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1 Introduction

Over the years, Guardian Saints have run a number of prize draws and competitions to promote and support Safer Internet Day. These draws and competitions have been open to both foster carers and to the young people themselves. As part of the entry criteria, we sought to gather statistical information to inform the work we do. Where appropriate, this information has been presented for educational and awareness purposes to fostering services and their carers. It has also been shared with organisations and individuals who work in this area (e.g. UKCIS, UKSIC and Ofsted) to highlight the challenges of keeping this particularly vulnerable group of young people safe online.

Foster Carer Information and Views

For Safer Internet Day in 2016 and 2019 we gathered information from Local Authority and Independent Fostering Agency Carers about them, how they and the young people they cared for used the internet and any challenges they’d had regarding online safety. We also sought their views on the key issues and risks that use of the internet and online services posed to young people in care.

Views of Young People in Care

For the Safer Internet day in 2018, we asked young people in care to tell us why they used the internet, what was the best thing for them about being able to use the internet and if there was anything that worried them, or issues they had experienced whilst using the internet or related services.

1.1 What is in this report?

The information collected from foster carers in 2016 was published in a report and a copy of this can be provided upon request (info@guardiansaints.com) or downloaded from our website. The data collected in 2019 has yet to be published in full but we thought, by way of a retrospective, it would be helpful to present some of the information alongside that from 2016 to give an indication of changes in the intervening years. Our intent is to publish the full data set at a later date.

The views provided by the young people has not been published in full, although a ‘snapshot’ was made available on our website and is repeated in the next section of this report by way of ‘setting the scene’.

The detail presented in the following pages is by no means all the information we have collected, however, does provide a reasonable sense of the whole.

1.2 About Guardian Saints

Formed in 2014, Guardian Saints is a Community Interest Company that provides a range of services to those responsible for safeguarding young people in care, to support them in establishing robust policies and practices with regards to online safety data protection.

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1 The 2019 survey received over 500 responses in total (survey responses that were not 100% complete have been discounted from the results presented).

2 Details of the services that Guardian Saints provide to the Fostering Community are listed at the end of this document.
2 What did young people in care have to say?

2.1 How could the internet be made better?

In 2018, as part of the prize draw, two of the key questions were:

“Is there anything that worries you or issues you have experienced whilst using the Internet?”

“Could you improve something about the internet and being online, what would it be and why?”

A selection of the responses to these questions are repeated below. These are presented verbatim (i.e. exactly as they were written).

2.2 Some worries and issues experienced

“I feel that it is easy for young people to be contacted by strangers on the internet and some young people in care are vulnerable. I have experienced this and have things in place to make me safe and it hasn’t happened again.”

“When I had a You Tube account I kept getting messages from strangers, this worried me so I deleted You Tube.”

“The fact that pornography is so easily accessible, harmful content in the media that causes low self esteem or hatred towards particular groups and websites that actively encourage harmful behaviour such as self - harming, anorexia or suicide. Also, cyber bullying.”

“People might try to contact you that you don’t want.”

“People trying to befriend me when I don’t know them and people trying to get me to send pictures of myself to them and them talking inappropriately to me..”

“The thing that worries me is how easy it is for paedophiles to access children and also how easy it is to be hacked.”

“Predators hiding behind a computer screen and being unaware of who this person is.”

“People have contacted me and I don’t know who they are. Grooming, cyber bullying…. ....via social media.”

2.3 ‘No worries’

“I don't use social media so I have no worries when using the internet.”

2.4 What would you improve?

“to make it safer because the internet is a dangerous place.”

“Safer search engines.”

“....mostly safer sites (such as Facebook, snapchat and Instagram) on hacking accounts and making friends with potentially dangerous people (make them safer).”

“Social media companies to take more responsibility for inappropriate content on their sites.”

“That when you go social media you would have to be on a certain age to go on it and also more security online and safety.”

“I would like no bullying online as there is enough in real life. I also do not like the fake people
online who use the Photoshop apps to look like someone that they actually are not. I do not like the body confidence apps that change people as people believe that is what they look like and try and be like them, when actually its all fake."

"I would improve the security of the Internet and allow the police to access everyone’s internet usage, because in the modern day paedophiles can get in contact with children quite easily."

"If anyone does cyber - bullying, then the social media site will ban them and get them into trouble. If they do it again they won’t be allowed on the site for a certain amount of time."

"I think you should be able to know who someone is just from a message so if its someone you don’t know instead of asking who they are you can just delete them."

2.5 The Internet of “good things” ....mostly

One young person in care provided a series of positive and inspiring comments, summarising what a great resource the internet can be and the potential benefits that can be derived by all, tempered with a reflection on the potential drawbacks

We asked: "In a few words, please tell us why you use the internet?"

They said: "To connect with friends, family, teachers and gain an insight into the rapidly changing world. I also use it to enhance my academic grades by using online textbooks, watching videos, typing etc. As well as learning new skills such as cooking, playing the guitar and the piano. I also use it for its satnav capabilities."

We asked: "In a few words, please tell us what is the best thing for you about being able to use the internet?"

They said: "The ability to learn easier than any other generation before me."

We asked: "In a few words, please tell us if there is anything that worries you or issues you have experienced whilst using the internet?"

They said: "Although freedom of speech is something everyone should be grateful that the internet has enabled it is being abused by a minority who insight hatred. Furthermore, it is scary that those viewing hatred can be pushed further down that path via surveillance assemblages that direct you onto similar content to keep one on that website."

"Also the rapidly developing electronic world is scary because adults often cannot keep up and therefore cannot protect the vulnerable."

"The government at large cannot keep up with rapid changes either. Therefore, allowing hackers to find more and more ways of destroying livelihoods and even the NHS."

"The electronic panopticon is scary as a citizen because the growing awareness that we are being watched cannot truly encourage curiosity."

We asked: "If you could improve something about the internet and being online, what would it be and why?"

They said: "The clarity around how to use it. So that most people know how to use it to its full positive potential and protect the vulnerable because of that knowledge. Also encourage people not to use it habitually and alternatively have a conversation."
3 Foster Carer Online Safety Surveys – 2016 and 2018

Alongside some quantitative data, the purpose of these surveys was to gain an overview from foster carers of the key issues, concerns and challenges they experience supporting online safety for the children and young people for whom they care. A copy of the full published report from the 2016 survey is available upon request (info@guardiansaints.com). We repeated the same set of questions in 2019 and, in the following sections, we present a subset of the results from both surveys for comparative purposes.

3.1 Young People in care by age

We asked: “How many children do you look after currently and what are their ages?”

2016

In the 2019 survey, it was considered of interest to expand the age bands to provide more granular information. We also wanted to gain an idea of how many carers supported ‘staying put’ arrangements allowing former young people in care to remain living with their former foster carers.

2019

As can be seen from our results, the majority of young people in care fall into the 11 to 17 age band, with around half of that number at the younger ages (0 to 10) and less than that over 16. It is pleasing to see that a number, however low, have stayed with their former foster carers after turning 18 in ‘staying put’ arrangements. ‘Staying Put’ is still relatively new and we understand that this process has not achieved maturity with some Local Authorities.
3.2 Do they know more than you?

We asked: “Do you think a child/the children in your care know more about technology than you do?”

As can be seen from the pie charts above there has been a shift between 2016 and 2019. In 2016, the majority of respondents felt the young people knew more than they did, whereas the latest indicator is that a slight majority of carers who now believe they know more.

This may be attributable to more/better training or could simply be a function of a shift in demographics as the foster carer population become slightly younger with roughly 30% of respondents being between 40 and 50 years of age and nearly 19% under 40. Those between 50 and 60 or 60 and over, making up the other half.

3.3 What are the perceived risks posed by use of the internet/digital services?

We asked: “What risks do you think the children currently in your care are potentially most vulnerable to?”

As can be seen above there has been some change in what the ‘perceived risks’ to young people are when accessing the internet/digital services. Cyber Bullying remains the highest ‘concern’, whereas ‘unplanned contact’ is considered a higher risk than indicated in 2016. Grooming and radicalisation are the lowest in terms of concern.

We considered it would be of interest to compare ‘perception’ against actual ‘incidents experienced’
3.4 What incidents have young people in your care experienced

We asked: “Have any of the young people you have looked after (either now or in the past) experienced any of these as a result of technology use (internet/mobile phone)?”

As shown there has been a change in terms of incident experience$^3$ from 2016 to 2019, with access to inappropriate sites moving ahead of both unplanned contact and cyber bullying.

$^3$ Please note that some responses indicated multiple incidents.
Although apparent from the pie charts above, we thought it would be helpful to compare the perceived risks from 2019 against the actual experience, this is represented below.

What Risks are young people in care most vulnerable to?

2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Risks - Ranked</th>
<th>Actual Incidents Experienced - Ranked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cyber Bullying</td>
<td>Inappropriate Sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unplanned Contact</td>
<td>Unplanned Contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Addiction</td>
<td>Cyber Bullying</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexting</td>
<td>Internet Addiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate Sites</td>
<td>Sexting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grooming</td>
<td>Grooming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radicalisation</td>
<td>Radicalisation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, although cyber bullying remained the highest concern, this is not reflected in actual incidents. By the same token unplanned contact matches in terms of both perception and experience. We are often told that such unplanned contact with members of the birth family has the biggest potential to disrupt placement stability.

3.5 Is enough training provided

We asked: “Does the Local Authority/Fostering Agency provide enough detailed guidance and training to you regarding online safety?”

![Graph showing online safety training](image)

It is not pleasing to see that a higher proportion of carers now feel that they aren’t receiving enough training. However, it could be that more foster carers are aware of the need and value of such training.

Guardian Saints have long held the view that online safety ‘awareness’ training, at the very least, should be incorporated into the ‘Skills to Foster’ training that is delivered as part of onboarding new carers.
3.6 Internet Safety in the home

We asked: "What challenges have you had whilst providing a safe internet access environment in the home?"

2016 and 2019

- Technical - I don't know what controls to apply or where to apply them
- Convenience – Setting controls for children makes access for others too complicated
- Guidance - I need more training in applying age appropriate controls
- Confidence - I know what to do but I don't want to mess things up
- No Challenges – No particular

What challenges have you had whilst providing a safe internet access environment in the home?

3.7 What additional support would help?

For 2019, we asked two further questions to ascertain what additional support might be useful for foster carers to help them with online safeguarding.

We asked: "What additional training would be helpful?"
As can been seen, a significant percentage were of the view that ‘hands on’ training with setting parental controls would be helpful.

Guardian Saints have been asked to provide such training on a number of occasions and it has been very well received. However, this type of training is difficult to support ‘en masse’ and becomes expensive for organisations on a ‘per head’ basis. As a consequence, most fostering services continue to provide ‘high level’ awareness training (classroom or online) whereas we believe guided training would be of benefit.

3.8 Carer Online Safety Helpline

We asked: “Do you think it would be helpful if there was a dedicated Online Safety ‘Helpline’ for foster carers?”

We have asked this question many times when talking to both foster services and/or carers. However, the magnitude of the positive was still somewhat surprising with virtually 93% stating that they felt it would be helpful.

4 Conclusion

There is a wealth of information about Internet safety, parental controls and technical reviews available online. However, it is clear that Foster Carers overwhelmingly agree that a dedicated helpline would be beneficial in their specific and unique situation. During the training sessions Guardian Saints deliver to Foster Carers we ask participants to tell us about the issues they face in providing a safe online experience for the young people in their care.

The issue most often cited is that settings are complicated to enforce, with confusion around where the controls should be put in place i.e. whether to set controls on the device/s, the broadband router or via service provider web interface – this confusion can, on occasion, result in either the wrong controls being established or none at all. A national helpline could provide the support and advice to address these issues and would help to instil confidence.
Guardian Saints services:

Online Safety for staff and carers
• General Online Safety training
• Guided practical training
• Policy awareness training

GDPR - Data Protection – (Fostering Specific)
• GDPR gap analysis
• GDPR audit
• Data Protection Officer - DPO as a Service
• GDPR data breach support service and incident response guidance

Cyber Essentials and IASME Governance Certification

Cyber Essentials Plus Certification
Cyber Essentials Workshop
• Introduction to the Cyber Essentials initiative
  • What are the criteria for success?
  • Major and minor non-compliance impacts
  • The benefits of passing
  • What to do if you fail
  • Cyber Essentials Plus – what’s the difference?

For more information contact us: info@guardiansaints.com or visit our web site: https://www.guardiansaints.com

Online Safeguarding for Young People in Care
A Retrospective

Supporting Safer Internet Day 2020