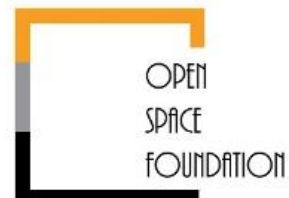


## CASE STUDY:

### MOLA in Sofia, Bulgaria

Empowering young opinion leaders in Sofia using MOLA





## Executive summary

Analysing the behaviour of young people in the schools where [Open Space Foundation](#) works for the past 2-3 years, they noted that (young people):

- Want to be online,
- Want to be interesting / liked with the publications they make;
- Are looking for entertainment that comes fast, loud and “WOOOO!”.
- Need someone else to legitimize that a certain entertainment (even their own experience) is valuable.

In the piloting phase, OSF conducted three trainings in order to empower young opinion leaders using MOLA. The first group consisted of 10 youth (14-16 years-old), Christians and Muslims from Turgovishte town. The second group consisted of 10 boys, Christians, Muslims and Roma (13 years old) from Veliki Preslav town; and the third group of 10 youth (18-27 years-old) living in Sofia city. Third MOLA training was implemented with a group of Bulgarian and foreign volunteers (18-27 years-old) between January and April 2023.

In the programme, methods of non-formal education and a combination of resources (curriculum) that are available for self-education (e.g., at home) were used. The goal of our work was to empower the participants with proper tools and knowledge that they can use as an opinion leader. The programme consisted of 2 phases: **Training** and **Activation**.

The goals of our training were:

1. To train young people to be able to influence the insecurity of their peers regarding their behaviour and to set good examples and models of ethical and sustainable behaviour from which to learn.
2. To empower them with proper tools that they can use as an opinion leader.

So far, OSF conducted:

- **3 trainings**
- **30 young people took part in the trainings**
- **2 teachers in a local high school in Turgovishte and Sofia city are familiar with MOLA.**

## Case study

The MOLA 3 training programme was implemented by OSF with a group of Bulgarian and foreign volunteers (18-27 years-old). The goal of the program was to empower young people with the proper tools and knowledge that they can use as an opinion leader.

Using the MOLA methodology, we have created a programme that consists of 2 phases: **Training** and **Activation**.

**Phase 1: Two-days training**, 6 sessions total, which took place in January 2023. The sessions were a combination of giving new information and knowledge, presenting new tools, and exercises for practice.

The sessions delivered information about:

- How they can be successful, effective and safe when they search for information online
- How to recognize fake news and what to do in such cases.





New tools introduced:

- Responsible behaviour as an opinion leader and specific examples (THINK model)
- Guidebook how to be good storyteller and create content online
- F.I.R.E. App – Module 4, curriculum created on the basis of the MOLA programme, adapted for self- and independent education.

In the exercises, they practiced:

- How to analyse facts and opinions
- How to present themselves online
- How to analyse the digital footprint that each one of them leave on the Internet.

Phase 1 ended with creating an individual plan for posting in the next 6 weeks.

## Phase 2: Activation

Over the next 2 months, young people created content and posted it to their profiles on platforms they like and use. The topics they chose are different: football, movies, books.... They presented random people or their own personal example, with a message on to show their peers good real-life examples.

MOLA is an easy-to-use programme. Individual sessions can be split up and incorporated into classroom lessons or civics lessons at school. The OSF team will use it as a tool in our work with young people. With this programme, we could train youth to be real multipliers and to activate their peers.

## Youth workers' experiences using MOLA

The training took place over two days in 6 training sessions. In the introductory session, we presented them with videos (how to search for information, how Google collects our data, and Internet safety tips) that were made for the purpose of the F.I.R.E. app. This allowed us to see their live reactions and whether we were achieving our goals:

- both in terms of the informativeness of the content
- as well as attractiveness and efficiency in conveying the necessary information.

The topic of the training obviously excited them. In the "Fact vs. Opinion session", serious clashes of position emerged. The game definitely raised the mood of the group and gave way to the next topic: Fake News. In the discussion, it became clear that they do not have criteria for reliable media, and they also doubt the national media regarding their approach and manipulation of information. Sessions three and four were dedicated to introducing the Opinion Leader Model and Digital Storytelling, after which we shared various resources and useful tools for participants to use in the future.

For the needs of our group, we decided to replace the topic of online health-related behaviour with a discussion of our rights online and what Netiquette is. In the next session, participants were invited to generate possible solutions to influence their peers and friends. Through brainstorming, they generated several solutions related to youth passivity and apathy towards real action, which has been replaced by "life on the web". At the end of the meeting, each young person shared how they see their work online in the coming weeks.



In the following 6 weeks, we held 3 general meetings with the young people and 3 more with each of them individually. They shared the results of their work and gave each other feedback. Several interesting results were created by young people:

- New Instagram profile from which to start “building an influencer career”. In the first meeting after the training, it was discussed with two youngsters the meaning of being an anonymous opinion leader and being one with your real name. Both youngsters are currently posting through their own profiles and are very keen to continue working with this model.
- Another youth dared to share in Facebook wall various social activities in which he participates, and which help him to develop but he thought that they would not be interesting to his classmates. He shared his satisfaction with the reactions he got on Facebook.
- Another participant chose to return to his great hobby, football, after the circumstances of his life pushed him to another path: to study engineering sciences and abandon sports. The task he has set himself is to use his own example to motivate his peers to go out and do sports. He found a club and resumed football training. He shares that he was surprised at the reactions he caused. Even people with whom he has not communicated for a long time have reconnected with him and commented positively on his messages. His plan is to continue posting on the topic, featuring seniors who are still on the field and in great shape as well as football as a team interaction.

Links:

[https://www.instagram.com/reel/CneZbfYKSJv/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/reel/CneZbfYKSJv/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

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## Young people’s experiences

Participants shared what **they learned from the MOLA sessions**:

- New tricks in terms of searching for information on the Internet.
- Described the “Fact vs. Opinion” session as very useful and well presented.





- The way the content is presented, and the games that make it easier for the information to be absorbed.

**They identified as an “Aha” moment** (what you wouldn’t have learned/ what wouldn’t have happened if you hadn’t come to the training):

- I have seen many ideas, and learned how some are thought. The people always are very interesting.
- I wouldn’t have realised that people had different vision of the things I didn’t like. I’ve become more emphatic.
- I’m not a fan of social media, but this training gave me the opportunity to see things differently.

**After the Activation stage:**

- I was surprised how many people watched my videos. Even people that we didn’t speak years now texted me and greet me
- It is easy to get followers
- Not so many people put attention on my new posts. What is not correct?
- I had a period of time in which I wasn’t so active in social media, but I see now that this could help me a lot.

