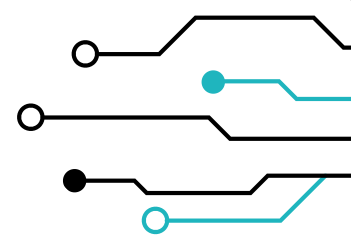




# END-OF-PROJECT REPORT

A youth-led online safety project delivered by  
Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) in partnership  
with NSPCC





I feel like I'm actually part of something and that people have listened to me...I think the group has done more than what we thought we would do, like lots of people have heard our ideas and what we wanted to say."

Maria, 15

"I feel like we did make a difference...we got the opinions of a lot of other people, all the younger ones, and I feel like because they had a voice and we got to find out more about issues and problems online. Also, the Stormont event, I feel like we got a lot out of that."

Matylda, 15



"I loved the [Stormont] Cyber Café because you actually got to talk to people from here, who knew exactly what is going on in Northern Ireland...I was on the news and probably screamed when I saw it."

Eimear, 17

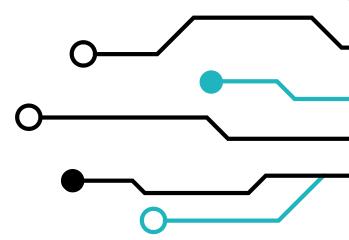
"It helped me recognise how dangerous the online world is, like I knew it was dangerous but I'll be a lot more aware now...and I feel like I could better support other people if they are having difficulties online."

Jamie, 17

"I've definitely been more careful, like I've warned people not to do certain things because it's just going to get you in a head of trouble like...I think it [online safety] might get better but there's a better way [than a ban] because some people might not be social enough to go outside and play football or you know what I mean? They might not have any friends and social media, gaming and stuff, it's something that people can have fun with."

Theo, 14

# FOREWORD BY NSPCC



The NSPCC is proud to have worked alongside Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) to deliver Be Cyber Safe NI: a project that places the voices, experiences and expertise of young people at its heart. At a time when children and young people are growing up in an increasingly complex digital world, this project has shown clearly that they are not only the experts in their own lives, but vital partners in shaping the solutions that will keep them safe.



Throughout the past year, we have been continually inspired by the honesty, courage and creativity shown by every young person involved. They spoke openly about what online life really feels like: the opportunities for connection, community and learning, as well as the harms that can follow them into their everyday lives. They shared what helps, what gets in the way, and what must change. Crucially, they did so not just for themselves, but for the young people who come after them.

Their insights have already begun to influence practice and policy across Northern Ireland. From informing safeguarding campaigns and education tools, to speaking directly with Ministers, civil servants, and online safety experts, young people have shown the power of meaningful participation. Their recommendations are grounded in lived experience: education that starts earlier and feels relevant; adults who listen without panic; reporting systems that work; and platforms that take real responsibility for safety by design.

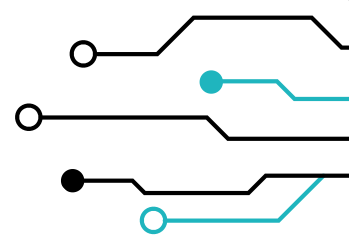
This project demonstrates what becomes possible when organisations come together with a shared commitment to listening to young people and acting on what they tell us. We are grateful to CiNI for their leadership and partnership, and to the youth workers, community organisations and families who supported participation every step of the way.

Most of all, we thank the young people themselves. Their determination to use their voices for change embodies exactly what we strive for as a children's charity: a society that protects children, listens to them, and empowers them to shape the world around them.

As the Online Safety Act begins to take shape in practice, and as Northern Ireland's own online safety priorities continue to evolve, the insights in this report must help guide the path forward. The foundations built through Be Cyber Safe NI: the youth-led insights; the strengthened networks; and the practical resources shaped by young people, will continue to inform NSPCC's work long after the project ends. We look forward to carrying this learning forward, continuing to advocate for change, and ensuring that the voices of young people in Northern Ireland continue to guide efforts to create a digital world where children are safe, supported and heard.

**Bronagh Muldoon**  
**Assistant Director Northern Ireland**  
**NSPCC**

# FOREWORD BY CINI



At Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI), we believe that children and young people must be at the centre of the decisions that affect their lives. Be Cyber Safe NI is a strong example of what can be achieved when that principle is put into practice.

CiNI had the privilege of working closely with young people across Northern Ireland as they explored the realities of growing up online. From the outset, this project was designed not simply to gather views, but to enable meaningful participation – creating safe spaces, building trusted relationships, and ensuring young people had genuine opportunities to influence those in positions of power.



Throughout the project, young people shared honest and thoughtful insights about their online experiences. They spoke about both the opportunities and the risks, and highlighted where systems are not working for them. Their message to adults and organisations was clear: listen, respond, and involve us in shaping the solutions.

A defining strength of Be Cyber Safe NI has been its commitment to a rights-based, youth-led approach. Through workshops, local engagement, creative activities and direct dialogue with decision-makers, young people were supported not only to share their views, but to see how those views can lead to real influence. This has included engagement with policymakers, contributions to safeguarding campaigns, and input into education tools and resources.

The impact has been significant. Alongside influencing practice and policy, young people have built confidence, skills and a stronger appreciation of their own voice. These outcomes matter – not only for this project, but for the wider goal of ensuring children and young people are active participants in the systems that shape their lives.

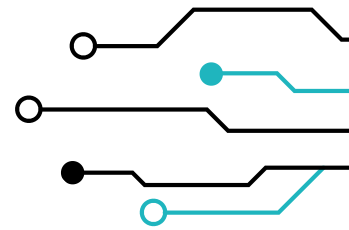
This work has been made possible through strong partnership. We are grateful to the NSPCC for their collaboration, and to the community organisations, youth workers and families who supported young people to take part.

This report is not an endpoint, but a call to action. The priorities set out by young people are clear: start earlier, make systems work better, support trusted relationships, and ensure accountability for online platforms. Meeting these challenges will require continued commitment to listening to young people – and acting on what they tell us.

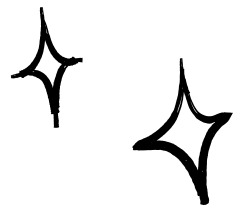
To the young people who shaped this project: thank you. Your voices have driven this work and will continue to shape what comes next.

**Natalie Whelehan**  
**Chief Executive**  
**Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI)**

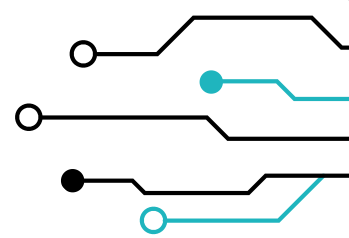
# CONTENTS



|   |    |
|---|----|
| <b>Executive Summary</b> .....                                      | 4  |
| <b>What Young People Told Us</b> .....                              | 8  |
| • What online life feels like for young people                      |    |
| • Where young people feel most let down                             |    |
| • What helps young people feel safer                                |    |
| • Accountability for online platforms                               |    |
| <b>Our Approach</b> .....   | 11 |
| • A rights-based, youth-led model                                   |    |
| • Safe and supportive participation                                 |    |
| • Building skills alongside voice                                   |    |
| <b>What We Did</b> .....  | 13 |
| • Understanding Online Safety                                       |    |
| • Deep Dive into Priority Areas                                     |    |
| • Youth Engagement and Media Production                             |    |
| • Stakeholder Engagement and Amplification                          |    |
| • Report, Evaluation and Celebration                                |    |
| <b>Stormont Cyber Cafe</b> .....                                    | 15 |
| <b>Media Campaign and Creative Outputs</b> .....                    | 18 |
| <b>What Changed</b> .....   | 20 |
| • Young people saw their voices taken seriously                     |    |
| • Influence on online safety policy and strategy                    |    |
| • Impact on education tools: Safer Schools NI App                   |    |
| • Influence on safeguarding campaign design                         |    |
| <b>Our Recommendations</b> .....                                    | 22 |
| <b>Appendices</b> .....   | 23 |
| A. Stormont Cyber Café  |    |
| B. Parentline Podcast: Be Cyber Safe NI – The Youth Takeover Series |    |
| C. Video Animations and Social Media Toolkit                        |    |
| D. Safer Schools App NI – Feedback Report                           |    |
| E. Letters from NI Executive Ministers                              |    |
| F. Media and Press coverage   |    |



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## WHAT WAS BE CYBER SAFE NI?

Be Cyber Safe NI was a youth voice amplification project that supported young people across Northern Ireland to explore online safety, share their real experiences of online life, and influence the adults and organisations responsible for keeping children safe online.

The project created a safe, structured space where young people could speak honestly about what it feels like to grow up online – including what helps, what harms, and what needs to change.

**“It helped my confidence and I enjoyed being able to share my ideas without being afraid of what people would think.”**  
**Iona, 14**

## WHY THIS MATTERED

For young people today, being online is not “extra” – it is part of everyday life. Young people use online spaces to connect with friends, learn, explore interests, play games, and express themselves. However, they can also face risks such as harmful content, harassment, grooming, scams, pressure to share personal information, and problems reporting harm.

Research consistently shows that children and young people are engaging with online spaces at increasingly early ages, with social media and online platforms playing a central role in how they communicate, learn and socialise. Studies have found that many children begin using social media platforms before the minimum age of 13, often accessing multiple platforms daily, which increases both opportunities and exposure to online risks such as harmful content, online bullying, and unwanted contact.[1] This highlights the importance of early, meaningful online safety education and supportive adult relationships to help young people navigate the digital world safely.

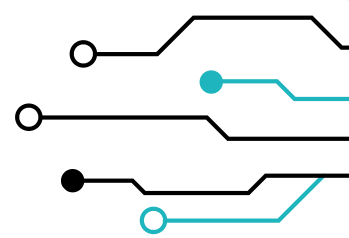
Young people consistently told us they want online safety to improve in ways that protect them without taking away their freedom to connect, learn, and explore.



**“I don’t want my younger sisters or cousins to go through this.”**  
**Alanna-May, 14**

1 Butler et al. (2025), ‘Screens, Safety and Social Media: Evidence from the Kids’ Life and Times (KLT) and Young Life and Times (YLT) Surveys.’ Queen’s University Belfast; Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNi).

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Hearing directly from young people in Northern Ireland was especially important because many of the services that affect children’s safety and support – including education, youth services, safeguarding and public health – are shaped locally through the Northern Ireland Executive and the Northern Ireland Assembly at Stormont. While regulation of online platforms is largely set at UK level, Stormont can set local direction, coordinate cross-departmental work, and drive practical change through strategies and action plans. Bringing youth voice into these conversations helps ensure local policy and practice are grounded in lived experience.

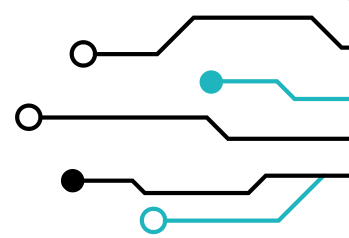
## WHAT WE DELIVERED

**From January 2025 to March 2026, the project delivered:**

- A structured programme of workshops, residentials, local engagement, and creative production opportunities with a core youth advisory group of 10 young people aged 14–17, from Limavady, Portadown, Dungannon, Belfast, and Downpatrick
- A major stakeholder engagement and youth voice amplification event at Stormont in collaboration with Ofcom: the Stormont Cyber Café (8 October 2025) attended by an Executive Minister and other MLAs, government departments and arms-length bodies, children’s authorities, online safety experts, community and voluntary sector organisations, parents/carers and young people
- A three-episode podcast series: Be Cyber Safe NI - The Youth Takeover (Parentline NI Podcast)
- Youth-led creative concepts for video and social media content aimed at young people and parents/carers to address barriers and encourage reporting



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## WHAT CHANGED

### By the end of the project:

- Young people reported increased confidence, communication skills and belief in their ability to influence adults and decision-makers
- Stakeholders gained clearer insight into young people's real online experiences and priorities
- Youth voice influenced policy discussions, safeguarding campaigns and education tools
- Youth-led feedback led to concrete changes in campaign design and review of national online safety resources for example, the 'Trust Trap' social media campaign developed by SBNI and PSNI to encourage reporting.

## KEY YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on what young people shared throughout the Be Cyber Safe NI project, four clear priorities emerged for improving online safety for children and young people.

### Education

Start online safety education earlier, make it consistent across schools, and deliver it in interactive and meaningful ways that reflect young people's real online experiences.

### Parents and carers

Support calm, informed adult responses and encourage trust-based conversations between young people and the adults who care for them.

### Reporting

Make reporting systems simpler, clearer and more effective, with visible reporting tools and feedback loops so young people know what happens after they report harm.

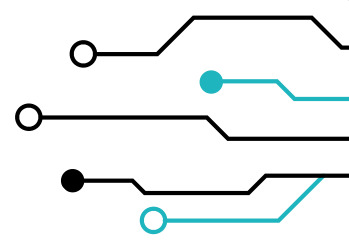
### Online platforms

Design safety into platforms from the start and involve young people in shaping solutions and resources intended for them.

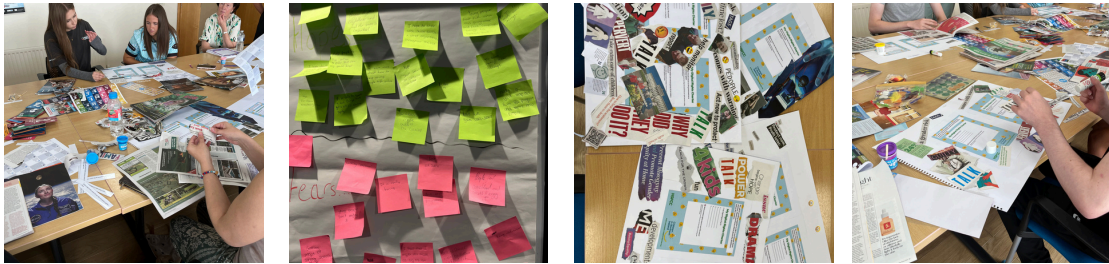
*A fuller set of youth-led recommendations is outlined later in this report.*



# WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE TOLD US



This section brings together what young people shared across workshops, local youth engagement, creative sessions and the Stormont Cyber Café. It reflects young people’s lived experiences and priorities – in their own words.



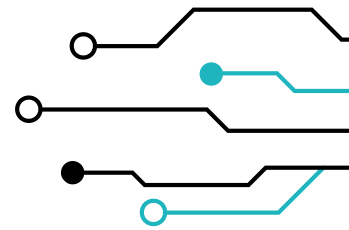
## WHAT ONLINE LIFE FEELS LIKE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people described online life as constant and unavoidable – something that sits alongside school, friendships and family life. They spoke about the benefits of being online, but also how harm can appear unexpectedly and follow them beyond physical spaces.

**I learned a lot about how social media can be both positive or negative, and how important it is to think carefully about what we post and share online.**  
– Iona, 14.

Young people were clear that online safety approaches must recognise **both opportunity and risk**, rather than treating the online world only as a threat.

# WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE TOLD US



## WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL MOST LET DOWN

### Reporting online harm

Across all engagement, reporting systems were consistently described as hard to use and difficult to trust. Young people spoke about unclear pathways, complicated processes and lack of feedback after reporting.

This sense that “nothing happens” after reporting was a major barrier to young people seeking help.

**“If there’s not a button to report, we won’t report it.”**

### Education that comes too late

Young people felt that online safety education often starts after awareness of risks and harm has already been gained. They called for earlier, consistent and engaging education.

**“By the time we get to secondary school, it’s too late.”**

**“For everyone of us in here talking about this, there is 100 other kids who are completely unaware of online safety and danger online.”**

### Adult responses driven by fear

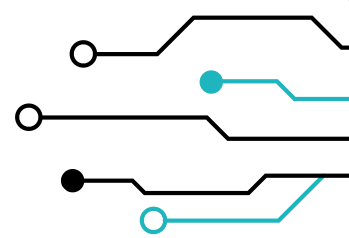
Young people described how panic-driven or punitive adult reactions can discourage disclosure and shut down conversation.

**“It’s not that we don’t trust our parents - we just don’t know how they’ll react.”**

**“Parents care so much that sometimes it makes them panic, and that distance creeps in.”**

**“What we actually need in those moments isn’t punishment - it’s help.”**

# WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE TOLD US



## WHAT HELPS YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL SAFER

Young people consistently said they feel safer when:

- adults listen first and stay calm
- rules are explained rather than simply imposed
- safety tools are visible and easy to use
- they are reassured that online harms are **not their fault**

Trust and relationships were repeatedly identified as central to safety.

“  
**What helps most is when parents stay calm, ask questions, and help us fix it instead of shouting.**  
”

“  
**When parents talk with us, not at us, it really helps.**  
”

“  
**We don't always need adults to fix things – sometimes we just need them to hear us.**  
”

## ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ONLINE PLATFORMS

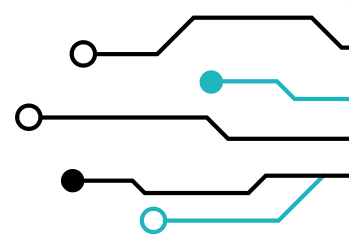
Young people were clear that responsibility for online safety should not sit only with children, parents or schools.

“  
**ANYONE can bump into harm.**  
”

“  
**Easy to get the report in but it's not being acted on.**  
”

They want online platforms and systems to take responsibility, and for young people to be involved in shaping solutions.

# OUR APPROACH



Be Cyber Safe NI was designed to amplify youth voice – ensuring young people were not just consulted, but genuinely heard and influential. This included:

- young people identifying what matters most
- young people shaping messages and outputs
- young people speaking directly to decision-makers
- young people seeing that their views lead to real action and change

Our approach to this work is largely adopted from the rights-based “Lundy Model” of child participation, which says participation must include Space, Voice, Audience and Influence – meaning young people are given safe opportunities to share views, supported to express them, listened to by decision-makers, and shown how their views are acted upon. [2]



Be Cyber Safe NI was delivered by Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) in partnership with NSPCC. CiNI collaborated with a range of community organisations and youth clubs to support young people’s participation. These included:

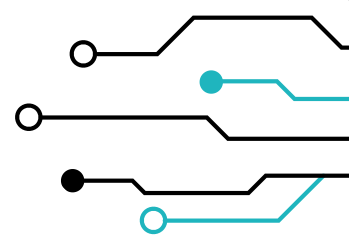
- Dry Arch Children’s Centre, Limavady;
- Oasis Youth / Community Intercultural Programme, Portadown;
- Clonmore Youth Club, Dungannon;
- Blackmountain Action Group, Belfast; and
- Patrician Youth Centre, Downpatrick.

The professional skills mix across our team, from experienced youth workers, policy and communications staff, and experts in online safety, played a significant role in the success of the project.

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[2] Lundy, L. (2007) “Voice” is not enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the UNCRC (British Educational Research Journal).

# OUR APPROACH



## WHO TOOK PART

The Be Cyber Safe NI group brought together 10 young people aged 14-17 from five areas across Northern Ireland:

- Limavady: Iona (14), Jamie (17)
- Portadown: Matylda (15), Maria (15)
- Dungannon: Alanna-May (15), Eimear (17)
- Belfast: Theo (14), Ethan (14)
- Downpatrick: Darragh (15), Odhrán (15)

This geographic spread helped ensure the group reflected a range of experiences and local contexts, including urban and rural perspectives. The young people who took part also reflected a range of abilities, socio-economic contexts, religions and ethnic minority backgrounds.

While the advisory group formed the core of the project, Be Cyber Safe NI also engaged wider groups of young people across Northern Ireland through local youth settings. Advisory group members played an active role in these sessions, helping to explore online safety issues with their peers and bring those perspectives back into the project. This wider engagement strengthened the project's insights and ensured that the voices reflected in this report represent the experiences of many young people beyond the core group. Further detail on this local engagement is outlined in the next section.

## YOUTH-LED

Young people were supported to identify priorities, explore issues, and shape outputs. Adults played a supporting role - creating safe spaces, providing guidance, and helping remove barriers to participation.

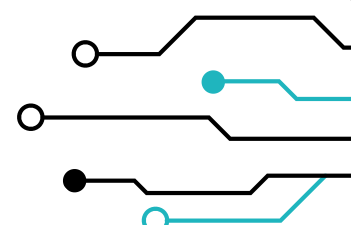
Online harm can be distressing to talk about. The project created supportive spaces where young people could participate at their own pace and feel respected and listened to. Robust safeguarding and trauma-informed practice was the golden thread throughout all of our work.

The programme intentionally included opportunities for young people to build skills such as:

- communication and teamwork
- public speaking and confidence
- understanding how decisions are made
- media and messaging skills

This helped young people not only share experiences, but also shape solutions.

# WHAT WE DID



Be Cyber Safe NI was delivered through a structured programme combining trust-building, exploration, creative production and amplification.

"The highlight for me was getting to know everyone better and building friendships. It was a great mix of learning and social time." Iona, 14

JAN 25



**STAY SAFE**

Purpose: explore key online safety issues in depth and begin shaping youth priorities.

## APR - June 25 DEEP DIVE INTO PRIORITY AREAS

- Residential trip and workshop series (Newcastle)
- Online session with SBNI supporting 'Trust Trap' campaign
- **POLICYMAKING AND DIGITAL RIGHTS WORKSHOP WITH NSPCC**

What this phase achieved:

- Clarified priority areas and shared understanding
- Strengthened confidence in discussing online safety

**CYBER**



## JAN - MAR 25 UNDERSTANDING ONLINE SAFETY

Purpose: build trust, establish the group, and begin exploring online safety realities.

### • INTRODUCTORY SESSION AND LAUNCH OF THE NI CYBER COLLECTIVE

- Social activity and workshop (Blackmountain)
- Workshop (Limavady)

What this phase achieved:

- Young people got to know each other and felt comfortable sharing views
- early insights began to emerge about what young people wanted adults to understand





## JUL - SEPT 25 YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND MEDIA PRODUCTION

**Purpose:** extend youth voice beyond the core group and create outputs that reach wider audiences.

- Introductory session and launch of the NI Cyber Collective-Local youth engagement activities (peer outreach)
- **PRODUCTION WORKSHOP (PODCAST RECORDING AND GRAPHIC DESIGN)**
- Event planning and press workshop with NSPCC

Alongside work with the core advisory group, the project included local youth engagement across Belfast, Limavady, Downpatrick, Portadown and Dungannon.

This engagement:

- widened insight beyond the core group
- validated emerging themes
- supported young people to engage peers in conversations about online safety

Across local sessions:

- young people suggested online safety is a major concern (92% of those who used BCSNI's survey tool)
- confidence in talking to adults about online harm was mixed
- Snapchat was frequently identified as a platform associated with harmful behaviour
- young people described using basic safety strategies, but found tools hard to navigate
- the most common age for initial access to apps and online games was 7-8 years old

**This reinforced young people's calls for earlier education and clearer safety tools.**

**What this phase achieved:**

Young people gained experience in media and messaging young people were supported to prepare for stakeholder-facing engagement youth voice was strengthened through peer insight gathering

## OCT - DEC 25

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND AMPLIFICATION

**Purpose:** amplify youth voice to decision-makers and the public.

- Residential trip and public speaking coaching session
- **STORMONT CYBER CAFÉ EVENT (PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS).**

*The Stormont Cyber Café brought young people together with decision-makers and stakeholders to explore how to protect young people online while allowing freedom to connect, learn and explore. Discussions were youth-led and captured through facilitated conversations and creative methods.*

#### • LAUNCH OF BE CYBER SAFE NI PARENTLINE NI PODCAST TAKEOVER SERIES

Young people:

- delivered a three-episode takeover series on the Parentline NI Podcast
- developed concepts for video animations and social media messaging
- shaped content designed to support disclosure and encourage calm-adult responses



- Remote feedback session with young people.
- Safer Schools App NI workshop, Department of Education
- Meeting with Head of EA Youth Services and report workshop

**What this phase achieved:**

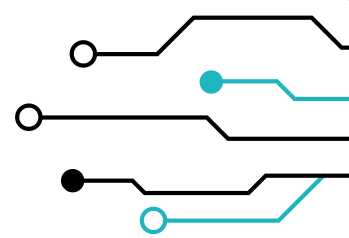
- young people directly influenced stakeholders and gained experience in formal decision-making spaces;
- pledges and recommendations were captured to support action
- youth voice reached wider audiences through podcast and media

## JAN - MAR 26 REPORT EVALUATION AND CELEBRATION

**Purpose:** ensure learning was captured, shared, and celebrated.

**MAR 26**

# STORMONT CYBER CAFE



A major milestone of the Be Cyber Safe NI project was the Stormont Cyber Café, held at Parliament Buildings. The event brought together young people from the Be Cyber Safe NI advisory group with policymakers, safeguarding professionals and representatives from across government, education and the voluntary sector.

The Cyber Café was designed as an informal, youth-led discussion space where decision-makers could hear directly from young people about their experiences of growing up online. Conversations explored how online spaces shape young people's lives, the challenges they face, and what changes are needed to make the digital world safer while still allowing young people to connect, learn and explore.



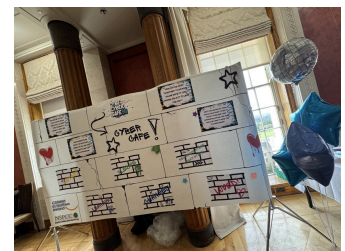
Participants included representatives from key safeguarding and policy organisations, including the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI), Ofcom, the Department of Health, the Department of Justice, the Department of Education, and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), alongside elected representatives from the Northern Ireland Assembly. The event created an opportunity for open dialogue between young people and those responsible for shaping online safety policy and practice.

## KEY THEMES FROM THE DISCUSSIONS

Several clear themes emerged during the conversations.

### Young people want protection, but not panic

Young people spoke about how adults often view the online world mainly through the lens of risk and danger, while young people also experience it as a space for learning, creativity, friendship and exploration. Bridging this gap between adult concern and young people's lived experience was seen as essential for building trust and effective safeguarding responses.

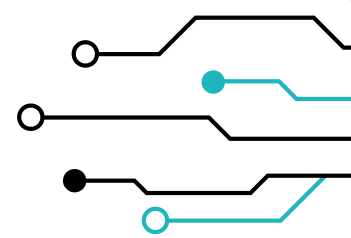


### Education, not just restriction

A repeated message from both young people and stakeholders was that online safety cannot rely solely on restrictions, bans or blocking content. Participants highlighted the need for earlier and more meaningful education about online safety, starting in primary school and continuing through a consistent, whole-school approach. Young people emphasised that learning should be interactive and engaging, rather than adults simply "talking at" them.

**"By the time we get to secondary school, it's too late. We need whole society approaches at every single age."**

# STORMONT CYBER CAFE



## Reporting needs to be simpler – and it must work

Reporting online harm was a major focus of discussion. Participants described reporting systems as difficult to find, complicated to navigate and unclear about who reports are actually going to. Young people also highlighted a lack of feedback when reports are made, which can create a sense that “nothing happens”.

**“If there’s not a button to report, we won’t report it.”**

Participants also noted that harmful content can sometimes remain visible even after reports have been submitted, and that reporting categories do not always reflect what has actually happened.

## Adults need support too

Parents and carers were recognised as having an important role in supporting young people online, but many feel unsure about how different platforms work or how best to respond when problems arise. Discussions highlighted the need for greater support for adults, including opportunities for parents, carers and teachers to learn together and develop confident, calm responses to online challenges.

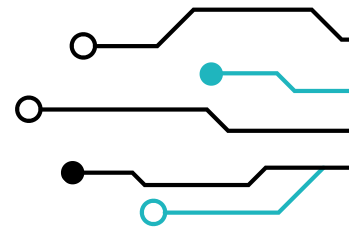
## Platforms and companies must be accountable

Participants also emphasised that responsibility for online safety should not rest solely with young people or their families. Online platforms and technology companies have a duty to design safer environments, ensure safety tools are visible and accessible, and involve young people in shaping improvements.

**“For every one of us in here talking about this, there is 100 other kids who are completely unaware of online safety and danger online.”**

**ANYONE can bump into harm.**

# STORMONT CYBER CAFE



## Youth voice and lived experience

Throughout the event, young people shared powerful reflections about their experiences online and the realities of navigating digital spaces.

These contributions helped ensure that the discussion remained grounded in the real experiences of young people, while also highlighting the importance of early education, effective reporting systems and supportive adult responses.

“**Cyberbullying - it’s in your pocket and you can’t escape it.**”

## Pledges and commitments

The Cyber Café concluded with stakeholders reflecting on what they had heard and identifying actions they could take to improve online safety for young people.

Participants committed to:

- listening to young people and engaging them as key stakeholders in online safety discussions
- continuing to educate themselves about the digital environments young people use
- supporting parents and carers to respond calmly and constructively when problems arise
- involving young people in the development of future resources and initiatives
- extending youth engagement on online safety to reach more young people across Northern Ireland

These commitments reinforced the importance of partnership and shared responsibility in creating safer online environments.

## Amplifying youth voices

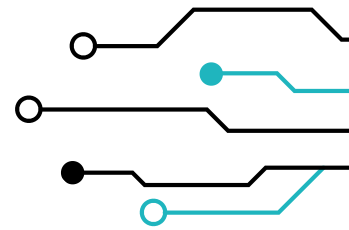
The Cyber Café also provided opportunities for young people to share their views with a wider audience. Several participants took part in **media interviews with BBC Northern Ireland and That’s TV**, which resulted in television and online coverage of the event. This media engagement allowed young people to communicate their perspectives directly to the public and further amplified the project’s message about the importance of listening to young people when shaping online safety policy and practice.

“**Getting my voice out to all the MLAs and people from Ofcom.**”  
— Theo, 14



Further detail about the event, including the full attendee list and additional reflections, is included in **Appendix A**.

# MEDIA CAMPAIGN AND CREATIVE OUTPUTS



Alongside engagement with policymakers and stakeholders, the Be Cyber Safe NI project developed a series of media and creative outputs designed to amplify young people’s voices and share their experiences of online life with a wider audience. These outputs were shaped directly by the themes and insights emerging from the project’s youth engagement activities, ensuring that the messages reflected the realities of growing up online.

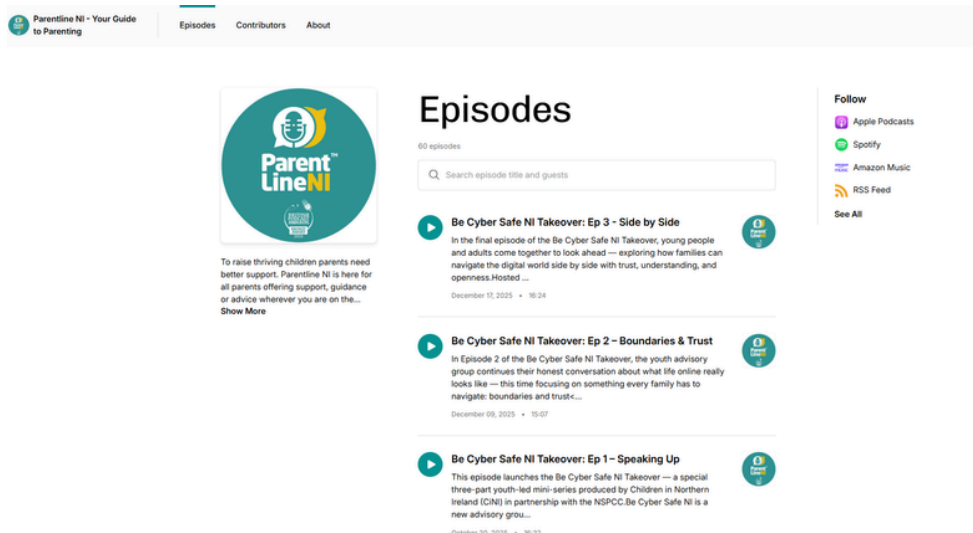


## Parentline Podcast Takeover Series

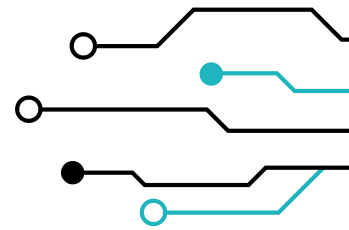
As part of the project, young people collaborated with CiNI and NSPCC to develop a **three-episode podcast series exploring online safety from a youth perspective**. The series provided a platform for young people to discuss their experiences of the digital world, including the benefits of being online, the challenges they face, and the kinds of support that help them feel safer.

The podcast episodes focused on key themes identified throughout the project, including the importance of supportive adult responses when things go wrong online, the balance between safety and independence, and the need for open conversations between young people, parents and educators about digital life. Young people played an active role in shaping the content of the episodes, helping to identify discussion topics, refine the language used and ensure that the messages felt authentic and relatable.

By sharing these conversations publicly, the podcast series helped extend the reach of the project beyond workshops and events, enabling young people to speak directly to parents, professionals and the wider community about their experiences and perspectives on online safety.



# MEDIA CAMPAIGN AND CREATIVE OUTPUTS



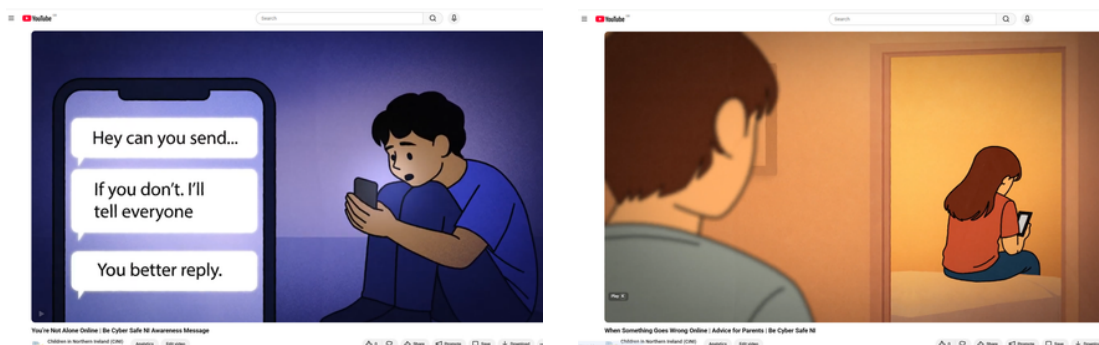
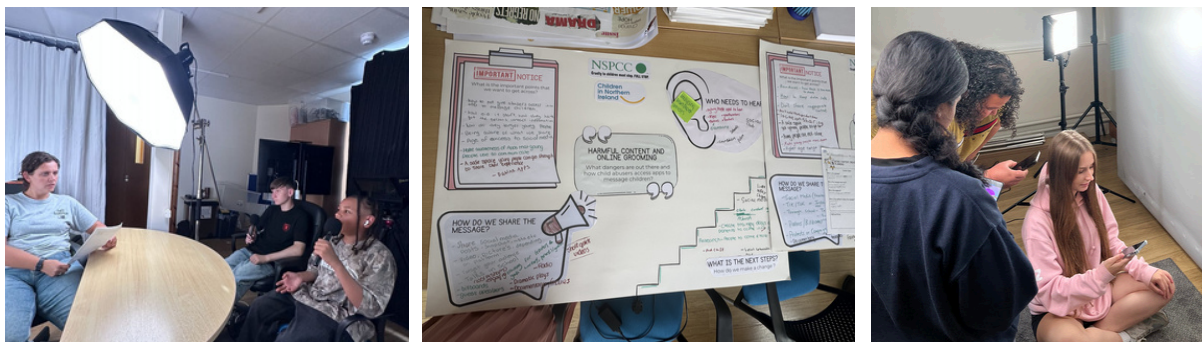
## Be Cyber Safe NI Animation Videos

The project also supported the development of a series of **Be Cyber Safe NI animation videos**, designed to communicate key online safety messages in a format that is accessible and engaging for young audiences. The animations draw directly on the themes and insights shared by young people during the project, translating their experiences into short visual stories that highlight common online risks and encourage positive responses. Young people involved in the project played an important role in shaping the development of these videos. Through discussions and creative workshops, they helped refine the tone, visuals and messaging to ensure that the animations reflected how young people actually experience online spaces. In particular, they emphasised the importance of messages that avoid blame and instead encourage young people to seek help when something goes wrong.

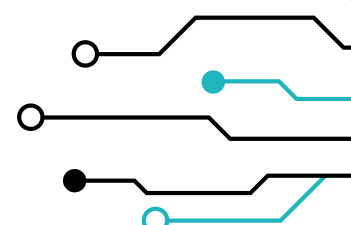
Together, the podcast series and animation videos represent an important part of the project's approach to youth voice amplification. By transforming young people's experiences and insights into shareable media content, these outputs help ensure that their voices reach wider audiences and continue to influence conversations about online safety beyond the lifetime of the project.



Further detail about these outputs, including podcast scripts and links to the animation content, is included in the appendices.



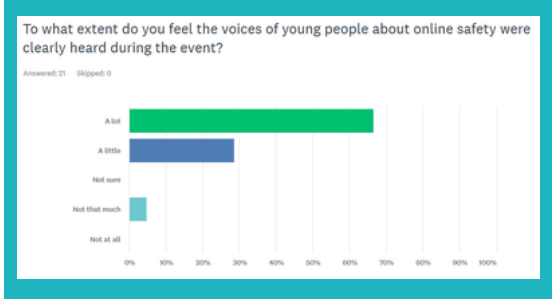
# WHAT CHANGED



## YOUNG PEOPLE SAW THEIR VOICES TAKEN SERIOUSLY

Following the Stormont Cyber Café, young people wrote to Ministers in the Departments of Education, Health and Justice to share their priorities for improving online safety, including earlier digital safety education in schools, greater support for mental health and wellbeing online, and clearer, more effective reporting systems when harm occurs. Ministers welcomed the insights shared by young people through the Stormont Cyber Café and recognised the importance of youth voice in shaping approaches to online safety. They confirmed that the feedback will help inform ongoing work under the Northern Ireland Online Safety Strategy, including future policy development, resources and safeguarding initiatives.

**“[A highlight was] getting my voice out to all the MLAs and people from Ofcom.” – Theo, 14**



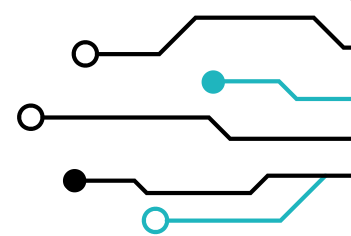
## INFLUENCE ON ONLINE SAFETY POLICY AND STRATEGY

Ministerial correspondence confirmed that youth feedback would inform work under the Northern Ireland Online Safety Strategy, including future campaigns, resources and identification of emerging issues.

The Minister of Justice committed to sharing feedback with Ofcom and the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland, and highlighted alignment with implementation of the Online Safety Act 2023. The Minister of Education confirmed that the insights shared will inform ongoing cross-departmental work on the Northern Ireland Executive’s Online Safety Strategy and future policy development. The Minister of Health recognised the importance of the issues raised, particularly the impact of online experiences on mental health and wellbeing, and confirmed that the feedback will inform future actions under the Strategy.



# WHAT CHANGED



## DIRECT IMPACT ON EDUCATION: SAFER SCHOOLS NI APP

Be Cyber Safe NI produced a bespoke youth feedback report on the Safer Schools NI App, based on a focus group with nine young people.

Young people said:

- awareness and access to the App were inconsistent
- content was too text-heavy and unengaging
- the App did not influence their online behaviour

They recommended:

- more visual and interactive content
- clearer differentiation from school communication systems
- embedding use of the App within classroom learning

The Department of Education formally thanked Be Cyber Safe NI and the young people for this feedback and confirmed it would be considered as part of ongoing work on online safety resources.

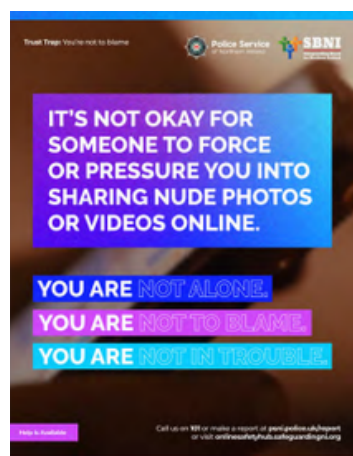
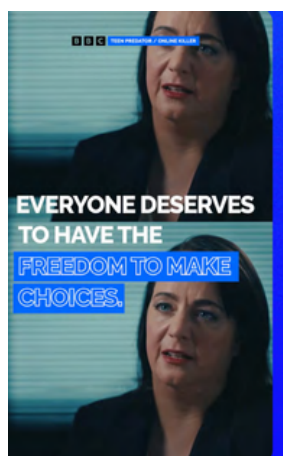


## INFLUENCE ON SAFEGUARDING CAMPAIGN DESIGN: TRUST TRAP, YOU'RE NOT TO BLAME

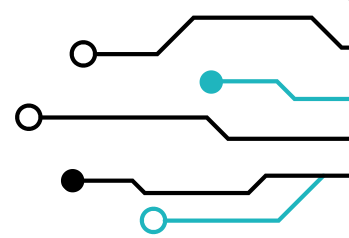
Young people reviewed draft assets for the Trust Trap: You're Not to Blame campaign led by the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland and the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Their feedback led to significant revisions to campaign videos and messaging. The changes were substantial enough to delay the campaign launch, but partners confirmed the final materials are much stronger because of youth input.

This demonstrates youth voice influencing safeguarding practice in real time, through genuine co-design rather than consultation.



# OUR RECOMMENDATIONS



Drawing on the insights shared by young people throughout the Be Cyber Safe NI project – including discussions with the advisory group, engagement with wider youth groups in their communities, and conversations with policymakers at the Stormont Cyber Café – the project identified a number of key priorities for improving online safety.

These youth-led recommendations reflect what young people told us about the changes they believe are needed to make online spaces safer and more supportive for children and young people.

## Education

Start online safety education earlier, make it consistent, and deliver it in interactive, meaningful ways.

“  
**We need whole society approaches at every single age.**  
”

“  
**There’s no point in designing a resource for young people if you haven’t spoken to young people.**  
”

## Parents and carers

Support calm, informed adult responses and build trust-based conversations.

“  
**Parents need to be understanding & approachable to deal with whatever their child is going through.”**  
”

## Reporting

Make reporting simpler, clearer and effective – with visible tools and feedback loops.

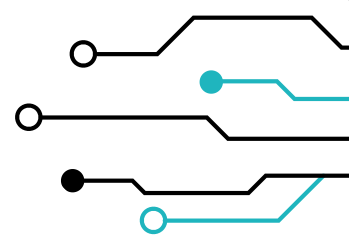
“  
**Easy to get the report in but [it’s] not being acted on.”**  
”

## Platforms

Design safety by default and involve young people in shaping solutions.

“  
**I think we’ve got somewhere with this, we’ve shown how dangerous social media can be...we’ve definitely had our voices heard**  
”

# APPENDIX A: LIST OF ATTENDEES, STORMONT CYBER CAFE



The Stormont Cyber Café took place in the Long Gallery at Parliament Buildings, Stormont, on 8th October 2025 and asked a central question:

**“How can we protect young people online while still allowing them freedom to connect, learn and explore?”**

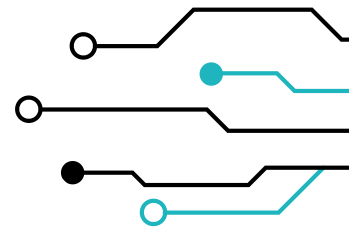
The event created a rare opportunity for young people to speak directly to decision-makers, including politicians and key stakeholders, about what needs to change. It was delivered in collaboration between CiNI, NSPCC and Ofcom. The roundtable discussions were led by young people from Be Cyber Safe NI.

96 people registered for the event and the attendee list shows a strong cross-sectoral mix, including:

- NI Youth Assembly
- NI Commissioner for Children and Young People’s Youth Panel
- Youth @ Children’s Law Centre
- Coláiste Feirste
- Oasis Youth / Community Intercultural Programme
- Blackmountain Action Group
- Patrician Youth Centre
- Clonmore Youth Club
- Dry Arch Children’s Centre
- Parentline NI
- Joanne Bunting MLA (Junior Minister, The Executive Office)
- Michelle Guy MLA (Chair, All Party Group on Online Safety)
- Safeguarding Board NI
- Department of Health
- Southern Health and Social Care Trust
- Western Health and Social Care Trust
- Youth Justice Agency
- Department of Justice
- Police Service of Northern Ireland
- Department of Education
- Education Authority
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment
- The Executive Office
- Barnardo’s
- Children’s Law Centre
- VOYPIC
- Action Mental Health
- Marie Collins Foundation
- Assist NI
- Victim Support NI
- Save the Children
- Independent consultants/Online Safety Experts
- Ofcom



# APPENDIX B: PARENTLINE PODCAST: BE CYBER SAFE NI – THE YOUTH TAKEOVER SERIES



To amplify young people’s voices directly to parents and carers, Be Cyber Safe NI produced a three-episode takeover series for the Parentline NI Podcast.

This allowed youth voice to reach beyond events and workshops, and gave parents the chance to hear young people explain what they need from adults in a calm, constructive way.

At the time of publishing this report in March 2026, we recorded a Reach / listens / downloads: \_\_\_\_\_

## Episode titles and themes

### Episode 1: It’s Hard to Talk: Trust, Fear and Finding Your Voice

This episode focuses on why young people often struggle to tell adults when something goes wrong online. A key message is that young people need adults to stay calm, listen first, and avoid blaming or punishing reactions.

### Episode 2: Boundaries and Balance: Privacy, Protection and Parental Controls

This episode explores how young people and parents can find balance between safety and privacy. It highlights that parental controls can be helpful, but trust and communication are essential.

### Episode 3: Growing Up Digital: Learning, Balance and Building Understanding

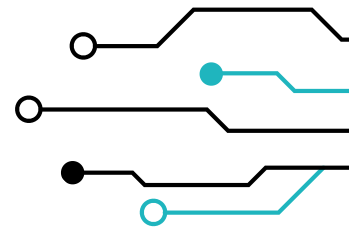
This episode focuses on the “generation gap” and the importance of learning together. It encourages parents to be curious, understand what young people do online, and build regular check-ins rather than only talking about online safety when something goes wrong.

The screenshot shows the Parentline NI website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'Parentline NI - Your Guide to Parenting', 'Episodes', 'Contributors', and 'About'. A search bar and a 'Follow' button are on the right. The main content area is titled 'Episodes' and lists 60 episodes. Three episodes are visible:

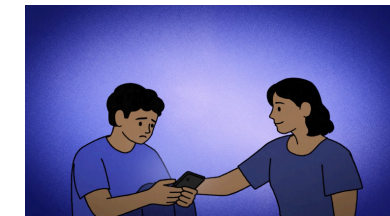
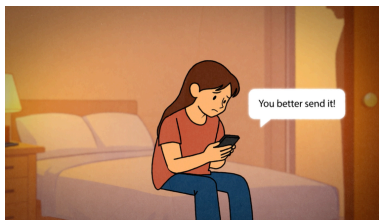
- Be Cyber Safe NI Takeover: Ep 3 - Side by Side**  
In the final episode of the Be Cyber Safe NI Takeover, young people and adults come together to look ahead — exploring how families can navigate the digital world side by side with trust, understanding, and openness. Hosted ...  
December 17, 2025 • 16:24
- Be Cyber Safe NI Takeover: Ep 2 – Boundaries & Trust**  
In Episode 2 of the Be Cyber Safe NI Takeover, the youth advisory group continues their honest conversation about what life online really looks like — this time focusing on something every family has to navigate: boundaries and trust....  
December 08, 2025 • 15:07
- Be Cyber Safe NI Takeover: Ep 1 – Speaking Up**  
This episode launches the Be Cyber Safe NI Takeover — a special three-part youth-led mini-series produced by Children in Northern Ireland (CINI) in partnership with the NSPCC. Be Cyber Safe NI is a new advisory group....  
October 20, 2025 • 16:32

On the right, a 'Follow' sidebar lists: Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Amazon Music, and RSS Feed, with a 'See All' link.

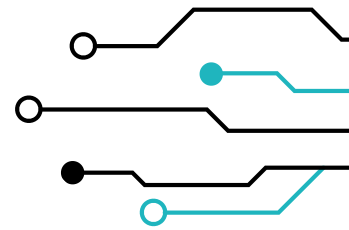
# APPENDIX C: VIDEO ANIMATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLKIT



Young people identified key audiences and bespoke messaging that would form part of their youth-led campaign to strengthen safety online. They deliberately wanted to target other children and young people with supportive signposting to further help, support and reporting; and they also wanted to encourage parents and carers to talk to their young people about issues online and build trust in order to address the fear of punishment and restrictions.



# APPENDIX D: MEDIA AND PRESS COVERAGE



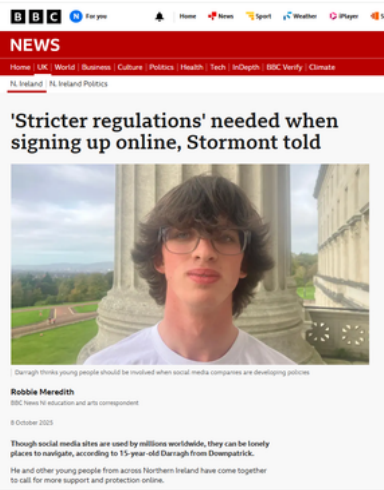
The project and Stormont Cyber Café received a strong level of coverage across local and regional media, including broadcast, radio and local press.

## Coverage included:

- Irish News: launch coverage for the youth online safety group (February 2025)
- BBC TV Newsline feature (including interviews with young people)
- BBC News Online feature with photos and interviews
- BBC NI Radio live interview
- ITV NI Morning News interview (pre-event)
- BBC Radio Foyle interview (staff and young people from Dry Arch Children’s Centre)
- That’s TV interviews with Eimear, NSPCC, and CiNI representatives
- Down Recorder (young people from Patrician Youth Centre)
- Northern Constitution - Limavady Chronicle (young people from Dry Arch Children’s Centre)
- Tyrone Herald (young people from Clonmore Youth Club)

## Media coverage helped:

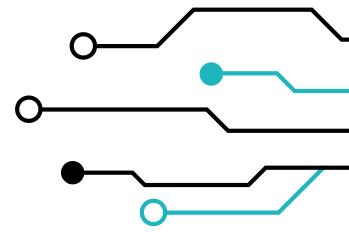
- increase awareness of online safety issues raised by young people
- show that youth voice belongs in policy and public conversations
- reinforce that online safety is not only a “family issue” but a systems issue



## BBC News Northern Ireland



# APPENDIX E: LETTERS FROM NI EXECUTIVE MINISTERS



*J. Scott*

*J.B.H.*

*T.M.*

*Ernie  
Dunnash*

*Alanna  
Murray*

*O McCollam*

*Alan Galtrey*

*Wendy  
Mojik*

10 December 2025

Naomi Long MLA  
Minister of Justice  
Castle Buildings,  
Stormont  
Belfast, BT4 3SG

Issued by email to: [DOJ.MinistersOffice@justice-ni.gov.uk](mailto:DOJ.MinistersOffice@justice-ni.gov.uk)

**Re: Stormont Cyber Café - Sorry We Missed You**

Dear Minister Long,

Sorry we missed you at the Stormont Cyber Café on 8th October 2025. The event was about how to make the internet safer for young people. It was run by Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) and NSPCC NI, with young people like us from across Northern Ireland taking part.

One big topic was reporting problems online – like bullying, scams, harmful content, and unwanted messages. A lot of us said that reporting doesn't really work.

Here's what we said:

- It's often hard to find where to report things on apps, and the forms are confusing.
- When we do report something, nothing seems to happen, or we get no reply.
- We want to be able to talk to a real person if something serious happens, not just a chatbot.
- Some young people are afraid to contact the police because they don't know what will happen next.
- It would help to have one simple place to report online harm that feels safe and easy to use.

For many of us, our phones and online lives are how we connect with friends and learn new things, but there are also risks. We believe that learning how to stay safe online is just as important as protecting children in the real world.

Thank you for everything your Department and the Police Service of Northern Ireland are already doing to support children and young people, and we would really appreciate if you could tell us more about this work and how you will take our ideas on board. We hope this feedback helps make online safety even stronger for children and young people in NI.

Yours sincerely,



J.B.H

T.M



O McCollam



[\\*Be Cyber Safe NI \(BCS NI\)](#) is a youth voice amplification project delivered in partnership between Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) and NSPCC NI. Supported by Oasis Youth/Community Intercultural Programme, Clonmore Youth Club, Dry Arch Children's Centre, Blackmountain Action Group, and Patrician Youth Centre.

 Children in Northern Ireland  @ChildreninNI

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Our vision is to make Northern Ireland a society where all **children** are **valued**, are treated **fairly** and are able to **flourish** .



10 December 2025

Paul Givan MLA  
Rathgael House  
Balloo Road  
Rathgill  
Bangor  
BT19 7PR

Issued by email to: [private.office@education-ni.gov.uk](mailto:private.office@education-ni.gov.uk)

## **Re: Stormont Cyber Café - Sorry We Missed You**

Dear Minister Givan,

Sorry we missed you at the Stormont Cyber Café on 8th October 2025. The event was about how to make the internet safer for young people. It was run by Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) and NSPCC NI, with young people like us from across Northern Ireland taking part.

We talked about how important education is in helping children and young people stay safe online. Most of us feel that schools could do more to teach online safety in a way that feels real and up to date.

Here's what we said:

- We need online safety lessons earlier, starting in primary school, not just when problems happen later on.
- Teachers and parents should get training and support so they understand what young people are facing online.
- We would like more interactive lessons – not just talks – and space to share our own experiences.
- Schools could have Digital Champions (students like us) who help others learn how to stay safe online.
- Online safety shouldn't just be a one-off lesson – it should be part of everyday learning.

For many of us, our phones and online lives are how we connect with friends and learn new things, but there are also risks. We believe that learning how to stay safe online is just as important as any other life skill we learn in school.

Thank you for everything your Department is already doing to support children and young people, and we would really appreciate if you could tell us more about this work and how you will take our ideas on board. We hope this feedback helps make online safety education even stronger in schools.

Yours sincerely,

*[Handwritten signature]*

JB-H

T.M

*[Handwritten signature]*  
Dunrobin

*[Handwritten signature]*

O McCollam

*[Handwritten signature]*

*[Handwritten signature]*  
Went  
Moxie



[\\*Be Cyber Safe NI \(BCS NI\)](#) is a youth voice amplification project delivered in partnership between Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) and NSPCC NI. Supported by Oasis Youth/Community Intercultural Programme, Clonmore Youth Club, Dry Arch Children's Centre, Blackmountain Action Group, and Patrician Youth Centre.

**f** Children in Northern Ireland **t** @ChildreninNI

Our vision is to make Northern Ireland a society where all **children** are **valued**, are treated **fairly** and are able to **flourish** .



10 December 2025

Mike Nesbitt MLA  
Minister of Health  
Castle Buildings,  
Stormont  
Belfast, BT4 3SQ

Issued by email to: [private.office@health-ni.gov.uk](mailto:private.office@health-ni.gov.uk)

**Re: Stormont Cyber Café - Sorry We Missed You**

Dear Minister Nesbitt,

Sorry we missed you at the Stormont Cyber Café on 8th October 2025. The event was about how to make the internet safer for young people. It was run by Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) and NSPCC NI, with young people like us from across Northern Ireland taking part.

Lots of us spoke about how being online can affect our mental health. We use our phones and social media all the time to connect, learn and relax – but it can also make us feel anxious, left out or unsafe.

Here's what we said:

- Seeing harmful or upsetting content online can really hurt our confidence and mood.
- Cyberbullying feels impossible to escape because it follows you everywhere.
- Parents and carers need help to understand what young people face online, so they can support us calmly and not just react with fear.
- We'd like more support in schools and communities to talk about online worries and where to get help.
- There should be more information about how to look after yourself online, just like your physical or mental health.

For many of us, our phones and online lives are how we connect with friends and learn new things, but there are also risks. We believe that learning how to stay safe online is just as important as protecting children in the real world.

Thank you for everything your Department is already doing to support children and young people, and we would really appreciate if you could tell us more about this work and how you will take our ideas on board. We hope this feedback helps make online safety even stronger for children and young people in NI.

Yours sincerely,



J.B.H

T.M



O McCollam



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Our vision is to make Northern Ireland a society where all **children** are **valued**, are treated **fairly** and are able to **flourish** .



Minister's Office Block C,  
Castle Buildings  
Stormont Estate  
Ballymiscaw  
Belfast  
BT4 3SG  
Tel: 028 9076 5723  
[DOJ.MinistersOffice@justice-ni.gov.uk](mailto:DOJ.MinistersOffice@justice-ni.gov.uk)

Our Ref: INV-0190-2025

Dr Ernest Purvis  
Be Cyber Safe NI  
Email: [ernest@ci-ni.uk](mailto:ernest@ci-ni.uk)

7 January 2026

Dear Dr Purvis

Thank you for your correspondence of 10 December on behalf of Be Cyber Safe NI providing me with helpful feedback on the key topics discussed at your recent event held in Parliament Buildings in October.

Unfortunately, due to prior commitments, I was very disappointed not to be able to attend the event. However, as Justice Minister, I am committed to doing everything possible to keep young people and children safe from harm and protect them from all forms of abuse and exploitation. I am very aware that social media and the use of the internet in general, is increasingly central to young people's lives and can have a very positive effect in terms of communication and learning opportunities; however, it also presents serious risks, particularly around grooming, exploitation and abuse. As technology evolves, so do the tactics of those who seek to harm. We cannot afford to

stand still and I commend you all for your efforts to make the internet safer for young people and highlighting, in particular, the key issue of reporting problems online.

While telecommunications is a reserved matter under the remit of the UK Government, the responsibility to keep young people and children safe online is shared across all government departments. This commitment is reflected in the [Northern Ireland Executive's Online Safety Strategy](#) and [Action Plan](#) which aims to empower children, young people, parents, carers and professionals to recognise, prevent and respond to online abuse. It plays a key role in developing evidence-based resources and research to strengthen policy and practice across Northern Ireland such as the Online Safety Hub, Professional Guidance on AI-generated Child Safety Abuse Material, Workforce Training, Youth Engagement Research and campaigns to highlight and educate. This will ensure that all children and young people can enjoy the educational, social and economic benefits of the online world and that they are empowered to do this safely, knowledgably and without fear.

My department plays an active role in this work, with officials contributing to the cross-departmental implementation group responsible for driving forward the delivery of the strategy and ensuring its actions are effectively carried out.

As you are all aware, the Online Safety Act 2023 has established a UK-wide regulatory framework to protect users from online harm. Ofcom, as the independent regulator, is leading its implementation with clear guidance and robust codes of practice for platforms. I noted with interest Ofcom's recent consultation on Additional Safety Measures – an important next step in delivering the Online Safety Act and creating a safer digital environment for everyone across the UK. My department has submitted a detailed response to that consultation, reinforcing our commitment to shaping policy and driving progress.

Importantly and very relevant to the concerns expressed regarding reporting mechanisms, some of the proposed additional safety measures focus on improvements to reporting mechanisms to enable users to report livestream content that depict the risk of imminent physical harm.

I am encouraged by Ofcom's recently published report on the up-to-date impact of the implementation of the Online Safety Act. The new rules set a high standard for providers to ensure the safety of UK users. Over the past year, users will have noticed improvements across several areas aimed at creating a safer online environment. However, significant work remains and emerging technologies and evolving content trends continue to present new challenges and risks.

As Justice Minister, I remain committed to progressing legislative reform where I can, to help protect our community from harms associated with online behaviour caused by ever increasing advances in technology. There is already a comprehensive and robust legislative framework in place in Northern Ireland to address a wide range of sexual offending related behaviours which apply both online and offline. For the main part, this is contained in the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008.

In the last political mandate, I strengthened the law by introducing new offences to deal the specific behaviours commonly referred to as 'up-skirting', 'down-blousing' and 'cyber-flashing'. I also introduced four new offences of 'pretending to be a child for the purpose of carrying out further child related offences', which act as a pre-cursor to child grooming, and which are unique to Northern Ireland. I also strengthened the law on disclosing private sexual images – commonly referred to as 'revenge porn' - to bring threats to disclose, within scope of the main disclosure offence.

Going forward, I propose to strengthen the law further through opportunities available to me to extend provisions being progressed at Westminster in addition to my

department's legislative programme. I have already secured the legislative consent of the Assembly to bring forward a number of provisions of the Westminster Crime and Policing Bill to Northern Ireland and I intend to seek approval for some further provisions in the New Year.

This includes:

- a new offence of 'child sexual abuse image-generators' to criminalise those who make, adapt, possess, supply or offer to supply anything which is made or adapted for use for creating, or facilitating the creation of, child sexual abuse images;
- a new offence of 'pornography depicting strangulation and suffocation', building on the current 'possession of extreme pornographic images' offence;
- updating the current offence of 'possession of a paedophile manual' to bring AI generated images within its scope.

Further, new reserved offences (extending across the whole of the UK) include creation of a new offence of 'online facilitation of child sexual exploitation and abuse' and a new power to scan child sexual abuse images at the UK border.

Included in my current legislative programme, is my intention to legislate to criminalise the creation and sharing of 'sexually explicit deepfake images'. I will do this by tabling an amendment to the current Justice Bill, at its Consideration Stage. A public consultation exercise seeking views on legislative proposals has not long concluded and almost 50 responses were received. These responses are currently being analysed and will help shape the legislative proposals going forward.

My department, in collaboration with key partners, continues to address the complex and cross-cutting challenges associated with online safety. However, as widely acknowledged, a criminal justice response alone is insufficient. Your feedback is very

important to all involved in delivering this commitment and I will share it with Ofcom and the Safeguarding Board in Northern Ireland. My officials would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to tell you about our work and hear more about your views and ideas on how we can further enhance online safety to make the internet safer for young people and will be in touch with you to arrange this.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Naomi R Long". The signature is written in a cursive style.

**NAOMI LONG MLA**  
**Minister of Justice**

*Please ensure that you quote our reference number in any future related correspondence.*

## FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTER

Dr Ernest Purvis  
Head of Policy  
Children in Northern Ireland

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11 February 2026

COR-1455-2025

Dear 'Be Cyber Safe' Team

### **STORMONT CYBER CAFE**

Thank you for writing to share the outcomes of your recent youth-led Stormont Cyber Café event. While I was disappointed not to be able to attend in person, I was very encouraged to hear about the success of the event and the quality of the research and insights gathered directly from young people.

I want to assure you that I am carefully considering the feedback you have provided. Young peoples lived experience is central to how we shape our approach to online safety, and your work strongly reflects the priorities set out in Northern Ireland's Online Safety Strategy, particularly the importance of prevention, education and listening to youth voice.

As you will be aware, I have issued guidance to schools on the use of mobile phones during the school day. This guidance is intended to support a balanced approach—one that recognises the positive role technology can play in supporting learning, while also responding to concerns in relation to issues including safety, wellbeing and learning that young people themselves consistently raise.

Alongside this, we continue to support schools, parents and pupils through initiatives such as Safer Schools NI, which provides accessible information, reporting routes and practical advice to help children and young people navigate the online world safely. These tools, combined with clear expectations for schools and informed input from young people, are key to strengthening our collective approach.

My officials are currently engaged with colleagues from across the Departments of Health, Justice and other key stakeholders in respect of the Northern Ireland Executive's Online Safety Strategy 2021/27. The insights shared are particularly timely, as officials consider what the new strategy for 2028, and beyond, might look

like and your feedback will help shape the conversation around this. There will be further opportunities for you to be involved as this work develops as the voices and experiences of children and young people are vital to inform future priorities.

For now, my priority is to ensure that children and young people are supported to use technology safely, confidently and responsibly, both in and outside of school. That includes continuing to listen to youth-led research, supporting schools to implement safeguarding measures effectively, and working with partners to strike the right balance between opportunity and protection.

Thank you again for your leadership and commitment in this important area. I commend you for placing young people at the centre of the conversation and I wish you every success as you continue this work.

I trust this information is helpful.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Givan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "P" and a horizontal flourish at the end.

**PAUL GIVAN MLA**  
**Minister of Education**

## FROM THE MINISTER OF HEALTH



Be Cyber Safe NI  
[ernest@ci-ni.org.uk](mailto:ernest@ci-ni.org.uk)

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Our Ref: COR-1935-2025

Date: *12* December 2025

Dear *Ernest Cyber Safe*

Thank you for your recent letter in relation to the Stormont Cyber Café. I'm sorry I wasn't able to attend in person, but senior officials from my department attended on my behalf and I know that they found the event really informative and valuable.

Events like this matter because your feedback is so important. The perspectives and voices of young people like you play a vital role in shaping policy and guiding the work that my department is committed to delivering.

My department sponsors Northern Ireland's Online Safety Strategy. Its vision is simple: every child and young person should be able to enjoy all the benefits of the online world—learning, connecting, and creating—while feeling safe, confident, and free from fear.

The Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) leads this work, and other government departments also play an important role in delivering the Strategy.

Significant work has been carried out under the Strategy with many successful outcomes, including the Online Safety Hub which can be found on the SBNI website. The hub brings together the latest advice and support for young people, families and professionals to help keep children and young people safe online. It covers important topics like social media, online bullying, screen time, online grooming, and new risks linked to artificial intelligence. There are also resources to help with mental health and emotional wellbeing, and signposting to services such as the Youth Wellness Web and Minding Your Head for advice, crisis guidance, and practical tips to help young people look after their mental health. The

content is kept up to date, so the advice and messages are always clear and consistent. I understand that your fantastic *Be Cyber Safe Takeover of the Parentline Podcast* is promoted through the hub, this is a great way to amplify your voices and help parents better understand young people's experiences. I would encourage you to use and share this resource.

A number of targeted campaigns have been delivered under the Strategy to help protect young people online and raise awareness of emerging risks. One example is the *Trust Trap* campaign, launched in August 2025 by the SBNI in partnership with the PSNI. This campaign raises awareness about online risks such as catfishing, grooming, and sextortion—reminding young people and families that anyone can be a target. It uses social media platforms such as TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram to share important messages about how to stay safe, how to report concerns, and where to find support if something goes wrong. Its message to young people is clear and compassionate: you are not to blame, you are not in trouble, you are not alone and help is available. It's great to know that Be Cyber Safe played a role in reviewing the campaign materials to ensure the messaging was relevant, I want to thank you for your important contribution and support.

Campaigns like *Trust Trap* are just a part of the work being delivered under the Online Safety Strategy. Another important part is listening to the voices of children and young people. For example, *Growing Up Online* research study by Stranmillis University College was commissioned by the SBNI in 2023 to inform work activities under the Strategy. The project included a survey of over 6,400 local young people and focus groups with young people from diverse backgrounds, as well as parents, educators, and other professionals working with children. More recently, the *Screens, Safety and Social Media: What Young People in Northern Ireland Are Telling Us* report was produced by Queen's University Belfast using feedback from over 2,100 16-year-olds in the 2025 Young Life and Times survey. This research helps us understand your experiences and priorities, so we can make sure the Strategy reflects what matters most to you.

Your views from the Cyber Café are really important to us, and we're committed to making sure they influence what happens next. We will review the feedback you have shared and use it to inform future actions under the Online Safety Strategy—whether that's shaping new resources, improving campaigns, or identifying emerging issues that matter most to you.

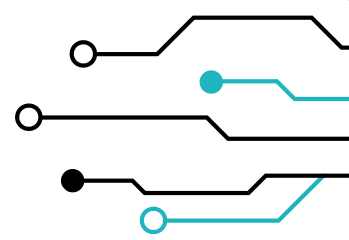
Thank you for taking part in the Cyber Café and for sharing your views. Your voice matters, and we want to keep hearing from you. Please stay involved—whether by using the Online Safety Hub, taking part in future resource development, or sharing your ideas—because together we can make the online world safer for everyone.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mike Nesbitt', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

**Mike Nesbitt MLA**  
**Minister of Health**

# APPENDIX F: SAFER SCHOOLS APP NI FEEDBACK REPORT





## **Feedback on the Safer Schools NI App submitted to the Department of Education**

December 2025

Dr Ernest Purvis - [ernest@ci-ni.org.uk](mailto:ernest@ci-ni.org.uk)



## Who We Are

[Be Cyber Safe NI](#) is a youth-led advisory group launched in January 2025 by Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) in partnership with the NSPCC. We are part of a wider UK effort, connected to the NSPCC's [Voice of Online Youth](#) project, and similar to groups in Wales, and Scotland.

Our purpose is simple but vital: to ensure that the voices of children and young people in Northern Ireland are heard in debates about online safety. Young people today spend more time online than ever before, yet their perspectives are often missing when policies and solutions are shaped. Be Cyber Safe NI is here to change that.

The group is made up of 10 young people (aged 13-17) from across Northern Ireland. Together, we:

- **Explore online safety challenges** - from harmful content and advertising to privacy, AI, and mental health.
- **Lead peer engagement** - gathering insights from young people across Northern Ireland.
- **Create advocacy materials** - podcasts, videos, graphics, and reports to amplify youth voices.
- **Shape solutions** - feeding our recommendations into local government, Stormont, and UK-wide policy discussions

Our activities include monthly workshops, residentials, creative production sessions, and events where we present directly to decision-makers at the Northern Ireland Assembly.

CiNI provides leadership, safeguarding, and strategic coordination, ensuring that our voices reach policymakers and professionals who design online safety strategies.

We work in partnership with community-based youth organisations across Northern Ireland, including:

- Blackmountain Action Group (Belfast)
- Patrician Youth Centre (Downpatrick)
- Oasis Youth (Portadown)
- Clonmore Youth Club (Dungannon)
- Dry Arch Children's Centre (Limavady)

This partnership approach ensures our work is locally rooted and regionally connected - giving us credibility both in our own communities and at the highest levels of decision-making.

Online safety is one of the defining issues for this generation of children and young people. Research shows:

- Children are going online at younger ages than ever before.
- Online harms - from cyberbullying to grooming and exposure to harmful content - are on the rise.
- Existing controls and safety measures often fail to reflect the lived realities of young people.

By bringing together youth voices, we help ensure that responses to online harm are realistic, effective, and designed with young people in mind. Be Cyber Safe NI will continue through 2025-26, with a focus on:

- **Expanding our reach** - gathering insights from more young people across NI.
- **Strengthening youth leadership** - equipping members with skills in advocacy, public speaking, and campaigning.
- **Influencing real change** - ensuring our recommendations are reflected in education, regulation, and resources.

Together, we can amplify young voices and create a safer digital world for children and young people in Northern Ireland.

## Focus Group on Safer Schools NI App

On 13 November 2025, Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) hosted Be Cyber Safe NI in Belfast for a Focus Group discussion on the Safer Schools NI App (hereafter referred to as 'the App'). Nine young people participated, supported by three youth workers and two facilitators. Each young person was accompanied by a trusted member of staff from their own youth club or community centre, who they could approach for support if required. A week before the workshop, young people were asked to download the App and familiarise themselves with it. The age and location of the young people participating is provided below, and in order to protect their identities we use only first names:

| <b>Name</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Town/City</b> |
|-------------|------------|------------------|
| Theo        | 14         | Belfast          |
| Darragh     | 15         | Downpatrick      |
| Odhrán      | 15         | Downpatrick      |
| Maria       | 15         | Portadown        |
| Matylda     | 15         | Portadown        |
| Eimear      | 17         | Dungannon        |
| Alanna-May  | 15         | Dungannon        |
| Jamie       | 17         | Limavady         |
| Iona        | 14         | Limavady         |

The gender breakdown for the group was five female and four males. The age range was 14-17 years old, with an average age of 15. The main towns/cities where participants live are: Limavady; Dungannon; Portadown; Downpatrick; and Belfast. No other demographic information was collected and young people were not asked to specify which school they attended, however it is clear that these span multiple sectors including: Controlled (secondary and grammar) schools; Catholic Maintained, and Integrated schools.



The main method for facilitating this Focus Group was a 'Walking Debate' - which encourages young people to explore contrasting perspectives by physically moving to different sides of a room to represent their chosen position. Each side corresponds to one of two opposing views or choices. After choosing where to stand, participants explain and reflect on their decision-making, listen to alternative viewpoints, and may reconsider their stance. This active approach helps develop critical thinking, communication, and appreciation of opposing or alternative opinions and perspectives by combining movement with deliberation.

The main facilitator, a senior youth worker, presented the group with five statements about the App and debates were framed around whether participants agreed or disagreed with these statements. The five core themes that were examined using these statements and debates can be summarised as:

- Accessibility and usability;
- Content and relevance;
- Credibility and trust; and
- Impact and future development.

# I'VE USED THE SAFER SCHOOLS NI APP BEFORE, OR MY SCHOOL ACTIVELY USE IT.

YES

How did you hear about it?  
What was your first impressions?

NO

What were your first impressions?

Young people were first asked whether they had ever used the App.

- **6 participants (two-thirds) said No**
- **3 participants (one-third) said Yes**

A clear geographic pattern emerged:

- Young people from **Portadown and Limavady** had *never* used the App.
- Those who had used it were from **Belfast, Dungannon, and Downpatrick.**

Young people who had *not* used the App said:

- "I have never seen it."
- "Never used it."
- "[It] doesn't work."
- "I don't have a code."

Those who *had* used the App said they heard about it from their **Form Teacher, Year Head, or Assembly.**

## Quotes from Young People:

"We used it last year and it wasn't very good - there wasn't much on it. This year we've been using it and it's better - you get notifications and stuff." - *Theo, 14, Belfast*

“Our school used it like two years ago but haven’t used it since. When we had it, it was just information, not much else.” - *Darragh, 15, Downpatrick*

“It looks boring. For our school we have an app, and that’s where we get all our notices from.” - *Alanna-May, 15, Dungannon*

“No [we’re not missing out] because our Form teacher tells us.” - *Iona, 14, Limavady*

### Summary of Feedback

Young people’s prior engagement with the App is **inconsistent** and heavily shaped by school practice. In many cases, **school systems and communications already fulfil the App’s functions**, reducing perceived need or relevance. The lack of access codes, lack of awareness, and the presence of other school communication tools all reduce uptake.

The infographic is titled "THE APP IS ACCESSIBLE" in large, bold, black letters. Below the title are two columns. The left column is headed "YES" in a purple box and contains three questions: "Is it easy to find, download and use without adult help?", "Is it young people friendly", and "Is it fun and engaging?". The right column is headed "NO" in a teal box and contains two questions: "What would make it more accessible?" and "What would make it youth friendly?".

The second walking debate explored issues around accessibility and design. Initially, one young person felt the App was accessible. By the end of the debate, **all participants disagreed** with the statement “*The App is accessible.*”

Key accessibility barriers included:

- Difficulty locating the correct version of the App
- Over-reliance on text

- Unclear symbols and navigation
- Poor visual appeal
- Not enough multimedia or interactive content
- Schools not actively promoting or supporting use

### **Quotes from Young People:**

"It was hard to find the right one." - *Iona, 14, Limavady*

"It's not fun, you could fall asleep using it." - *Eimear, 17, Dungannon*

"[They should] put Blockblast on it." - *Iona, 14, Limavady*

"The wee symbols don't really direct me where to go." - *Theo, 14, Belfast*

"[I] hate the layout, it's your average [design], I could probably do that." - *Eimear, 17, Dungannon*

"Nobody reads anything anymore, [you] need a video or animation, even like a quiz game." - *Iona, 14, Limavady*

"If every school had like a leader board, you could see where you are placed." - *Matylda, 15, Portadown*

"Schools are not really actively promoting it." - *Darragh, 15, Downpatrick*

"[There are] too many words." - *Alanna-May, 15, Dungannon*

"It's not very vibrant." - *Jamie, 17, Limavady*

"Maybe if it read out the words it would be better." - *Iona, 14, Limavady*

### **Summary of Feedback**

Accessibility challenges were the **strongest and most consistent theme**. Young people emphasised that an effective safety app must be:

- Visually appealing
- Easy to navigate
- Multimedia-rich
- Designed for short attention spans
- Promoted consistently by schools

The current version does not meet these expectations.

# THE APP CONTENT IS RELEVANT TO YOUNG PEOPLE AND SUPPORT THEY NEED.

## YES

The app talks about issues that actually affect young people?  
The examples and stories are current and realistic.  
The advice would genuinely help if you faced something worrying online.

## NO

What topics are missing or out of date?  
Does it sound like its written FOR young people, not just ABOUT them?

Voting outcome: **Yes - 2 | No - 7**

While a small number felt the content had improved or was youth-friendly, the majority felt it was too long, too text-heavy, and insufficiently tailored to young people's needs.

### Quotes from Young People

"My form teacher edited it... it is youth-friendly... it's good for revising." - *Theo, 14, Belfast*

*(Shows positive impact when teachers actively curate content.)*

"There were big - 5 sheet - documents for each section, it was too much." - *Darragh, 15, Downpatrick*

"[It's] written for adults... my dad would struggle to read it. Pictures would help." - *Iona, 14, Limavady*

"Topics-wise it reads more about safeguarding... needs more mental health... links but no explanation." - *Eimear, 17, Dungannon*

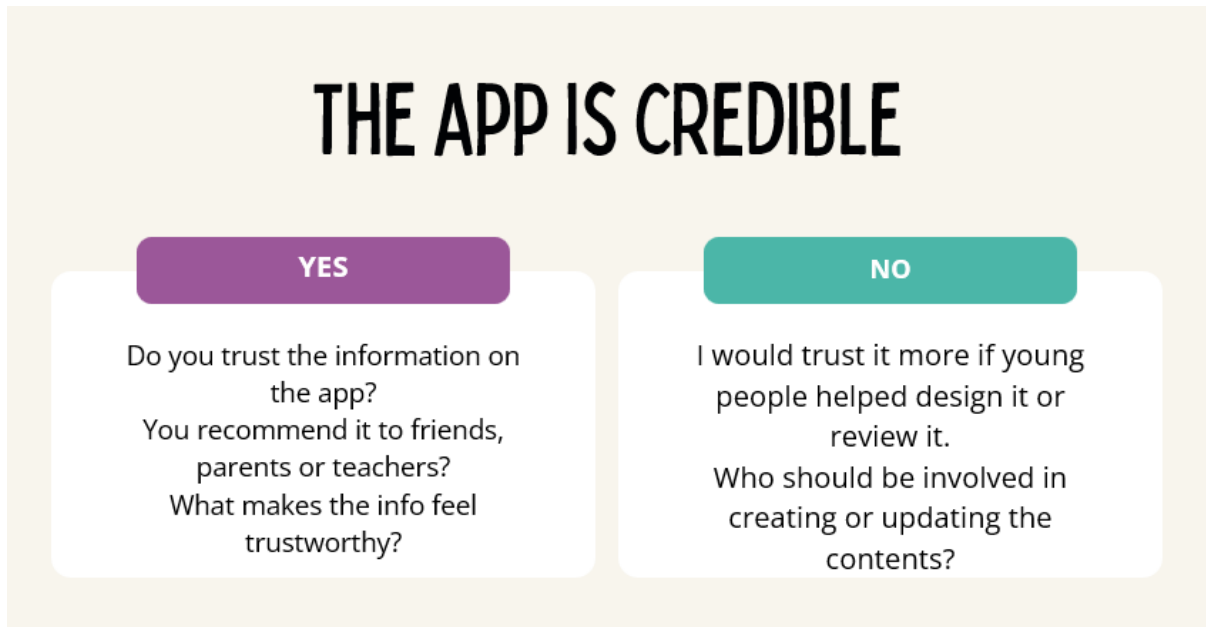
### Summary of Feedback

Young people want:

- Clear, concise content
- Visual explanations
- Mental health and self-care information
- Interactive learning

- Better categorisation and signposting

Lengthy documents embedded inside an app do not align with how young people learn or access information digitally.



Voting outcome: **Yes - 2 | No - 5**  
(Some participants were unsure.)

### Quotes from Young People

"It's from school, so you believe it." - *Theo, 14, Belfast*

"Majority of info is trustworthy but it is too long. They should put it out to young people from different backgrounds... anyone who works with children should be involved." - *Eimear, 17, Dungannon*

"It's good you have to put a code in, you know it's just your school." - *Matylda, 15, Portadown*

A youth worker added:

"There are 2000 kids in our area and they have never heard about it... there is nothing different from what you can google." - *Youth Worker, Downpatrick*

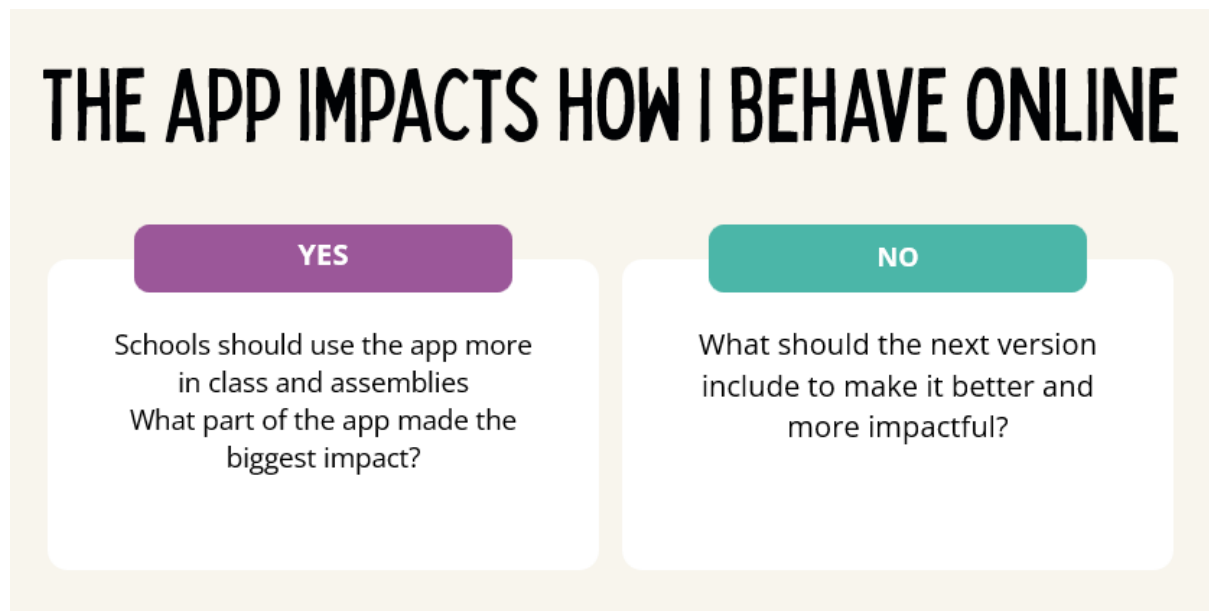
### Summary of Feedback

The App benefits from **school association** but suffers from:

- Low awareness

- Limited differentiation from existing school systems
- Questions about how content is updated
- Limited local relevance

The strongest trust-building factor – *personalisation and relevance* – is currently missing.



Voting outcome: **Yes - 0 | No - 7**

Young people were clear that the App **does not influence their online behaviour**.

When asked where they *do* get online safety information, they replied:

- "TikTok"
- "AI"
- School communication systems (emails, classroom notices, school apps)
- Teachers
- Parents

### **Quotes from Young People**

"I literally just look at Outlook... I would keep the information [on the App], just change the layout." - *Eimear, 17, Dungannon*

"Anything for students goes on our classroom... anything for parents goes on the school app." - Alanna-May, 15, Dungannon

"When I had it, it was all about bullying... not a lot on online safety." - Darragh, 15, Downpatrick

### **Summary of Feedback**

Young people do not see the App as a source of influence or learning. They prefer **dynamic, bite-sized, social-media-style information**, or in-school delivery through assemblies and workshops.

**WHAT ' S ONE MESSAGE YOU ' D SHARE  
WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION OR  
THE APP DEVELOPERS?**

In terms of broader reflections on Online Safety Education, young people emphasised:

- The importance of *interactivity*
- Story-based learning
- Classroom discussion
- Workshops with relatable facilitators
- Opportunities to hear real stories (anonymised)
- Repetition and reinforcement

### **Quotes from Young People**

"Needs to be advertised more." - Maria, 15, Portadown.

"Minimise words." - Alanna-May, 15, Dungannon.

*"To be honest, it's crap. Do away with it. The school could do it. My school is probably one of the better ones, so we do things in Assemblies but it would be better taught in classrooms." - Eimear, 17, Dungannon.*

*"More on advertising it, the more people use it, the more money they get, the better it should be." - Theo, 14, Belfast.*

*"Needs to be something bigger to get people to use it. All this information, it's too boring. It's the same as the parent app. [Our] Form Tutor could tell us about it, discuss it as a class." - Iona, 14, Limavady.*

*"[We could do] activities, small group discussions. Could use Kahoot! as well." - Theo, 14, Belfast.*

*"[We could] have workshops." - Maria, 15, Portadown.*

*"It feels like all the information is repeated: Don't do this; don't do that. Someone sharing what actually happened to them [is more interesting]." - Iona, 14, Limavady.*

### **When asked what workshops in school were delivered well:**

*"My school don't really...don't want to say laid back, but you wouldn't have assemblies, it's minimal, you wouldn't really be taught about it, [it's] not really a good thing like." - Theo, 14, Belfast.*

*"We had these people come in like 2 years ago...mainly focused on bullying etcetera. They do a music quiz, there is a storyline, it is the same character, it is very interactive." - Darragh, 15, Downpatrick.*

*"'Love for Life' - they have a story, [then they] stop it, do games. They go for something serious then break it up [with activities]." - Matylda, 15, Portadown.*

*"Repetition - some people just need it to learn." - Eimear, 17, Dungannon.*

*"The Violence Against Women and Girls Workshop - there was a really funny, not too serious, not too funny, person and he interacted with us." - Maria, 15, Portadown.*

*"It's attention spans - people are different. Like our history teacher is always repeating stuff for people." - Iona, 14, Limavady.*

### **Asked what they could change about the App**

*"Shorten - make it simpler." "So much writing." "Change the layout." "Colours." "More interesting."*

*"My school has definitely not signed up to it." - Eimear, 17, Dungannon.*

*“Our school, we are not allowed our phones at all, so it would be no good at all.” - Iona, 14, Limavady.*

*“My school wouldn’t really care about [using phone] - I’m in upper sixth. The first year ones aren’t allowed their phones at all.” - Eimear, 17, Dungannon.*

*“We’re not allowed phones at all - but the boys across the road, they’re allowed theirs all the time. It makes you want to have your phone out more.” - Alanna-May, 15, Dungannon.*

*“I think it’s better to use your phone. Now I have to use an Atlas.” - Iona, 14, Limavady.*

*“Young people can be hard to reach. Could it be broadened out to other organisations like youth centres? The name for the App is boring and the crest/logo looks basic.” - Youth worker, Downpatrick.*

### **Suggestions for different names**

*Safer Internet*

*Be Cyber Safe NI*

*Inter-Schools*

### **Recommendations**

Based on the evidence gathered, two categories of recommendations emerged:

- (1) Improvements to the Safer Schools NI App**, and
- (2) Broader approaches to online safety education.**

#### **1. Improvements to the Safer Schools NI App**

*Redesign for Accessibility and Engagement*

Young people strongly recommend:

- A clearer, more intuitive navigation system
- Visually vibrant design
- Greater use of icons, images, and colour
- Text-to-speech features
- Short, scrollable formats rather than embedded PDFs
- Dynamic content (videos, animations, infographics, quizzes)

- Gamified elements such as leaderboards, badges, or challenges

#### *Improve Onboarding and Awareness*

- Simplify the login process
- Ensure every school distributes access codes
- Integrate short “how-to” guides or onboarding videos
- Promote the App through assemblies, tutor groups, or school leaders

#### *Make Content Youth-Centred and Modern*

- Increase mental health, self-care, and digital wellbeing content<sup>1</sup>
- Provide clearer explanations for external links
- Tailor content by age group
- Include anonymous real stories or scenarios
- Use a tone aligned with youth digital culture

#### *Strengthen Local Relevance and Updating*

- Allow schools to easily customise or highlight local priorities
- Ensure content is updated regularly and transparently
- Involve young people from diverse backgrounds in co-design
- Collaborate with youth workers, safeguarding leads, and teachers

#### *Demonstrate Purpose and Impact*

- Explain what the App can do that other school apps cannot
- Add tools such as self-assessments, check-ins, or safety planners
- Provide resources on emerging issues (AI misuse, scams, image-based harm)

## **2. Broader Online Safety Education Approaches**

Young people highlighted that **apps alone are insufficient**. They want online safety education that is:

#### *Classroom-based and Interactive*

<sup>1</sup> See for example: <https://cypsp.hscni.net/youth-wellness-web/>

- Workshops delivered by relatable facilitators
- Activities such as quizzes (Kahoot), group tasks, roleplays, storylines
- Discussion-based, not one-directional

#### *Embedded Throughout the Curriculum*

- Not limited to pastoral care or assemblies
- Reinforced throughout the year
- Tailored to age, school culture, and digital maturity

#### *Story-Driven and Realistic*

- Use of anonymised real-life stories
- Case studies relevant to local communities
- Practical strategies for managing risk

#### *Multi-Platform Delivery*

Young people prefer to receive information from:

- TikTok-style short videos
- School communication systems
- Teachers and trusted adults
- Interactive online resources

A multi-platform strategy will help the Department reach more young people effectively.

### **Conclusion**

This focus group reveals a clear and consistent message: young people do not currently view the Safer Schools NI App as accessible, engaging, or impactful. However, their feedback also demonstrates a strong desire for better digital resources, more engaging learning, and youth-centred tools that meaningfully support safe online behaviour. Young people want online safety solutions that are:

- Designed with them, not for them
- Visually engaging and interactive
- Embedded in school culture
- Part of a broader, more dynamic education strategy

Listening directly to young people is essential. Their insights highlight both the limitations of current approaches and the opportunities for creating something far more impactful. With meaningful investment in co-design, engagement, and modern digital communication, Northern Ireland can deliver online safety education that truly meets the needs of this generation.