

## Technology and Child Engagement

Technology can be introduced to ways in which children are engaged with regards to protection. This generally includes education, data collection, and communication with social workers/ child services. While propositions in this article make reference to some pieces of technology, the reader must recognise that it has many more aspects than those mentioned here - this article is not exhaustive.

### Education

In emergency situations, technology can serve as both a tool for learning, and a subject of learning. As a tool for learning, technology (in the form of portable devices, internet courses etc.) can help child victims access knowledge and skills that they otherwise would have been deprived of in an emergency situation. As the world is significantly impacted by technological advancements, it is also crucial that technology be taught as a subject to children so that they possess the relevant skills and know-how to navigate society and build careers after departing from relief conditions.

One such example is the global network of FabLabs. In Greece, Terre des hommes (Tdh) in collaboration with the Global Humanitarian Lab built a FabLab in Greece. This particular FabLab is a space for refugee children to learn technology, skills, and create their own projects, diverting children away from the streets while providing an informal education. Labs are equipped with 3D printers, design tools and software, to name a few features. FabLabs are part of a network of 1000 labs worldwide, allowing beneficiaries to continue working on their previous projects after arriving at a new destination. The skills learnt in the lab should help children with future employment. Other FabLabs are in the pipeline, preparing for launch in Hungary, Romania, and Ukraine.

Teaching children about their rights and safety: as outlined in the Convention of the Rights of the Child, children possess universal rights. However, some children may not be aware of those rights. It is thus imperative to begin teaching children their rights in a child-friendly manner, especially to vulnerable groups. One example is a unicef video that tries to teach children the basics of child rights<sup>1</sup>. Videos are interactive and engaging, and is likely a more effective tool for communicating complex ideas such as 'rights' to a young person. Good alternatives may take the form of video games, such as Council of Europe's online game (dating back to 2009) that teaches basic internet safety rules to children

Teaching adults about children's rights: while this is not cutting-edge or recent innovation, it is worth highlighting just how technology has made the world a smaller place. Adults may now learn about child rights and good practices online, such as at the UNICEF website<sup>2</sup>. Authorities and agencies are increasingly using the internet to disseminate best practices, as seen in this child rights-approach to teaching in Scotland<sup>3</sup>. And while online and mobile platforms have been in use by the public for years now, it is imperative that child protection-oriented organisations do not miss out - your use of ChildHub to read this article is a case in point.

### Data Collection

Surveys can be more easily conducted on a larger scale at targeted groups such as children. Data can be collected using mobile devices, completed on personal devices or with the help of surveyors with mobile devices. Personalised surveys can reach individuals in the target group through email. Best of all, data collectors receive a tremendous benefit from having the survey accessible on the internet.

---

<sup>1</sup> See UNICEF Australia (2013).

<sup>2</sup> See UNICEF (2017).

<sup>3</sup> See Brown, K. (2016).

Data collection may not have to be an end in itself, but can also be a part of particular campaigns, such as raising awareness of child rights. Apart from the channels implemented above, social media such as Facebook and Twitter have polling capabilities which encourage popular engagement, which can then be tapped on to spread a message. For instance, having found that a majority of respondents do not believe that child rights are compromised in their society, campaigners can then present factual data that says ‘1 in 5 children in [location] are victims of [abuse, exploitation etc.]’, or any type of data and format which adds shock value or leaves an impression.

### **Contact with Child Services/ Social Workers**

Internet and smartphone penetration is growing in the world, an increasing number of users are young people and children. Where traditionally communication between children and child services, and between involved adults with child services occur on phone lines and in person, online and mobile platforms present an opportunity to create new avenues for child services and social workers to be reached. This may involve establishing a more actively managed website, an electronic reporting/ communication system, or advertising to increase public awareness of contact methods when assistance is required. This adds greater accessibility and choice for adults/ children to engage with child services.

When engaging with young children, or children who had experienced trauma that they were unable to mentally process, child-friendly toolkits may enter the picture. Toolkits may take the form of handbooks, forms, or interactive games, often with simplified language and expressions that best allow the child to comprehend and devote attention to the social worker. Electronic child-friendly toolkits may be synergised with mobile devices and the internet because it allows greater access to useful resources and good practices.

The above are just some examples of how we could make use of technology to better help children. It is not meant to be exhaustive, and any innovative applications are always welcome news. If you would like to learn more or share information, please visit [childhub.org](http://childhub.org) where you can find other material relating to child protection.

The following sources were consulted and referred to in the writing of this summary. Readers may find these sources insightful.

Written by Ser Jay Tan in 2018.

### **References**

Brown, K. (2016, August 23). Bringing Child Rights into the Classroom [online], *The General Teaching Council for Scotland*. Available at: <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/News/Blog/blog-bringing-child-rights-into-the-classroom.aspx>. Accessed 9 August 2018.

Terre des hommes (2018). FabLab: An Innovation Space for Refugees in Greece [online]. Available at: <https://www.tdh.ch/en/projects/fablab-innovation-space-refugees-greece>. Accessed on 6 August 2018. UNICEF (2017, July 10). Teaching and Learning About Child Rights [online], UNICEF. Available at: [https://www.unicef.org/crc/index\\_30184.html](https://www.unicef.org/crc/index_30184.html). Accessed 8 August 2018.

UNICEF Australia (2013). *What Are Child Rights?* [online video]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1BFLitBkco>. Accessed 9 August 2019.