

Using cyber volunteers to prevent online child victimisation

Reducing online child victimisation using a team of cyber volunteers to deliver online safety awareness messaging.

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Key details

Does it work?	Promising
Focus	Prevention Diversion
Topic	Anti-social behaviour Child sexual exploitation and abuse Community engagement Crime prevention Cybercrime including fraud Digital Vulnerability and safeguarding
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Region	North West

Key details

Partners	Police Community safety partnership Education Voluntary/not for profit organisation
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	January 2018
Scale of initiative	National
Target group	Adults Children and young people Communities

Aim

This project uses cyber volunteers to increase online safety knowledge and awareness for children and capable guardians across Lancashire.

The aim is to use cyber volunteers to deliver training that assists in the prevention of ongoing and future victimisation of Lancashire children.

The project aims to provide a response to online child victimisation that:

- is efficient
- is effective
- provides value for money
- is sustainable

The project also aims to aid Lancashire Constabulary by helping to address recommendations made within His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) child protection inspections.

Intended outcome

Using cyber volunteers to deliver training to increase online safety knowledge and awareness has the following intended outcomes.

- Prevention of online child victimisation through the delivery of awareness messaging.
- Reduced demand generated by online child victimisation for Lancashire Constabulary and partner services due to increased online safety knowledge and awareness.
- Improved confidence in the police by communities in Lancashire through awareness of and support for the use of cyber volunteers.

Description

Cybercrime in all its forms (both enabled and dependent) was on the rise in Lancashire.

A designated project manager in the force wrote several presentations to inform, educate and alert children and young people to issues of:

- cyber bullying and the law
- sexting and the law
- protecting digital footprints and online life through safe passwords
- updating technology
- backing up data
- explaining the Computer Misuse Act

The force looked at work currently being delivered locally and nationally around child sexual exploitation. It found to be lacking in schools, with teachers not confident in delivering on the subject.

Neighbourhood policing teams, digital policing teams and local authority specialist teams had extremely limited capacity. Creating cyber volunteers therefore enabled Lancashire Constabulary to

begin to plug some of the gaps needed within school-based prevention programmes.

Evaluation

A survey was administered to 288 children across four year groups. The survey asked about their online habits before the presentation and what they took from the presentation after delivery. This survey measured the effectiveness of both the content and delivery of the presentation.

Findings suggested that the surveyed children:

- displayed improved ability to identify online risks and threats
- were more likely to display online self-protective skills
- were less likely to become victims or perpetrators of cybercrime or online child sexual exploitation

A number of key trends were also identified from the survey results that related to the effectiveness of elements of the presentations across age and gender. These findings are now being used to adapt future content to maximise the impact of the programme.

Overall impact

Within the first 18 months of the project:

- 25 cyber volunteers were recruited
- 280 presentations were delivered
- around 11,500 school aged children were reached

While only 288 children completed a survey, more children and staff have provided positive feedback about the presentations.

The National Cyber Protect Network was formally established in 2018 to 2019. This network uses much of the Lancashire model as a starting point for a national roll-out of cyber volunteers.

The purpose of this national programme is to let forces register cyber volunteers with a broad spectrum of cyber skills and add them to a national register. This allows their skills to be utilised both locally and nationally where possible.

Today there are established Cyber Protect Teams. These manage cyber volunteers and a national structure for cyber volunteers.

In 2023, Lancashire Constabulary continues to use the cyber volunteers to deliver inputs across the county.

This project won a Tilley Award in the Business Support and Volunteers category in 2020.

Learning

Lancashire Constabulary highlight the following learnings.

Importance of having baseline measures

Now there are national teams of cyber volunteers, it's easier for forces to standardise and quality assure all material.

Similarly, schools now have to incorporate online safety into their curriculum. Other charities are now also getting involved in school deliveries.

Need to manage coordination control

Coordination of cyber volunteers can be time consuming and almost a full-time role. In Lancashire, some Cyber Volunteers have conducted admin duties for the in-force Project Manager to support co-ordination control. The Cyber Volunteers enjoy having more responsibility and this approach also contributes to sustainability.

Importance of advertising

This allows for more frequent delivery and obtaining regular locations for cyber volunteers to deliver at. As advertising can be time consuming, where possible forces should allocate this task to a staff member as a part of their duties.

Considering sustainability

Sustainability can be an issue if cyber volunteers have other commitments that take precedence over this voluntary role. Lancashire learned that having multiple different locations for the cyber volunteers to attend kept them interested.

Need for robust and timely evaluation

Lancashire highlights the need to promptly send out feedback sheets after presentations, and to also monitor the return of these.

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Tags

Cybercrime Cyberbullying Child sexual exploitation Child abuse