

THE HUNTING GROUND AUSTRALIA PROJECT

3 October 2017

Committee Secretary
Senate Finance and Public Administration Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary,

Re: Inquiry into the delivery of National Outcome 4 of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children 2010-2022

The Hunting Ground Australia Project thanks the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee for the opportunity to make a submission in relation to its current Inquiry into the delivery of National Outcome 4 of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children 2010-2022, 'Services meet the needs of women and their children experiencing violence,' insofar as that Outcome is given effect by the 1800 RESPECT Domestic and Sexual Violence National Counselling Service.

If you require clarification on any of the issues raised in the submission please contact our team via

We look forward to the publication of results from the survey and submissions process in May 2017.

Yours sincerely,

Allison Henry

Campaign Director – The Hunting Ground Australia Project

THE HUNTING GROUND AUSTRALIA PROJECT

**Submission to Finance and Public Administration References Committee re
the delivery of National Outcome 4 of the National Plan to Reduce Violence
Against Women and Their Children 2010-2022**

October 2017

Introduction: The Hunting Ground Australia Project

The Hunting Ground Australia Project is a documentary film impact campaign that for the past two years has used the acclaimed US documentary *The Hunting Ground* as a tool to engage Australian universities, and the broader community, in a conversation around issues concerning sexual assault and harassment, consent, disclosure and reporting in Australian universities and residential colleges.

The Hunting Ground was acquired for distribution in Australia by Madman Entertainment after premiering at the Sundance Film Festival 2015 and was one of six documentary films selected for the 2015 philanthropic Good Pitch² Australia initiative held at the Sydney Opera House on 16 September 2015.

Significant philanthropic pledges grants and in-kind pledges made at the Good Pitch event provided support for the formation of a campaign team to drive and implement the impact campaign.

Since late 2015 The Hunting Ground Australia Project has played a critical role in:

- facilitating a national campus screening program of *The Hunting Ground*, supporting some 25 staff previews and more than 70 campus and residential college screenings¹, providing an opportunity for thousands of Australian university staff and students to see and consider the documentary.

¹ See The Hunting Ground Australia Project's website at <http://www.thehuntinggroundaustralia.com.au/participating-universities/>

- instigating the Australian Human Rights Commission's national student survey on the prevalence, reporting experiences and responses to sexual violence in Australian university settings – the Commission's landmark report *Change the Course: National report on sexual assault and sexual harassment at Australian universities*² was released on 1 August 2017.
- Engaging the Australian Human Rights Centre (AHRCentre) at UNSW's development of effective and appropriate institutional responses to sexual assault and harassment in Australian universities – the AHRCentre's report *On Safe Ground: A Good Practice Guide for Australian Universities*³ was released on 3 August 2017.
- commissioning the Full Stop Foundation to adapt existing ethics and consent training programs to the Australian university context.⁴
- partnering with Fair Agenda to support the first ever record of the quantity and quality of sexual violence prevention training provided by university residential colleges⁵ and
- with the Full Stop Foundation, supporting the Full Stop Foundation Ambassador and journalist Nina Funnell to produce three factsheets – for victim-survivors, student representatives and journalists to improve media converge of sexual assault and harassment in Australian universities.⁶

Ethics and Consent Training: The Sex, Safety & Respect program and training materials

A key component of The Hunting Ground Australia Project's impact campaign was preventative in nature, and involved the development of education materials and programs to better equip university students and staff to respond to victims of sexual violence. By educating young people, their educators and carers about respectful relationships, consent laws and ethical choices, we hoped that Australian students would have a framework to take into their future workplaces and families.

² See <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/projects/university-sexual-assault-and-sexual-harassment-project>

³ See <http://www.ahrcentre.org/topics/strengthening-australian-university-responses-sexual-assault-and-harassment>

⁴ See <http://www.thehuntinggroundaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/THGAP-Sex-Safety-and-Respect-Training-Resources-FINAL.pdf>

⁵ See http://www.fairagenda.org/residences_survey

⁶ See resources on The Hunting Ground Australia Project's website at <http://www.thehuntinggroundaustralia.com.au/resources/>

The Hunting Ground Australia Project in early 2016 engaged the Full Stop Foundation, led by Professor Moira Carmody and Karen Willis OAM, to adapt existing ethics and consent training programs to the Australian university context. The purpose of the Full Stop Foundation is to support and resource the work of Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia (RDVSA) to reduce and ultimately eliminate sexual assault and domestic violence in Australia.

The *Sex, Safety & Respect*⁷ program and training materials is an experiential program focusing on healthy relationships, communicating in intimate relationships, sexual ethics, consent and bystander strategies. The program has already begun to be employed in Australian universities and residential colleges.

Expertise and experience of the Full Stop Foundation and Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia

The Hunting Ground Australia Project selected the Full Stop Foundation for this key aspect of our impact campaign because of the collective decades of experience and expertise held by key personnel at both the Full Stop Foundation and RDVSA. All of the programs in *Sex, Safety & Respect* are delivered by educators who have been specifically trained to deliver sexual violence prevention education in multiple settings including universities. They are highly skilled and have extensive backgrounds working as counsellors with sexual assault survivors, and as educators.

Furthermore, Full Stop Foundation and RDVSA staff competencies align with *Australia's National Standards for the primary prevention of sexual assault through education*. Funded by the Federal Office for the Status of Women, the Standards were developed by a research team from the Social Justice Social Change Research Centre UWS, in a collaborative partnership with the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), on behalf of the National Association of Services Against Sexual Violence (NASASV), and provide a best practice framework for effective sexual assault prevention education.

1800 RESPECT Domestic and Sexual Violence National Counselling Service

In the context of our partnership with the Full Stop Foundation around the *Sex, Safety & Respect* program, we have been exposed to a range of issues relating to the operation of the 1800 RESPECT hotline.

⁷ See <http://www.fullstopfoundation.org.au/MainMenu/Training-Programs/Sex-Safety-Respect>

When we started our screening program in 2015 we highlighted the 1800 RESPECT number in the trigger warning at the beginning of *The Hunting Ground* and included information about the hotline in all of our written materials.

Over the course of our project, however, we have been made increasingly aware of concerns relating to the hotline, arising from changes to the service which have impacted on the provision of high quality counselling. This has included reports from student survivors who have not received the specialist support they required when they reached out to the hotline for assistance. As a result we have more recently changed our project materials to read: Call 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732) *and ask to speak to a trauma counsellor* (emphasis added) so that survivors are not inadvertently triaged to less effective and appropriate counselling.

We note RDVSA's recent announcement that it has decided to withdraw from the 1800RESPECT Trauma Counselling Service, and the key concerns that RDVSA has outlined in relation to the proposed subcontract with Medibank Health Solutions. The Hunting Ground Australia Project's interaction with student survivors of sexual violence over the past two years, including their experience attempting to utilise the 1800 RESPECT hotline, means that we share a number of these concerns.

In our experience RDVSA have provided high quality trauma counselling to those whose lives have been impacted by sexual violence, and the Full Stop Foundation have designed and delivered very effective sexual assault prevention education programs. As noted above, we particularly value the collective decades of experience and expertise held by key personnel at both RDVSA and the Full Stop Foundation.

We are concerned that RDVSA's decision to withdraw from the 1800 RESPECT contract will see 70 dedicated RDVSA staffers made redundant and that these workers will not receive their redundancy entitlements. We are deeply troubled to learn that RDVSA may have to close down if the Federal Government does not fund these redundancy payments. We anticipate this would also have a negative influence on the Full Stop Foundation and its capacity to deliver its programs.

Also of considerable concern is that these developments will all adversely impact on the delivery of National Outcome 4 of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children 2010-2022, namely "Supporting frontline services to better recognise and respond to women and their children

who have experienced sexual violence.” As the Third National Action Plan acknowledges, Australia is experiencing a crisis of sexual violence, with nearly 1.5 million women in Australia having experienced sexual assault since the age of 15. The Australian Human Rights Commission’s *Change the Course* report revealed an alarming incidence of sexual assault and sexual harassment in Australian university environments. In this context, every step should be taken to back experienced frontline specialist services and the survivors of sexual violence they support.