



Australian Youth Affairs Coalition

**Submission in response to
*The Joint Select Committee on Cyber Safety Inquiry into
cyber safety Issues affecting children and young people***

June 2010

Australian Youth Affairs Coalition

The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) is Australia's non-government youth affairs peak body, which seeks to represent young people aged 12-25 and the sector that supports them.

AYAC boasts a growing membership of State and Territory Youth Peak Bodies, National Youth Organisations, researchers, policy makers and young people themselves, who are all passionate about creating an Australian community that supports and promotes the positive development of young people.

AYAC aims to:

- Provide a body broadly representative of the issues and interests of young people and the youth affairs field in Australia
- Advocate for a united Australia which respects and values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, promotes human rights, and provides justice for all
- Represent the rights and interests of young people in Australia, at both a national and an international level
- Promote the elimination of poverty and to promote the well being of young Australians, with a particular focus on those who are disadvantaged.
- Recognise the diversity of Australian society, to promote the cultural, social, economic, political, environmental and spiritual interests and participation of young people in all aspects of society
- Advocate for, assist with and support the development of policy positions on issues affecting young people and the youth affairs field, and to provide policy advice, perspectives and advocacy to Governments and the broader community
- Facilitate co-ordination and co-operation within the youth affairs field

AYAC and its members are dedicated to working for and with young people and seek to ensure they have access to mechanisms, which allow them to make decisions about issues that affect them in the Australian community.

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Recommendations

In response to the *Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety inquiry into cyber safety issues affecting children and young people*, AYAC believes cyber safety policy concerning children and young people should be based on effective approaches using evidence base, youth participation and capacity building with communities rather than hype and assumption regarding potential risks.

We urge the Federal Government to use this inquiry as a catalyst for action that enables young people to enjoy the benefits of technology whilst managing cyber risks. We endorse the following recommendations to assist with achieving this:

1. That children and young people be directly engaged to share their experiences and help develop relevant solutions to cyber safety.
2. That a *whole of community* approach be adopted to reflect the range of contexts in which young people engage in technology.
3. That education and prevention strategies in relation to cyber-bullying begin in primary school and be evidence based.
4. That the government adopt standards that mandate the use of child-friendly, plain language privacy policies for websites.
5. That government policy recognise the important role parents, caregivers, educators and youth workers play helping young people to navigate cyber risks.
6. That further resources be provided on education programs for parents and caregivers to recognise the importance of their role in supporting and guiding young people in cyber safety issues.

AYAC looks forward to the findings of this committee and to working with governments to ensure young people have a voice in cyber safety policy development, as well as ensuring communities are empowered to develop robust programs to combat cyber safety issues.

Introduction

As the use of technology increases so too will the associated risks. And while these risks are the subject of regular media commentary and hype, they should be considered in context and with reference to offline behaviours. Indeed many young people have positive and enriching experiences using a range of technology mediums¹.

A recurrent issue in relation to cyber safety, particularly as it relates to children and young people, is the assumptions about the prevalence and scale of cyber risks as well as the capabilities of young people to navigate such risk. A case in point is cyber stalking. The issue of cyber stalking and online grooming is one that is much feared by parents and sensationalised by the media. Although it is a serious issue, in reality the majority of solicitation online actually comes from other young people² rather than the stereotype of the older, male stranger.

AYAC calls on governments to approach these issues by drawing on a strong evidence base, rather than hype and stereotypes, and to recognise that the most serious threats to cyber safety issues are linked to offline behaviours³. Therefore any consideration of cyber safety need also take this into account.

AYAC believes that any policy development and implementation strategies in relation to cyber-safety issues affecting children and young people needs to include young people's participation as a core component of the process. This has been highlighted in relation to developing policies for Internet use⁴ and cyber-bullying so it is "consensual and not imposed"⁵. Particularly given that young people's knowledge and understanding of online engagement can exceed that of their parents and other generations. In this regard government approaches to cyber safety should adopt a strengths based approach to children and young people, recognising that many are proficient and regular users of many forms of technology.

There has been a major increase in the use of technology in Australia over the past few years⁶:

- Each month in 2004 there were 500 million SMS messages sent, compared to 10 million per month in 2000
- In 2007-2008, 67% of Australians had internet access at home, compared to 16% in 1998
- Similarly wireless internet connection totalled 1,462,000 in 2008, compared to 481,000 in 2007

¹ Blanchard, Michelle, Atari Metcalf, Jo Degney, Prof. Helen Herrman & Dr Jane Burns (2008) 'Rethinking the Digital Divide: Findings from a study of marginalised young people's ICT use', *Youth Studies Australia*, v.27, n.4, 2008, pp.35-42

² Dooley, J.J., Cross, D., Hearn, L., Treyvaud, R. (2009) *Review of existing Australian and international cyber-safety research*, Child Health Promotion Research Centre, Edith Cowan University, Perth

³ *ibid*

⁴ Department of Education and Children's Services (2009) *Cyber-safety - Keeping Children Safe in a Connected World, Guidelines for Schools and Preschools*, Government of South Australia

⁵ Australian Institute of Criminology (2007) *Cyber bullying: issues for policy makers*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology, AICrime Reduction Matters no. 59

⁶ Dooley et al, *op. cit.*:63-4

The ever-increasing use of technology sets the stage for increases in threats to cyber safety. However, many of these risks can be managed through education and empowerment of young people and communities. AYAC believes that the responses to cyber safety issues should consider:

- Young people's participation in any policy development and solutions to cyber safety threats
- A strengths-based approach to children and young people in relation to technology
- Education of young people, school staff and parents
- Cyber safety risks in perspective with offline behaviours
- Ensuring negative risks and positive experiences are given equal consideration

In preparing a response to the ***Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety inquiry into Cyber-Safety Issues affecting children and young people***, AYAC is conscious that other State and Territory jurisdictions have undertaken similar inquiries dealing with predominantly similar issues.

Therefore AYAC's response draws on submissions and consultations carried out by State and Territory Youth Peak Bodies, as well as from AYAC's Policy Advisory Council, which is a representative group of young people and youth sector organisations from around the country.

AYAC welcomes the opportunity to contribute to a national discussion surrounding how Australian governments can work to develop a coordinated response to cyber safety as it relate to children and young people, which community members feel they own and actively engage with.

Our response focuses primarily on the concept of addressing cyber safety through:

- Youth involvement
- A strengths based approach to children and young people
- The education of stakeholders,
- The development of evidence based education programs, and
- Adopting a *whole of community* approach to cyber safety.

Online behaviours

- Inappropriate social and health behaviours in an online environment
- Cyber-bullying

Inappropriate social and health behaviours

Efforts to combat inappropriate behaviours in relation to the online environment need to be considered in conjunction with offline behaviours.

Internet addiction

Concern and assumptions regarding 'internet addiction' needs to be mediated by clear evidence base and a concurrent consideration of the positive impacts of the internet on young people. This term "has been promoted and sensationalised by the media but as yet has little clinical validity"⁷. Indeed some research has highlighted that young people's excessive use of the internet related more to social connection, such as instant messaging and social networking sites, than the medium necessarily⁸. Inappropriate and excessive use of the Internet must be considered with offline behaviours and offline factors.

Promotion of negative behaviours

Exposure to material that promotes negative behaviours online is readily accessible to children and young people. There is some indication that young people seeking information on offline behaviours such as self-harm are linked to many other variables⁹.

Exposure to promotion of inappropriate behaviours can have negative implications for young people but equally the Internet provides a safe space for young people experiencing difficulty to express their views and access support online. Responses to this issue need to focus on helping young people to develop coping mechanisms and be aware of support available from parents and services in the community.

Cyber-bullying

The rate of cyber-bullying is set to increase as the rate of young people using technology grows. Cyber-bullying needs to be considered in the context of 'traditional' – i.e. face-to-face – forms of bullying. Where it differs significantly from offline bullying is that it can reach a wider audience in a short timeframe and there is assumed anonymity.

There are a number of issues of concern that need to be considered in the context of any cyber-bullying policy in this area:

- **Under reporting**
AYAC is concerned about the rate of under-reporting of cyber-bullying by young people. Young people are more likely to confide in their peers and they may not speak up to authority figures fearing that their access to technology will consequently be restricted¹⁰.

⁷ McGrath, Helen (2009) *Young People and Technology: A review of the current literature*, The Alannah and Madeline Foundation, 2nd edition:34

⁸ Dooley et al, *op. cit.*

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Campbell 2007; Rickwood et al. 2005; Smith et al. 2008 as cited in Price, Megan & John Dalgleish (2010) *Cyberbullying: Experiences, impacts and coping strategies as described by Australian young people*, *Youth Studies Australia*, v.29, n.2, 2010, pp. 51-59

Strategies adopted by governments must ensure that complaints are taken seriously, and that “strengths-based support and guidance is provided to young people”¹¹. In this regard there is a role for the education and youth sectors to manage and support this process.

- **Behaviour behind cyber-bullying**

Young people have identified that it is often the behaviour rather than the technology *per se* that is key to combating the issue of cyber-bullying¹². Anonymity is certainly a key element of cyber-bullying behaviour, despite most victims knowing the identity of their perpetrator. There is a perception of anonymity and lack of culpability. Technology increases the impact of bullying behaviour but ultimately it is the behaviour that needs to be addressed.

- **Peer relationships**

There is overlap in the groups of young people who are both victims and perpetrators of cyber-bullying. Schools and governments must give due consideration to the quality of peer relationships in any strategies addressing cyber safety¹³.

- **Ages experiencing peaks in cyber-bullying**

The peak in cyber-bullying in the transition period from primary to high school¹⁴, with other research citing a steady increase from early to late high school, is a worrying trend and an integral factor to consider in education programs.

- **Lack of evidence based cyber-bullying programs**

Research suggests that while there are a number of education programs in this area there is only a limited number that are actually evidence based¹⁵. AYAC proposes that greater emphasis be placed on evidence-based education programs and early intervention to counter cyber-bullying.

In response to these issues AYAC recommends:

- That the government support cyber-bullying education programs that are evidence based,
- That education programs begin during primary school and continue into high school
- A coordinated approach is adopted so that young people, parents and schools are involved in the process of raising awareness of risks and developing measures to counter inappropriate behaviours online.
- That children and young people are engaged in effective strategies to identify and combat cyber-bullying to ensure strategies are meaningful, relevant and supportive as well as promoting clear consequences of cyber-bullying.
- That peer relationships are addressed in all cyber safety strategies

¹¹ Price, & Dagleish, *op. cit.*: 58

¹² YACVic (2009) Sticks and Stones and Mobile Phones: Bullying in the New Millennium
<http://www.yacvic.org.au/policy/items/2010/02/309476-upload-00002.pdf>

¹³ Price and Dagleish, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ Dooley et al, *op. cit.*

Contexts of cyber safety

- The online environment in which Australian children currently engage
- The role of parents, families, carers and the community

AYAC recognises that young people experience many benefits from engaging in an online environment including connection, socialisation and self-expression. Indeed many young people have grown up with technology as a key part of their identity and expression.

Young people use the Internet for an average of one hour and 17 minutes each day which includes¹⁶:

- Almost 50 minutes of using the internet for messaging, visiting social websites and emailing,
- 15 minutes for games online against other players, and
- 13 minutes for homework on the computer and/or Internet.

The way young people access new technology bypasses physical access points - such as school or home - that may have filters or other safety measures. Furthermore young people tend to be more familiar with technology than parents and as such parents may not be aware of potential risks.

The two main strategies used to mitigate risks online are Internet filters and educational programs. Parents commonly cite *trust* as the reason why internet filters are not used and this may explain the low levels of use of internet filters in Australian households¹⁷. There are a range of reasons that prevent parents from monitoring online usage and risks. In particular the difficulty with keeping up with advances in technology and functions such as social networking sites¹⁸. For young people new technology, such as social networking sites, are used as an essential part of everyday social interaction whereas parents and other adults predominantly use the internet for practical business purposes and learning¹⁹.

AYAC highlights the following as key issues:

- **Whole of community approach**

Cyber safety issues, such as cyber-bullying, occur across a range of locations and require strategies that go beyond a single location, such as school, home or youth groups. Cyber-bullying largely takes place outside of school but it can have very negative effects on young people's performance at school as well as self-esteem and social relationships²⁰. It is thus imperative that a *whole of community* approach is adopted in order to address the multiple modes in which children and young people access the online environment. In this approach youth workers, youth services and schools have an important role in addressing cyber safety and helping young people and other stakeholders develop effective strategies to manage risk.

¹⁶ McGrath, Helen (2009) *Young People and Technology: A review of the current literature*, The Alannah and Madeline Foundation, 2nd edition

¹⁷ Dooley et al, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ McGrath, *op. cit.*:3

¹⁹ McGrath, *op. cit.*

²⁰ Price and Dalglish, *op. cit.*

- **Parental concerns**

Parents are concerned about cyber safety however many do not take action on their concerns and they may have disproportionate concerns regarding particular cyber risks²¹. AYAC asserts the importance of educating parents and the community to the actual risks and on the range of strategies and support available to young people online.

In response to these issues AYAC recommends:

- Parental education programs that promote appropriate action and a clear understanding of cyber risks.
- A *whole of community* approach to cyber safety at the local level.
- Recognising the important role youth services and workers can have in promoting cyber safety to young people.

Privacy

In general young people have a positive attitude to technology and the Internet coupled with a healthy concern regarding threats to their privacy online²². However, young people are monitored in many areas of their lives and so online spaces provide a place where they can express themselves away from parents, teachers and other authority figures. The issue of privacy relates both to misuse of personal information online and the positive opportunity for self-expression and connection away from parents.

It is impossible to eliminate all risks and completely avoid persons with ill intent in an online environment. Parents and caregivers have an important role in helping young people develop coping strategies to navigate such risks.

Governments need to recognise that there are two conflicting trends among young people; concern for privacy and disclosure of personal information. In Australia, more than 92% of young people view their online privacy as 'very important', despite 40% of young people having had pictures posted online without their permission²³. We need to also recognise that many young people are discerning about who they connect with online, even providing false information if they feel their privacy is threatened.

AYAC highlights the following as key issues regarding privacy:

- **Push factors to disclosing information online**

Young people do realise their information online is not secure and there is growing concern among young people about providing personal information over the internet. According to the Office of the Privacy Commissioner, the number of young Australians

²¹ Stilgherrian, (2010) *Parents don't act on cyber-safety fears*, CBS International, 22 March 2010

²² McCartney, Tania (2010) 'Australian Teens Protective of their Online Identity', *Australian Women Online*, 18 February 2010

²³ Dooley et al, *op. cit.*:141

concerned about internet privacy has quadrupled in past two years²⁴. However factors like peer pressure and incentives (such as quizzes, prizes or discounts) lead young people to disclose personal information online. AYAC believes education and transparency are key to supporting and empowering young people.

- **Lack of transparent website privacy policies**

Websites frequented by children and young people often have privacy policies that are wordy and difficult to understand. AYAC proposes that the government implement strategies to promote the use of child-friendly, plain language privacy policies so that young people can make an informed decision about disclosing their personal information.

- **Privacy and youth development**

Risk and boundary pushing are part of growing up. The commonly held view that accessing social networking sites reflects a selfish disregard for privacy and high rates of disclosure negates the positive correlation that has been identified between risk and opportunities²⁵. Parents and youth workers have a role in managing these two elements. They are required both to guide and support young people to navigate risks whilst also allowing freedom.

AYAC recommends the following actions regarding the issue of privacy:

- Advocating for educational programs that develop awareness of privacy,
- Educating parents and caregivers on the importance of their role in supporting and guiding young people in privacy issues,
- Mandating transparency in website privacy policies, especially social networking sites, so that they are in child-friendly, plain language and easily visible on the site,
- Incorporating young peoples attitudes and concerns regarding privacy, and
- Recognising the positive link between risk and opportunities for young people's development.

²⁴ Office of the Privacy Commissioner (2007) *Community attitudes to privacy*, Office of the Privacy Commissioner:61

²⁵ Jansz, Candice (2010) *'Growing up networked'— An analysis of youthful risk-taking and disclosure within online social networking websites*, 'Watch this Space: Children, young people and privacy' Crown Promenade Hotel, Melbourne, Friday 21 May 2010, Monash University.

Best practice responses to the cyber safety of children and young people

Effective and inclusive cyber safety programs are vital to ensuring children and young people can continue to enjoy the benefits of new and existing technology whilst being empowered to stay safe and access help to minimise risks to their cyber safety.

There have been numerous studies and programs focussed on cyber safety for and with children and young people. Rather than duplicating the work that has already been undertaken, AYAC has provided a number of examples of such programs.

For each example we have provided a short summary as well as contact names and URLs. This list illustrates the innovative solutions and success that can be achieved when young people are engaged in issues that concern them, and communities are educated and empowered.

Title	SuperClubsPLUS Australia
Researcher	Dr Martyn Wild , La Trobe University
URL	http://www.yourkidsed.com.au/info/link-super-clubs-plus
Summary	
“SuperClubsPLUS is a safe alternative to the wider-known social networks and actively encourages and stimulates children to practice how to be, and how to keep, safe online at all times. It has won multiple awards internationally for its education value, its innovation and of course, its cyber safety. It is supported here in Australia by Telstra Foundation.”	

Title	ThinkUknow cyber-safety education program
URL	http://www.thinkuknow.org.au/site/index.asp
Summary	
ThinkUknow raises awareness of strategies to promote the cyber safety of children and young people. This project delivers interactive training to parents, carers and teachers through primary and secondary schools.	
This program was successfully piloted in 2009 and is now being implemented across Australia. ThinkUknow was originally created by the UK Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre. In Australia, the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and Microsoft Australia have collaborated to develop this program.	

Title	Developing ethical digital citizens
Contact	Lee Baxter, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
URL	http://www.telstrafoundation.com.au/dir148/tfweb.nsf/telstraskidsfund/200809report/\$FILE/Telstra%27s%20Kids%20Fund%20grant%20recipients%202008%202009.pdf (Page 13)
Summary	
<p>This research project aims to educate and build capacity of local communities to develop a shared understanding of cyber safety issues and a culture of Ethical Digital Citizenship. The project includes: student led resources, community website and DVD as well as student forums and songwriting.</p> <p>Research report by Dr Sophie Reid later in 2010.</p>	

Title	Know IT All
Organisation	Childnet International
URL	http://www.childnet-int.org/kia/
Summary	
<p>Childnet International has developed a multi-media cyber safety training program for teachers, parents and young people. It was developed in consultation with young people and teachers. They also promote the ways in which children are using the internet to make a positive difference in society.</p>	

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