

Communications Plan

City of London – Middlesex-London Health Unit
2024 Screen Time

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1. Introduction

The Middlesex-London Health Unit is devoted to identifying and addressing important health issues affecting the local community. Our organization provides a wide variety of programs and services improving the safety and wellbeing of residents in the London-Middlesex area. Classes include sexual health presentations, water safety sessions and more. The unit aims to promote healthy and informed choices through educational resources, both in-person and online. These programs are open to everyone in the community and encourage changes that will lead to drastic lifestyle improvements.

The Middlesex-London Health Unit's newest campaign looks to reduce screen time among parents in the area. It centers around the negative effects of digital devices on children's social, psychological and physical development. Most importantly, it highlights the influence parents have on their children's media consumption through their personal screen usage. The purpose is to inform parents of these detriments and encourage them to model proper screen hygiene. Parents should show a reduction in their own digital use in response to our upcoming Screen Time Workshop.

2. Background

In recent years, there has been a [global trend of children spending more time on digital devices](#). New technologies are portable and instantly accessible, with more incentives to increase usage than ever before. Kids are encouraged to engage with media games, learning packages and educational applications on their devices. In line with this shift, [screen time among children in Ontario has drastically increased](#) following the COVID-19 pandemic. Device usage not relating to school-based activities has gone up by three hours per day compared to the pre-pandemic period. This exceeds national public health recommendations detailed by Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines and the Canadian Paediatric Society. It is suggested that children's screen time should not be greater than one hour per day at any age.

Experts are advising parents to limit their child's screen time amid growing concerns that [computers hinder social and psychological development](#). Research shows that greater computer usage takes time away from social activities with peers. This leads to depression and loneliness resulting from social isolation, as well as poor problem-solving skills and creative expression. Parents also have less time for enriching interactions with their kids like shared reading and playing together with toys. As a result, children are increasingly suffering from poor language development and fewer academic achievements later on. Repeated exposure to violent media is linked to aggressive behaviour and increased anxiety and fear in young kids. Other conduct problems, hyperactivity and inattention are all associated with greater screen time, especially before bed.

One of the strongest determinants of a child's increased screen time is [device usage among parents](#). According to social cognitive theory, kids tend to mimic their parents' behaviour. As a result, children whose parents spend less time on screens use digital devices at a lower rate. In comparison, parents who spend a lot of time using digital devices are more likely to see similar behaviour from their offspring. It is highly

recommended that parents model healthy screen hygiene by reducing their own use of devices at home.

3. Goal

Reduce parents' screen times to prompt a decrease in children's digital usage, thus promoting better screen hygiene.

4. SMART Objectives

1. To create awareness among parents in the London-Middlesex area, specifically to increase comprehension of proper screen hygiene and the benefits of reduced device usage for children, by 50 per cent over four weeks.
2. To create acceptance of the importance of modelling proper screen hygiene among local parents, specifically to increase their interest in taking the Screen Time Reduction course by 25 per cent over four weeks.
3. To have an effect on the action of parents in the London-Middlesex area, specifically to reduce their own personal screen usage by 25 per cent over four weeks.

5. KPIs

1. KPIs to be used for the first objective include:
 - a. Reach: An increase in web traffic to the Middlesex-London Health Unit's Screen Time webpage, which provides educational resources about device usage among children and ideas for screen-free activities, as well as registration for the Screen Time Reduction four-week workshop.
 - b. Impression: How many times our digital paid ads are displayed.
2. KPIs to be used for the second objective include:
 - a. Click thru rate (CTR): Measure how many clicks our digital ads to the Screen Time Reduction four-week workshop receive.
 - b. Engagement: An increase in overall engagement with stakeholders, shown through comments, shares and likes on social media posts.
3. KPIs to be used for the third objective include:
 - a. Conversion rate: How many ad clicks result in the enrolment into the Screen Time Reduction workshop.
 - b. Return on Investment (ROI): If the money spent on the campaign results in enrollment into the Screen Time Reduction workshop.
 - c. Return on ad spend (ROAS): Did the money spent on digital advertising result in an increase in awareness, clicks and conversions?

6. Research Summary and Research Tools

Our research was conducted primarily through secondary sources and studies, specifically through scholarly articles. The research gathered revealed the overall global trend of children spending more time on digital devices, as well as focusing specifically

on how [screen time among children in Ontario has drastically increased](#). Post-COVID has had a significant impact on the ways in which children interact with their digital devices.

Further research demonstrates how [computers hinder social and psychological development](#). Some of the negative impacts to children include depression and loneliness, as well as poor problem-solving skills and creative expression.

There are a few gaps of information for this campaign. While there is research that demonstrates the trends on a global and provincial scale of increased time on digital devices amongst children, there is no specific local data. Because this campaign is directed toward a Middlesex-London audience, collected secondary research should support primary research that will be conducted by our unit.

In this self-conducted research, it will begin with a smaller sample of the general public, namely in focus groups. Various focus groups will be conducted with parents around the city, whose children are aged five to 17 years old. Discussions will centre around screen time usage in the household, as well as the methods the family currently uses to minimize screen exposure and actively engage in quality family time.

The information gathered from these groups will develop questions for the longitude survey being introduced in the Screen Time Reduction workshop. This survey will be broken down into two parts: the first will be presented in the first workshop, to determine a starting point of understanding (i.e. what habits does the family currently possess, without participating in the workshop); the second part will be a follow-up survey post-workshop (i.e. what is the family doing differently after having learned various techniques and tactics to reduce screen time).

The data collected from both surveys will inform the direction of future programming related to screen time awareness, specifically as to whether there is value in future Screen Time Reduction workshops.

7. Situational Analysis

Environment Scan

Externally, the Middlesex-London Health Unit has established many clinics and other services to support its community. Some of the clinics and services offered include:

- COVID-19 Vaccination Clinic
- Birth Control Clinic
- Prenatal Health (in-person or online workshops)
- Food Handler Certification courses
- Sexual Health Presentations

These clinics and services are offered in a manner that can best reach its intended audience; there are online courses that can be taken, as well as home visits and in-

person workshops. The variety in delivery methods allows us to reach a broader audience and include more of the community.

Some of this programming is also in partnership with other local and provincial organizations (for example: we do not offer the Food Handler Certification courses directly through our unit, but we do offer links and resources where that information can be found).

As [we are a part of a larger collective of health units throughout the province](#), we are in a fortunate position to already have the support of both our local community and other units in Ontario. This means that we are well-positioned to promote our upcoming program.

The four-week Screen Time Reduction workshop aims to offer low-stake, minimal effort classes to parents and their children for the following two reasons: (1) to raise awareness as to the impacts of continued excessive screen time and (2) to offer strategies and techniques for those families to lower their screen time usage. The intention is to bring in a variety of relevant local guest speakers to host these workshops, twice a week, an hour a session.

As there are planned professional guests who will lead the workshops, it is important we take into consideration the cost of hosting this new program. Many families are strained by the rising costs of living and may not have the financial resources in place to afford this extracurricular activity. As such, we are keeping the cost as low as possible so that it can reach a broader audience.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- Our upcoming Screen Time Reduction workshop will be made affordable (\$75.00 for those who sign-up a minimum of two weeks in advance; \$100.00 for those who sign up afterwards) and offered both in-person and online.
- The program will only run for four weeks; participants are expected to commit only an hour session, twice a week.
- As we are a platform that regularly promotes other local organizations and relevant resources, we will also be introducing various professionals to speak more specifically on their relevant field (for example: Dr. Michelle Ponti can speak to [an article she wrote about promoting healthier relationships for children in this digital age](#)).

Weaknesses

- The cost of living has increased to a point where families may not have the disposable income for a new workshop.

Opportunities

- We offer a promotion that reduces the cost of the workshop to invite as many members of the community to participate as possible (a 25 per cent price reduction).
- Post-COVID has again increased awareness as to the impact of excessive screen time amongst youth; this makes it so that a Screen Time Reduction workshop is relevant and timely.
- Include professionals and researchers in the workshops, to lend an informed and relevant angle to the discussion.

Threats

- Those that are asked to participate in the survey in the first workshop may not feel inclined to provide answers again in the 6-month follow-up survey.
- As the intention is to include professionals and researchers, a lot of the programming relies on their active and willing participation.

8. Risks Summary

The first risk we have identified for this campaign is **inadequate funding**. As we are a non-profit organization, we rely heavily upon the revenue generated from other programming, which in turn is returned into continuing that programming. By diverting those funds from established services into a new campaign, it puts those programs at risk. To mitigate this risk, there is a long-term plan in place to appropriately move funds towards this campaign in a manner that does not disrupt the flow of our other programming.

Another potential risk is low turn-out, leading to **insufficient returns**. As the Screen Time Reduction workshop relies on a paid sign-up, it is possible that that turns away those that would have participated had the programming been free or at a lower cost. As we are investing monies from other programming into promoting this new campaign, it is imperative that it derives a profit. However, as there is no guarantee as to the exact number of participants in the workshop, it is possible that we sustain a loss. We will mitigate this risk by conducting the appropriate research beforehand to ensure that the workshop will feasibly foster funds.

There is also the risk of a **shortage in guest speakers**. A point of interest in this workshop is the opportunity to learn from and interact with professionals who can speak knowledgeably about their field of expertise. Many professionals occupying this space work on a full-time basis and may not be able to commit to hosting an entire session. This risk will be mitigated through proper communication, whereby we clearly outline our needs and expectations, should they volunteer their services.

Finally, it is important that we frame our campaign as a means to better inform participants of proper screen hygiene, as opposed to a guaranteed manner in which to appropriately raise their children while using technology. If we are not careful, we could make it seem as though this workshop will completely reverse the negative impact improper screen hygiene has had on their kids. As such, we could face bad reviews and **lose trust** with our community. To avoid this scenario, it is imperative that we properly

advertise the workshop: the exact programming, who will be speaking, possible outcomes after the workshop concludes, etc.

9. Audience Analysis

Categories of Publics

Customers

- Local parents of children aged five to 17 years. Based on the research conducted, it is this age range where children are most likely to be actively using digital devices. As such, it is important to target their parents on appropriate screen hygiene.

Producers:

- Other organizations that want to join in on the four-week program. This can include organizations with which we already have a rapport (i.e. the way we already reference other organizations for the Food Handler certification courses), or it could be an opportunity to form new connections.

Enablers:

- Local parents of children aged five to 17 years. They will be receiving the most targeted advertising. As a result, they will be able to spread our message more broadly within their circle.
- Local news media has the potential to be an enabler, depending on whether they report on our workshop in a manner that brings positive attention to it.
- Organizations with which we already have a rapport. As we are a platform that regularly promotes other organizations, we could utilize those relationships for them to promote us as well.

Limiters

- Local parents whose children are not in the age range five to 17 years.

Stages of Development

Non-Public

- Local parents of young adults aged 18 years or older.

Inactive or Latent Public

- Local parents of children aged two years or younger.
- Local parents who have never thought about the influence their own personal screen hygiene has on their children and have never thought that there are resources that could teach them more on the topic.

Aware public

- Local parents of children aged five to 17 years who know their family could benefit from the workshop, but who do not believe it's important enough to enrol.

- Local parents of children aged five to 17 years who do not have the resources (time, finances, etc.) to enrol in the program.

Active public

- Local parents of children aged five to 17 years who have previously utilized one of our other services or clinics. They already have an idea of the type of programming we put on.
- The local community that is actively involved in teaching others more about appropriate screen hygiene.

10. Key Messages

Key Message #1

The Middlesex-London Health Unit believes reducing screen time is beneficial to the overall health and wellbeing of families with young children.

Key Message #2

The Middlesex-London Health Unit believes children aged five to 17 years should reduce their screentime significantly, especially those in the most influential years of their lives.

Key Message #3

The Middlesex-London Health Unit believes that behavioural changes begin with the parents and reducing parent screen usage can promote healthier lifestyles for children aged five to 17 years.

11. Strategies and Tactics

Objective #1: To create awareness among parents in the Middlesex-London area, specifically to increase comprehension of proper screen hygiene and the benefits of reduced device usage for children, by 50 per cent over four weeks.

- Strategy #1: Offer a four-week course on the effects of too much screentime and how to reduce it.
 - Tactic #1: Put out ads to promote this course. These ads will be featured on both Instagram and Facebook.
 - Tactic #2: Add a QR code to the ad and links to the webpage on digital ads running on social media.

Objective #2: To create acceptance of the importance of modelling proper screen hygiene among local parents specifically to increase their interest in taking the screentime reduction course by 25 per cent over four weeks.

- Strategy #1: Increase click-through rate for people interested in signing up for the course.
 - Tactic #1: Direct people to the course registration page from ads.

Objective #3: To have an effect on the action of parents in the London-Middlesex area, specifically to reduce their own personal screen usage by 25 per cent in six months.

- Strategy #1: Incentivize signing up for the course by offering a discount.
 - Tactics #1: Register before Nov 19 for 25 per cent off the price of the course.

12. Action Plan

Tactic	Audience	Delivery Date	Responsibility
Release social media ads (i.e., Instagram, Facebook) to promote the course	Parents of children aged five to 17 years	Roll out by Sept. 12	Marketing & communications team
Add QR codes and links to the webpage on digital ads running on social media	Parents of children aged five to 17 years	Sept. 12	Marketing & communications team
Direct people to the course registration page from ads	Parents of children aged five to 17 years	Sept. to Nov. campaign	Marketing & communications team
Offer 25 per cent off the full course price to those who register before Nov. 19	Parents of children aged five to 17 years	Sept. 12 to Nov. 19	Marketing & communications team

13. Evaluation

In order to ascertain the effectiveness of our campaign, it is important that we have an evaluation plan in place to follow the stages and evolution of our campaign, including during and after.

The first method of evaluation is revenue gained through registration for our Screen Time Reduction workshop. The main goal continues to be bringing awareness to parents about the impact their screen hygiene has on their children. Further analysis will be conducted to assess the information retained by participants and changes in behaviour. This will be done primarily through self-assessment at the end of the course.

Since the digital campaign will be running on social media, metrics built into the Instagram and Facebook platforms can be used to determine the impact of ads. Increases in follower count and engagement through comments, likes and shares can be used to measure the growth of our accounts. An analysis of the indicated KPIs will reveal the effectiveness of the ad campaign in turning interest into registration.

Increasing traffic to our Screen Time webpage is crucial for boosting attention to the issue and redirecting parents to the workshop registration page. This can be measured using a data processing platform like Google Analytics. It will also reveal the number of viewers who are looking at the webpage but not moving forward to the registration site.

A second method of evaluation includes the results provided in both surveys. The initial survey will set the foundation for the rest of the workshops and inform the types of guest speakers that should host. It will determine the level of awareness parents already have of screen hygiene before taking the workshop. Six months later, the final survey will provide a holistic view of the impact of the workshop. This will give us an understanding of where our course succeeded in boosting awareness and acceptance of modelling proper screen hygiene, as well as behavioural changes reflecting this newfound knowledge.

Though it is not explicitly mentioned in our plan, any earned media is considered a positive gain towards our overall objective. As such, any form of news coverage about the event, along with reshares or discussion on social media will be seen as beneficial for the campaign.

By following our evaluation plan, we will be able to ascertain the effectiveness of our campaign. It will allow us to determine if our strategies and objectives were successfully achieved. If that is not the case, the results will guide us towards making the necessary refinements to better connect with our target audience and achieve our goals in the future.