
SAFE FROM HARM: DEVELOPMENT OF ONLINE CHILD PROTECTION TRAINING FOR SCOUTS NEW ZEALAND

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Abstract

Introduction: SCOUTS New Zealand place paramount importance on keeping young people safe from harm. New Zealand (NZ) has one of the highest rates of child abuse and child death by maltreatment in the developed world. SCOUTS NZ engage with 14,500 children and young people, supported by 4,500 adult volunteers in 340 locations across New Zealand. SCOUTS wanted to inform and educate all their members about the importance of child protection (CP), while managing the challenges of a geographically disparate population through online learning.

Method: “Introduction to Child and Youth Protection” module was created collaboratively with SCOUTS NZ and online educators at Whitireia NZ. The aim was to provide an accessible, evidence based, self-paced online module illustrating the realities of child abuse and neglect in NZ, while enabling the participants to understand the role of SCOUTS NZ in child and youth protection. The module was developed using “Articulate Storyline”, peer reviewed by Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) working in Youth Development and Social Work, and evaluated using the Kirkpatrick framework.

Results: 1102 SCOUTS leaders and volunteers have completed the CP module and evaluation to date. Significant improvements in the learning outcomes “Understanding the realities of child abuse and neglect in NZ” (5.32 ± 1.35 vs. 6.26 ± 0.79 , $p < 0.001$), “Understanding the importance of child and youth protection in NZ” (5.99 ± 1.13 vs. 6.51 ± 0.71 , $p < 0.001$) and “Understanding the role of SCOUTS in child protection” (5.74 ± 1.22 vs. 6.46 ± 0.79 , $p < 0.001$) were found on completion of the module. Participants found the module engaging (95%), useful (97%), applicable (99%) and relevant to their role (99%).

Conclusion: By using tailored, appropriate content, emotive topics can be addressed through online learning, as this successful collaboration has demonstrated.

Introduction

Aotearoa New Zealand has one of the highest rates of child abuse and one of the worst rates of child death as a result of maltreatment in the developed world (Adamson, 2013). On average a child dies every five weeks as a result of violence in New Zealand, the majority of whom are under 12 years of age (New Zealand Police, 2016). Between 2007 and 2016, children under five years of age represented 12% of all homicide victims, while in 2015, 63 children aged 16 years or under were hospitalised as a result of an assault perpetrated by a family member (New Zealand Police, 2016).

Sobering research by Rhoulard and Vaithianathan (2018), found that nearly 10% of all children fall victim to substantiated abuse or neglect in New Zealand, and that on average one child dies every five weeks as a result of violence in New Zealand (Doolan, 2004). While physical abuse and violence are often the most recognisable forms of abuse, children can experience emotional abuse, which may involve feeling unsafe at home, feeling degraded, receiving constant criticism or being left alone, while sexual abuse includes inappropriate touching and involvement in any sexual act with an adult. Oranga Tamariki Act (Oranga Tamariki, 1989) defines child abuse as “the harming (whether physically, emotionally, or sexually), ill-treatment, abuse, neglect or deprivation of any child or young person”. Sadly, studies have found that one in four New Zealand girls is sexually abused before the age of 15 (Fanslow, Robinson, Crengle, & Perese, 2007) and that Māori girls are at greatest risk. It is also reported that NZ Police respond to one “family violence” call every five minutes (New Zealand Police, 2016), indicating that hundreds of New Zealand children are exposed to abuse and violence every day.

Most child abuse occurs within the family environment but it can happen anywhere: at school, in the larger community, or online (Child Matters, n.d.). The sad reality is that most child abuse occurs in what would otherwise be seen as a ‘safe’ environment, often undertaken by a trusted family member, friend, church leader, sports coach, teacher or mentor. Unfortunately SCOUTS New Zealand has not been immune from acts of abuse, which has led to a significant overhaul of how SCOUTS keeps children and young people safe from harm.

Every child has the right to a childhood free from harm. With 5,000 volunteers trusted with the care and protection of over 14,500 child and youth members within SCOUTS New Zealand (Scouts New Zealand, 2018), SCOUTS feel they have a critical role to play in ensuring children and young people remain safe. One strategy to keep children in their care safe from harm, is to support their volunteers to understand what child abuse is, how to recognise abuse and what to do should they suspect abuse.

SCOUTS place paramount importance on keeping young people safe from harm, but were struggling to provide comprehensive face-to-face child protection training to all members and volunteers of the 340 SCOUTS groups across New Zealand. SCOUTS identified that online learning could deliver standardised organization-wide child protection training and education, in spite of the geographically disparate nature of participants.

Methods

Educators at Whitireia New Zealand worked with SCOUTS NZ to create an accessible, engaging, and non-threatening eLearning module that allowed the participants to encounter the often alarming and disturbing content associated with child protection privately, independently and at their own pace. This paper presents the evaluative study of the newly created “Introduction to Child and Youth Protection” online learning module, and explores the reality of creating an online environment where participants can explore a challenging content in a positive learning atmosphere.

The development team, consisting of a health and occupational psychologist, educationalist, a nurse education eLearning developer and representatives from SCOUTS NZ, created a researched and referenced module entitled “Introduction to Child and Youth Protection” as the first of three modules addressing child protection for SCOUTS NZ. The objective was to create a suit of objective, interactive modules that explained realities of child abuse and neglect in New Zealand, explored the impact of child abuse in SCOUTS NZ and provided opportunities for participants to reflect on their behaviour in relation to keeping children safe from harm. Subsequent modules examine how to recognise types of abuse, including the behaviour of perpetrators, how to manage a disclosure, and what to do should they suspect abuse. The learning outcomes were designed to mirror those of the traditional, classroom-based pedagogy:

- Understanding the realities of child abuse and neglect in NZ;
- Understanding the importance of child and youth protection in NZ;
- Understanding the role of SCOUTS in child protection.

The eLearning developers worked with SCOUTS NZ and child and youth development subject matter experts to identify suitable content, source material, linked references and real-world scenarios. A storyboard and prototype were then developed, and scenarios were filmed using local Scout groups. The module was designed to take approximately 30 minutes to complete and was comprised of 22 pages of content. The content defined child abuse and neglect, discussed demographic data relating to child abuse, neglect and family violence, and demonstrated real-world scenarios to illustrate best practice. The module was created using Articulate 360 (Articulate, 2017) and was accessed via the CPD@Whitireia Moodle Learning Management System (LMS). Module development tools

such as Articulate 360 allow non-programmers such as tertiary educators to create dynamic flexible learning material (O'Donnell, Lawless, Sharp, & Wade, 2015), that can be viewed anytime, at any place and on any device. The ability to access the child protection modules in a safe, non-threatening and comfortable environment selected by the participant was deemed critical in the creation of the module. Once developed, the child protection module was reviewed and tested internally and then by a group of SCOUTS volunteers to check any technical issues, content and suitability.

The evaluation is based on Kirkpatrick's Four Levels of Evaluation model (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006), which proposes a four level training evaluation approach. The first two levels, Reaction and Learning can be assessed on completion of the course, and include both the participants perceptions of the training and their perceived increase in knowledge. Levels Three and Four explore the extent to which the new learning has been applied and the organizational impact of the training, and fell outside the remit of the current project. The evaluation questionnaire contained three sections. The first section asked participants to rate their reaction to the content and applicability of the module, while the second section explored the response to the various interactive tools in the module. Both sections used a four-point Likert scale response format. The final section explored changes in understanding based on the learning outcomes and were charted on a seven-point sliding Likert scale, from low to high level understanding. Participants were first asked to retrospectively rate their previous understanding of each of the three learning outcomes before having completed the module, and then reflect on their current understanding following module completion.

Results

The "Introduction to Child and Youth Protection" online learning module launched in April 2019. To date 2401 (47%) of the estimated 5021 SCOUTS NZ volunteers (Scouts New Zealand, 2018) have gained access to the modules, while 1102 participants have undertaken the evaluation to date, representing 45% of participants. The average time to complete the module was reported as being between 20 and 40 minutes. Many participants had a long association with SCOUTS, with an average of 9.5 (SD = 10.52) years active (range 1 – 65 years).

Participants were asked to rate their reaction to the modules using a four-point Likert scale response format, from one (*Strongly disagree*) to four (*Strongly agree*). The participant's reactions to the module content is shown in Table One.

Table 1: The percentage of participant's reaction to the "Understanding Child and Youth Protection" module content

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I found the module content engaging	1%	3%	67%	29%
I found the content of the module useful	<1%	2%	61%	36%
The module content is relevant for SCOUTS leaders and volunteers	<1%	<1%	42%	57%
I was comfortable with the content of the module	<1%	1%	49%	49%
I am more confident in my understanding of child protection issues	<1%	5%	59%	35%
I am confident that I can and will apply this understanding to my role in SCOUTS.	<1%	<1%	44%	55%

While 81% of participants were comfortable learning about child and youth protection in an online environment, 80% expressed a preference for online child and youth protection education, rather than a traditional classroom / workshop-based approach. Reactions to the various interactive devices were broadly positive, as shown in Table Two.

Table 2: The percentage of participant's reaction to the "Understanding Child and Youth Protection" interactive devices

	Not at all engaging	Not very engaging	Quite engaging	Very engaging
Sliders	1%	10%	67%	22%
Click and reveal	2%	11%	65%	22%
Filmed scenarios	<1%	5%	48%	46%
Reflective questions	1%	9%	64%	26%

Significant improvements in the learning outcomes "Understanding of the realities of child abuse and neglect in NZ" (5.32 ± 1.35 vs. 6.26 ± 0.79 , $p < 0.001$), "Understanding of the importance of child and youth protection in NZ" (5.99 ± 1.13 vs. 6.51 ± 0.71 , $p < 0.001$) and "Understanding of the role of SCOUTS in child and youth protection" (5.74 ± 1.22 vs. 6.46 ± 0.79 , $p < 0.001$) were found on completion of the module.

Discussion

Child abuse and neglect is an emotive topic, and the statistics relating to child abuse and neglect in Aotearoa New Zealand are particularly shocking. SCOUTS New Zealand is a diverse and inclusive youth organisation, and has embraced the obligation to do everything possible to keep its young people safe from harm. As such, the "Introduction to child and youth protection" module was the first of three online modules focussed on child protection, and sits alongside a raft of new child protection initiatives. These include the new 0508 SCOUTHELP helpline, "Feeling unsafe?" promotion and advertising, along the

“Purple Card” scheme, which places child protection information in the hands of all SCOUTS members, leaders, children and volunteers.

The results show that the module was very well received by participants. User experience ratings were positive for over 95% of participants, and almost all found the module relevant, useful and immediately applicable to their role in SCOUTS. User engagement and subsequent learning can be enhanced if learning is timely and relevant (Brooks et al., 2016), and critically, although the participants had a high level of understanding relating to child protection before undertaking the module, there were significant improvements in knowledge relating to all three learning outcomes on completion.

While all the interactions were predominately reported as engaging, the most engaging were the video scenarios. The scenarios demonstrated SCOUT leaders responding to events in a familiar environment, enabling the participants to reflect on their own practice and how they would respond in a similar situation. Creating a simulated learning environment as an education method in a relevant context, actively engages learners in the learning process (Lamont & Brunero, 2013). The realness of simulation can promote deep experiential learning and awareness due to its perceived relevance to the learner (Peddle, 2011). This educational approach provides real-life, engaging, authentic problem-based learning that requires the learner to reflect on their own SCOUTS practice.

One of the major drivers of this project, was to ensure that education around child and youth protection was accessible to all SCOUTS members, leaders and volunteers. eLearning is a highly effective approach that enables flexible and cost effective competence development, as it is not restricted to physical location or time of use (Jeong & Yeo, 2014). eLearning, such as the Child and Youth Protection eLearning series, enables more people to be educated, at a lower cost and with similar or even better learning outcomes compared with classroom-based learning (Salmon, 2013). The creation of the eLearning child protection modules have increased accessibility to appropriate education on a number of levels. Firstly, the module could be undertaken anytime, anywhere and from any device ensuring that those who are unable attend face-to-face training or are geographically isolated from training in the main centres, were able to participate. Secondly, the modules were accessible, created using audio on each slide, closed captions and plain language to cater for the wide range of learnings styles and reading abilities. Finally, studies have shown that carefully created online education can successfully address sensitive topics and issues of culture safety (Asbury & Orsborn, 2020), illustrating that eLearning can provide a safe environment to engage with challenging content. By creating accessible, authentic eLearning SCOUTS NZ can become a more informed, responsive and proactive organisation in the field of child and youth protection.

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