YouthLink Scotland

Digital Youth Work Survey | 2023 Results & Key Findings

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Survey of digital youth work in Scotland

KEY FINDINGS

27% of digital youth work projects focus on cyber resilience compared with 4% of non-digital projects.

A further 33% of digital youth work projects cover cyber resilience 'a little bit' compared to 15% of non-digital projects.

In 2023 we carried out a survey of digital youth work. We wanted to understand more about what's happening, how youth work is building capacity for cyber resilience in Scotland, and how to support growth.

The results represent 71 survey responses from youth workers, representing work with approximately 11,500 young people.

70% of the youth work projects in our survey deliver activities for young people using digital technologies.

48% deliver activities focussed on specific technologies and 68% deliver activities to develop digital skills or knowledge.

The quotations in this summary are drawn from five in-depth interviews and a focus group. The research is helping us to track the development of digital youth work in Scotland and the ways in which it contributes to young people's safety and security online. It provides a baseline for future research. This work was funded by Scottish Government, commissioned by YouthLink Scotland and carried out by BrawData.

What did we learn about digital youth work?

Digital youth work takes place in every area, from Dumfries and Galloway to Shetland.

Projects covering wider geographic areas were most likely to cover cyber resilience.

Digital youth work takes place across Scotland, delivered by national youth organisations, local authorities and independent third sector organisations.

Number of digital youth work projects, by Local Authority:

|	
7	Angus
5	Aberdeen City
10	Aberdeenshire
4	Argyll and Bute
10	City of Edinburgh
5	Clackmannanshire
4	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
5	Dumfries and Galloway
10	Dundee City
6	East Ayrshire
4	East Dunbartonshire
6	East Lothian
6	Falkirk
5	East Renfrewshire
10	Fife
10	Glasgow City
8	Highland
6	Inverclyde
6	Midlothian
6	Moray
4	North Ayrshire
6	North Lanarkshire
5	Orkney Islands
9	Perth and Kinross
5	Renfrewshire
5	Scottish Borders
5	Shetland Islands
6	South Ayrshire
5	South Lanarkshire
6	Stirling
5	West Dunbartonshire
7	West Lothian

How youth work activities are delivered

KEY FINDINGS

The most common delivery method was in-person group sessions.

31% used online group sessions; 21% used online one-to-one sessions.

Digital youth work includes both in-person and online. It takes place in groups and one-to-one delivery. The most common delivery method is in-person group sessions.

70 In-person group sessions

33 In-person one-to-one sessions

22 Online group sessions

15 Online one-to-one sessions
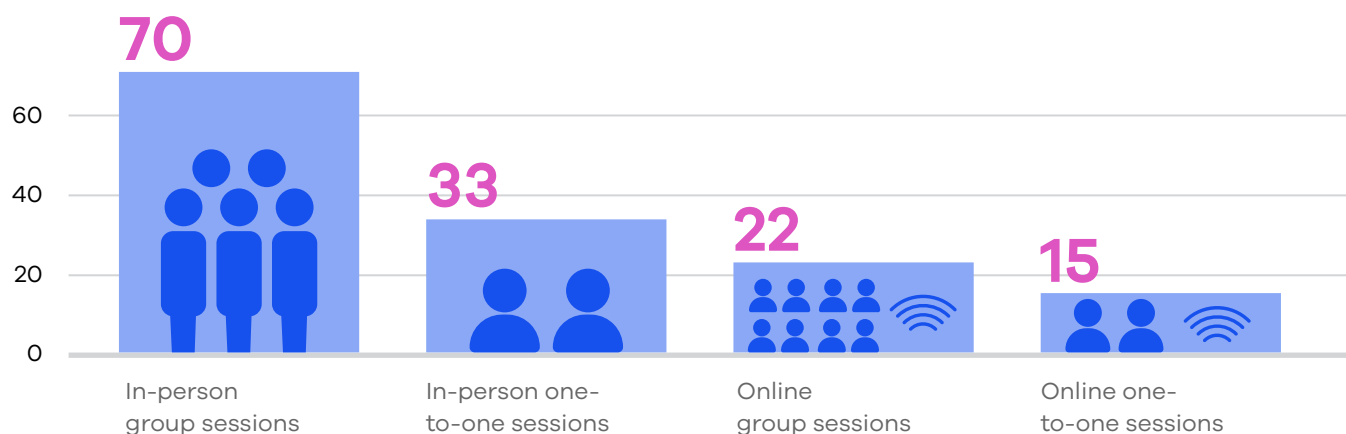
Number of responses by ways respondents deliver activities with young people

Types of digital youth work activities

KEY FINDINGS

70% of projects deliver activities for young people using digital technology.

68% deliver activities to young people aiming to provide training or develop digital skills.
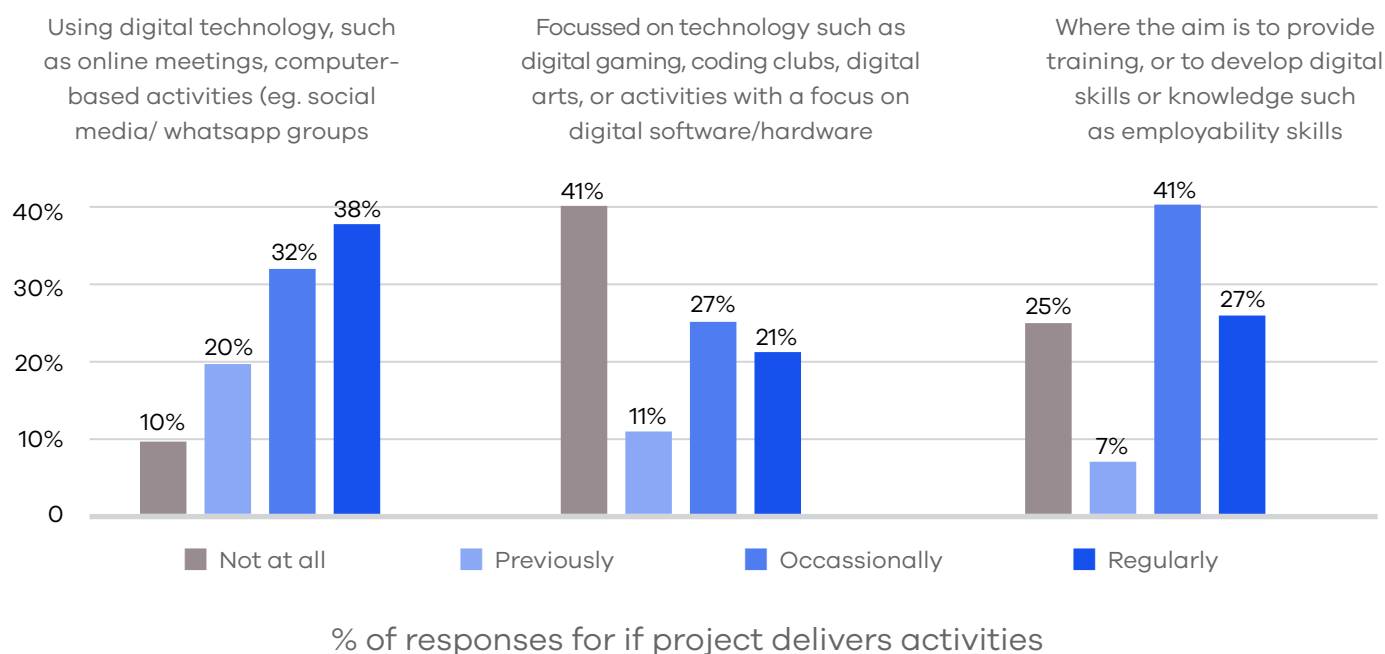
Digital youth work includes:

Using digital tools as a way to connect with young people

Activities that focus on specific technologies

Supporting young people to develop skills and knowledge

Using digital technology, such as online meetings, computer-based activities (eg. social media/ whatsapp groups

Focussed on technology such as digital gaming, coding clubs, digital arts, or activities with a focus on digital software/hardware

Where the aim is to provide training, or to develop digital skills or knowledge such as employability skills

Group 1 (Using digital technology):
- Not at all: 10%
- Previously: 20%
- Occasionally: 32%
- Regularly: 38%

Group 2 (Focussed on technology):
- Not at all: 41%
- Previously: 11%
- Occasionally: 27%
- Regularly: 21%

Group 3 (Where the aim is to provide training):
- Not at all: 25%
- Previously: 7%
- Occasionally: 41%
- Regularly: 27%

■ Not at all   ■ Previously   ■ Occassionally   ■ Regularly

% of responses for if project delivers activities

Find out more about Digital Youth Work.
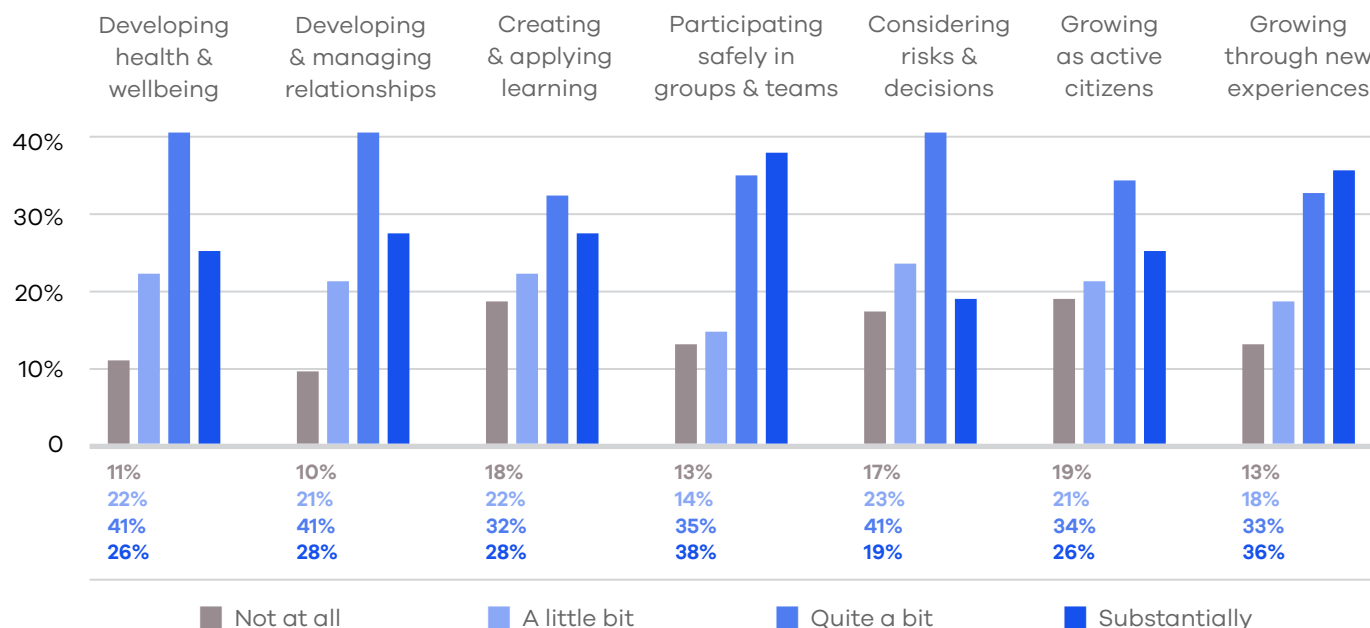**European Guidelines on Digital Youth Work**

Digital youth work supports national youth work outcomes

KEY FINDINGS

Project digital activities contribute to the youth work outcomes 'quite a bit' or 'substantially'.

Young people participate safely and effectively in groups/teams as a result of these projects.

The outcome most commonly identified as following from projects' digital activities was 'participating effectively in groups and teams.'

	Developing health & wellbeing	Developing & managing relationships	Creating & applying learning	Participating safely in groups & teams	Considering risks & decisions	Growing as active citizens	Growing through new experiences
Not at all	11%	10%	18%	13%	17%	19%	13%
A little bit	22%	21%	22%	14%	23%	21%	18%
Quite a bit	41%	41%	32%	35%	41%	34%	33%
Substantially	26%	28%	28%	38%	19%	26%	36%

% of responses by the extent to which respondents current digital activities contribute to national youth work outcomes

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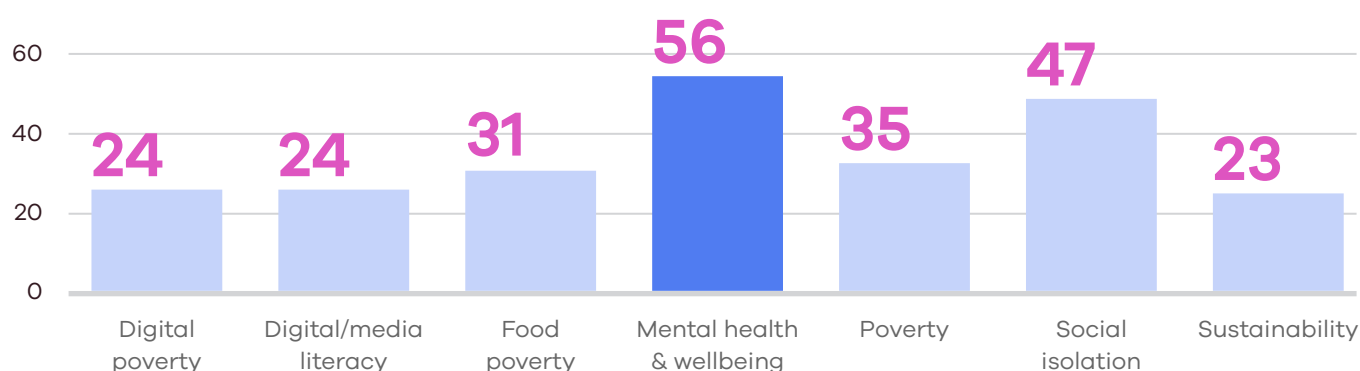
Designing products to take home not only embeds learning but also allows the young people to enjoy showing family members their creations or give them as presents. This is a real bonus when a number of the young people who are taking part are living in poverty.

The school attendance of the young people 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.

Y Innovate, YMCA Tayside

Digital youth work projects address a wide range of issues

Projects in the survey most commonly focussed on mental health & wellbeing, and social isolation, and were least likely to focus on sustainability.

	Digital poverty	Digital/media literacy	Food poverty	Mental health & wellbeing	Poverty	Social isolation	Sustainability
	24	24	31	56	35	47	23

Number of responses by the issues addressed directly by respondents' projects

KEY FINDINGS

- In terms of how digital makes a difference to youth work, examples included engaging young people it might be hard to connect with otherwise, including those not ready for face-to-face after C19, neurodivergent young people, and groups with geographically spread participants.

- For the group, after C19 delivery has now primarily gone back to face-to-face, due to demand from young people, youth worker skillsets, and insight it offers into young people's wellbeing.

- In terms of youth work with a focus on using digital as an activity, examples included: using TikTok (building confidence and creativity); upskilling young people around PowerPoint and audio recording; and VR headset use by an art group. Possible future projects included a gaming group for quieter young men (to build confidence and reach new participants).

- Barriers to digital youth work included equipment costs and staff skillsets, especially given pace of change. An organisation working with young people affected by substances found lack of access to phones to be an issue, but also stated that social media enabled young people to compare lives, and that some messenger services are used by drug sellers.

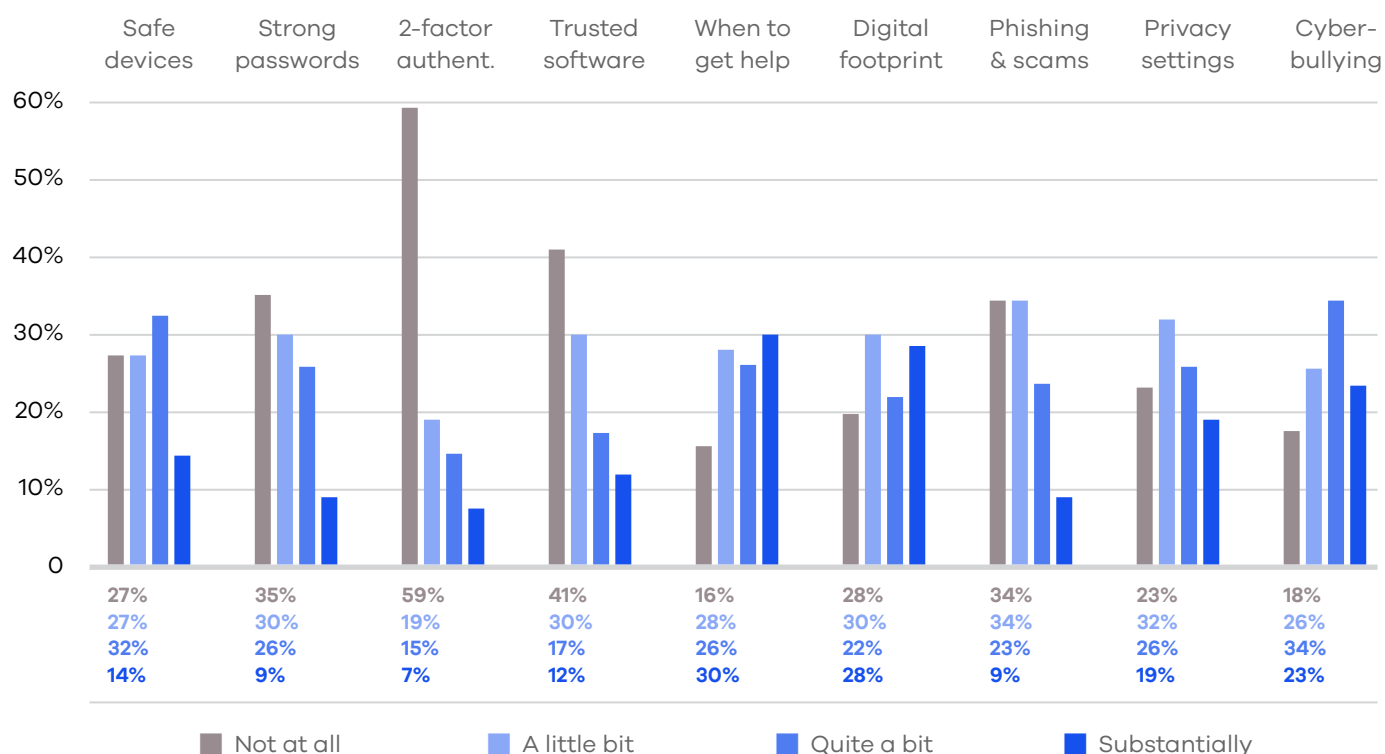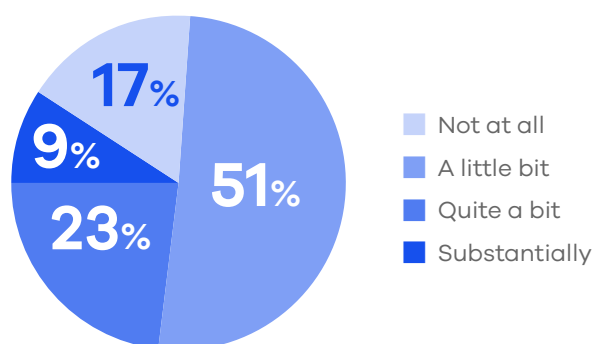# How digital youth work supports cyber resilience

KEY FINDINGS

The majority of projects (51%) aimed for cyber resilience/online safety only 'a little bit.'

The most common skill covered was 'cyber-bullying, grooming and online exploitation.'

Cyber resilience is most likely to be a sub-theme for youth work rather than the main focus. Online harms are more likely to be covered than topics such as passwords and two-factor authentication.

How youth work projects aim to develop young people's cyber resilience/online safety knowledge

Pie chart:
- 51% A little bit
- 23% Quite a bit
- 9% Substantially
- 17% Not at all

Legend:
- Not at all
- A little bit
- Quite a bit
- Substantially

	Safe devices	Strong passwords	2-factor authent.	Trusted software	When to get help	Digital footprint	Phishing & scams	Privacy settings	Cyber-bullying
Not at all	27%	35%	59%	41%	16%	28%	34%	23%	18%
A little bit	27%	30%	19%	30%	28%	30%	34%	32%	26%
Quite a bit	32%	26%	15%	17%	26%	22%	23%	26%	34%
Substantially	14%	9%	7%	12%	30%	28%	9%	19%	23%

Legend:
- Not at all
- A little bit
- Quite a bit
- Substantially

% of responses by the extent to which respondents would say that their activities help to develop young people's knowledge and skills in the above areas

How digital youth work supports cyber resilience cont.

KEY FINDINGS

Digital projects successfully introduce young people to cyber resilience and online safety.

27% of digital projects focus on cyber resilience compared with 4% of non-digital projects.

Digital projects offer far more opportunities for young people to explore ways to keep themselves safe and secure online than youth work in general.
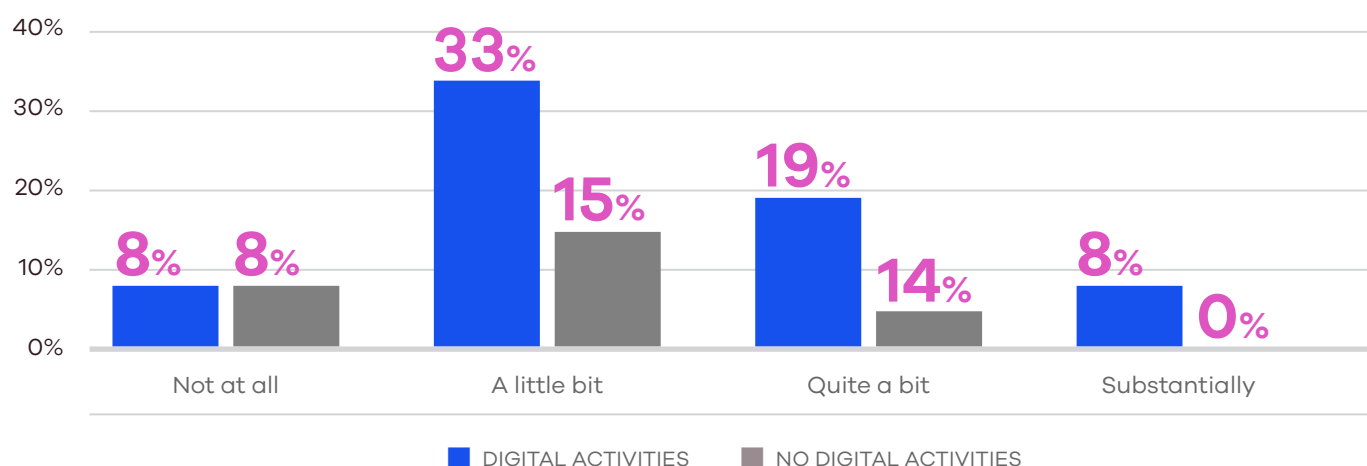
% of projects where the aim is to develop young people's cyber resilience and/or online safety knowledge and skills

	Not at all	A little bit	Quite a bit	Substantially
DIGITAL ACTIVITIES	8%	33%	19%	8%
NO DIGITAL ACTIVITIES	8%	15%	14%	0%

The Online Youth Club offers a number opportunities for youth workers to talk to young people about digital resilience. Digital issues arise in the club's online setting and youth workers can jump in to discuss these. Being in a shared digital space at the same time means youth workers can talk to young people about their online actions whilst they are doing them. For example, youth workers can see content young people share, and watch items with them in the virtual rooms. This means everyone can discuss content in real time, rather than youth workers hearing about it second-hand as would be likely to happen in a face-to-face setting. Likewise, youth workers can look at issues that arise in how young people handle chats in real time, rather than hearing about it as a past event.

Designing avatars can naturally lead to discussions about how young people present themselves digitally. The platform also lets young people to message youth workers privately if they want to discuss particular problems one-to-one, though this is used alongside other digital methods such as texting.

Online Youth Club, Medway

How digital youth work supports cyber resilience cont.

KEY FINDINGS

The digital activities that projects most commonly connected to developing cyber resilience and developing online safety were 'using social media' and 'gaming and play.'

Cyber resilience skills and knowledge are incorporated into digital youth work activities that also contribute to national youth work outcomes (see page 6).
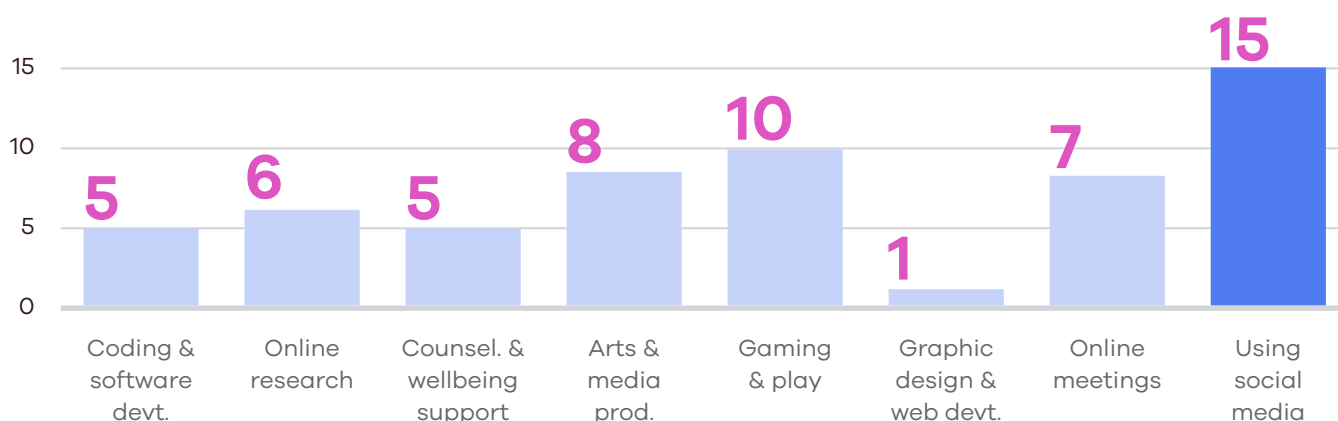
How different types of digital activities contribute to cyber resilience

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

- Projects working specifically on digital/media literacy and addressing digital poverty were the most likely to have cyber resilience/online safety as an aim. These projects were also most likely to be familiar with the Cyber Aware guidance.

- Only 7% of respondents were substantially familiar with the Cyber Aware guidance. 43% of respondents were not at all familiar.

- Local authority projects were more likely than others to include cyber resilience and/or online safety in their aims. However, LAs were the organisation-type least likely to say that they were familiar with Cyber Aware guidance. Projects with paid staff were more likely to be familiar with the guidance.

- Projects covering wider geographic areas were more likely to have these aims.

- The areas where projects most identified a need for training or guidance were 'delivering digital activities to train young people' and 'digital activities focussed on specific technologies.'

- Projects run by charities and voluntary organisations were more likely than those run by local authorities to be interested in further training and guidance, particularly for cyber resilience and online safety.

Work around cyber resilience and staying safe online is not hugely different from traditional youth work. It is still about building positive relationships with young people and doing engaging activities with them, looking at issues relevant to their lives and threats they face; it is just that these issues will include online safety issues, like social media use, cyberbullying and potential grooming or unwarranted attention from adults. Similarly, work with young people around cyber resilience and staying safe online can use the same methods as traditional youth work; is not required to be high-tech.

The Citadel, Leith

Supporting young people who face different challenges

KEY FINDINGS

Digital youth work contributes to young people knowing when to share decision making with a trusted adult.

Digital is part of youth work practice across many communities in Scotland, contributing to meeting the diverse needs of young people. Our survey asked questions about both online safety (helping people stay safe online) and cyber resilience (keeping data and devices safe).

	Deprivation	Disability	Ethnicity	Gender	LGBTQIA+	Neurodiversity	Religion/Belief
Not at all	12%	12%	17%	17%	10%	9%	17%
A little bit	36%	41%	22%	26%	33%	29%	33%
Quite a bit	24%	6%	5%	9%	24%	14%	0%
Substantially	28%	41%	56%	48%	33%	48%	50%
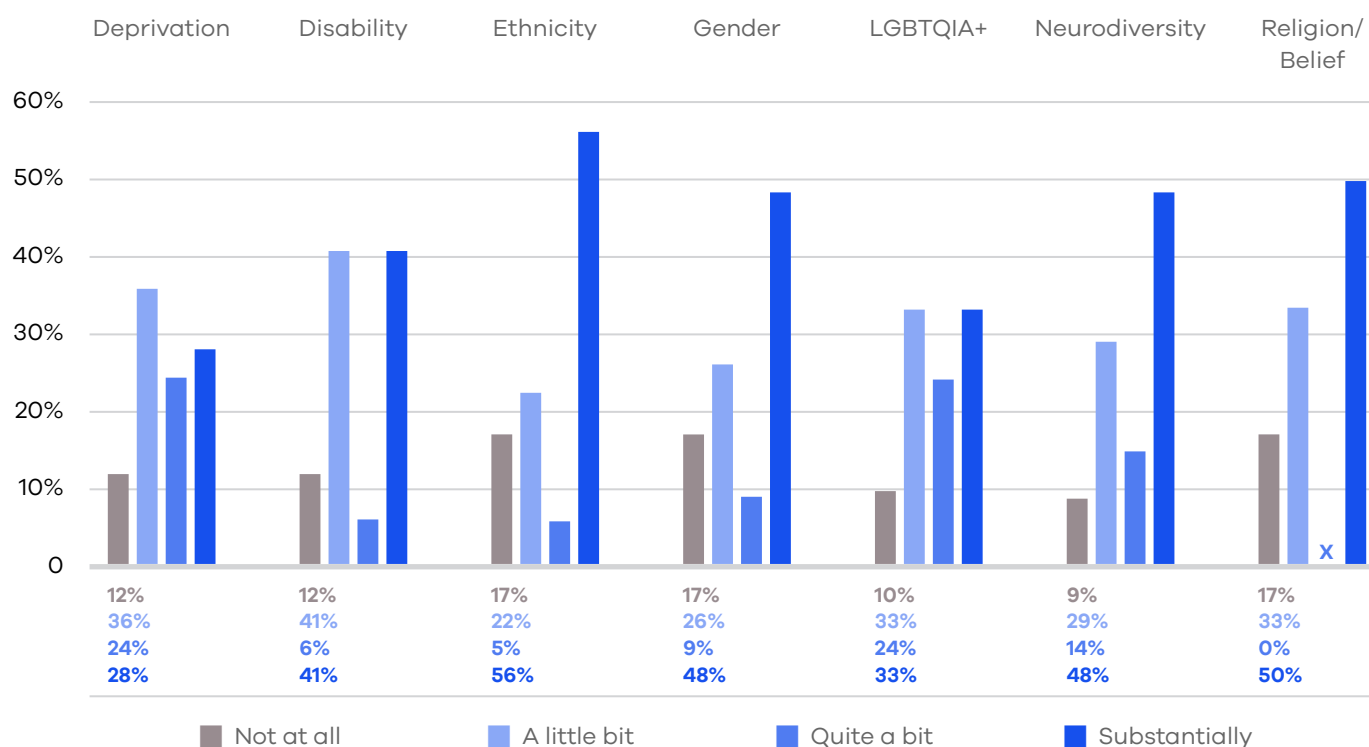
How youth work helps young people know when to share decision making with an adult they trust
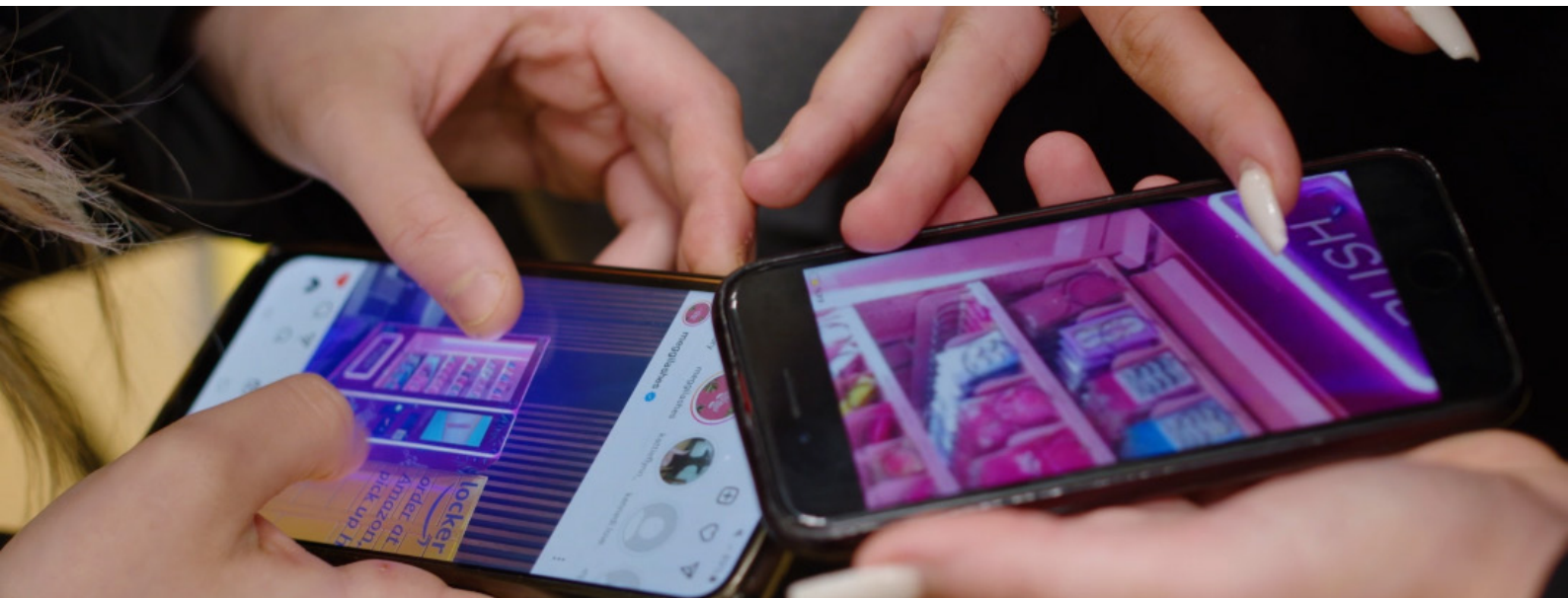
Supporting young people who face different challenges cont.

KEY FINDINGS

Activities help young people from different communities to recognise cyberbullying, grooming and other online exploitation.

Digital is part of youth work practice across many communities in Scotland, contributing to meeting the diverse needs of young people. Our survey asked questions about both online safety (helping people stay safe online) and cyber resilience (keeping data and devices safe).

	Deprivation	Disability	Ethnicity	Gender	LGBTQIA+	Neurodiversity	Religion/Belief
Not at all	14%	18%	17%	17%	14%	19%	17%
A little bit	31%	18%	17%	13%	14%	14%	8%
Quite a bit	33%	29%	27%	35%	38%	29%	25%
Substantially	22%	35%	39%	35%	34%	38%	50%
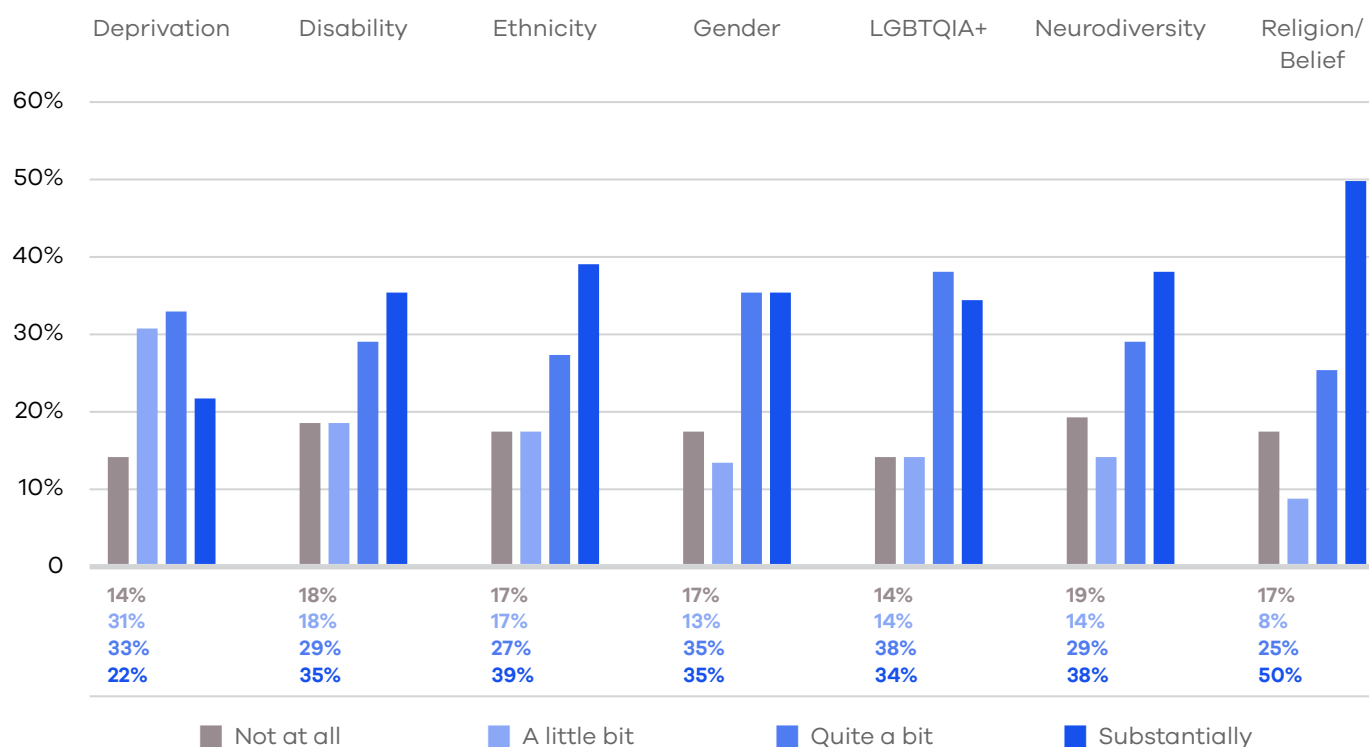
How activities develop skills and knowledge to recognise cyberbullying, grooming and other online exploitation, developing skills to react and recover

Focus group— digital youth work and cyber resilience

A focus group at the 2023 Digital Youth Work conference explored cyber resilience and online safety in digital youth work. Here are some of their key thoughts.

- Cyber resilience isn't something young people raise when they consult with youth workers; that young people tend to think they know about it; and often they do know more than youth workers. But the group also felt that the sector needs the skills to say what is appropriate.

- **Examples of youth work with a cyber resilience element:** dealing with cyber resilience issues during normal drop-in sessions; playing a card game with primary students on safety on different platforms; running online awareness programmes for schools; and teaching around resilience whilst using SpatialChat.

- **Should cyber resilience be part of youth work?** The group raised the need for this to happen organically so it reflects the needs of the young people they are working with, and the unique position of youth workers, as those young people may be happy to share issues with that they would not share at school or home.

- **The group discussed the importance of setting boundaries in digital spaces.** This included that youth workers need to be clear when they will be available to help young people on digital channels. Likewise, group agreements to set rules for WhatsApp groups and Discord servers were spoken of as a means of translating normal youth work objectives, such as managing relationships, to an online setting.

- **Issues that make it difficult to translate face-to-face group agreements to online:**

  - Issues around documenting youth worker interactions with young people, and the need to follow policies being more at the forefront of youth workers' minds when online.

  - Possible issues with codes of conduct needing to vary across platforms, though the group also discussed the importance of emphasising to young people that the same rules that apply face-to-face apply online. The group also discussed the importance of young people understanding the different context such as online interactions leaving digital footprints.

  - Need for staff cyber resilience and confidence.

- **Opportunity areas for digital youth work raised:** working with young men around understanding influencers such as Andrew Tate; bringing in expertise from businesses, for example, coding; and more digitally-aware youth workers.

Read the full survey results here

Digital Youth Work Case Study: Codebase

Codebase's Digital Skills 4 Girls programme runs creative activity sessions using digital technology for girls and non-binary young people. Codebase's community of technical experts and connections with other youth workers are valuable resources for running the project.

Coding and computing are a key focus, with activities such as making video games that provide chances to code using no-code tools and be creative with pixel art. Tools are often selected that are free and browser-based so that young people can continue to work on their projects after sessions.

WHY DIGITAL?
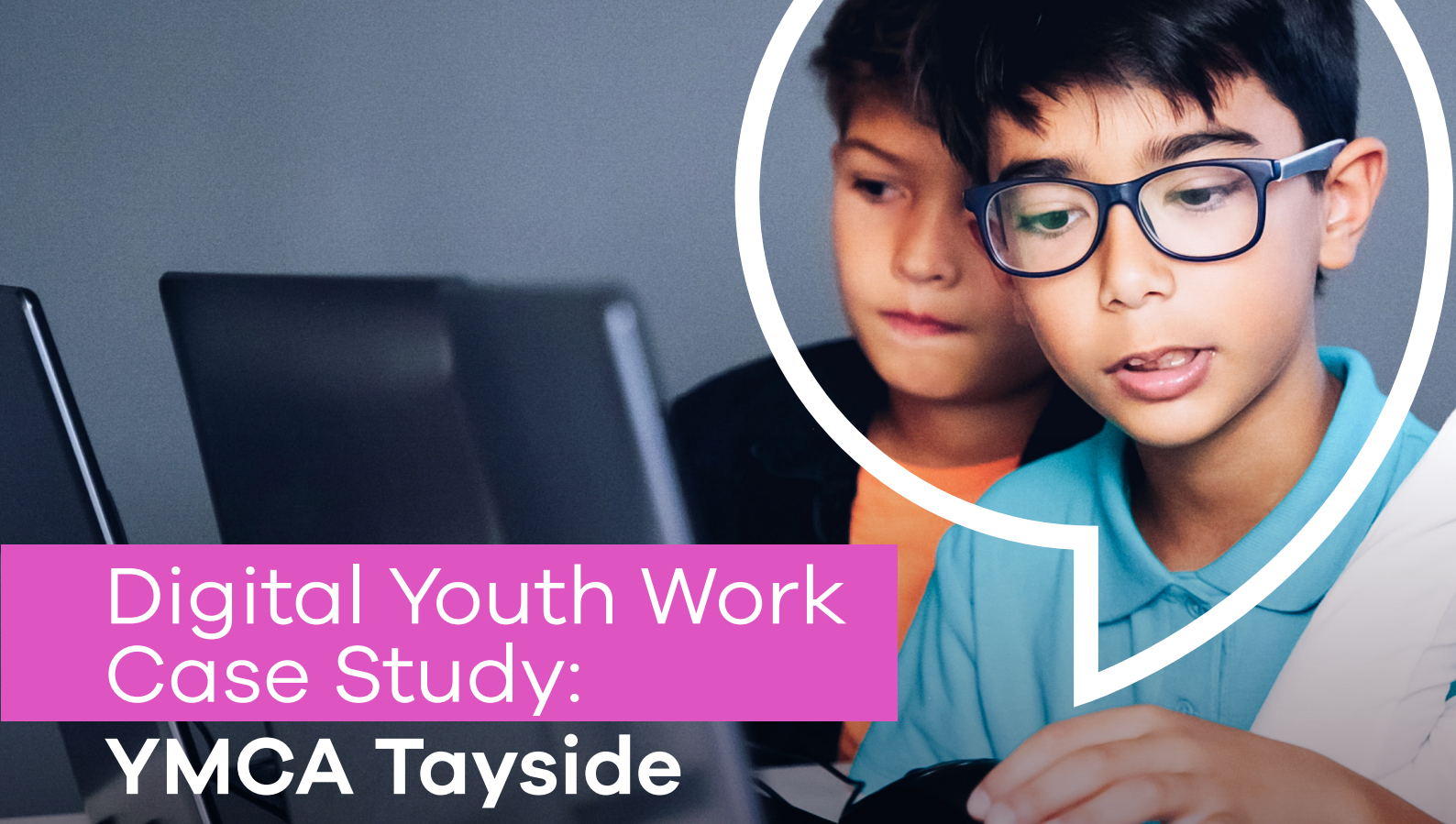
The programme grew out of low female participation in Prewired, a weekly, self-directed coding club in Edinburgh that lets young people work on their own projects.

Pre-pandemic, on average approximately 10% of attendees at Prewired would be girls, with, for example, one girl being reluctant to attend because she felt there were too many boys there and it was too noisy.

BUILDING CYBER RESILIENCE

Young people ask why they have to use a designated WiFi network for young people rather than the general one available in the building, leading to discussions around digital technology and safeguarding procedures. There are measures that restrict the content young people can access, as the sites young people want to access is one issue found with delivering digital youth work. For example, they are limited from going on YouTube, with unsuitable videos, rather than following session plans. Likewise, when accessing the Digital Skills 4 Girls laptops, they get to see what a secure password looks like.

READ THE FULL STORY

Digital Youth Work Case Study:
YMCA Tayside

YMCA Tayside's Y Innovate digital hub hosts weekly activities 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.

WHY DIGITAL?

The Y Innovate digital hub is a space that provides digital learning opportunities, to tap into young people's creativity and develop their skills.

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.

BUILDING CYBER RESILIENCE

Day-to-day conversations between youth workers and young people lead to discussions around cyber resilience. For example, young people often discuss issues around contact with peers via phones, and youth workers are able to talk to them about possible solutions.

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.

READ THE FULL STORY

Digital Youth Work Case Study:
Citadel Youth Centre

Old's Cool is an intergenerational project through which young people design and deliver activities for older people. It is run by Citadel Youth Centre, an organisation based in Leith that provides a range of clubs for young people, as well as working with mums and toddlers and providing employability support. It provides a trusted, safe space for a range of people.

Discussions around cyber resilience and online safety developed in Citadel Youth Centre's intergenerational activity programme Old's Cool after it moved to online delivery during the Covid-19 lockdowns. Staying safe online and cyber resilience are also discussed through Citadel's employability work and youth clubs. Citadel finds that whilst cyber resilience does not need to be treated very differently from other issues it works on, having time and resource to build organisational understanding is important.

WHY DIGITAL?

Whilst young people originally ran activities face-to-face with older people for Old's Cool, the Covid-19 lockdowns meant delivery had to move online and Citadel needed to explore digital intergenerational practice. Old's Cool looked at setting up Zoom so that young people could deliver activities over this platform.

BUILDING CYBER RESILIENCE

In the Old's Cool project, conversations around cyber resilience and staying safe online came up organically, or through the process of the project moving online, rather than being planned with specific aims in this space from the start. In face-to-face discussions with small groups of young people relevant issues were discussed such as: internet safety; what to share on social media; how to use devices; and potential challenges older people could have engaging with them.

READ THE FULL STORY

Digital Youth Work Case Study:
High Life Highland

The Highland Year of Young People social media project gave youth ambassadors unprecedented access to a project's social media accounts. High Life Highland encouraged this to work safely by having conversations with ambassadors around what to post and when to seek help, and not making assumptions about young people's digital knowledge.
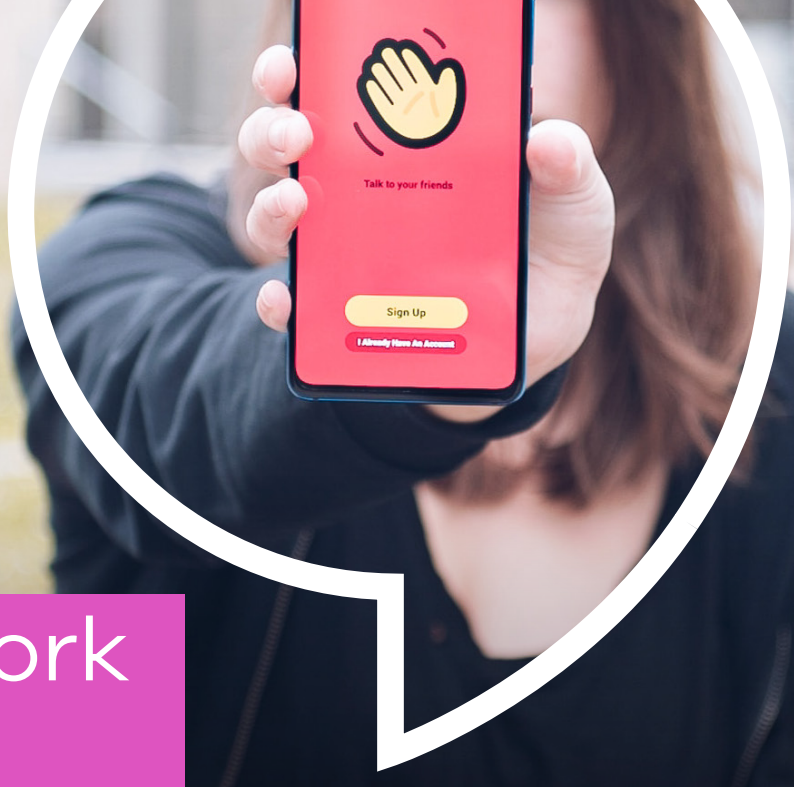
WHY DIGITAL?

From their first meeting, the youth ambassadors, who drove the project, decided they wanted to use social media to connect as a group and with other young people. A key reason for this was the rural Highland setting. Youth work in Highland can be challenging, even when working with young people from just a small part of the local authority area.

High Life Highland has gone on to use digital in a number of youth work projects, taking forward learning from the original project. The project meant youth workers already had relationships with staff working around the council's digital infrastructure when Covid-19 restrictions began, making it easier to explain to departments why, for example, they should have access to the Education Department's digital platforms to carry on youth work online.

BUILDING CYBER RESILIENCE

Staying safe discussions between the youth worker and ambassadors took place, with the youth worker trying to frame safeguarding and protection issues in ways young people would understand. Conversation topics included: the ambassador's information, and how this could be shared; the posts they would write; and sense-checking each other's work.

READ THE FULL STORY

Digital Youth Work Case Study:
Medway Youth Service

Medway Youth Service's Online Youth Club aims to engage with young people by providing different digital spaces where they can chat and take part in activities. Youth workers are able to see content participants are viewing or creating, and discuss cyber resilience issues with them as they arise. This project from outside Scotland was included to ensure a broad base to the research.

WHY DIGITAL?

Medway Youth Service's Online Youth Club offers weekly evening sessions to young people through SpatialChat. Participants are typically age ten and eleven, though older young people, up to nineteen, or twenty-five with SEND, can also take part. Via the platform, Medway provides a virtual space with multiple digital rooms, such as a recreation room and a gaming room, where different conversations can take place. Participants move avatars representing themselves to their preferred location, hearing more of what is taking place in a room the closer they are. Young people can join in through video conferencing and a chat function, and are able to share content and take part in activities.

BUILDING CYBER RESILIENCE

Digital resilience is discussed by Medway's youth worker, with concerns that 'cyber' is a term lost on both young and older people. Likewise, 'digital' is broader, encompassing any device that connects and digitizes an aspect of people's lives. Digital issues arise in the club's online setting and youth workers can jump in to discuss these. Being in a shared digital space at the same time means youth workers can talk to young people about their online actions whilst they are doing them. For example, youth workers can see content young people share, and watch items with them in the virtual rooms. This means everyone can discuss content in real time, rather than youth workers hearing about it second-hand as would be likely to happen in a face-to-face setting.

READ THE FULL STORY

YouthLink Scotland

Read the full survey results online:

Main slidedeck

Access full case studies online:

Codebase
YMCA Tayside
Citadel Youth Centre
High Life Highland
Medway Youth Service
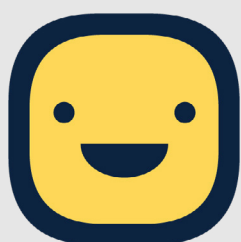
digital
YOUTH WORK

Digital youth work is growing in Scotland, as more and more youth workers take action to support young people in their online lives, enable the development of digital skills and share together in the fun of digital activities.

To find out more about how YouthLink Scotland supports digital youth work contact Hilary Phillips **hphillips@youthlink.scot**