



Change your story



# Evaluation of NewsWise family workshops: Media literacy in community settings

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**The  
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Foundation**

**PSHE** | ASSOCIATION

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# Executive summary

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Families play a vital role in supporting children's understanding of news, but families from underrepresented backgrounds may lack access to opportunities to develop critical news and media literacy knowledge, confidence and skills. A survey of parents in 2019 found that more than 1 in 2 (55.1%) wanted more support to help their children understand the news ([Picton, 2019](#)).

The NewsWise family workshops aimed to support children aged 10–11 in areas of disadvantage in Birmingham and the West Midlands to develop their ability to critically analyse online media and news and develop resilience to mis- and disinformation. The intervention trained local facilitators working in community settings to run engaging family workshops using high-quality resources to support a range of media literacy activities. These included questioning sources, distinguishing between fact and opinion, learning how online images can be manipulated and how information can be targeted, and managing wellbeing in relation to news and online information.

The NewsWise family workshops aimed to provide children and families with the knowledge and understanding to develop resilience to mis- and disinformation

Between January 2023 and March 2024, the project team recruited a panel of local experts as an advisory board, and two panel sessions were held. 25 community facilitators were trained, including 11 librarians, one community-centre worker and 13 youth leaders. The project reached 19 community settings in Birmingham and Coventry. A total of 437 parents (116) and children (321) took part in 39 sessions, and 282 family activity booklets were given to participating families to take away. A NewsWise family activity was also included in the *Bring it on Brum* magazine (circulated by Holiday Activities and Food), which was distributed to 1,000 families around Birmingham over the Christmas break.

As this evaluation shows, parents and children found the NewsWise family workshops engaging, with most parents (98.5%) and children (95.1%) rating them as 'very good' or 'good'. Parents' comments further suggested that the workshops were highly valued, with one saying, "It was a great opportunity to spend 1:1 time discussing the subject. Great activities as a platform for this."

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**Key findings: Children reported improved media and news literacy knowledge and confidence.**

The workshops appeared to improve media and news literacy knowledge and confidence in children taking part. For example, most (93.5%) children agreed they knew more ways to check if media and news online was trustworthy after taking part, and almost 9 in 10 (87.4%) said they felt more confident to question stories and information they found online. Notably, the percentage of children who felt confident about spotting fake news increased from 40.9% before to 94.4% after the workshop.

**Parents reported increased knowledge and confidence to support their children's media and news literacy.**

Parents also reported greater knowledge and confidence in supporting their child's online media and news literacy after the workshop. Almost all (96.6%) agreed they knew more ways to check the trustworthiness of media and news online, while the percentage who felt confident discussing news and information with their child increased from 57.9% before to 95.2% after the workshop. In addition, 9 in 10 (88.5%) parents felt they had learned strategies for supporting their children's wellbeing around media and news.

**Facilitators rated the training as excellent.**

Finally, training was highly rated by facilitators, with all rating it 'excellent' and reporting that their knowledge and skills to engage families with media and news literacy had increased.

Input from panels played a vital role in the development of the project, and the workshops provided important activities for an underserved age group. However, limited staff time to facilitate the project and unpredictable attendance at sessions led to challenges reaching the target number of families. In response to these challenges, resources were adapted to offer flexible self-directed options alongside more formal facilitator-led workshops, and the target location was expanded to the wider West Midlands. Notably, two organisations (the Libraries of Birmingham and Coventry) have continued to run the workshops beyond the pilot period, suggesting the adapted approach offers a practical, effective and sustainable way to support families in community settings.

## Introduction

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Advances in digital technology have changed how media and news are created and experienced. Alongside this, there has been a growing recognition of the need to strengthen resilience to mis- and disinformation, acknowledging their potential to threaten democracy and children and young people's wellbeing. A high-quality home learning environment supports children's development, and, as children and young people are exposed to media and news at home, families play a vital role in supporting children's understanding of news and online information. Families from underrepresented backgrounds may lack access to opportunities to develop critical news and media literacy knowledge, confidence and skills (see, e.g., [Ofcom, 2022](#)), potentially leading to lower levels of news and media literacy and greater susceptibility to mis- and disinformation. Research has found that more than half of UK parents (55.1%) want more support to help their children understand the news ([Picton, 2019](#)).

### About NewsWise

The Guardian Foundation, the National Literacy Trust and the PSHE Association developed the NewsWise programme<sup>1</sup> in 2018, based on a shared mission to create a generation of news-literate children. The programme aims to empower children

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<sup>1</sup> <https://theguardianfoundation.org/programmes/newswise>

with the skills and knowledge to engage with news, to feel confident to ask questions and challenge misinformation, and to share their own values and opinions in a fair, responsible and truthful way. The programme has received a Global Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Award from UNESCO, a Nesta Democracy Pioneers Award and a WAN-IFRA European Digital Media Award.

This project from the NewsWise team was delivered by The Guardian Foundation and evaluated by the National Literacy Trust. The family activities were adapted from existing resources developed with input from all three charities.

## The NewsWise family workshops project

The NewsWise family workshops project was designed to support children aged 10 to 11 and their families with the knowledge and confidence to critically evaluate media and news and recognise mis- and disinformation. Focusing on Birmingham, which was identified as an area of literacy need by the National Literacy Trust<sup>2</sup>, the project aimed to work alongside community organisations to train professionals to deliver engaging workshops about online media and news literacy across library, community and school-based settings. The project was commissioned by Ofcom as part of an initiative supporting organisations to trial innovative approaches to improve the online knowledge and understanding in communities needing the most support<sup>3</sup>. *Making Sense of Media* is Ofcom's programme of work to help improve the online skills, knowledge and understanding of UK adults and children. This project was one of 13 projects commissioned in December 2022 to improve media literacy skills across four cohorts: older adults; people living with disabilities, learning disabilities or cognitive impairment; children and young people; and communities experiencing financial disadvantage.

Contacts at community organisations were consulted at every stage of the project to support iterative improvements to delivery, content and evaluation and ensure local voices and experiences were represented. An expert panel was recruited for

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<sup>2</sup> 50% of wards in Birmingham rank in the top 10% of literacy need in England:

<https://literacytrust.org.uk/communities/birmingham/supporters/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/news-centre/2023/ofcom-supports-organisations-boosting-online-literacy-skills-in-local-communities>

the purpose of understanding the needs and media literacy concerns of the settings in which the team intended to pilot the project. The panel was involved in shaping the structure and content of the workshops as well as the training sessions. Proposed session outlines, workshop materials and training documents were shared with the panel ahead of meetings, and the panel directly informed the design of the project.

Panel members were recruited with the aim of having representatives from relevant fields in the local area: libraries; community centres; charities; and parents. The project team contacted prospective panel members with the help of organisations with whom they had existing relationships, such as the National Literacy Trust Birmingham Hub, the Living Knowledge Network and Birmingham Voluntary Service Council.

Potential participating organisations were offered training, high-quality resources and ongoing support to deliver engaging media and news literacy sessions. Over the course of the project, practical challenges meant the delivery format had to be adapted from an exclusively 'train-the-trainer' approach to including members of the project team in delivering workshops. In addition, based on feedback from panels and community members, workshops were adapted to support families to interact with resources in a more 'self-directed' way with support from facilitators, rather than asking families to follow a fixed schedule of activities.

This report focuses on evaluation data from eight facilitators, 68 adults (parents/carers<sup>4</sup>) and 149 children who took part in the project during 2023 and 2024. It also includes reflections on what has been learned and how this might inform future iterations of the project and others working to support media and news literacy in similar settings.

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<sup>4</sup> 'Parents' will be used to denote any adult accompanying a child to the workshops for brevity; for more information on family relationships, please see 'Sample' section



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## Evaluation methodology

The evaluation was developed with the Ofcom definition of media literacy in mind (“the ability to use, understand and create media and communications in a variety of contexts”<sup>5</sup>), with a focus on the ability to “question, analyse, appreciate and evaluate [those communications]” (Ofcom, 2004). The evaluation and project team discussed a brief Theory of Change (see Appendix 1) and the development of the evaluation framework, during which the following outcomes were determined:

### Short-term outcomes:

- Trainers have increased knowledge, skills and confidence to engage families with media and news literacy.
- Children and families have increased awareness of the media and news environment, including targeted information.
- Children and families have increased ability to critically engage with media and news, including wellbeing strategies.
- Children and families have increased knowledge of visual media literacy, including how to check if images can be trusted.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/media-literacy-research>



### Medium- to long-term outcomes:

- Children and families feel confident to challenge misinformation and disinformation.
- Children and families increasingly consider the extent to which media and news is trustworthy.
- Children and families have increased resilience to misinformation and disinformation.
- A media and news literacy approach becomes embedded in settings.

A mixed-methods approach was used to determine the extent to which objectives were reached, based on adult and child self-report surveys and feedback forms. Throughout the project, further insights were gathered through expert panels and feedback from the project team. See Appendix 1 for details about the survey samples and sample demographics.

### Limitations

The evaluation consisted of short self-report questionnaires designed to be proportionate to a relatively light-touch voluntary workshop in community settings. As such, findings are brief and measures subjective. In addition, despite efforts on the part of the project and evaluation teams to provide surveys for families with English as an Additional Language and to use language suitable for families with lower levels of literacy, some families may have struggled to access the surveys. The potentially limited data obtained as a result may affect how representative findings are of all families taking part, so they should be treated with caution.

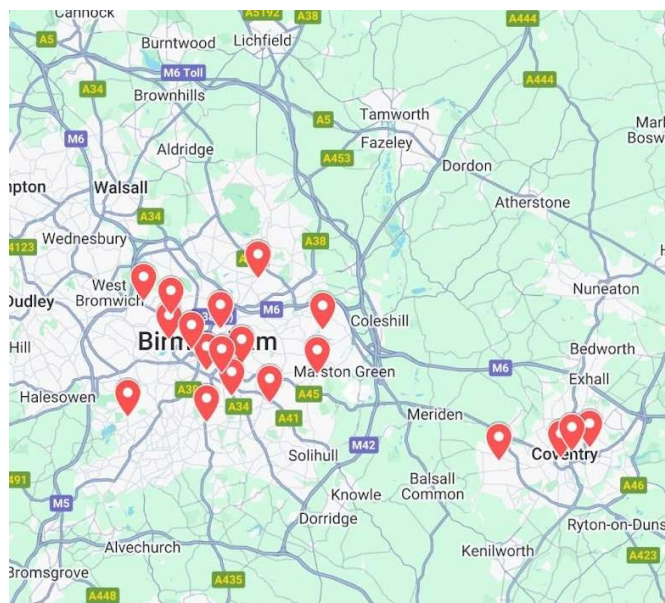
## Outputs

Between January 2023 and March 2024, the project reached **19** settings in Birmingham and Coventry (locations indicated on the map below). A total of **437** parents (116) and children (321) took part in **39** sessions. The majority of these (26) were delivered by the project team; 10 were co-delivered with community staff; two were delivered independently by community staff; and one was delivered by youth leaders.

**25** trainers in community settings were trained in **seven** sessions, including 11 librarians, one community-centre worker and 13 youth leaders. A panel of local experts was recruited: panel members included representatives from Libraries Connected, the Library of Birmingham, Nechells Pod and the National Literacy Trust Birmingham Hub, as well as a local parent. Two panel sessions were held.

In addition, **282** family activity booklets were given to participating families to take away after the session, and a NewsWise family activity was included in the *Bring it on Brum* magazine (circulated by Holiday Activities and Food), which was distributed to **1,000** families around Birmingham over the Christmas break.

**Figure 1: Location map**



## Findings

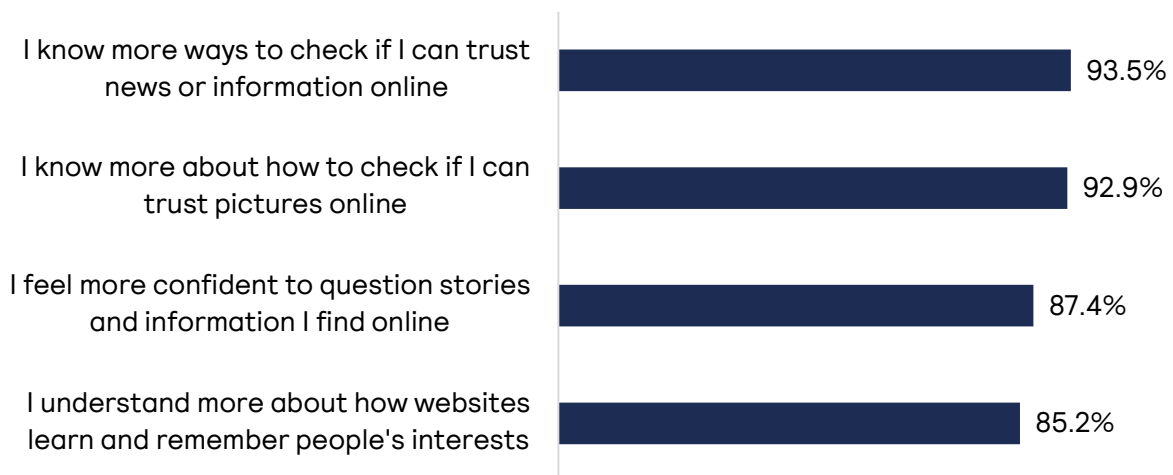
**1: The NewsWise family workshops project improved media and news literacy knowledge and confidence in the children who took part.**

Children reported greater knowledge and confidence around checking the trustworthiness of media and news online.

Children were also presented with statements linked to the short-term outcomes in the Theory of Change and invited to express their agreement with them. Of four linked statements, most children agreed that they knew more ways to check if media and news online was trustworthy after the workshop, with 93.5% agreeing (see Figure X). However, 9 in 10 (92.9%) children also said they felt they knew more about how to check if they could trust pictures online, and almost 9 in 10 (87.4%) said they felt more confident to question stories and information they found online.

While more than 4 in 5 (85.2%) also agreed that they knew more about how information online can be targeted, this statement had the lowest agreement levels, suggesting fewest children felt they had learned about this aspect of online media and news literacy compared with other objectives. This may relate, in part, to the average age of the children taking part and the comparative difficulty of this concept.

**Figure 2: Children's agreement with statements (post-workshop survey)**



Finally, the percentage of children who said they felt 'very' or 'quite' confident about spotting fake news increased from 40.9% before the workshop to 94.4% after the workshop. More specifically, more than four times as many felt 'very' confident about spotting fake news after the workshop (increasing from 13.9% to 56.3%).

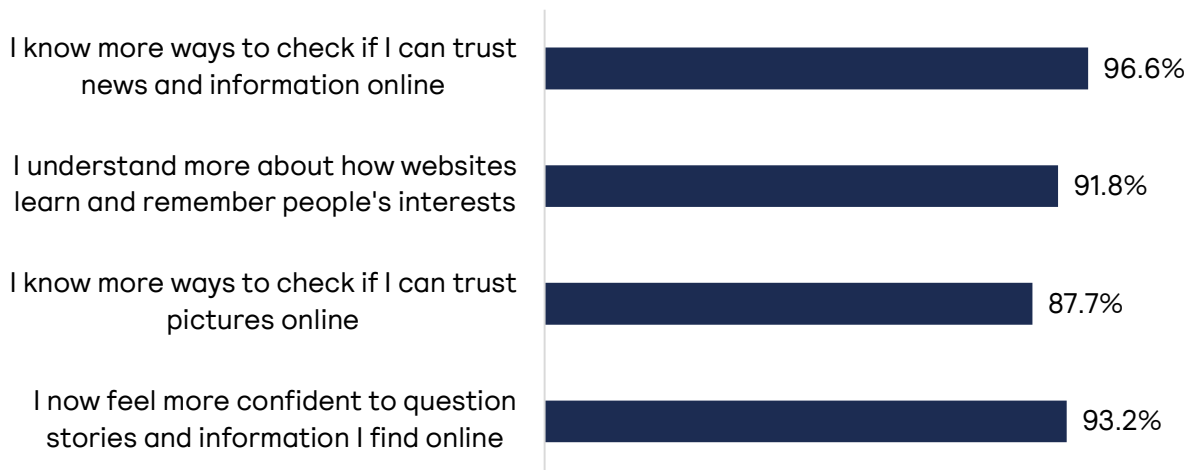


## **2. The workshops project improved media and news literacy knowledge and confidence in the parents it worked with.**

**Parents reported greater knowledge and confidence around checking the trustworthiness of media and news online.**

Almost all parents agreed that they knew more ways to check the trustworthiness of media and news online after the workshop (96.6%, see Figure 3). This included outcomes stated in the Theory of Change, such as knowing more about how information online can be targeted (91.8%) and how to check if images online can be trusted (87.7%). As a result, most parents agreed that they now felt more confident to question stories and information they found online (93.2%).

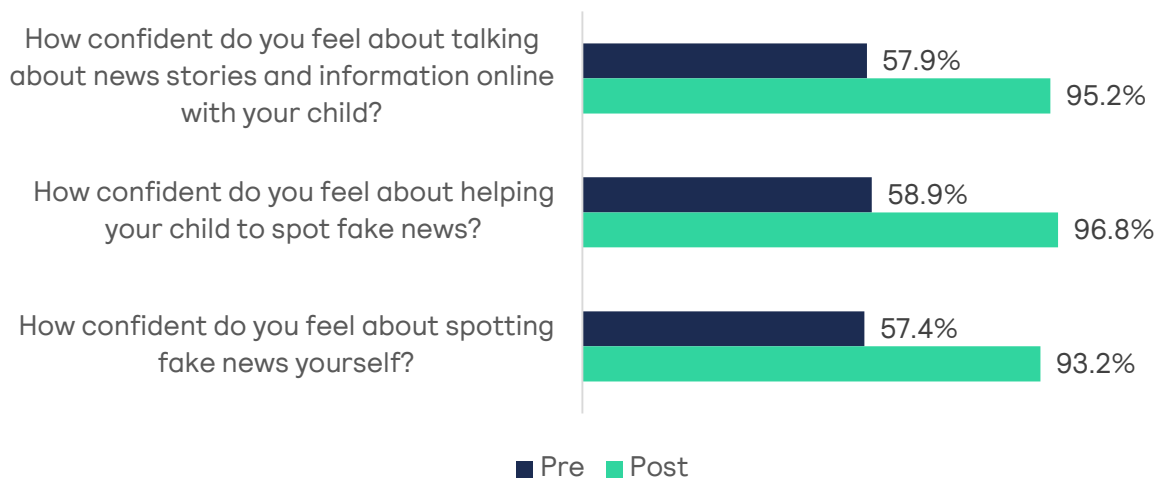
**Figure 3: Parents' agreement with statements (post-workshop survey)**



**Parents were more confident about discussing news and information online with their child and helping them identify unreliable news stories after taking part.**

Furthermore, the percentage of parents who felt ‘very’ or ‘quite’ confident about talking with their children about news and information online increased from 57.9% before to 95.2% after the workshop (see Figure 4). Indeed, almost three times as many said they felt ‘very’ confident about talking about news and information with their children after the workshop (increasing from 19.3% to 57.1%). Similarly, the percentage who felt ‘very’ or ‘quite’ confident helping their child to identify fake news increased from 58.9% before to 96.8% after the workshop. A similar increase was seen in the number of parents feeling confident about their own skills in spotting fake news, with the percentage increasing from 57.4% to 93.2%.

**Figure 4: Parents feeling ‘very’ or ‘quite’ confident before and after the workshop**



The percentage of parents who felt confident about talking with their children about news and information online increased from 57.9% before to 95.2% after the project

In addition, reflecting the short-term outcome, “Children and families have increased their ability to critically engage with media and news, including wellbeing strategies”, 95.0% of parents agreed that they could help their child’s wellbeing by talking about the news with them, while 88.5% said they had learned strategies for supporting their children’s wellbeing around media and news.

Finally, parents and children were invited to provide any additional comments about the workshops not already covered in the survey, with comments suggesting that families felt they offered a valuable and welcome chance to discuss fake news with both their children and facilitators, and children focusing on their enjoyment and learning:

*Well done – much needed in this era of multiple fake news portals*

*[Parent post-workshop feedback]*

*Loved having the chance to discuss the topic and ... get feedback from the facilitators*

*[Parent post-workshop feedback]*

*It was very fun and the people were very nice*

*[Child post-workshop feedback]*

*You should invite more people because we think they would enjoy it*

*[Child post-workshop feedback]*

*It's very good as it improves your learning about fake news*

*[Child post-workshop feedback]*

### **3. Facilitators felt the training had increased their knowledge and confidence in supporting families with online media and news literacy.**

Facilitators (community centre and library staff) were asked to complete a short survey after a project-training session and, in some cases, observation of a workshop session. Surveys were designed to measure the extent to which the short-term outcome, “Trainers have increased knowledge, skills and confidence to engage families with media and news literacy”, had been reached and to gather contextual information about facilitators’ roles and reasons for taking part.

Eight responses were received from five settings<sup>6</sup>. Of those completing surveys, job roles included a variety of Digital Inclusion positions, Digital Media Assistants, Service Delivery Assistants, Library Assistants and an Assistant Library Manager. Reasons for taking part included the need to support resilience to mis- and disinformation and the project complementing other work with families, children and young people:

*I think fake news is increasingly important to be aware of. People need to be armed with the knowledge to understand differences between real and fake news*

*I am keen to investigate new tools to help deliver media literacy programmes and share learning in a fun and interactive way to benefit the residents of Coventry*

*We currently work with young people in various ways. This includes programmes such as digital aspirations and online safety. We feel that delivery of this session would complement our current offer*

*We had started going into libraries talking with families and young people about fake news and AI – NewsWise sounds a great project for us to take part in and build on work we started*

Training participants were invited to rate the training on a five-point scale from 'excellent' to 'very poor'. All (eight of eight) facilitators who rated the training chose to rate it as 'excellent', suggesting that the training had been engaging and informative. Participants enjoyed the fun, interactive and engaging exercises, learning about the terminology and getting insights into how workshops could be hosted, as well as the opportunity to take part in activities themselves in preparation for their own delivery.

Overall, surveys suggested that participants felt the training had increased their knowledge of media and news literacy. Before the training, participants rated their knowledge as 'excellent' (one rating), 'good' (two ratings) or 'average' (four ratings). Following the training, the number who rated their knowledge in this area as 'excellent' increased to five, with three rating their knowledge as 'good'. In

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<sup>6</sup> Birmingham, Coventry, Handsworth, Nechells and Sparkhill

addition, all (eight of eight) facilitators felt their skills to engage families with media and news literacy had increased and all (eight of eight) agreed that they felt more confident to support families after taking part in the training. This suggests the training was effective in increasing facilitators' knowledge and confidence around supporting family online media and news literacy.

Indeed, most (six of eight) participants said they felt 'very' prepared to deliver the project after taking part in the training, with two saying they felt 'somewhat' prepared. With these two respondents, comments suggesting a need for "more time to fully discuss next steps" and "time to refresh myself before the event". Similarly, most facilitators 'strongly' agreed that the training was relevant to their work (six of eight) and that they would recommend the training to others (seven of eight). However, fewer 'strongly' agreed that they would integrate the learning from the training into their future work (two strongly agreed, six agreed). This may relate to perceptions around the opportunities to support families in this way and would merit further exploration.

Finally, when invited to make any other comments, one facilitator felt "marketing and promotion... may need to be considered and also safeguarding/risk assessment" and another suggested "workshops should be available to adults too... especially the older population [who] would benefit greatly". It was felt that the simplicity of the resources would appeal to this age group, and points to the opportunities opened up for these settings by having this knowledge and resources made available to them.



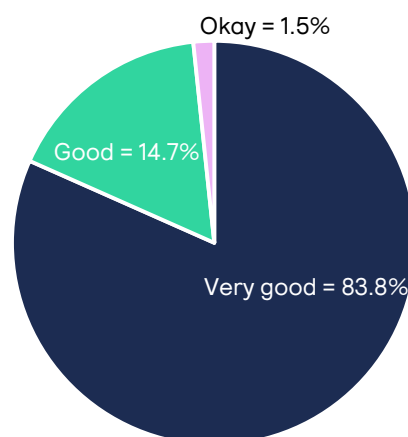


#### **4. Parents and children found the NewsWise family workshops engaging and valuable.**

Post-workshop surveys for parents and children were designed to measure progress towards short-term outcomes noted in the Theory of Change, including increased awareness of the media and news environment; increased ability to engage critically with new media and news; and increased knowledge of visual media. In addition, families were asked to reflect on their experience of the workshop, and what they felt was best or could be improved about the activities.

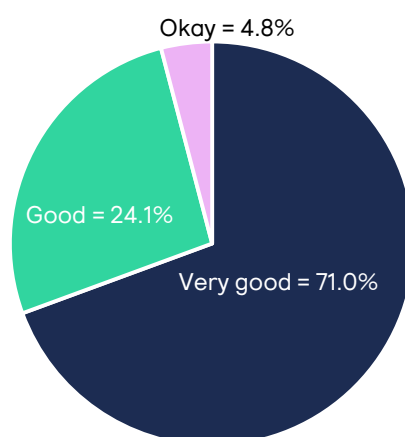
Firstly, parents and children were asked to rate the workshop on a five-point scale from 'very good' to 'not good at all'. The workshop was highly rated by both groups, with most parents (98.5%) rating it as 'very good' (83.8%) or 'good' (14.7%), and 1.5% rating it as 'okay' (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5: What did you think of the NewsWise family workshop? (Adults)**



Similarly, of children who chose to rate the workshop, most (95.1%) rated it as 'very good' (71.0%) or 'good' (24.1%), with 4.8% rating it as 'okay' (see Figure 6). This suggests that families enjoyed the workshops, with 4 in 5 adults and 7 in 10 children choosing to give it the highest rating ('very good').

**Figure 6: What did you think of the NewsWise family workshop? (Children)**



Of parents who shared how long they had spent on the self-directed activities (supported by facilitators), eight said they had spent 'up to 30 minutes', four said 'between 30 minutes and 1 hour' and two said they had spent '1 hour or more' in the workshop. This information was gathered only in later iterations of the surveys, after the workshop was developed to allow for more self-direction. While the data is helpful for information about typical time spent, indicating that up to 30 minutes was most common, the small sample size makes it difficult to draw any conclusions about connections between this and any reported outcomes. However, parents and children were also invited to add any comments about the workshop, and parents' comments emphasised the interactive nature of sessions, the multimodal learning opportunities and the friendliness of staff facilitating the workshops:

*It was a great opportunity to spend 1:1 time discussing the subject. Great activities as a platform for this*

*Engagement of all taking part. Got the children and adults thinking*

*They layout on different tables. The praise throughout. Being explained, interactive, images, not just writing*

*Identification of the qualities of a genuine news website. The activities to narrate what the internet feeds us with*

*My children were very engaged and adults from library were very warm and supportive*

It was a great opportunity to spend 1:1 time discussing the subject. Great activities as a platform for this.

Children's comments on their favourite parts of the workshop focused on different activities:

*Fun activities to do with fake or real news reports*

*Being a news reporter and playing a fun game with my mum*

*We enjoyed the game of guessing what each other liked ('hook the reader')*

*Playing 'the camera never lies'... and the 'real or fake'*

*I enjoyed 'gorilla on the loose' because I liked the methodical way of working it out*

Parents and children were also asked how the workshops might be improved. One child suggested:

*When you've done all of the activities you could do interviews about what you know*

This might be a good way of supporting families to have an informal 'plenary' in the style of a news reporter and could be considered in future iterations of the project.



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# What has been learned from project delivery and evaluation?

## Delivery

**Learning from national, regional and local experts: input from panels played a vital role in the development of the project, providing insight into feasibility, confidence and concerns and informing relevant and effective adaptations to workshop design.**

By establishing and facilitating regular expert panels, the project team gained essential feedback and insight in relation to the acceptability and feasibility of resources, delivery and evaluation. Members of the panel also provided helpful information relating to librarians' confidence in running sessions and concern about being viewed as experts in this topic area. To mitigate this, the training aimed to equip librarians and community organisation staff with both in-depth subject knowledge and direct experience of the activities. In addition, the workshop design was adapted to offer a participant-led version as well as a more structured facilitator-led version, allowing less-confident facilitators to be as hands-on or -off as they preferred.

As a note, other smaller organisations may have provided helpful insights but lacked the capacity to support the project. For example, a charity working with families was also recruited to the panel, but representatives were unable to take part because of other demands on their time.

**Recruitment of community organisations was challenging, even with the help of a wide network, with pressure on community staff time acute and additional help needed from the project team to support delivery.**

Recruiting organisations to the project was significantly more difficult than anticipated. The NewsWise team used various strategies, gaining enthusiastic support from contacts in the local authority in the early stages and liaising with the National Literacy Trust Hub staff in the region who work extensively in the community. In addition, various national, regional and local networks and bodies

were approached as conduits to other organisations, including Libraries Connected, Birmingham Voluntary Service Council, educational partnerships and holiday clubs. Nearly 80 organisations were contacted but only 12 were eventually involved in the project.

Funding and related staffing challenges presented the most important barrier to involvement among libraries and community organisations, making it difficult to release staff for workshop training or facilitation as more urgent services took priority. For example, organisations providing early help support expressed interest and enthusiasm for the aims of the project and acknowledged the need for it in their communities. However, providing access to urgent services such as housing and SEND support took priority (and demand for staff time). This was also particularly acute in community libraries where resources were so limited that a librarian attending a training session would mean their library had to close for the duration of the training. Some organisations cited an already full schedule of activities, suggesting a longer lead time might have helped. However, even when there was limited capacity for embedding the workshops into existing schedules, many organisations were interested in having the NewsWise team deliver a one-off workshop for them. For these reasons, to make involvement feasible for community organisations, it became necessary to adapt from an exclusively train-the-trainer approach to include expert staff from the project team in running the workshops.

More positively, the programme team developed strong relationships with the Library of Birmingham and community libraries via existing connections at the British Library and the Living Knowledge Network. Library of Birmingham and Library of Coventry librarians were on the expert panel convened to advise at the beginning of the project, and this early involvement supported later engagement. Nevertheless, limited engagement overall meant the target location had to be expanded to the wider West Midlands, although all organisations worked with were in either Birmingham or Coventry.

**Attendance was very unpredictable and often lower than expected because of unforeseen circumstances, such as poor footfall.**

Attendance at most sessions was also lower than predicted, meaning more sessions were needed to reach the target number of families. The Library of

Birmingham, which had estimated around 40 children would attend the workshop each day during the summer holidays, had significantly lower numbers of children visit than expected, reflecting a wider decrease in footfall (2,000 visitors a day compared with 4,000 the year before). Local library staff suggested that this may have been related, in part, to the impact of new parking policies and emissions charges for families unable to visit the city centre by public transport.

The informal nature of holiday activities also made it difficult to predict or guarantee the number of families attending drop-in sessions. In libraries, where new children and families visit daily, there was more investment in learning how to run the workshops as they could run them several times throughout the year and always reach different children. The potential audience was more limited at a community or youth organisation. As they were more likely to see the same children weekly, they often preferred to offer the workshop once rather than running it multiple times.

Despite the challenges, partnering with libraries proved to be beneficial. Librarians and children told us that the NewsWise workshops provided something for an otherwise underserved age group (most other activities on offer were for younger children). Libraries also offered a more structured setting where children and families were used to going for free educational activities and resources. Indeed, the Libraries of Birmingham and Coventry have continued to run these workshops themselves beyond the pilot project period. As information professionals, librarians and senior leadership in libraries were generally more invested in training in critical media literacy skills and delivery than staff in other community centres or organisations.

**Flexible delivery, such as offering self-directed options alongside facilitator-led workshops and training young people to support sessions, provided relevant ways to reach a broader range of families and children.**

As noted above, alternative ways to deliver the workshop were developed to address emerging factors around staff confidence, capacity and different audiences attending sessions. In libraries, a more informal drop-in workshop worked better as this is what families were used to participating in at libraries and allowed for different entry and exit points. A more structured facilitator-led

workshop tended to work better at community organisations. Facilitators also had the option of switching between workshop types depending on the space available and the number of participants on the day.

The activities were intentionally designed to be completed by children and adults working – and learning – together. In library settings, where children are much more likely to be visiting with an adult, this worked particularly well. Indeed, adults were accustomed to staying with their child during an activity. When families did work together it was very successful, as shown by comments such as: “It was a great opportunity to spend 1:1 time discussing the subject. Great activities as a platform for this.” However, in settings such as breakfast clubs and youth groups, a key learning was that it is unusual to provide activities for whole families. While this initially presented a barrier, as the project progressed, the requirement for an accompanying adult was relaxed to allow broader participation. In addition, in some of these settings, the project team trained young people to deliver activities to other young people. In total, 22 Year 6 children who attended breakfast clubs at two primary schools were trained to co-deliver subsequent breakfast club workshops. The following sessions were delivered by the NewsWise team, with the Year 6 pupils each leading a group of their peers to help them complete the activities. This was a successful model, with school staff reporting that pupils were discussing the activities in between the sessions and were excited to attend. Elsewhere, 13 participants in the Highlife Centre’s YV (Youth Vision) leadership network aged 14 to 20 were trained to run the workshop activities with younger children as part of their leadership-development project.

Presenting the workshop as the Fake News Detective Agency was a successful engagement tool for children of this age range (10–11). Resources to take away, including lanyards with the NewsWise code for children (see right), and family activity booklets for the whole family were also very popular and may help to sustain learning from the workshops over time.



## Evaluation

**Survey design and language were intended to be accessible, but it was still difficult for some families and children to engage with and it needed further simplification. It was also difficult to ensure surveys were available in the home languages spoken by participants.**

The main learning from this evaluation related to the design and wording of the surveys. Surveys were designed to be simple and brief, both to reflect the time allocated to the workshop and to be as inclusive as possible for families with lower literacy levels and/or English as an Additional Language. For example, post-workshop feedback forms limited questions to the main objectives of the project and, wherever possible, included simple images ('smileys' and icons) to support comprehension (see, e.g., [Behavioural Insights Team, 2019](#); [Massey, 2021](#), and Appendix 2: Example survey questions).

Nevertheless, survey design and question wording had to be re-visited on several occasions as feedback suggested some participants were struggling with some of the language or vocabulary. In addition, concepts such as 'targeted information' could be difficult for the target age group to understand and were more challenging to evaluate. We also simplified the language because children and parents were completing surveys together and we were keen to have separate reflections from each group. It was important to respond to feedback about the accessibility of surveys for families taking part. However, while changes were kept to a minimum for consistency, slight changes in wording may have affected how well outcomes could be recorded. Usually, changes required a very simple tweak (e.g. changing the word 'images' to 'pictures') but a period of initial testing may have been beneficial had there been more time.

Community contacts also suggested that families might benefit from the surveys being translated into additional languages. Based on information from frontline staff on the main languages being spoken by potential participants, this included Ukrainian and Urdu. Surveys were translated accordingly and both online and paper versions were updated. However, neither translation was used by participating families, presumably as no families speaking those languages went on to take part.



This indicates the difficulty of predicting which languages might be spoken by project participants.

## What changes would be made to the project in future?

### Delivery

During the delivery period, several adaptations were made as the NewsWise team learned more about working in community settings, as detailed the ‘Learning’ section above. These are the changes that might be made in future iterations of the project:

- A significant time investment is needed to build and develop relationships to recruit organisations to the project. The length of this pilot period meant design, organisation recruitment and iteration had to happen in a very short time. In future, more time would be spent promoting the project within networks in the target region ahead of delivery.
- Libraries (staff capacity allowing) were the most engaged type of setting. Librarians have greater interest in investing in continuing professional development and developing their knowledge as information professionals. With sufficient training and knowledge provided, librarians can be confident to deliver workshops unaided. There is an appetite among librarians for more training and provision for this age group. In future, the project would focus on working with libraries. In addition, the model in libraries is replicable in multiple settings, offering opportunities to scale the project. Smaller community organisations were quite disparate in audience, offering and organisation structure making scaling in these settings less viable.
- Go to where the intended audience already is. Breakfast clubs proved very effective for reaching large numbers of children as they are already in the setting as standard. However, organisations that usually work with children but not parents were hardest to engage and had low attendance numbers because families were unaccustomed to attending such activities together.
- Keep the workshop activities informal and fun. Activities with too much reading or writing felt inappropriate for after school, weekends and the school holidays in informal settings. These activities were adapted after the first workshops.

## Evaluation

Alongside changes already made to survey design and wording, future evaluations could include more opportunities for discussions with families and children or (as suggested by one child participant) they could find a way to record optional post-session interviews between children and parents on what had been learnt.

While attempts to translate surveys into other languages were made based on local information, these proved unnecessary. Later information from partner organisations suggested that the number of languages spoken would require greater translation input than the project was able to provide. Future projects may be able to take advantage of developments in technology (e.g. generative AI), which may allow more fluid or flexible translation of questions.

A validated measure of news literacy suitable for 9- to 11-year-olds was published towards the end of the project delivery period (Harrison et al. 2024). Future evaluations may consider incorporating these measures or, alternatively, including a short piloting, testing and reflection period to ensure any other surveys used are accessible to typical participants.

Finally, the evaluation was designed to focus on the impact of the project on family confidence around online media and news literacy, and (at this stage) did not seek to compare the approach with another delivery model. It also proved difficult to compare impact between facilitated and self-directed learners due to this approach being developed later in the delivery period and a relative lack of data to enable a useful comparison. Future evaluations may seek to compare outcomes for each approach, and indeed both approaches with alternative interventions. Future studies could also include observations to identify which practices are most impactful or where more support is needed.

## Recommendations to others supporting young people's media and news literacy

The NewsWise family workshops project has provided valuable insights into the effective provision of media literacy support for families through community

settings. To incorporate and build on the findings above, recommendations to similar organisations include:

**1. Project design and evaluation should involve input from community members at all stages.**

Efforts to understand and elevate the perspectives of those working with target audiences supported more effective and relevant delivery. Expert panels provided the project-delivery team with invaluable information about the acceptability and feasibility of project elements along with useful suggestions for improvements to delivery and evaluation.

**2. Go to where the intended audience is. Flexibility is vital in reaching families through community settings.**

A significant time investment is needed to build and develop relationships in a region to recruit organisations to a project. In most settings, there was no way of accurately predicting or guaranteeing the number of families who might attend and various unforeseen factors may affect the ability of local families to participate in sessions. However, families are accustomed to attending and doing activities together in libraries. Large numbers of children attend breakfast clubs at schools and, due to the familiar formality of the setting, are more receptive to this type of workshop – they were more ‘ready to learn’ than at an after school or holiday workshop. At other youth and community organisations, it is unusual for parents to attend the activities, which led to low parental engagement and attendance.

**3. Findings appear to indicate that a facilitated or self-directed workshop could be an effective approach to supporting online media and news literacy in community settings, but high-quality resources and support are essential for ensuring sessions are engaging and impactful.**

Community settings have limited staff available to run workshops of this nature. In addition, while staff may have some confidence in the subject matter, their confidence in facilitating learning with families may be lower. Offering an option of self-directed workshops may be one solution to lower availability or confidence in staff, while high-quality expert-produced resources are welcomed by hard-pressed staff in community organisations.



## Conclusion and ideas for action

Libraries and community organisations offer a vital ‘third space’ for reaching families and supporting online media and news literacy outside of formal school or similar settings. Along with providing access to digital resources and tools, sessions supporting media literacy in libraries can also address digital divides relating to benefits of effective use of digital resources. In addition, research suggests that community-based media-literacy interventions can have a positive impact on participants’ ability to engage critically with news and information (see, e.g., [Ofcom, 2022](#); [Ofcom, 2022a](#)).

Findings from this evaluation of the NewsWise family workshops project show that taking part appeared to increase facilitators’ and families’ knowledge and confidence around online media and news literacy. Feedback suggested that this model, providing training and flexible resources for workshops in libraries and community organisations, was perceived to be a successful approach. Qualitative data emphasised that sessions were relevant and engaging for children, and greatly valued by parents.

The project benefited greatly from advice and insights from librarians and community organisations throughout the project delivery period. An iterative approach allowed the team to make essential changes to project design, training and delivery, including the production of different workshop options (facilitated or self-directed) to suit different settings and circumstances.

However, while such workshops appeared engaging and impactful, they depended on local community organisations having sufficient funding and staff to be a viable approach, and on unpredictable factors such as variable attendance to reach a reasonable number of children and families. Nevertheless, an attitude of flexibility and openness, coupled with practical adaptations linked with the challenges faced over the course of the project, offered effective solutions to delivering media literacy workshops with families in settings with variable levels of support available.

The two library regions taking part in this pilot have both indicated that they intend to continue to offer sessions to their families. In addition, Norfolk Libraries have expressed interest in piloting sessions in their localities, although this would depend on funding for the NewsWise programme team to deliver the training. National library organisations including Libraries Connected have shown consistent interest in offering the training nationally. With appropriate funding, this could be a viable way of scaling the project. Breakfast clubs also proved a successful way of reaching children of this age group and helping them to develop media and news literacy skills, although this would need further development to ensure the sessions are viable at greater scale. More broadly, there have been important lessons about activities delivered outside the classroom and/or in informal settings, particularly regarding expected reading and writing levels and engagement. The effectiveness of self-directed learning in the sessions was one of the biggest takeaways and will inform ongoing NewsWise programme design.

Evaluations of community-based media-literacy projects remain relatively limited, particularly in relation to UK-based projects. We hope this report, and particularly the findings, learning and recommendations, will make a useful contribution to the research in this area.



## Appendix 1: Sample

We received 217 post-workshop surveys from participating parents (68) and children (149) and facilitator feedback from eight surveys (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Survey responses**

	Time point	Purpose	Number of participants reached	Number of surveys completed
<b>Parents</b>	Post-workshop	To provide adults' perspectives on workshops	116	68
<b>Children</b>	Post-workshop	To provide children's perspectives on workshops	321	149
<b>Facilitators</b>	Post-training survey	To provide facilitators' perspectives on training and workshops	25 <sup>7</sup>	8

### Sample demographics

The project was initially aimed at children aged 10 to 11, but this was changed to reach children of around this age to enable more flexibility for families with more than one child. Ages, where disclosed in surveys, ranged from 7 to 15, with an average age of 10. When adults and children chose to share family relationships, most said they were daughters (26), mums (20) or sons (7), with 4 nieces, 2 nephews, 2 grandsons, 1 grandmother, 1 grandad, 1 aunt and 1 set of friends also taking part.

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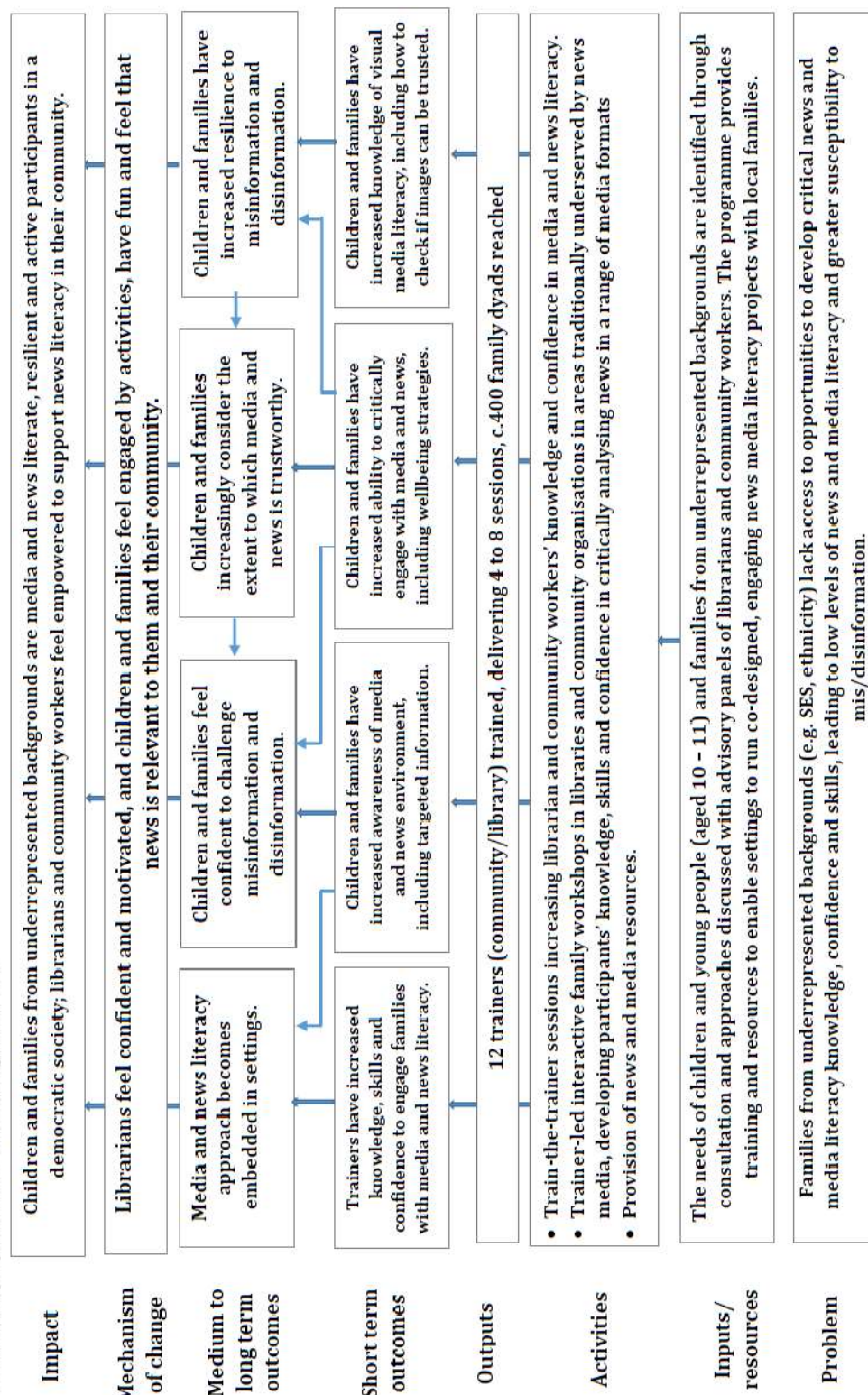
<sup>7</sup> Note: youth facilitators were trained to support other young people but were not asked to complete post-training surveys, rather they were asked to forward feedback from their sessions.



## Appendix 2: Theory of change

### NewsWise Ofcom family library programme Theory of Change 2022 v1

*A news literacy project training local community organisations and libraries in areas of disadvantage to deliver family workshops about news literacy, with a focus on online skills for families and children aged 10 – 11.*



## Appendix 3: Example survey questions

### Example of child survey question using 'smileys'

1. What did you think of the NewsWise workshop?

- ☐ 😊 Very good
- ☐ 😊 Good
- ☐ 😐 OK
- ☐ 😞 Not very good
- ☐ 😡 Not good at all

### Example of parent survey question using icons

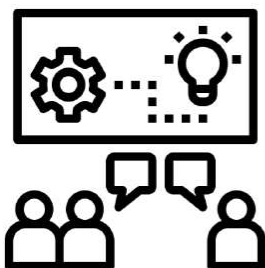
1. What did you think of the NewsWise workshop?



- ☐ 😊 Very good
- ☐ 😊 Good
- ☐ 😐 OK
- ☐ 😞 Not very good
- ☐ 😡 Not good at all

### Example of question in Ukrainian

1. Які Ваші враження від семінару NewsWise?



- ☐ 😊 Дуже добре
- ☐ 😊 добре
- ☐ 😐 ОК
- ☐ 😞 Не дуже добре
- ☐ 😡 Зовсім не добре



## About the National Literacy Trust

Our charity is dedicated to improving the reading, writing, speaking and listening skills of those who need it most, giving them the best possible chance of success in school, work and life. We run Literacy Hubs and campaigns in communities where low levels of literacy and social mobility are seriously impacting people's lives. We support schools and early years settings to deliver outstanding literacy provision, and we campaign to make literacy a priority for politicians, businesses and parents. Our research and analysis make us the leading authority on literacy and drive our interventions.

Literacy is a vital element of action against poverty and our work changes life stories. Visit [www.literacytrust.org.uk](https://www.literacytrust.org.uk) to find out more, donate or sign up for a free email newsletter. You can also find us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter.

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