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| REF: YFRS.01  **Youth Focussed Research Study**  **School Briefing Sheet** |  |

This short paper outlines the arrangements for the HeadStart Online Wellbeing Research Study your school has agreed to take part in. The briefing has been designed to outline the process and the various considerations along the way e.g. criteria for selecting participants, logistics of the sessions etc. If you have any further questions, please get in touch with [ben.bolton@swgfl.org.uk](mailto:ben.bolton@swgfl.org.uk) or 07393 036621.

**Overview of the Study**

During the 2018/19 (and potentially part of the 2019/20) academic year, I am keen to engage young people to help us understand online behaviour. Despite over a decade of E-Safety input, it can be argued that little has changed in terms of behaviours. Despite our collective best intentions relating to E-Safety, it would appear there is a more powerful motivation is driving online risk-taking behaviour.

The research study will be qualitative in nature and will be focussed on empowering young people to share their thoughts and experiences, both good and bad. We will predominantly be using focus groups of 6 – 8 young people. However, if further detail is required, I am also requesting consent to interview young people in smaller groups or even one to one.

**What year groups will be involved?** – We would like to engage all year groups between year 4 and year 10 inclusive. If we are able to engage year 11 it would be valuable, but the pressure upon these pupils is respected.

**How many young people from each age group?** – I would like to work with relatively small groups. Six young people is optimal; however, it could work with eight young people. If there are more than 8 young people ken to take part, we can discuss this, however, capacity is finite. I could potentially run more than 1 focus group in a year group if there is seen to be value in doing so. Alternatively, we could arrange to do something with a larger group at a later date.

**Is the Research Study ethically sound?**

This research has been subject to two rounds of ethical approval. The Cornwall Council Research Governance Framework (mandated by the Department of Health) and also the Ethics Committee at Plymouth University. The study has been successful in securing ethical approval from both of these institutions (Letters can be provided).

**What will the research focus on?**

Given the nature of Grounded Theory, the research will not be tightly constrained by specific research questions at the outset. I will start with key areas of focus or themes. The data gathered will influence both the questions themselves, but also the data collection methods used. Whilst I can give an overview of the plan to date, it must be appreciated that additional research methods will be employed as data gathered begin to shape the direction of the study. The themes are listed below.

**Research Theme 1** – How are young people engaging with the online world and how is this changing over time and by age group?

**Research Theme 2** – What effect is the online world having on young people’s social and emotional development… the way young people see themselves and their empathy for others?

**Research Theme 3** – How is the online world normalising and legitimising certain forms of behaviour?

**Research Theme 4** – How can professionals and parents provide young people with a better support framework in terms of online wellbeing?

These research themes have shaped the data collection methods used.

**How do we select the young people?**

This is a qualitative sample based upon grounded theory. Therefore, the sample framework is relatively loose. Unlike quantitative studies, we will not be seeking to put in place a statistically representative sample.

The sample of young people will be based upon **their belonging to a demographic or being in a position to inform the research themes**. We are keen to work with a range of young people as they will all have experience and insight to inform the study.

The criteria for sample selection are as follows:

* The young person must be from the appropriate year group.
* The focus groups / interviews will not focus on technology therefore, there is no need to be a technical expert. Lived experience is our interest.
* The young person must be resilient / able to cope with discussing this issue. If the school is aware of reasons why this might not be the case this should be discussed beforehand.
* The young people selected should be confident working and talking in a small group. The facilitator can help those who may struggle.
* We will be conducting mixed gender groups, so a balance of gender is a consideration though not essential (if needed we will conduct single gender groups as a follow up)
* A random selection is fine i.e. every third name on the register, but equally, volunteers is fine. I want young people to be willing to take part rather than forced.
* All sample members must have written parental / guardian consent.

**What will the young people be asked to do?**

The research methodology is relatively simple and takes two related approaches.

1. Focus Groups – I will sit with a group of 6 – 8 young people and discuss online issues. I will do this at the beginning and end of the academic year, unless the need for interim conversations is identified by either party. I will have a small set of discussion topics, but the young people will be influential in shaping the direction of the conversation.
2. Interviews: I would also like to hold individual / pair interviews with participants where there is a need to explore their thoughts in more depth and in a more confidential setting. The need for this will be identified through the focus group activity.

**Safeguarding Considerations**

* Consent will be collected from parent and child prior to the session. No consent, no involvement. Support from the school would be appreciated on this. Consent will be for a 2-year term with the option to withdraw at any time.
* For my own safety, I would insist that a member of staff be available and nearby at all times during the research.
* I need to be made aware of safeguarding contacts within the school before starting the research sessions.
* Sessions will be subject to both video / audio recording. This is clearly discussed in the consent process.

**What support do I need from the school?**

The support needed from school will be as follows:

* Support to select 6 – 8 young people from each relevant year group.
* Support to send / receive letters and consent forms.
* Act as liaison between school and family.
* Provide a suitable room for conducting focus group discussions (Quiet with no disturbance)
* A suitable room to conduct interviews (as above but obviously can be smaller)
* A member of staff to be present at all times during research session
* Support to engage parents / school staff as required in additional family / professional focus groups.

**What will the school get in return?**

We value the commitment given by schools. Therefore, we want to ensure there is a clear benefit for taking part. HeadStart will offer:

* To share research findings / important information as it becomes apparent.
* To support develop the confidence and competence of professionals to provide sustainable support regarding online wellbeing.
* Run a training session for staff / governors if required.
* Ad Hoc support from professionals linked to the HeadStart Programme research.

**When will this start.**

I would like to start fieldwork in the Autumn term 2018/19. Therefore, the process needs to commence as soon as possible.

**What topics will we discuss?**

It is difficult to be specific on this given the grounded theory approach. However, some areas of general discussion might be

* How are they using the internet?
* Their views on the online world?
* What do they think about the media headlines (I will provide examples)?
* Do they have any concerns for their own wellbeing?
* What drives their decision making online?
* Does the internet shape their identity?
* What role does the online world play in friendships?
* How does using the internet make them feel, does it change their mood at times?
* Relationship with school / family re: online world?
* How do they cope with challenges / what are their most important resilience factors?

I will ensure all discussion are age appropriate and language / approach will be tailored to the age group in the session.

**Frequently Asked Questions**

We have prepared a sheet of frequently asked questions that will be sent to all potential participants and their parents / guardians to provide an overview of the research proposal. This will hopefully answer any questions they have before they give their consent to take part. An example is provided below.

**Youth Focussed Study - Participant Information Sheet**

**Research project title:** How is the online world impacting the social and emotional development of young people?

**Background**

My name is Ben Bolton. I am employed by Cornwall Council but also work very closely with the South West Grid for Learning, an online safety charity based in Exeter. I work on a programme called HeadStart Kernow. HeadStart Kernow is focussed on the emotional health and wellbeing of young people. My role specifically looks at the impact the online world is having on young people’s wellbeing. This research is also the foundation for my PhD at Plymouth University.

**Background**

HeadStart Kernow is a Big Lottery funded programme focused on emotional health and wellbeing. There are 6 HeadStart Programmes across the UK, each receiving funding to explore the emotional wellbeing of young people aged 10 – 16. As part of the wider programme, we have made a commitment to undertake significant research into the impact the online world is having upon emotional and mental health and determine what we can do to address this challenge.

**What is the research about?**

The working title is currently “Is the Social and Emotional Development of young people under threat from the online world?” With your input, this might change as the research progresses.

The growth of the online world is changing society and we need to improve our understanding so that we can respond more effectively. There is a lot of research about young people and their online lives, the way they use the internet and Social Media and common types of risk taking behaviour e.g. online harassment. There is very little research on the impact this is having on their emotional and mental wellbeing and how it is potentially changing the way young people view themselves and the way they relate to others.

This research is not about technology, it is about the way we use the technology and the impact this has on our own wellbeing and that of others. We will focus on behaviours, emotional impacts and mental health rather than handsets, apps and social media platforms.

**Why should I take part in the research?**

If you choose to take part in this 2-year study, you will be informing research which could have a significant impact on future of public policy in the UK. The information and thoughts that you provide will directly shape policies, tools and resources to help improve things for future generations. This research is likely to have local, regional, national and potentially International impacts because so little research has been done in this area.

As the lead researcher, I hope we can build a really positive working relationship over the 2 years so that we all get the best possible experience from this opportunity. I also hope that I can make the experience enjoyable for you. We will chat, explore and discuss issues and you can help me understand the challenges / opportunities you face.

**If I take part in the research, what will I be doing?**

I need you to help me understand what it is like to be young. When I was growing up there were no mobile phones and Internet wasn’t invented. You are the first generation to grow up not knowing what it was like to live without the internet and smart phones.

If you decide you want to take part, it will be easy for you. I will work with your school to arrange for a small group to have a chat with me twice per year. I would also like to speak with you individually and ask you some simple questions so that I can really understand what it feels like to be young and online. Trust, me, I will be much more nervous that you.

**When will the sessions take place and how long will they last?**

I will work with your school to arrange sessions during the school day. The sessions should last between 1 hour and 90 minutes. This depends upon how much you have to say. If we are finished earlier, we can stop. I will make sure that I work with your teachers to minimise the impact on your learning.

**Are the small group discussions and interviews formal?**

No, not at all. We will sit and have a chat and maybe do some activities. I might ask you to show me things online to help explain what you are talking about. There are no right or wrong answers, this is completely about you and your opinions / feelings.

**If I don’t use Social Media, can I take part?**

Absolutely yes. This is a 2-year study so it is likely that different people will start using social media at different times and in different ways. Some will be heavy users, others will be much lighter. Some will actively contribute content, others will be much more interested in viewing content.

Whatever your relationship with the internet and the online world, you have an important viewpoint, even if you don’t use it at all.

**If I agree to take part and then change my mind, can I pull out?**

Totally. Whilst I hope you enjoy this and want to take part, you have the right to pull out at any time and no questions will be asked.

If for any reason you don’t want to continue, ask you parents / guardian to let you teacher know and I will remove your name from the study. Alternatively, they can contact me direct.

**Is the research confidential?**

Yes, the information you give me is confidential. This means that I will not tell your friends, parents, staff or anyone else what you have said. Whilst there may be school staff in the room at times, they will also treat the information as confidential.

The only time I might want to talk to someone else about what you say is if I think that you, or someone else are in danger of being hurt. If this happens I will talk to you about it first, but I will need to inform the school.

**Will you record me?**

Yes, but don’t worry. I would like to record the group discussions and interviews so that I can listen to them again and write down everything that is said. When I write down what is said I will not use real names so no-one can tell who said what. After I have written down what has been said I will delete the recordings.

In addition, I would sometimes like to take still photos during sessions but this will be done in a way so as not to identify individuals. This will be for promotional purposes.

**Is it anonymous?**

Yes, completely. If you or someone else says your name in the interview or focus group I will change this when I write up the session.

**What happens after the research?**

I will write about the research that I have done and present the findings widely. It is likely that I will also publish some of this and talk about what I have been doing so that other people can learn from our experience.

I will use fake names at all times so that no-one will be able to link what has been said to you. If you want to see any of the work that I publish after the research or want to be involved in telling people about this research, tell me and I will send you more information.

**I want more information about this?**

In the first instance speak to your teacher, they can contact me. I am more than happy to answer any questions you have. Please remember, I want you to enjoy this experience and part of this is making sure you have all of the information you need.

**What if I want to make a complaint or have something I can’t talk to you**

**about?**

If you have any problems, concerns or complaints as a result of this research you

can contact my manager of supervisor:

Line Manager: Richard Head, HeadStart Programme Lead [rhead1@cornwall.gov.uk](mailto:rhead1@cornwall.gov.uk) or by phone 01872 326345

Supervisor at Plymouth University: Professor Andy Phippen [andy.phippen@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:andy.phippen@plymouth.ac.uk) or on mobile 07817 667334

**I want to take part, what do I do now?**

You need to ask your parents / guardian to read and sign the attached consent form to let me know you agree to take part. By signing this form, you are agreeing to take part and to be recorded.

Ben Bolton

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Appendix 1 – Process Flow Chart

