



Case Study

Y Innovate - YMCA Tayside

Digital Youth Work and Cyber Resilience Research May 2023



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YMCA Tayside

YMCA Tayside's Y Innovate digital hub hosts six-week courses for small groups of young people in primary seven who find the school environment challenging. Youth workers focus on young people's interests to engage them in internet safety discussions.

YMCA Tayside is an inclusive Christian organisation established in 1995 and is open to young people of all faiths and none, encouraging them to belong, contribute and thrive. Although part of an international movement that started in 1844, YMCA Tayside is autonomous and seeks to serve local communities by focusing primarily on the needs of its young people.

Their vision is to support young people to build a positive future through their engagement of opportunities that develop the mind, body, and spirit.

Support is open to young people aged 8-25 and nurtures their progression and development by building positive, trustful relationships with the purpose of having "somewhere to go, something to do and someone to talk to". Their youth work services have a particular focus on young people who face multiple and complex barriers to economic, social and education inclusion.

Y Innovate primary seven work

The Y Innovate digital hub is a space that provides digital learning opportunities, to tap into young people's creativity and develop their skills. Sessions held in the Y Innovate space include Enterprise Lab times, where those age 16 and over can use the technology and develop entrepreneurial skills, and drop-in sessions for young people to use the hub whilst having fun.

YMCA Tayside also works with small groups of young people in P7 s over 6 week blocks who find that the classroom setting can be distracting. This includes one afternoon a week in the Y Innovate hub where young people get to use the technology on offer, such as trying robotics or garment pressing. The Y Innovate sessions are run alongside weekly sessions of more traditional youth work.



Using the Y Innovate hub offers a number of benefits to young people. As well as learning IT skills and new software, the hub provides young people with a creative outlet, enabling them to design objects and get the satisfaction of making physical products. It lets them showcase to others the skills they already have and take pride in them, such as art skills. Young people also get to use novel equipment they would not typically be able to access otherwise.

Young people taking part in the primary seven programme see a number of benefits. They get more focused adult attention than possible in school classes, giving them the opportunity to chat with youth workers about what is going on in their lives. Young people also develop cooperation and team work skills. The time in the Y Innovate hub is also fun for the young people, who are buzzing when they arrive and love the Y Innovate space. The novelty of the experience, getting to use equipment such as 3D printers that they wouldn't access at home or school, is exciting, and having the tech sessions ahead of the traditional youth work sessions helps the young people engage more readily.

Designing products to take home not only embeds learning but also allows the young people to enjoy showing family members their creations or give them as presents. This is a real bonus when a number of the young people who are taking part are living in poverty.

The school attendance of the young people s who take part in the P7 programme, which often tends to be low, improves on the days of the YMCA sessions. The young people are attending school more regularly on the days they have activity sessions at the YMCA.





Overall, YMCA Tayside finds these conversations go deeper as time goes by, when young people start to feel more comfortable with specific youth workers and youth workers learn more about the young people.

YMCA Tayside finds that there are often issues with the suitability of the digital content the young people in the P7 programme discuss in their sessions. For example, they talk about viewing influencers on social media such as Andrew Tait, or content linked to football hooliganism. Providing a safe space is crucial to the young people being able to express their views, which in turn allows the youth worker to challenge some of their opinions.

YMCA Tayside is then able to design traditional youth work sessions in reaction to issues that come up in the digital sessions. For example, it ran a traditional session about role models given the concerns youth workers raised around the influencers young people spoke about in the Y Innovate times. Having sessions spread over 6 weeks gives youth workers time to spread out when issues are addressed and undertake research for later sessions, unless there are safeguarding concerns to be dealt with immediately.



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Learning from the project

For YMCA Tayside, looking at and using examples from the current content that young people are talking about is important for conversations about cyber resilience and staying safe online. This way conversations reflect their interests and what is relevant to them. For example, in the role model session youth workers focused on influencers that they knew mattered to the young people.

Similarly, focusing on issues young people bring up, and discussing those as interesting topics to have a longer conversation about, can encourage the young people to talk around those issues. It means these conversations are not imposed on young people, and so they become more willing to discuss the subject, even if they don't see to eye-to-eye with the youth worker on the issue itself.

Holding sessions that incorporate staying safe online as part of broader discussions helps keep young people engaged. A session on Instagram or Snapchat safety may struggle to hold young people's attention on its own. A session on role models, which can include staying safe online messages alongside reflections on issues young people see as central to their lives, such as personal relationships and family dynamics, is more likely to hold their interest. Sessions are also broken up with games and activities to maintain keep young people engaged.

One resource that YMCA Tayside feel could help with their cyber resilience and staying safe online work is a site or document with details of what users can do on each social media platform. For anyone who doesn't use an individual platform it can be hard to know the full features of an app. Each can have different safeguarding issues, for example Snap Maps raising safeguarding concerns. Finally, though young people like the new experience Y Innovate technology offers, the novelty of equipment can change quickly. VR headsets, whilst once very popular in the youth club, are now less well used as more young people have begun to get them at home.

In summary, youth worker concerns around content young people access has led YMCA Tayside's Y Innovate digital hub to work with young people in primary seven around staying safe online. Key to this work has been for youth work to look at current examples of content young people are seeing and digital topics they bring up, and to incorporate learning around online safety in to broader sessions.



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