



New software to protect vulnerable children online to be piloted in Surrey

May 14, 2013: New software designed to help parents and carers of vulnerable children keep their children safe on the internet is set to be trialled in Surrey.

The project, being run by the Epsom based child protection charity, the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, will involve 25 families taking part in a two month trial of computer monitoring software, developed by software company *Securus*, based in Hershaw. The software is programmed to monitor computer activity and record instances of concern, for example, inappropriate content such as sexual material, indications of grooming occurring or bullying situations. It contains a number of 'libraries' which allow it to identify worrying or concerning text or images on the computer screen – either online or offline and if something is identified, it takes a screen shot (a picture of what is on the screen) which can then be reviewed by an adult and appropriate action taken.

The charity is working with a number of Surrey based Special Educational Needs Schools to pilot the software with 25 families but has some places left for other families across the county.

Director of Research and Development at the Foundation, Donald Findlater said:

“As we have been hearing in the news today, the internet can pose real risks to children. Statistics from the the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (Ceop) show that in the last 12 months they received 18,887 reports of abuse, that’s 14% more than the previous year.

“Research we conducted into internet safety and children with Special Educational Needs showed that many pupils with Special Educational Needs are regular internet users but have a limited understanding of the potential dangers to their safety they face online.

“While filtering and blocking software has a role to play in keeping children safe, it wouldn’t pick up on grooming behaviour on Facebook, for example. This software will. We hope it will prove to be an important additional tool for parents and carers who want to keep their children safe online.”

The research report, *Internet Safety and Children with Special Education Needs*, found that:

- Special Educational Needs children are using technology in much the same way as other children, albeit there was some evidence of less extensive use of the internet and they appear to engage in social networking at a later age. They often seek friendships online as they are often isolated from their local communities.
- Mainstream technology providers who cumulatively create the online environment have made little if any allowance for users who may have learning and behavioural difficulties.
- Messages about online safety have been received by the children but were not necessarily well understood or applied to the range of online contexts that is desirable.

- Basic terminology such as ‘social networking’ and ‘privacy settings’ were not meaningful to most of the children studied.
- The children may struggle to anticipate and respond to risks involving deceit, may respond to inappropriate requests (perhaps repeating inappropriate behaviour) and may become obsessive in their online activities.
- Teachers lacked confidence that the children would or were able to implement their self-protective strategies sufficiently; and some parents lacked confidence in their own knowledge and skills to provide a safe online environment at home.
- Online risks are unlikely to materialise in the school environment due to the filtering, monitoring and supervision that is in place here. By far the greatest risk for children with special educational needs, as with other children, is when they are at home or at the home of a friend or relative.
- Parents lacked up-to-date knowledge, not only of the risks and of their management, but also of the different ways in which children engage with technology.

Director of Research and Development at the Lucy Faithfull Foundation added:

“This study showed that we have a cohort of children participating in all the same online activities as other children, but lacking the ability to judge and interpret the way in which people they encounter on the net behave towards them. A question such as ‘What are you wearing?’ might immediately send warning signals to other children but may be answered as a matter of course by a Special Educational Needs pupil. Managing the privacy settings on a Facebook account can also prove difficult for some Special Educational Needs pupils. Filtering and blocking software does not address these sorts of risks.

“Along with the monitoring software, parents and carers will also be encouraged to contact the Stop it Now! Helpline if they have any concerns about their child’s safety. Trained staff will then be on hand to offer advice, information and support.”

If you would like to take part in the software monitoring trial at no cost, contact the Lucy Faithfull Foundation on 01372 847160 or email Wolvercote@lucyfaithfull.org.uk.

To find out more about how you can protect children from sexual abuse visit www.parentsprotect.co.uk.

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Notes to editors:

For more information and/or interview opportunities please contact Deborah Denis on ddenis@stopitnow.org.uk | 01372 847160 | 07540 690 315

1. About the Lucy Faithfull Foundation

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation celebrated 20 years of protecting children from sexual harm in 2012. Named after its founder, Baroness Lucy Faithfull of Wolvercote, the Lucy Faithfull Foundation is the only UK-wide child protection charity dedicated solely to reducing the risk of children being sexually abused. It works with entire families that have been affected by abuse including: adult male and female sexual abusers; young people with inappropriate sexual behaviours; victims of abuse and

other family members. Drawing on expert knowledge about child sexual abuse the charity offers a broad range of services for professionals and members of the public. These include: assessments, intervention and treatment of known offenders, case specific advice and support, training and development courses and workshops, educational programmes for internet offenders and their families, circles of support and accountability, internet safety seminars for schools (teachers, parents and children) and Parents Protect! training for professionals, parents, carers and other adults. www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk. It also runs the Stop it Now! Campaign and Helpline (0808 1000 900) www.stopitnow.org.uk and www.parentsprotect.co.uk

2. About Stop it Now!

Stop it Now! UK and Ireland is a national campaign and Freephone confidential Helpline. It aims to prevent child sexual abuse by increasing public awareness and empowering people to act responsibly to protect children. Stop it Now! believes that it is the responsibility of all adults to take positive action to prevent the sexual abuse of children. Stop it Now! is an alliance of leading children's charities including the NSPCC, Action for Children, Children England and The National Association of People Abused in Childhood, working with the government and child protection agencies, to promote public education and prevent child sexual abuse. The Stop it Now! helpline has been operating since 2002 and aims to prevent child abuse by encouraging abusers and potential abusers to seek help and by giving adults the information they need to protect children safely. The helpline is funded by the Ministry of Justice and the Lucy Faithfull Foundation. www.stopitnow.org.uk