

SUBMISSION No. 31

Centre for Children and Young People



research, education & advocacy

Senator Dana Wortley
Senator for South Australia and Chair Joint Select Committee on Cyber Safety
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT 2600

25th June, 2010.

Dear Senator Wortley,

RE: Inquiry into Cyber-Safety

Thank you for providing the Centre for Children and Young People (CCYP) with the opportunity to make a submission to the Committee. The Centre aims to promote the participation of children and young people in research, education and advocacy by bringing together four important strands: an interdisciplinary approach; a focus on research, education and advocacy for children and young people; an emphasis on cross-sectoral partnerships to promote evidence-based policy and practice; and the inclusion and the participation of children and young people. The CCYP are advised by a young person's consultative committee, *Young People Big Voice* (YPBV). Members of the YPBV are young people, aged 14-20, from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. The group meets once every month to advise the Centre and to support its work by:

- advising and collaborating on research activities, including involving young people in research and evaluation as participants and as co-researchers;
- attending and addressing seminars and conferences about issues that affect young people;
- mentoring future YPBV members; and
- advocating to government about important issues for research about children and young people

The YPBV were provided with the terms of reference for the Inquiry into Cyber Safety and considered these at a meeting on June 16, 2010. At that meeting, YPBV identified three issues of importance they would like to bring to the attention of the Committee.

1. Children and Young People's Participation in the Inquiry

The issue of cyber-safety is core to the wellbeing and safety of the majority of Australian children and young people. Given this, it is critical that the innovative and unique perspectives of children and young people are integral to the development, implementation and evaluation of policy so as to ensure decisions affecting service delivery and the allocation of resources are effective, sustainable and responsive to their needs.

A significant evidence base of national and international research highlights the benefits for policy makers when children and young people participate in government decision-making, including:

- better decisions, development programs and policy results (Hart, 1992; Percy-Smith, 2006; Lansdown, 2008; Moss and Dahlberg, 2005)

Centre for Children and Young People

Southern Cross University PO Box 157 Lismore NSW 2480

Phone (02) 6620 3605 ● Fax (02) 6620 3243 ● Email ccyp@scu.edu.au

www.ccyp.scu.edu.au


Southern Cross
UNIVERSITY
A new way to think



- broadening and deepening how we practice democracy and citizenship (Thomas, 2007; Kulynich, 2001)
- enabling the positive development of children's identity, competence, sense of responsibility and sense of belonging in the community (Kjorholt, 2004; Graham, 2004)
- enabling children to protect themselves (Alderson, 2010; Lansdown, 2008; Cashmore, 2001).

Providing opportunities for children and young people to participate in government policy, programs and services that affect them is also a central feature of a representative and democratic society, and a right afforded to all Australian children and young people according to the United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child (UNCRC), ratified by Australia in 1990. Accordingly, YPBV suggest a key issue for this Inquiry is to consider how children and young people will participate in the work of the Committee and, more broadly, in the development and evaluation of social policy, programs, services and initiatives developed to respond to cyber-safety issues affecting children and young people. As one YPBV member explains:

The process of participation should enable children and young people to not only benefit from social policies created for and around them but that they are also empowered to be a part of the decision making. Without allowing children and youth to participate actively, YPBV felt a major voice in the debate would be lost. YPBV further consider that by ignoring and overlooking the input of those most impacted by policy means that endeavours of the committee will be less fruitful and productive in the long term. Embedding the views and perspectives of children and young people in the work of the Committee means involving them in the process of participation during consultations about what is best for them and would benefit them the most.

2. Ways of supporting schools to change their culture to reduce the incidence and harmful effects of cyber-bullying

Schools are places where the majority of young people spend most of their time, and YPBV acknowledge their important role in reducing the incidence and effects of cyber bullying. YPBV had several suggestions about how school cultures might be changed, which are summarised below:

YPBV believe that the role of schools in the development of children and young people impacts greatly. During discussion there were a number of points the group felt important for the Committee to consider including; teaching teachers to work with children and young people about cyber safety, the need for resources that are relevant to children and young people on issues of cyber-safety and involving children and young people in the development of curriculum and resources. In regards to all of these points YPBV once again feel it is necessary to consult with children and young people about how the issues currently impact and also be open to their suggestions, through consultation, on how to practically resolve them.

YPBV members also consider that parents and caregivers play an equally important role:

During discussions YBVP delved into the many issues concerning the role of parents and caregivers in the question of cyber-safety. The group concluded that for some parents and caregivers it may be an issue of ignorance and naivety about their child's safety on the internet; however that for most parents and caregivers it was purely a matter of not knowing how to approach the topic. The home is where most children and young people access the internet and therefore the group suggests that parents and caregivers need to be educated about the importance of, and "how to", have conversations with their kids about cyber safety.



3. The merit of establishing an Online Ombudsman

YPBV members are generally supportive of the idea of an Online Ombudsman to investigate, advocate and act on cyber-safety issues. YPBV recommend that one of the functions of an Online Ombudsman be to facilitate Australian children to share their views on developing effective responses in relation to issues of cyber-safety. YPBV affirm the capacity and aspirations of young people for being involved in such initiatives:

Global trends and society project an image of children and youth as problematic, struggling with their tumultuous physical and emotional changes, unresponsive and self-consumed. However, YPBV believe society should really see youth as altruistic, with an acute sense of justice, eagerness to learn about the universe and a desire to contribute to the construction of a better world. The group feel in order for this to happen, we need to develop a culture that looks at children and youth with the outlook and perspective of respect and trust in their innate capacities.

Where To From Here?

The Centre for Children and Young People is of the view that consultations, such as that outlined above, involving *Young People Big Voice*, potentially provide the Committee with important and relevant insights into the issues and threats associated with their safety and wellbeing. The Centre respectfully suggests that an important task for the Committee is to generate the meaningful and ongoing involvement of children and young people throughout the course of this Inquiry. We suggest that this might include: involving children and young people early and in an ongoing way, developing guidelines with children and young people about the purpose of their participation, ensuring the Committee's processes are as child-friendly and focused as possible within the legislative structures which the Committee must operate, supporting children with relevant and appropriate information and resources and ensuring feedback is provided at the completion of their involvement.

Conclusion

The Centre for Children acknowledges the Federal government's commitment to children and young people and commends the government for initiating this inquiry into cyber-safety issues affecting children and young people. The Centre for Children and Young People and its youth advisory group, *Young People, Big Voice*, are willing to support the work of the Committee in any way that the Committee considers would be useful and relevant to the Inquiry.

For further information about the Centre please contact:

Dr Robyn Fitzgerald
Postdoctoral Research Fellow and Facilitator YPBV
Centre for Children and Young People
Southern Cross University
Lismore 2480
Ph: 0266 203062
Fax: 0266 203243

Webpage: www.ccp.scu.au