New programme funds online safety support for children's digital experience in care.

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For children and young people in or leaving care, life brings more challenges than it does for their peers. This is also true online.[1] The digital environment can be a refuge to escape to, an incredible resource, or a location for further harms. Yet foster carers describe a lack of digital skills and confidence.[2] They receive little specialised training to respond to the online lives of children.

'If children and young people are to be safer and thrive online they need the guidance of the community of adults around them - particularly when there's the potential for the shifting and complex vulnerabilities of their offline lives to be exacerbated and added to when they're engaging online' says Nominet, announcing the REACH programme to address this.

We are delighted that our team The **enable** consortium, has received a grant to make a meaningful and significant contribution to the online safety ecosystem of young people in care. **enable** brings together academics, the consultancy Youthworks, online safety specialists, experienced foster carers, a youth engagement group, and both public and private sector care teams. We will co-create an accredited, evaluated online safety training programme for foster carers and a Knowledge Bank of resources and case studies, with support to foster carers in person.

"Foster carers told us about their responsibilities and struggles – while eager to do their best for all children in their care and often very worried about digital risks, they lacked the tools to do so," said Adrienne Katz, Director of Youthworks, "children described carers who had widely varying approaches from turning off the router to confiscating their mobile phone."

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[1] 'Vulnerable Children in a Digital World'. Adrienne Katz and Aiman El Asam.
[2] Children's Commissioner: 'Growing Up Digital In Care.'

"I go online to escape my life, to find people like me and new friends', said Jen, 15 (not her real name) 'and that led to me linking up with people who seemed nice at first, but turned out scary. I had no one I could tell."

"I felt so alone. I went online and began sharing pics 'cos I wanted likes and I thought I looked good. But my pics got used in awful ways. I was devastated and had nobody I felt I could tell. My foster carer does not use social media, so I didn't think she'd know what to do." Alesha, 14. (Not her real name).

In the **enable** programme, care experienced young people will share their suggestions, needs and experiences. Foster carers and those who work with them will be consulted about their needs and training preferences to co-create these resources.

Led by Dr. Aiman El Asam of the Department of Psychology at Kingston University, London, the Enable Consortium welcomes this opportunity to put into practice practical solutions identified by our research programme and The Cybersurvey.

CONTACT: Adrienne Katz, Director Youthworks,

@AdrienneKatz1 akatz@youthworksconsulting.co.uk   02034175051