Our Purpose
This summer, Childhood USA launched a bold new initiative, The Childhood Summer Institute. It has gathered and equipped a diverse group of teens (15-19 years-old) with the knowledge and tools to act as agents of change in addressing the local and global epidemic of Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (CSEA).

The Summer Institute Scholars have connected over a period of five weeks with corporate leaders (e.g., CWT, Ericsson, Facebook, Microsoft, NetClean, Verizon), United Nations senior representatives (e.g., UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children Najat Maalla M’Jid, ITU’s Doreen Bogdan-Martin, UNICEF’s Cornelius Williams, End Violence’s Howard Taylor), criminal investigators and law enforcement (e.g., Child Rescue Coalition, Griffeye), academics and journalists (e.g., The Economist Intelligence Unit, Karolinska Institutet, Mount Sinai Adolescent Health Center, The New York Times), foundations (e.g., Oak Foundation, Tides Center), and champions from civil society organizations (e.g., Darkness to Light, Global Citizen, The New York Foundling, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), RAINN, SafeBAE, Safe Horizon, Safe & Sound) to learn about science and evidence-based solutions to safeguarding children on- and offline. Through these interactions, emphasis was placed on mapping and understanding the ecosystem of child abuse and exploitation, and on the multi-stakeholder, intersectional, systems-based approaches to collective actions required to protect children and achieve Sustainable Development Goal 16.2: ending all forms of violence against children by 2030.

Scholar Snapshot
8 Scholars come from the U.S.
- 4 from New York City metro area
- 4 from Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area
1 Scholar joins us from Guyana.
Pronouns Used: 8 - She/Her/Hers; 1 - He/His
Rising: 1 - 10th grade; 5 - 12th grade; 3 - college
Our Scholars
The scholars have lived diverse lives and bring distinct approaches to engaging and problem-solving.

They are students working through high school and advancing in college, committed to STEM, psychology, history, film and journalism. They have all found ways to activate for their communities outside of academics, too, whether already working in medical care and counseling or catalyzing their artistic platforms to support their peers. Some may be survivors themselves of abuse and/or exploitation; most know someone impacted by its trauma and wish they could have shown up even more than they did.

The Scholars joined the Summer Institute holding in common a fundamental caring for human and children’s rights. They also carry a conviction that young people can and do work best for, and with, one another. They have charged themselves with serving, advocating, and eradicating injustice for a resilient and sustainable future.

Our Summer Academy
In addition to our work with the Scholars, Childhood also engaged three middle school age students (rising 6th, 7th and, 8th graders) who despite being geographically spread out (New Jersey, New York, and Washington) were able to collaborate virtually on their collective desire to raise awareness for healthy social media usage and online safety for young children.

Referencing the New York City Department of Education’s guidelines for social media usage aimed at children 10 years-old and younger, the group actively worked to produce their own set of recommendations “in their own voice” for online safety in a format that was more child-friendly where content was broken down into a digestible format that is easily understandable and readily adoptable. The Summer Academy joined the Scholars for multiple presentations to share their work and received feedback to refine their approach with the final product to be shared externally.

Conclusions
The Summer Institute was designed to articulate the fundamental scope, challenges and approaches in addressing the epidemic of CSEA. Its purpose has been to educate and empower a diverse group of young advocates to plug into a common framework for safeguarding childhood everywhere from disruptions of violence, exploitation and abuse. We are all affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on our communities. As we call for recognition and uprooting of systemic racism and socio-economic injustice we confront the realities of our personal and collective lives, as well as the complexity of the issue we tackle.

The Summer Institute’s model of youth engagement has grounded our Scholars in a broad systems-based perspective and equipped them with skills to respond responsibly and empathetically to disclosures of abuse using their own voices.

The virtual access afforded between Scholars and Special Guests at the Zoom-based Summer Institute has demonstrated Childhood’s commitment to the kind of multisectoral partnerships, capacity-building and solutions development and implementation that drives the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Drawing from our extensive network of partners and as a UN-accredited NGO, we were extraordinarily fortunate to attract experts from civil society organizations, academia and research centers, companies and foundations, media institutions, and UN specialized agencies.
For example, over just a two-day span, the Scholars were able to:

- Learn firsthand from two investigative journalists from The New York Times about their groundbreaking investigation of the surge of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) online;
- Practice breaking down advocacy campaign objectives into action planning with NCMEC to reduce and prevent victimization in the first place;
- Articulate priorities for a nascent youth advisory infrastructure;
- Engage with safety experts from Facebook, NCMEC, Microsoft and Verizon to learn about detection mechanisms for CSAM and the reporting mechanisms.

The Scholars were able to trace connections between the responsibilities of multiple actors and through back-to-back engagement with our guest speakers reinforced their knowledge of key terminology, statistics, and prevention and response workflows.

The instances illustrated here resurfaced in session after session:

**Case Study 1**

Scholars learned from several nodes within the “ecosystem” of child online protection; its coordinated agents might deploy the automated image scanning of Microsoft’s software, PhotoDNA, on a Verizon-owned web services provider, while relying on user reports and proactive monitoring by messaging companies like Facebook and corporate investigators, which all get funneled to the central NCMEC database and ultimately to on-the-ground law enforcement.

The repeated articulation of collective efforts between these forensic technologists resonated in particular with a cohort of Scholars that had emphasized their preference for, facility with, and immersion into image- and video-sharing social media platforms.

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**The Ecosystem**

![Diagram of the Ecosystem](source)

*Source: Verizon, 2020. Unauthorized disclosure, reproduction or other use prohibited.*
Case Study 2
The Scholars also continuously identified that the relationship between a child’s online and offline lives is forged within the broader social ecosystem in which that child is embedded. Guided by our public health, social work, trafficking prevention, and family support experts, the students traced how the concentric circles of a social-ecological model all mediate the delivery and endurance of child safety and well-being. Societal norms and structures first delimit community capacity and service provisioning, which, in turn, circumscribe familial bandwidth.

Social determinants of health such as poverty, racism, segregation, and environmental injustice can and have compounded a disparate incidence of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) upon Black, Indigenous and communities of color. It is critical that the Scholars have recognized the socialized risks of trauma to youth as they make sense of our current moment. As revealed by diverging access to connectivity and technology across our isolated households, digital exclusion is increasingly linked to economic, political, and social exclusion, and the further silencing of situations of deprivation and abuse.

Source: Darkness to Light, 2019. All Rights Reserved.
Workforce Development & Skills-Building
In order for the Scholars to not only continue gearing themselves toward future employability, but also to feel equipped to intervene in ameliorating these systemic crises, the Summer Institute prioritized learning by building transferable skills. Childhood USA recognizes that what these young leaders must develop is an entrepreneurial mindset and a mix of hard, soft and digital skills.

The following were embedded into our curriculum:

Portable Workforce Development Skills

- Leadership & Accountability
- Critical Questioning / Analytical Reasoning
- Effective Communication & Presentation
- Research, Data Collection & Analysis
- Flexibility, Creativity & Adaptability
- Collaborative Skills / Building Connections
- The Growth Mindset
- Growing Online Networks
- Digital Safety & Civility

Mission-Oriented Skills

- Advocacy / Community Awareness
- Economic & Social Impact
- Sustainability / Replicability / Scalability
- Alignment w/ Government Priorities
- Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (“Cultural Intelligence”)  
- Public Health & Policy
- Importance of Public-Private Partnerships
- Evaluation & Metrics Reporting
- Systems Thinking / Interdisciplinary Solutions

Emotional Intelligence and Soft Skills

- Empathy
- Self-Esteem
- Interpersonal Awareness / Relationship Building
- Problem-Solving
- Negotiation
- Decision-Making
- Self-Reliance / Motivation
- Time Management
- Stress Management
## Weekly Snapshot

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<th>Week 1: &quot;The Situation&quot;</th>
<th>Week 2: &quot;The Stakeholders&quot;</th>
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<td>Scholars were introduced to the interdependent nature of the issue of CSEA and the actors and infrastructures involved. They met with leaders from Ericsson, The Economist Intelligence Unit (to review the <em>Out of the Shadows: Shining Light on the Response to Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation</em> a 60-country benchmarking index), Darkness to Light, Child Rescue Coalition, and Oak Foundation. They exchanged with other youth ambassadors, as well as learned how Childhood works and who is driving its partnerships forward.</td>
<td>Scholars paid particular attention to the vulnerabilities exposed and disparities revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic, placing offenders, victims, and technologies in focus. They heard from public health researchers, social workers, journalists and activists, and met with private-sector executives and safety officers from Facebook, Microsoft, NetClean and Verizon.</td>
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<th>Week 3: &quot;Global &amp; Local Governance&quot;</th>
<th>Week 4: “Our Time to Respond”</th>
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<td>Scholars broadened and connected their understanding of CSEA out to its national and global scales. Grounded in the findings of the UN Broadband Commission’s report on Child Online Safety, they convened with representatives from RAINN, United Nations and its specialized agencies like UNICEF and ITU, with the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, and with partners in intelligence (The Soufan Group) and travel industries (CWT) that are working across hundreds of countries.</td>
<td>The first half of the Summer Institute offered Scholars the experience of interfacing – under conditions of unprecedented virtual access – with experts that have dedicated themselves to transforming the way we address, prevent, and respond to CSEA. The Scholars repeatedly responded to appeals from these adult leaders, who are seeking youth input on how to concretely and sustainably recruit young voices as they build their own solutions.</td>
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<th>Week 5: “Amplifying Youth Voices”</th>
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<td>Showcasing a range of Final Projects, from community interview initiatives to original how-to videos to pop culture media analyses, the Scholars presented their takes on what we must recognize, and how we must collectively act to combat CSEA.</td>
<td>In this second phase of the Summer Institute, they began researching and producing their Final Projects in earnest. Drawing on the fundamental evidence of the problem and the multifaceted solutions our experts presented, the Scholars synthesized the material they found most uniquely relevant to shape their own community-specific outreach platforms. The hours they spent crafting their personal guides to the issue were integrated with engagements from UNITAS, Global Citizen, and Manifest NYC to understand the impact strategy behind building unconventional communications campaigns and a strong personal brand.</td>
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We celebrated the Scholars’ achievement and investment by reuniting them with the younger Summer Academy cohort, who delivered their updated child online safety guidelines. Childhood USA will look to operationalize the perspectives exchanged in these developmentally specific summer programs as we implement our year-round youth advisory capacity.
Looking Ahead
The comprehensive feedback from our Scholars was overwhelmingly positive. We are thrilled that many of them plan on joining us as inaugural members of the Childhood Youth Advisory Council. Their input will help to inform further development of our future Summer Institute curriculum and strategy.

From their perspective, the most important solutions presented by Special Guests reinforce the fundamental recognition that it is responsibility of adults for keeping children in their communities safe and supported. Our Scholars were, in particular, fascinated by the groundbreaking research of Dr. Christoffer Rahm on pedophiles and child sexual abuse offenders as he develops neuro-therapeutic and psychiatric and social treatment interventions for historically alienated and stigmatized patient population. Through their Final Projects, the Scholars demonstrated the effectiveness of training models that vest parents with the awareness and initiative to communicate accurately and openly with their children and other adults in youth-serving roles thereby reducing family- and community-level risk factors for abuse and exploitation.

We learned that more than three-quarters of our Scholars are interested in studying mental health, survivor response, treatment, and services, and social welfare systems in greater depth. And, as the generation leading rich digital lives, the Scholars were motivated to understand how technology can be a “superhero” for child-protection. They were reassured by companies like NetClean, Microsoft, and Griffeye that implement technology to detect and take down CSAM, and Verizon that hosts hackathons to identify further detection solutions, with which both corporate and law enforcement investigators track the movements of malicious online actors and malware. The Childhood Summer Institute introduced to Scholars the leading edge of development of comprehensive approaches to addressing CSEA online.

But it is also very important to underscore that for Childhood and all the guest speakers, the Summer Institute also provided a unique opportunity to interact with and learn from the Scholars and Summer Academy students about their priorities and challenges in life, and all their innovative approaches to address our common cause, the ending of child sexual abuse and exploitation.

This program is made possible thanks to the partnership and generous support of:

![Verizon](image-url)  ![Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation](image-url)  ![Carlson](image-url)  ![PolSinelli](image-url)