

## **‘Maddie is Online’: a creative path for school nurses to champion the safe and resilient participation of young people in the online environment.**

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In March 2021, The Scottish Government published its [Digital Strategy for Scotland](#), with a vision for an ethical digital nation, where “children and vulnerable people are protected from harm” and products and services are designed from a user perspective and delivered, in a way that ensures they are “inclusive and ethical and resilient”. A recent Scottish Government independent [report](#), published in November 2022, further builds upon the concept of “trust”, by means of engaging the people of Scotland “in digital decisions that affect their lives” and delivering this vision with respect to Human Rights, ensuring that Children & Young People, in particular “grow up loved, safe and respected”. According to this [vision](#) of trustworthy, ethical, inclusive and participatory online society spans to areas such as “cyber resilience”, which is a critical for enabling “digital public services, digital inclusion, and skills development” and to [artificial intelligence \(AI\) technologies](#), which present challenges and opportunities for children and young people. The direction highlights the national [action plan](#) on internet safety focusing on collective responsibilities and steps that should be taken to equip anyone who supports children and young people (professionals, parents and carers) with the necessary skills for online safety and resilience.

However, in order to ensure that children and young people are supported to be safe, resilient and empowered, it is important to also understand how they actively engage with the technical, creative, learning, social and collaborative affordances of the digital world they inhabit, how they perceive, interact with and shape their online experiences. What tactics do they use to leverage new opportunities or to address the evolving challenges they encounter within the online environment, and by extension how they (can) grow to develop into future proof, ethical trustworthy and resilient digital citizens?

There is growing [research](#) aiming to help us understand the ever-increasing complex online world children and young people encounter, however efforts to build digital citizenship education into the lives of children and young people in schools, most often focus on [online harms](#) (e.g., misinformation, scams, fraud and phishing and other online safety concerns). We may be missing opportunities to understand and reinforce positive engagement and opportunities for growing diverse online digital skills and developing online resilience. Learning activities of that nature can take the form of open and critical dialogue, as well as creative exercises that allow children and young people to express their voice, contribute their perspectives or showcase their existing digital skills and knowledge.

School nurses play an important role in improving the “emotional/mental health and wellbeing” of children and young people in schools, as one of their key priorities for [intervention](#)). As part of safeguarding and supporting this priority, school nurses are well placed to champion the implementation of key nursing [interventions for wellbeing and safety](#), via the prevention, detection, and reporting of online harms by means of providing helpful resources and supportive guidance to both parents and pupils. Moreover, school nurses are uniquely positioned to form collaborative partnerships with teachers and trusted relationships with children and young people that enable honest and open dialogue. This can foster a skills growing mindset and positive online behaviours in pupils, educating against causing or experiencing online harms, helping them to understand their rights and obligations in relation to the use of personal data, and instilling cyber-resilience and a safe digital footprint: overall, championing the principles of digital citizenship, governed by the ethical and responsible use of technology and leveraging online connectivity for learning, creating and participating effectively in the digital society.

Transferring these principles to the online environment, it is clear that more opportunities should be available for children and young people to discuss and express their views and own world perspectives and that it is imperative for these to be taken into consideration in education (and as an extension in the education of teachers and school nurses).

There are only a few examples of educational videos which deal with real life online issues, aimed directly at children, such as "[Let's Fight It Together](#)" cyberbullying video from *Childnet* or cartoon stories which tackle internet safety issues such as the "[BBC Newsround Internet Safety Film](#)" and "[Josh and Sue](#)" by *The UK Child Exploitation and Online Protection Center*. These are not used as tools for just entertainment but as a way to engage young people, directly linking with real-life online issues they may be experiencing and relate to their own circumstances. Much more work, however, is required in this domain to engage learners at a younger age in conversations about online situations that may have a direct impact on their lives and those of others. These can be also used as tools that helps school nurses and teachers to connect with the experiences of young people.

'[Maddie is Online](#)' is an innovative community-led project developed in the School of Creative and Cultural Business at the Robert Gordon University, that uses creative storytelling to produce learning and teaching material for school teachers, nurses, parents and everyone involved in children's education, support and safeguarding. It focuses on the development of young people's online information, digital and media literacy skills through digital animated stories, drawing attention to critical issues of online connectivity, in a way that is fun and engaging, linking to children's and young peoples' own online experiences within everyday life. The educational material has been developed with the creative input of young people, librarians, academics, university students and the general public and focus on the digital citizenship skills that young people (aged 9–12-year-old) require in order to navigate safely, effectively and ethically their online environments. Every series is accompanied by an eBook toolkit that engages creatively student interns and contains [useful resources and activities](#) linked to each one of the series themes. The educational toolkits extend the relevance and the reach of the cartoon audio-visual material available by means of incorporating systematic guidance for running the series, step-by-step structured digital lesson plans that are used in different subjects at school, reflective and evaluative exercises, which become the basis of training sessions and helpfully tagged and evaluated freely-available open educational resources that offer additional avenues for further supporting young people to develop digital literacy skills in the areas of interest for the project. In that way nurses, teachers, librarians and parents and anyone who wishes to engage young people with these topics gains direct access to the video material together with instructions and further training ideas that complemented the series.

'Maddie is Online' has been supported by the Scottish Library and Information Council, [the Scottish Government](#) and [Digital Xtra Fund](#), and the Robert Gordon University [Innovation Accelerator programme](#), on the basis of supporting creatively young people's digital literacy and resilience skills development, with an empowering [agenda](#) for school teachers, librarians, nurses and youth workers.

The work has been designed with a focus on information, media and digital literacy as well as the concept of 'digital citizenship', highlighting the need to develop not only the technical skills required in today's digital online environment, but also the ability to find, understand, use and share information and create media and communications in diverse online contexts, following responsible and ethical behaviour. At the centre of the cartoon stories is opening dialogue around the challenges and opportunities of the online world.

The project includes four series with cartoon animated stories accompanied by educational toolkits which can be incorporated in teaching or consultation within a school or home environment:

a) 'Maddie is Online' [Series 1 Online Resilience](#), focusing on online resilience and safety and consists of 8 short episodes that engage young people in a cartoon story of online bullying. Series 1 was [piloted](#) and subsequently delivered and evaluated in workshops with six out of the seven schools with the participation of a total of 239 children in S1 classes. The young people who took part connected with Maddie's everyday life experiences and were empowered to talk about positive and challenging online situations they experienced during the global pandemic and express their needs for further training.

b) 'Maddie is Online' [Series 2 Misinformation](#), aiming to teach children the importance of managing online information and particularly information evaluation. It deals with fake news and misinformation.

c) 'Maddie is Online' [Series 3 Copyright](#), which explores strategies for protecting personal content and crediting the rights of others, addressing Creative Commons Licenses. This series was developed remotely during the global pandemic, engaging creatively young people and the community.

d) 'Maddie is Online' The ethics of Online Safety and Security (currently created by selected Scottish schools via a [school competition](#), including with young peoples' own stories, characters and voice-overs). Stories were selected by an expert judging panel from Digital Xtra Fund, Digital Skills Education, iDEA, Education Scotland and the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland. As part of series 4, five online, fully interactive training workshops on the ethics of online safety and security were also delivered to 263 delegates from the UK and internationally in collaboration with [Mesomorphic](#).

As part of our commitment to cross school interdisciplinary collaboration, 'Maddie is Online' will be delivered in the 'Nursing MSc Advancing Practice School Nursing and Health Visiting' course, offered by the School of Nursing, Midwifery and Paramedic Practice and led by Dr Elaine Allan. Dr Allan with impactful work in this area on [The Children's Rights Revolution \(qnis.org.uk\)](#) has been an advocate of building long lasting trust relationships between different stakeholders and enabling the voice of children and young people to be heard: "to be more evident in the development, design, and delivery of services to progress the rights of children". Dr Allan's project focused on exploring what children and young people expected around the planning and delivery of future health services that concerned them, particularly around health and wellbeing, building connections and trust between young people, NHS professionals and Higher Education. It is within this spirit and following the principles of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (House of Lords et al, 2015) that this new collaboration will unfold: Not only we "should think about the best interests of children and young people when making choice that affect them" (Article 3) but also continue supporting young people to have "[the right to have their views heard and taken seriously \(Article 12\)](#)".

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