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ROBERT is supported by the Safer Internet III programme



Risktaking Online Behaviour Empowerment Through Research and Training – ROBERT

Purpose: ROBERT project intends to make online interaction safe for children and young people. This will be achieved through learning from experiences of online abuse processes and factors that make young people vulnerable as well as those that offer protection. Perpetrators' strategies in relation to grooming of children online will also be explored along with developing an understanding of how abuse may develop in the online environment. Children and young people will be empowered in order for them to better protect themselves online. Groups of children perceived to be more at risk will specifically benefit from chances of improved self-protection.

Partners: This 24 month project (June 2010 to June 2012) is funded by the European Commission Safer Internet Programme as a Knowledge Enhancement Project. It is managed and coordinated by the CBSS Expert Group for Cooperation on Children at risk, EGCC, in partnership with:

- University of Tartu, Estonia
- Linköping University, Sweden
- University of Edinburgh, UK
- Save the Children Denmark
- Save the Children Italia
- Innocence in Danger, Germany
- Stellit International, the Netherlands and Russia
- Kingston University, UK

Methods used:

1. We will draw upon the experiences of young people who have been subjected to online abuse (often called grooming), through interviews conducted by trusted people already in a helping relationship with the young person. The interviews will take place across several European countries and will be analysed systematically to help us make sense of how young people experience the process that led up to the abusive situation.
2. We will also interview people convicted of online offences, again through trusted relationships, to further make sense of the contexts that leave young people open to abusive situations.
3. A final set of interviews will be through focus groups with young people, some of whom may be considered to be more at risk of online abuse: young people in alternative care, young people that are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender and young people with some form of disability. The focus groups will explore perceived vulnerabilities and resilience with a specific focus on how young people manage the challenges modern technology puts on them.
4. Before we start the interviews we will systematically collect European reports and research in different European languages, published on the topic of Internet related abuse of children. These will be organised into a database which will be a part of the www.childcentre.info website run by the EGCC and will be publicly available.

Outcomes:

1. A review of existing research and literature on online offending in different languages will be made available in an online public database.
2. A final report for a European and International audience will combine the data analysis and results from the project to inform professional understanding of the experience for children and young people of online solicitation, grooming and sexually abusive behaviour.
3. Based on interviews with online offenders a report identifying situational indicators of risk online, in terms of technological affordances, victim behaviours and offender decision-making strategies will be published.
4. Research articles and presentations of the main findings of the project.
5. A final conference in the spring of 2012.

Other direct benefits: Children that have suffered online violence and abuse will receive better informed and more comprehensive assistance. Law enforcement will have more tools when prosecuting and convicting online offenders as their knowledge on how abusive situations develop will increase their operational ability. Legislation can be improved as legislators will have access to pan-European knowledge. Academic researchers across Europe and beyond will have a new tool through which they can assess gaps in present knowledge and build on already existing achievements.

Findings from the research and the interviews will be used to share with young people, the general public, practitioners and researchers in order to empower change through research and training.

The project will at all times include children, not only in terms of gathering information, but also in evaluating the conclusions from the project.