



Youth Participation and everyday digital life

Report on MLL Media Education Activities for Youth
2024–2025



THE MANNERHEIM LEAGUE



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To the Reader

This report presents The Mannerheim for Child Welfare's (MLL) media education activities for young people in 2024–2025, focusing on youth participation and engagement in digital environments. Key channels for MLL's media education for youth include The MLL YouthNet website (YouthNet) and its social media platforms, lessons and workshops organized in schools and educational institutions, as well as youth-targeted surveys on media use.

During the 2024–2025 period, 33 young people actively participated in the development of YouthNet with us. These young volunteers generated, planned, and produced nearly 300 media items for the YouthNet website and its social media channels, provided peer support on the discussion forum, and moderated messages posted to the forums. Young volunteers also participated in national and international youth panels and traveled with us to Brussels for the EU Safer Internet Forum. Through media education lessons, we reached a remarkable 80,458 children and young people, discussing topics such as online harassment, balanced media use, gaming, digital peer skills, and respectful interaction.

In the Digitutkijat ("Digital Researchers") project, primary school students were given the opportunity to share their thoughts on media use in family life.

A total of 22 meetings and training sessions were organized for Youth Net young volunteers. These events provided opportunities to brainstorm content for Youth Net, receive guidance in media production, and discuss challenging topics. Feedback was collected from the youths in all guided sessions to help develop the activities and highlight different perspectives on the Youth Net website and its social media channels. Young people were able to discuss issues important to them, influencing MLL internally as well as more broadly at the national level.

During the reporting period, the YouthNet website (www.nuortennetti.fi) received approximately 430,000 active users, with around 650,000 visits and 1.7 million page views. On Youth Net's safe, pre-moderated, and anonymous discussion forum, 12,244 messages written by young people were published. In these peer-support discussions, topics that particularly interested young people included various forms of sexuality, everyday life challenges, and friendships. In addition, youth submitted 80 pieces of self-produced content for publication on the Youth et website.

Beyond the website, young people were also engaged through YouthNet social media channels on Instagram and TikTok. Videos and campaigns received over 3.8 million views in total. The Instagram profile was viewed nearly 400,000 times. Almost 700 posts were created for Instagram, of which 206 were produced by the young people themselves. Our followers showed significant interest in peer-support content and posts related to well-being.

A warm thank you to all the young people and partners who participated in our activities during the 2024–2025 period

The MLL YouthNet – Information, Support, and Activities

The MLL YouthNet (YouthNet) website and its social media channels provide a platform for participation in online youth activities.

YouthNet, together with its affiliated social media channels, constitutes a platform through which young people are provided with access to reliable information, peer support, and the presence of a responsible adult. YouthNet further functions as both an activity hub and a publication venue for youth-led media productions. A core principle underpinning YouthNet is the advancement of youth participation, which entails safeguarding the rights of young people to articulate their views, to be duly heard, and to have their perspectives formally recognized. The service enables young people to engage in community life, exercise influence over its activities, and assume responsibility for their decisions.

Moreover, participation is understood as the realization of equal rights and equitable access to trustworthy information. The ongoing development of the service is explicitly informed by these principles.

YouthNet offers young people:

- An anonymous, open, and moderated peer-support discussion forum.
- Approximately 700 information pages on topics related to adolescence, such as sexuality, relationships, mental health, and media.
- Opportunities to engage in meaningful volunteer work in various roles according to one's age and personal resources.
- Opportunities to influence and make youth issues visible. Any young person can submit an opinion piece or other content for publication.
- Access to Child and Youth Helpline. The helpline can be accessed via phone, chat and through a digital message service. The service number 116 111 is a pan-European child helpline a number common to all European countries.

Activities on YouthNet are guided by the Government Decree on youth work and policy (The Youth Act) and the The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Volunteering on YouthNet allows young people to participate in digital activities from anywhere in the world. Youth Net is a safe and equitable community built collaboratively by young people and YouthNet staff. At the core of development are young people's experiences, a safe and equal user experience, and the strengthening of digital participation. Special attention is given to content that is relevant and interesting to young people, as well as accessibility.

Activities on YouthNet and its social media channels constitute preventive digital youth work, reaching children, young people, and young adults across Finland in their own communities online, at school, and in educational institutions. YouthNet provides opportunities for participation while taking into account each individual's resources and age.

In 2024–2025, the most popular sections on the YouthNet website, based on youth usage, were related to sexuality, mind and body, and help and support. During the reporting period, particular emphasis was placed on the intersections of media and sexuality from the perspective of strengthening young people's well-being, as well as the impact of social media on appearance-related pressures and harmful or dangerous social media challenges.

Internet and Media Subsection Performance on the YouthNet Website During the Project Period

During the project period, the *Internet and Media* subsection of the YouthNet website was viewed 76,872 times, highlighting its relevance and reach among users. A new content module, titled *Social Media and Appearance Pressure*, was launched to support young people in understanding the effects of media while promoting body positivity.

As part of this initiative, a poll and discussion session were conducted to gather insights from young people. Key findings revealed that 39% of participants frequently experience negative emotions due to social media imagery. Discussions underscored the artificial nature of social media content and its influence on body satisfaction. Participants also noted that appearance-related pressures are not limited to social media but are prevalent in schools and other daily environments. This feedback emphasizes the importance of addressing appearance pressures holistically, both online and offline.

In the subsection of the YouthNet website *Sexuality and Media*, young people created the *Social Media and Sexuality quiz*, which encourages reflection on their own experiences on social media. The quiz questions were accompanied by short informational pieces aimed at young people, providing background knowledge on the topic. In addition, young people were invited to suggest their own ideas for feel-good social media challenges. Through YouthNet website, they can also report new social media trends, particularly those that may be concerning and should be communicated to other young people. Within the Internet and Media theme, the most-read pages were related to digital well-being and online sexual harassment.

On YouthNet's social media channels, the most widely shared content was produced by young people and focused on everyday life management, equality, and school-related topics. Peer-support discussions raised questions about sexual development, friendships, and coping with everyday life. Two new forums were introduced: Nuortennetti Development Ideas and Deep Topics. The discussion threads Friendship Book and Tell About Yourself in 10 Points also received many messages from young people.

YouthNet Volunteer Activities

YouthNet volunteers are young people aged 13–29 who work together with YouthNet staff in a digital environment. The application process remains open all year round, regardless of residence, background, or previous experience. Volunteers undergo training for their assigned tasks and are offered both group and individual guidance.

The three volunteer groups include young people of different ages who contribute to creating a safer digital space for all youth.

The volunteer roles include:

- Moderators of the peer-support discussion forum.
- Online peer-support-person, known as *Verkk@ri*.
- YouthNet Web Editors

YouthNet Web Editors create content on a wide range of topics. Young people aged 13 and above may contribute as Web Editor, while the Online peer-support-person's role is available

to those aged 16 and above. Online peer-support-persons also participate in the peer-support forum, helping to ensure that as many contributors as possible receive support and feel acknowledged. All messages submitted to the discussion forum are reviewed by moderators, who assess and, if necessary, edit the content before it is published in the appropriate forum.

During the reporting period, 18 monthly meetings and weekly individual discussions were held with the young volunteers via the Discord server. Volunteers produced over 200 pieces of content for YouthNet's social media channels and website, contributing more than 800 hours of volunteer work. In total, 33 young people took part in YouthNet volunteering activities.

Developing Digital Skills Together

Experiences and feedback were collected from volunteers through a dedicated survey. The results show that volunteers feel part of a close-knit community where everyone can be themselves. The aspects of the work young volunteers valued most were:

- writing their own texts,
- ease of getting support
- finding an enjoyable hobby.

Volunteering with YouthNet provided young people the opportunity to practice a variety of skills, including writing, ethical conduct, principles of safe spaces, time management, confidence, and social skills. 89 % of volunteers felt that the number of meetings was sufficient, and 100% reported receiving enough support and guidance. Volunteers believe that their work develops skills useful for other youth, such as teamwork, communication, media production, media literacy, and digital skills, all of which are important for education and future employment.

During the reporting period, volunteer guidance was focused on supporting group cohesion and addressing the individual needs of volunteers producing content. The orientation for new volunteers was slightly extended, and materials were updated for clarity. During the reporting period the volunteers also participated in thematic training on topics such as online harassment, artificial intelligence, and loneliness prevention.

Youth Voice Featured on YouthNet

YouthNet publishes content created by young people, with contributions produced by YouthNet Web Editors as well as youth engaged through school collaborations. In addition, any young person may submit their own articles or creative work for publication. Young people employed during the summer period also contributed content to YouthNet website or its social media channels.

During the reporting period, 80 pieces of youth-produced content were published on the website, alongside 206 posts on social media channels. The published materials—including videos, podcasts, blog posts, drawings, and social media posts—reflected young people's perspectives, experiences, and narratives concerning everyday life and issues of importance to them. The covered themes included friendship, equal sexual rights, bullying, coping with pressures, study tips, and maintaining a balanced daily rhythm.

Examples of Content Created by Young People

Poster

A poster created by a young person highlighted the positive and negative aspects of digital communities. Their own experiences in social media communities illustrated clearly the difference between a safe and an unsafe online environment.

Videos

Videos produced by young people addressed online harassment and feelings of loneliness generated by social media. During the reporting period, these videos were viewed over 750 times.

Podcast

In their podcasts, young people discussed trash talk in digital games as a form of online harassment, reflected on using Snapchat and parental attitudes, and explored recycling from a sustainable development perspective.

Opinion Pieces

Through peer-support opinion pieces, young people addressed topics such as social media and appearance-related pressures, safe digital environments, individual benefits of the internet, and highlighted the responsibility of major social media companies in promoting young people's digital well-being.

Animations

Young people produced animations about loneliness and the support that YouthNet provides to youth. These peer-support animations were also used in promoting the service to other young people. During the reporting period, the animations were viewed over 1,000 times.

The discussion forum is a safe digital space for young people

"This is a place for me where I can REALLY relax, where I don't have to pretend anything, where I can ask for help with any problem or try to help others!"

Young people today are eager to express their thoughts and connect with peers in a meaningful way. A peer-supported, pre-moderated forum provides platform for this exchange. On Youth Net's discussion forum, young people can participate freely in discussions without the need for formal registration. A simple nickname is all that's required, ensuring both accessibility and anonymity. During the reporting period, this peer-supported forum demonstrated its value by receiving 12,244 messages from young people. This volume highlights the importance of such platforms in empowering youth to share their voices, exchange ideas, and build connections in a safe and supportive environment.

During this period, emphasis was placed on supporting and guiding YouthNet volunteer moderators by reviewing clear moderation scenarios together. Quick and clear moderation has a direct impact on the active use of the forum: the faster messages are published, the more messages are posted. In 2024, due to the forum's popularity, YouthNet group chats were discontinued, and moderator guidance was further developed and strengthened through additional training. Moderators were able to suggest themes or topics for further

training. Intersections of religion and sexuality emerged as one of the most popular training themes from a moderation perspective.

Between 2024 and 2025, technical updates were made to the forum to improve message search functionality, and the number of discussion boards increased. Moderators received training on handling difficult moderation cases by reviewing examples. Difficult cases included balancing freedom of expression with equality and reliable source sharing among young people.

Emerging trends on the forum included discussions related to therian hobbies and intersections of religion and sexuality from the perspective of freedom of speech. Topics that had become regular themes, such as sexual diversity, changes to one's body, studies, and friendships, continued to appear consistently in youth discussions.

YouthNet visitor survey

"It's nice to read what other young people think in discussions and articles, and at the same time get new perspectives on life."

The overall functioning of the YouthNet service is evaluated annually through open feedback, the experiences of YouthNet volunteers, and an open visitor survey.

The annual visitor survey evaluates the user group's opinions regarding the website's functionality, timeliness, and development needs. This survey is conducted using a Webropol questionnaire to systematically gather feedback and insights for improvement.

During the reporting period, 151 young people responded to the survey, the largest group being 13–15-year-olds.

Reasons for using Nuortennetti

The main motives for using YouthNet were seeking information, passing time, and seeking support. About 35.5% of respondents wanted to explore the site, 34.6% sought help or support for their own situation, and 32.7% were interested in reading other young people's experiences. Additionally, some used the site to relieve boredom (27.1%) or to chat with a trustworthy adult (20.6%). 17.8% sought help to alleviate loneliness.

Most important content for young people

YouthNet provides youth with information, support, and activities. According to the survey, the clear number one is the youth discussion forum (57%), highlighting that peer support and the opportunity to share thoughts with other youth are most valuable. The second most popular content was services that help children and young people (43%), showing that young people also need support from adult professionals.

Informational texts on various topics (25%), quizzes (23%), and youth-produced content (20%) interested many but not as strongly. Least attention was paid to podcasts (7%), "other" options (7%), and peer-support pages (4%). The survey indicates that young people value the

opportunity to discuss with peers and easily access adult support from free services most. Unidirectional content, like podcasts or peer-support pages, was of significantly less interest.

How YouthNet benefits young people

"Information on how much young people can influence things and that we have opportunities for many topics. Also, that I'm not alone and can always make acquaintances and friends."

The main benefit for youth was gaining new information (48%). Other significant benefits included receiving help from an adult (30%), finding activities for boring moments (28%), and peer support from other youth (23%). Better understanding of emotions (19%) and increased self-esteem (15%) were also noted. Some respondents mentioned finding friends (11%) and relief in everyday life (12%).

Based on the responses, YouthNet primarily supports youth by providing information, adult help, and activities, while participation in activities was not seen as highly beneficial.

Satisfaction with media literacy content

"I like most that Nuortennetti allows victims to get help and share their experiences anonymously."

Young people found YouthNet's media literacy content generally useful across all examined themes. The greatest benefits were related to online bullying: nearly half (48%) considered the content extremely useful. Other important topics included loneliness (43%) and harassment (43%). Content on hate speech (39%) and discrimination (37%) was also fairly useful but slightly less so than content on bullying.

Young people also highlighted areas for improvement:

- *"More discussions about life changes"*
- *"More information and support for accepting differences"*
- *"More posts created by young people"*

To improve the user experience, young people especially wished for extended opening hours for the Children and Youth Phone chat service, as evening access was challenging. Suggestions also included improving the site's visual design, creating a mobile app, and adding a search function to the forums. 97.2% of young people would recommend YouthNet to others.

Youth panels

During the reporting period, young people participated in Safer Internet activities at both national and international levels, providing their ideas, experiences, and wishes to decision-makers.

National youth panel

During the reporting period, a joint youth panel was organized by three organizations as part

of Safer Internet activities. Four YouthNet Web Editors participated. In spring 2025, a discussion event was held on Discord server in collaboration with a high school in Uusimaa. 27 high school students participated as part of their school day. Topics included:

- media literacy as a civic skill
- online bullying
- sexual harassment online.

Discussions followed The Safer Space Principles, allowing youth to express their opinions freely. Participants discussed Finland's new law prohibiting mobile phones in classrooms. Youth noted that phones do not disrupt lessons if silent, and their own or others' phone use does not hinder studying. Participants saw media literacy responsibility as shared among teachers, youth themselves, and partly parents. The importance of source criticism was particularly remembered. Some thought online bullying could be solved by turning off devices but recognized potential serious effects on the victim.

BIK Youth Panel 2024

Two YouthNet Web Editors participated in the international BIK Youth Panel and the Safer Internet Forum in Brussels in October 2024. Youth-led workshops discussed body image, gender roles, violent content, and online bullying.

Digitutkijat – insights from media

The joint project by the Finnish Cultural Foundation (SKR) and Mannerheim League for Child Welfare (MLL), *Digitutkijat*, targets 4th graders and their parents through fun research workshops. The goal is to enhance children's and youth's media skills safely and supportively, while aiding media education at home and school.

In 2024, 424 workshops were held for 4th graders, reaching approximately 8,500 children. For upper-secondary peer mentors, 55 90-minute media mentor workshops were organized, involving about 460 youth, some of whom also assisted with 4th-grade workshops. Workshops were well-received, praised for child-centered handling of topical issues, student engagement, and visuality. Visiting trainers added particular value. Teachers rated the likelihood of recommending workshops to colleagues as 9.29/10 (n=115). Survey data from students (2,752 responses) and parents (221 responses) informed content planning for workshops, parent evenings, and professional training.

Selviytyjät – online peer groups for bullied youth

"I learned to handle the difficult emotions caused by bullying, accept that I was a victim, realize I'm not the only one, and that it's not my fault. Joining and actively participating in the group was probably one of the best decisions I've made."

Selviytyjät is coordinated by MLL's Järvi-Suomi district, offering local peer groups and individual guidance for bullied youth aged 12–21, plus training for professionals working with youth.

Two online groups in Spring 2024 included 11 participants aged 13–19, meeting weekly for nine weeks. Groups were led by an MLL staff member and a social work student. The aim was to strengthen self-esteem, mood, and coping skills. By the end, youth were more confident in expressing themselves, thought more positively about themselves, and felt hopeful about the future. 80% reported gaining coping strategies, 90% felt support for self-esteem, and 87% reported improved mood.

Digital environments and social media are integral to youth life, bringing new forms of bullying: fake profiles, offensive comments, harassment, deepfake content, and unauthorized image sharing. Online peer groups provide a safe space to process these experiences, strengthen self-esteem and mood, and find ways to cope.

"I learned to find strengths and ways to handle difficult emotions. The feelings from bullying experiences are empowering; it's basically that it happened and is gone, and now look to the future."

Strengthening Young People's Digital Skills in Schools

MLL's media education trainers conduct around 200 school visits, parent evenings, and online trainings annually. During the reporting period, MLL's media education trainings (249 events) reached a total of 80,458 children and young people, as well as 11,551 parents and professional educators.

The *SuperDigischool* remote lesson, targeted at lower secondary students. In October 2024 The *SuperDigischool* reached more than 70,000 participants and provided them with information on digital wellbeing and smart and safe use of digital media. MLL's media education lessons broadly addressed the connections between media use and well-being. In addition to online bullying, the themes included balanced media use, its effects on sleep and concentration, the role of social media in friendships, digital gaming, and phenomena encountered online, such as sexual harassment. Lessons were delivered through discussions and interactive methods whenever group size and facilities allowed.

MLL's peer student activities are present in 93% of Finnish lower and combined secondary schools, involving around 11,000 peer students annually. Every year, peer students receive additional training focused on media education themes, addressing friendship skills in social media and gaming, as well as media use that supports well-being. Support materials are produced annually to assist in holding lessons, awareness sessions, and campaigns. Peer students organize school-level media education activities each year, including morning assemblies, events, and lessons for their fellow students.

The Youth Media Use Survey

MLL regularly conducts surveys with young people to ensure their voices are heard and their perspectives on media use are included in MLL's development and advocacy work. The Youth Media Use Survey was carried out in November 2023 and published in spring 2024 with the aim of mapping young people's media habits as well as their thoughts and experiences related to everyday digital life.

A total of 3,627 young people aged 9–22 responded to the survey, the majority of whom (83%) were between 13 and 17 years old. Respondents considered the survey topic important and emphasized the opportunity to be heard:

"It's important that we young people are heard and that our opinions are valued."

"Hopefully this survey will make a difference."

"This survey made me think myself about what is acceptable online, so it was useful!"

The survey results showed that many young people would like to reduce their internet use. More than two-thirds reported using social media services or digital games for three hours or more on weekdays. Young people reflected critically on their time use: 35% wanted to reduce it, 8% had already reduced it, while 42% felt they were using digital environments in a balanced way.

Feelings of exclusion and loneliness emerged as significant themes. Up to one-quarter of young people reported feeling left out or lonely on social media when they saw situations they were not part of. About one-third of young people also felt pressure to look good in social media pictures. In open responses, they reflected on the importance of a critical attitude to avoid appearance-related pressures:

"For example, different beauty ideals promoted on social media can be a major risk factor for a young person's mental health."

"Many social media influencers edit their photos, and that gives young people a false impression of appearance-related pressures."

The survey also highlighted young people's wish for adults' understanding and support: they want adults to recognize the significance of media use in their social lives and identity development and to discuss it respectfully instead of focusing only on restrictions.

"At home, it's important to care and be interested in young people's social media use, and not just forbid everything."

"I think adults should teach young people, from the very first phone, how to behave and act on social media."

The survey results emphasize the importance of listening to young people's voices and provide valuable insights for supporting media education and digital well-being. Young people's own experiences and wishes offer concrete perspectives on how adults can help them find balanced and safe ways of using media.

The Young People and Cyberbullying 2025 Survey

MLL regularly conducts surveys for young people to ensure that their voices are heard and their experiences are incorporated into MLL's advocacy and development work. The Young People and Cyberbullying 2025 Survey was conducted in December 2024, aiming to map young people's experiences and perspectives on online harassment in digital environments, such as social media and online games. A total of 6,372 young people responded to the survey, of whom 5,990 aged 13–18 were included in the analysis.

The survey results revealed that online bullying has become more common and diverse among young people. About 20% reported experiencing online bullying daily, and nearly one-third (30%) had been bullied in the past month. Bullying often took the form of name-calling, indirect nastiness, insinuations, deliberate ignoring, or exclusion, and TikTok was considered a particularly problematic platform for bullying. Bullying also occurred in digital games such as *Fortnite*, *Roblox*, and *Counter-Strike 2*, manifesting as insults, racism, or misogyny.

According to the young respondents, the consequences of bullying can be severe for victims. Of those who responded, 25% reported social isolation, 22% reported anxiety, and 8% reported suicidal thoughts as a result of bullying. For bullies, however, the consequences were often negligible, and online anonymity made it possible to bully without significant repercussions.

Young people described their experiences openly:

"Usually a big group bullies one person. The victim is kicked or hit, and others laugh and record in the background."

"I remember about two years ago when I was shown a video where a boy my age was first insulted and mocked, and then beaten up. Watching that video was really traumatic for me."

"Overwatch 2 is quite toxic. After losses, you can get nasty messages from your own teammates."

"Especially insecure boys insult girls and women in games, using offensive names or making hurtful jokes."

Young people expressed a clear wish for adults, such as parents and teachers, to intervene more actively in online bullying and to support those who are bullied. They called for more effective measures to prevent and address bullying, so that solving the problem does not fall solely on the shoulders of youth themselves.

"Adults could intervene more in bullying and support us who are being bullied."

"We need more ways to stop bullying online."

Listening to young people's voices is crucial, as they are the ones who experience online bullying in their everyday lives. Their experiences and perspectives provide valuable knowledge on how bullying manifests and how it can be tackled effectively. Without youth involvement in discussions and decision-making, anti-bullying solutions may remain detached from young people's realities. Listening to their voices is key to creating safer and more responsible digital environments where all young people can participate safely and be heard.