Keeping libraries esafe

Accessing information in libraries often involves navigating the internet. But how can you help library users to dodge scams, avoid identity theft and stop children from stumbling onto inappropriate content? BRAD LANGOULANT from the Alannah and Madeline Foundation outlines six things you can do to stay esafe.

It's not always possible to monitor the things that children see and hear on the internet, regardless of how vigilant you are as a parent. The Alannah and Madeline Foundation, an organisation dedicated to the protection of children, set out to make the internet safer for children. One of the foundation's initiatives, eSmart Libraries, is a cybersafety framework designed to fully equip libraries, their staff and library users with the skills they need for smart, safe and responsible use of digital technology.

During a recent independent evaluation of the eSmart program, library staff and management were asked for their opinion on the most important part of eSmart.

ALIA 80 YEARS STRONG

A librarian, who has completed her training, helping a customer.

The unequivocal answer that came back was professional development.

'Effective staff knowledge and capabilities' was indicated as the most important factor influencing behaviour change.

'Only when staff are truly comfortable with technology will library users be comfortable with technology,' one respondent stated.

Technology has affected most industries, but few have needed to adapt at the same pace as library staff. Librarians are required not only to learn new technologies but also to become proficient enough to assist and educate a range of library users. For many it was a very steep jump – from beginner trying to learn to expert trying to teach.

Libraries are seen as vital sites for bridging the digital divide. They offer a space that provides free public access to digital resources – computer terminals, broadband, Wi-Fi and software – as well as offering the education and training necessary to navigate them.

As more library users access online content via their library service there has been a shift towards incorporating aspects of online safety to protect the user and the wider library community. Learning how to safely use technology protects the whole community from exposure to inappropriate content and reduces the likelihood of falling prey to other cyber risks, such as identity theft and violations of personal privacy.

The Alannah and Madeline Foundation's eSmart program training comes in a variety of formats. With more than 200 resources located on the online eSmart system (most of which have been created by library staff) and access to eight online self-regulated learning modules, each library registered for eSmart is able to put together their own custom-made program for professional development.

eSmart is now being implemented in more than 70 per cent of public libraries, and of the libraries who have completed eSmart, 100 per cent of library managers and 93 per cent of staff reported improved staff knowledge and confidence in how to be safe, smart and responsible online. The major areas of digital upskilling include maintaining a positive online reputation, identity protection, frauds and scams, privacy and social media.

The end result is that libraries are enhancing their reputation as safe public spaces in both a physical and online sense, benefiting both staff and users.

Professional development doesn't have to be done through formal channels. Should you find yourself with a few spare minutes, here are five ways to increase your knowledge and skills when it comes to online safety.

1. SUBSCRIBE TO SCAMWATCH
Subscribe to Scamwatch (scamwatch.gov.au) and get regular updates on current frauds and scams. Consider how you might use this information to help library users.

2. LOOK AT IPARENT
The iParent website – bit.ly/2g9RVbA – contains vital information on how to keep children safe online. Have a look at the major issues and learn strategies for keeping young people safe online.

3. FAMILIARISE YOURSELF WITH YOUR LIBRARY'S TERMS AND CONDITIONS
Enhance your knowledge of your own library's terms and conditions. What is and isn't allowed online and what has been put in place to ensure online safety?

4. LEARN MORE ABOUT SOCIAL NETWORKING, GAMES AND APPS
Find out about the risks involved in using particular websites and apps. Visit this eSafety page – bit.ly/1MqXv16 and learn about the safety level of various sites and what you can do to enhance privacy.

5. LOOK ON YOUTUBE
The Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner, ThinkYouKnow and Stay Smart Online have great videos about online safety. Often a few minutes in length, they are a great option for visual learners.

6. CHECK OUT 'MY FIRST MOBILE AGREEMENT'
Telstra provide useful tools for parents and families that lay out device agreements for the whole family to sign. Go to bit.ly/2qp8Ybd.

For more information about eSmart Libraries, go to esmart.org.au/esmart-libraries/.

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