



**youth affairs council**  
OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

**SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON CYBER-SAFETY**

Provided by the **YOUTH AFFAIRS COUNCIL OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA Inc.**

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The Youth Affairs Council of SA (YACSA) was established by the youth sector in 1980 and is the peak body representing the views and interests of young people and the youth sector in South Australia.



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## **Introduction**

In May 2010, the Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety (the Committee) was established by Federal Parliament, and commenced its inquiry into the safety of children and young people on the internet. The Committee was re-established by the 43rd Federal Parliament by a resolution of appointment passed by the House of Representatives on 28 September 2010 and the Senate on 30 September 2010. It is required to report on the cyber-safety issues contained in its terms of reference no later than 30 April 2012.

In June 2010, YACSA provided a brief submission to the inquiry in the form of a letter. In November 2010, YACSA received an invitation from the Joint Select Committee to provide a further submission to the inquiry. This document constitutes an expanded and updated submission from YACSA, using the June 2010 letter as a starting point.

## **Executive Summary**

The Youth Affairs Council of South Australia (YACSA) is the peak body in South Australia representing the interests of young people, youth workers, organisations and networks throughout the non-government youth sector. Policy positions are independent and not aligned with any political party or movement. YACSA's aim is to encourage young people, and those working with them and for them, to achieve meaningful improvements in the quality of young people's lives.

The internet can be a playground, a classroom, a cinema, a jukebox, a conversation, and everything in between, and young people use it for all these things and more. In considering cyber-safety issues, YACSA acknowledges that young people are often the experts on their own use of technology, and that blanket restrictions on this use are neither practical nor useful. Instead, we encourage parents, caregivers, politicians and other decision-makers to work with young people to determine safe and appropriate ways of using technology.

- Children and young people today are at home on the internet, while today's adults – parents, caregivers, teachers, politicians – are relative newcomers to the online environment, with varying degrees of interest in, knowledge of and competency using digital technology.
- The vast majority of children and young people's access to the internet occurs in "safe" physical locations, such as their school or home. Therefore, the stakeholders with the greatest ability to influence the ways in which children and young people access the internet are parents, caregivers and teachers.
- By framing young people's internet use in the language of "threats," it is easy to overlook the opportunities available to young people online, and also the fact that young people are usually able to understand and manage any risks they may take online.
- YACSA is concerned that the language and terminology that has been created to define the risks young people face online – such as the use of the prefix "cyber" – has the effect of separating young people's online life from what takes place in the world around them. For young people



there is no such separation – it’s just life, and accessing the internet is an integral part of their day-to-day existence.

- There are four common misconceptions raised by adults when considering the sexual solicitation of young people online: that adults who sexually solicit young people online conceal their identity and trick or coerce young people into meetings; that the majority of sexual solicitations are directed at children, rather than adolescents; that social networking sites the online places young people are in most danger of receiving unwanted sexual solicitations; and that it is predominantly older adults who target and solicit children and young people. Not one of these assumptions is supported by any of the existing research into online victimisation of young people.
- YACSA argues that encouraging and building young people’s media literacy will support young people’s natural ability to assess and respond in a healthy way to the content they view online, including any material that may be deemed illegal or inappropriate.
- The online world plays a vital role in the development of young people’s self-confidence and values, and young people today are simply taking advantage of the technology they have grown up to test boundaries, experiment with relationships, challenge adult norms and develop an individual identity. So, while YACSA acknowledges that young people may behave in risky ways online, we note that these risks often arise from traditional sources such as peer group dynamics, which are then transferred to the internet.
- Attempts to control online risk-taking behaviours through methods based on monitoring and restriction are destined for failure, as such methods will not transfer to an online environment. Instead, we need to identify and implement solutions which take young people’s whole lives into context
- Technology addiction: YACSA would be very wary of labelling young people’s general use of technology, and the way it is integrated into their lives, as “addiction,” as young people view this use as a necessary and fundamental part of their lives. YACSA would encourage the government, in conjunction with the non-government sector, to explore any methodologies or initiatives that specifically confront excessive and damaging technology use in young people.
- Online promotion of anorexia: YACSA argues that if a young person suffers from an eating disorder, the primary goal of any treatment must be to address the causes of that disorder, and provide the young person with the support and/or medical intervention required for them to overcome their illness. In a more general sense, the government’s attention and resources would be better directed towards programs and initiatives that enhance young people’s media literacy, to allow them to critically assess the images presented to them in the media. Thus, should a young person encounter a pro-anorexia website, they will be equipped with the skills to draw the appropriate distinctions between realistic and unrealistic images.



- Drug use: YACSA would advocate that the government's attempts to stop young people from abusing illicit drugs would better directed to early intervention and prevention methodologies, rather than focusing on the internet, an aspect of young people's lives that has little impact on the likelihood of them taking drugs.
- Underage drinking: Placing an undue emphasis on the promotion of alcohol consumption or alcoholic drinks online diminishes the attention given to the promotion of alcohol consumption in other areas of young people's lives. Therefore, YACSA suggests that the laudable objective of reducing the prevalence of underage drinking can be more effectively achieved through early intervention and education initiatives.
- Underage smoking: YACSA advocates that the amendments proposed to the *Tobacco Products Advertisements (Prohibition) Act 1989* in 2004, covering the online advertising and sale of tobacco products, be passed by Parliament as a matter of priority. In this way, young people's exposure to smoking promotion and imagery online will be reduced, without any restriction being placed on their internet use.
- YACSA is a strong advocate for education programs for parents and caregivers regarding privacy issues online, including identity theft, which should focus on further empowering young people, and giving parents and caregivers the skills to work with children and young people in protecting their privacy online. YACSA also strongly supports the implementation of youth-friendly, plain language privacy policies for online services, so young people can make an informed decision about disclosing their personal information.
- YACSA supports any and all programs and initiatives that work with whole-school communities, including parents and caregivers, to reduce the incidence and harmful effects of bullying, and that provide young people and school staff with the knowledge, skills and support to effectively respond to bullying.
- YACSA argues that any role and responsibility for cyber-safety issues undertaken by an ombudsman, could be equally well-served by the establishment of a national Guardian for Children and Young People. Such a position would be able to identify and pursue many issues relevant to the lives of children and young people, including cyber-safety, and in so doing arguably bring greater resources and knowledge to bear on those issues.



## The Online Environment

Children and young people today are at home on the internet. They are “digital natives” who have “spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers, videogames, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age.”<sup>1</sup> By comparison, today’s adults – parents, caregivers, teachers, politicians – are relative newcomers to the online environment, with varying degrees of interest in, knowledge of and competency using digital technology.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in the twelve months prior to April 2009, an estimated 2.2 million Australian children aged between 5 and 14 years accessed the internet<sup>2</sup>. For 86% of these 2.2 million children, the key physical point of access for online activity was at school, while 92% also went online at home<sup>3</sup>.

This is unsurprising given the number of Australian homes with internet access has more than quadrupled in the last decade, from 16% of all households in 1998 to 72% in 2008-09<sup>4</sup>. In fact, young people’s use of the internet is so widespread that it has an identifiable impact on consumer trends – households across Australia are less likely to own a computer and be connected to the internet and/or broadband if they have no children aged less than fifteen years<sup>5</sup>.

Taking these statistics into account, it is clear that the vast majority of children and young people’s access to the internet occurs in “safe” physical locations, where there is at least the possibility of adult supervision. Therefore, the stakeholders with the greatest ability to influence the ways in which children and young people access the internet and use information technology are the stakeholders most likely to be present in those physical locations – parents, caregivers and teachers.

Having said this, of the 2.2 million Australian children who accessed the internet in the year prior to April 2009, only 3% reported having had some kind of personal safety or security problem online.<sup>6</sup> This means that **97%** of children and young people accessing the internet had a safe and positive experience. It is exceedingly unlikely that each of these children had an adult seated next to them as they navigated the internet, and thus we can conclude that young people are generally able to keep themselves safe online without direct adult supervision.

In saying this, we acknowledge that there may be young people who are having distressing experiences online, who don’t know how or where to report such experiences, perhaps through fear their access to

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<sup>1</sup> Prensky, M, 2001, *Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants*, “On The Horizon”, vol.9, no.5, MCB University Press. Viewed online 6 January 2011 at: <http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives.%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part1.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> ABS, 2009, *Children’s Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities*, catalogue number 4901.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics. Viewed online 4 January 2011 at <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/4901.0~Apr+2009~Main+Features~Internet+use+and+mobile+phones?OpenDocument>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> ABS, 2009, *Household Use of Information Technology*, catalogue no. 8146.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra. Viewed online 4 January 2011 at <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/8146.0>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



the internet will be restricted by their parents or caregivers. YACSA considers that the extent of such non-reporting should be considered a research priority for the government and non-government sectors.

Taking each of the above points into consideration, YACSA holds that the best way to protect young people online is to take a two-pronged approach: we must augment young people's natural digital literacy with education and support structures, while at the same time educating and assisting those stakeholders most able to influence young people's use of the internet – parents, caregivers and teachers.

### **Cyber-Safety “Threats”**

In addressing this issue YACSA would first like to suggest that by framing young people's internet use in the language of “threats,” it is easy to overlook the opportunities available to young people online – opportunities to interact, communicate, create, debate and entertain each other. Given the reach and scope of the online environment, these opportunities necessarily carry an element of risk, especially as young people's lives, views and personal information is online “more prominently, publicly and abundantly than ever before<sup>7</sup>.”

When adults treat risk as a problem rather than an opportunity they often fail to realise these “inherent risks are largely within the competencies of young people to manage<sup>8</sup>.” After all, research has shown that there is a positive association between risk and opportunity, and “the more young people experience one, the more they experience the other<sup>9</sup>.”

In the context of the Committee's Terms of Reference, then, YACSA would be keen for point (v) – “examining the need to ensure that the opportunities presented by, and economic benefits of, new technologies are maximised<sup>10</sup>” – to be given greater emphasis than the “threats” young people face online. However, given the Terms of Reference also specifically outlines these “threats,” YACSA will address each identified “threat” individually.

### **“Cyber”-bullying and “cyber”-stalking**

YACSA is concerned that the language and terminology that has been created to define the risks young people face online has the effect of separating young people's online life from what takes place in the world around them. The clearest example of this is where the Joint Select Committee's Terms of Reference make direct reference to cyber-bullying and cyber-stalking<sup>11</sup>. YACSA would argue that these terms are misleading.

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<sup>7</sup> Jansz, C, 2010, ‘*Growing Up Networked*’ – *An analysis of youthful risk-taking and disclosure within online social networking websites*, presented at the *Watch This Space: Children, Young People and Privacy* conference, Crown Promenade Hotel, Melbourne, Friday 21 May 2010. Viewed online 6 April 2011 at [http://www.privacy.vic.gov.au/privacy/web2.nsf/files/watch-this-space-conference-2010-candice-jansz-presentation/\\$file/conference\\_10\\_no2.pdf](http://www.privacy.vic.gov.au/privacy/web2.nsf/files/watch-this-space-conference-2010-candice-jansz-presentation/$file/conference_10_no2.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Matthews, M, n.d. *Fostering creativity and innovation in cooperative federalism – the uncertainty and risk dimensions*, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, Canberra. Viewed online 6 April 2011 at [http://cpi.anu.edu.au/ripp/public/Matthews\\_ANZSOG.pdf](http://cpi.anu.edu.au/ripp/public/Matthews_ANZSOG.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Jansz, 2010, p. 9

<sup>10</sup> *Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety Terms of Reference*, 2010, viewed online 7 April 2011 at <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jssc/tor.htm>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid



The use of the prefix “cyber” implies that the bullying and other negative activities occasionally directed at young people online are a somehow separate component of young people’s lives. For young people there is no such separation – it’s just life, and accessing the internet is an integral part of their day-to-day existence.

It also suggests that the harassment that can take place online is an isolated problem caused by technology, and can therefore be controlled or eradicated with technology-based solutions. This is not the case. “Cyber”-bullying is bullying – it simply takes place online. The same applies to stalking – the inappropriate behaviour/crime in question is the act of stalking, not the tools and techniques used.

Creating a new terminology allows the community to address this issue in isolation, without considering the context in which it takes place. Instead, we would advocate direct funding and support to ways of preventing bullying and stalking in general, no matter how it is conducted or what tools are used.

Some adults overlook this point, and remain convinced that the way to overcome the problems associated with bullying in an online environment is to restrict or attempt to regulate the way children and young people access and use the internet. YACSA’s concern is that such measures may work against the interests and wellbeing of young people by limiting their ability to engage with their peers and take part in the activities and processes necessary for their development.

### **Sexual Solicitation Online**

The relative ignorance of many adults when it comes to online communication – and the fear this can provoke – can lead to major issues as adults attempt to regulate and monitor young people’s access to the internet. Nowhere is this clearer than with the issue of sexual solicitation of children and young people online.

There are four common misconceptions or fears raised by adults when considering the sexual solicitation of young people online. The first is that adults who sexually solicit young people online do so by covertly gathering information about young victims they have already identified, then concealing their identity and tricking young people into physical meetings, where they then use violence to coerce the young person into sexual acts. The second is that the majority of sexual solicitations are directed at children, rather than adolescents.

The third is that social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace are the online places young people are in most danger of receiving unwanted sexual solicitations, given the ease with which personal information can be revealed and accessed by others. The fourth is that it is predominantly older adults who target and solicit children and young people.

Not one of these assumptions is supported by any of the existing research into online victimisation of young people.





For example, a study conducted by the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children in the United States shows that the majority of online sexual solicitations – 90%<sup>12</sup> – were directed at teenagers aged 13-17, not young children. Nearly half of these solicitations were made by other young people under the age of 18<sup>13</sup>. From these statistics, as well as a range of other published research<sup>14</sup>, we can conclude that many of the online sexual solicitations received by young people are from their peers. This peer-to-peer contact often occurs as part of the interactions regarding sex, romance and relationships common to adolescent development.

By comparison, the type of online sexual solicitation most feared by parents and caregivers, that of the hidden online predator trapping and coercing a young person, is very rare. In fact, research suggests that in the majority of online sexual solicitation cases referred to police, adult offenders are honest about being an adult, and are honest about their intentions to have sex with the young person they have solicited<sup>15</sup>.

This is compounded by the startling fact that three out of four young people who physically meet the adult who has solicited them online do so *more than once*<sup>16</sup>. This suggests that offenders are using young people's natural curiosity towards sex and sexuality to build relationships – no matter how inappropriate – rather than coercing or threatening young people.

This is also true in the case of social networking sites, with a number of research papers stating not only that “the majority of youth who use the internet are not frequently involved in...sexual solicitation<sup>17</sup>,” but that “broad claims of victimization risk, at least defined as unwanted sexual solicitation or harassment, associated with social networking sites do not seem justified<sup>18</sup>,” and “social networking sites such as MySpace do not appear to have increased the risk of victimization by online molesters<sup>19</sup>.”

It is important to note at this stage that the misinformation regarding sexual solicitation of young people online is a phenomenon perpetuated by the often-hysterical tone taken by the media when reporting on cyber-safety issues. Such reporting reinforces the stereotype that young people are passive victims in the online environment, whereas young people generally experience the internet as a safe medium, and are therefore more likely to find sensationalist reports and warnings lacking in credibility.

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<sup>12</sup> Wolak J, Mitchell K & Finkelhor D, 2006, *Online victimization of youth: Five years later*, National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, Alexandria, Virginia, USA, p.17. Viewed online 11 January 2011 at: [http://www.missingkids.com/missingkids/servlet/ResourceServlet?LanguageCountry=en\\_US&PageId=2530](http://www.missingkids.com/missingkids/servlet/ResourceServlet?LanguageCountry=en_US&PageId=2530).

<sup>13</sup> Wolak et al., 2006, p.15.

<sup>14</sup> Wolak J, Finkelhor D, Mitchell KJ & Ybarra ML, 2008, *Online Predators and Their Victims: Myths, Realities and Implications for Prevention and Treatment*, “American Psychologist” Vol. 63, No. 2, pp. 111–128

<sup>15</sup> Ybarra ML & Mitchell KJ, 2008, *How Risky Are Social Networking Sites? A Comparison of Places Online Where Youth Sexual Solicitation and Harassment Occurs*, “Pediatrics” vol.121, pp. 350-357. Viewed online 6 January 2011 at <http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/121/2/e350>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 355

<sup>17</sup> Ybarra ML, Espelage DL, Mitchell KJ, 2007, *The occurrence of internet harassment and unwanted sexual solicitation victimisation and perpetration: association with psychosocial indicators*, “Journal of Adolescent Health” vol. 41, pp. 31-41

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 40

<sup>19</sup> Wolak et al., 2008, p. 117



Sensationalist media coverage also has severe negative implications for the quality of the policy responses implemented by governments and other bodies, as policy decisions may be made as a reaction to media coverage, rather than through consultation and investigation of the issues involved.

Taking all of the information above into account, it quickly becomes clear that the approaches parents, caregivers, teachers and the broader community currently take regarding young people's safety need to change, to reflect the correction of erroneous assumptions we have made about online sexual solicitation of young people. In this sense, YACSA is pleased that the Joint Select Committee has been reconvened, as it allows for a more detailed examination of these assumptions, and in doing so, improves the public policy and safety outcomes for young people.

### **Exposure to Illegal and Inappropriate Content**

When it comes to the issue of young people's access to illegal or inappropriate content on the internet, YACSA's position is most effectively summarised by one of the principles of the Common Sense Media Foundation (CSM), a US-based not-for-profit organisation "dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing the trustworthy information, education, and independent voice they need to thrive in a world of media and technology<sup>20</sup>." One of CSM's core tenets is "we can't cover [young people's] eyes but we can teach them to see<sup>21</sup>."

Children and young people are exposed to what many adults would call "inappropriate content" every day – sexualised imagery in music videos, stylised violence on television, images of actual violence in the newspaper. Arguing that such content is somehow more likely to have an impact on children and young people when viewed on the internet is a fallacy, and one which draws focus away from the real issue – young people's media literacy.

Research suggests that children develop the ability to discern the difference between representation and reality, how to cope with potentially unwanted or upsetting emotional responses, and to make critical judgments about areas such as television violence even without explicit attempts to encourage and promote such media literacy<sup>22</sup>.

Even so, YACSA would argue that governments, parents, caregivers, teachers and the broader community have a responsibility to actively encourage and build young people's media literacy, as a wide range of studies in this area conclude that education in media literacy may be a more effective strategy than blocking or filtering young people's internet access<sup>23</sup>.

Reinforcing and supporting the development of young people's media literacy will give them a network of support that will allow them to assess and respond to the content they view in a healthy way, and to continue to build their resilience in the face of content that might be distressing or damaging. This is

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<sup>20</sup> Common Sense Media, 2011, *Our Mission*. Viewed online 7 April 2011 at <http://www.commonsensemedia.org/about-us/our-mission>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Buckingham, D, Banaji, S, Burn, A, Carr, D, Cranmer, S & Willett, R, 2004, *The Media Literacy of Children and Young People: A review of the research literature on behalf of Ofcom*, Centre for the Study of Children, Youth and Media Institute of Education, University of London, UK, p. 3

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 3



particularly important during young people's development, as the internet is often used to investigate or access information about topics young people may not feel comfortable talking to others about, such as sexual health issues.

### **Inappropriate Social and Health Behaviours in an Online Environment**

The online world plays a vital role in the development of young people's self-confidence and values, and young people today are simply taking advantage of the technology they have grown up with to do what they have always done: test boundaries, experiment with relationships, challenge adult norms and develop an individual identity.

As such, certain behaviours have always been a part of adolescent development, such as risk-taking, investigating sub-cultures, establishing peer groups, and the bullying and exclusion that can take place within those groups. The inappropriate social and health behaviours identified in the Joint Select Committee's Terms of Reference are a symptom of this period of adolescent development. The difference is that in addition to acting out these behaviours in the playground or at the local shopping centre, young people increasingly turn to another environment they are comfortable with and feel safe in – the internet.

So, while YACSA acknowledges that young people may behave in risky ways online, we consider it crucial to an informed debate on cyber-safety to note that these risks do not always arise from the internet *per se*, but rather from traditional sources such as peer group dynamics, which are then transferred to the internet and amplified through repetition and reproduction.

Additionally, research suggests that those young people who are more likely to take significant risks online— such as responding to sexual solicitation – are also more likely to take risks in other areas of their lives. Young people who take such risks often demonstrate characteristics including elevated rates of substance use, involvement in offline victimisation, perpetration of relational, physical, and sexual aggression, a propensity to respond to stimuli with anger, poor emotional bonds with caregivers, and poor caregiver monitoring<sup>24</sup>.

In other words, young people do not exist in a vacuum; the issues and challenges they face in their life will always find some way of manifesting in their online behaviour. This means attempts to control online risk-taking behaviours through traditional methods based on monitoring and restriction are destined for failure; such methods will not transfer to an online environment. Additionally, such attempts are likely to do more harm than good, as they expose the faulty assumptions some adults make about young people's capacity to protect themselves online.

Therefore, we need new techniques to deal with the problem, and solutions which take young people's whole lives into context. This is widely recognised in current research, with many youth workers and

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<sup>24</sup>Ybarra ML, Espelage DL, Mitchell KJ, 2007, *The occurrence of internet harassment and unwanted sexual solicitation victimisation and perpetration: association with psychosocial indicators*, Journal of Adolescent Health vol. 41, pp.31-41



academics agreeing that “professionals working to reduce youth victimization online would likely have a bigger impact if they focused on youth behaviour rather than regulating specific contexts<sup>25</sup>.”

## Technology Addiction

YACSA accepts the possibility that technology addiction exists as a diagnosable mental disorder – in fact, the American Psychiatric Association is considering including it in the next (5<sup>th</sup>) edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-V), which is the standard classification of mental disorders used by mental health professionals in the United States, listing the diagnostic criteria for every psychiatric disorder recognised by the U.S. healthcare system<sup>26</sup>. According to the DSM-V, in order to be considered an addiction, an individual’s technology use would have to comprise the following elements:

*“1) excessive use, often associated with a loss of sense of time or a neglect of basic drives, 2) withdrawal, including feelings of anger, tension, and/or depression when the computer is inaccessible, 3) tolerance, including the need for better computer equipment, more software, or more hours of use, and 4) negative repercussions, including arguments, lying, poor achievement, social isolation, and fatigue<sup>27</sup>.”*

Unless and until these criteria are met in individual cases, YACSA would be very wary of labelling young people’s general use of technology, and the way it is integrated into their lives, as “addiction.” For many adults, the seemingly constant use of social networking sites and mobile phones is a worrying sign that young people are distancing themselves from the “real world.” In contrast, young people view this use as a necessary and fundamental part of their communication and interaction with friends, education providers, entertainment, and the myriad other information sources to which the internet gives them access.

In light of this, and the fact that there is still some debate as to whether internet addiction should be a diagnosable condition, YACSA will refrain from offering specific comment on the efficacy or otherwise of potential treatments for internet “addiction.” However, we note with interest developments overseas, for example a dedicated technology addiction clinic in the UK<sup>28</sup>, and would encourage the government, in conjunction with the non-government sector, to explore these developments as well as any methodologies that specifically confront excessive and damaging technology use in young people.

## Online Promotion of Anorexia

Often, pro-anorexia websites are seen by their users as “safe havens” where young people suffering from eating disorders can “connect with similar others away from the judgmental eyes of the rest of the

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<sup>25</sup> *op cit* Ybarra & Mitchell, 2008, p. 555

<sup>26</sup> *DSM-5 Development*, 2010, American Psychiatric Association. Viewed online 7 April 2011 at <http://www.dsm5.org/about/Pages/Default.aspx>

<sup>27</sup> Block, JJ, 2008, *Issues for DSM-V: Internet Addiction*, American Journal of Psychiatry, vol. 165, pp. 306-307. Viewed online 7 April 2011 at <http://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/full/165/3/306>

<sup>28</sup> *Young Person Technology Addiction*, n.d., Capio Nightingale Hospital, London, UK. Viewed online 7 April 2011 at <http://www.nightingalehospital.co.uk/services/addictions/technology-addiction/>



world<sup>29</sup>.” Parents, caregivers, doctors, and the wider community see them as encouraging formerly healthy young people into destructive eating patterns, leading to lasting damage to their wellbeing.

YACSA would argue that this concern over the online promotion of anorexia or other eating disorders is often another manifestation of the belief that young people’s lives are divided into online and offline spaces, with a clear technological distinction between the two. As YACSA has said elsewhere in this submission, this idea creates the impression that certain online activities can be prevented or restricted, therefore eliminating the problem.

Instead, YACSA would argue that the internet acts as nothing more than a communication medium. If a young person suffers from an eating disorder, the primary goal of any treatment must be to address the causes of that disorder, and provide the young person with the support and/or medical intervention required for them to overcome their illness. Preventing a young person from accessing sites promoting anorexia is only one element – doing so in isolation, without regard to the genesis of the young person’s eating disorder, is likely to have little or no effect.

Conceptualising pro-anorexia sites as a cause, not a symptom, also negates the far more widespread and insidious impact of popular culture on young people’s self-image and self-esteem. Numerous studies have provided evidence of this impact – for example, research published in the journal of the American Academy of Paediatrics showed preadolescent and adolescent girls who were frequent readers of fashion magazines were more likely to report wanting to lose weight and dieting because of magazine images and articles<sup>30</sup>.

Therefore, rather than focusing on pro-anorexia websites, YACSA argues that the government’s attention and resources would be better directed towards programs and initiatives that enhance young people’s media literacy, to allow them to critically assess the images presented to them in the media. Thus, should a young person encounter a pro-anorexia website, they will be equipped with the skills to draw the appropriate distinctions between realistic and unrealistic images.

This is especially relevant for young people already suffering from eating disorders. In fact, such advice is often offered directly to doctors and psychiatrists via academic papers:

*“Clinicians may respond to the eating disordered client who visits pro-anorexia websites for support by discussing their negative impact and by engaging in media literacy, which encourages critical evaluation of the media and its messages and appears to help decrease the impact of thin-ideal images on body dissatisfied women<sup>31</sup>.”*

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<sup>29</sup> Bardone-Cone, AM & Cass, KM, 2007, *What Does Viewing a Pro-Anorexia Website Do? An Experimental Examination of Website Exposure and Moderating Effects*, International Journal of Eating Disorders, vol. 40, pp. 537-548. Viewed online 7 April 2011 at [http://www.columbiainmissourian.com/media/multimedia/2009/02/06/media/Archive\\_/img/bardone%20study.pdf](http://www.columbiainmissourian.com/media/multimedia/2009/02/06/media/Archive_/img/bardone%20study.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Field, AE, Cheung, L, Wolf, AM, Herzog, DB, Gortmaker, SL & Colditz, GA, 1999, *Exposure to the Mass Media and Weight Concerns Among Girls*, Pediatrics, vol. 103, pp. 36-40. Viewed online 7 April 2011 at <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/reprint/103/3/e36>

<sup>31</sup> Bardone-Cone & Cass, 2007, p. 546



## Drug Use

The latest edition of the *National Drug Strategy Household Survey* shows there has been a steady decrease in the use of most illicit drugs between 1998 and 2008<sup>32</sup>. This decline has also been noted by the Australian Institute of Criminology, which has published research showing a ten-year downward trend of positive drug test results<sup>33</sup>, even among individuals with a previous drug conviction.

Meanwhile, as outlined earlier in this submission, the number of young people using the internet has been increasing dramatically. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the fear shared by many parents, caregivers and politicians – that the internet is encouraging, supporting or increasing illicit drug use among young people – is not one that is supported by the available evidence.

Therefore, YACSA would advocate that, again, the government's attempts to stop young people from abusing illicit drugs would better directed to early intervention and prevention methodologies, rather than focusing on the internet, an aspect of young people's lives that has little impact on the likelihood of them taking drugs.

## Underage Drinking

In 2009, a study by the European Alcohol and Health Forum found “consistent evidence to demonstrate an impact of alcohol advertising on the uptake of drinking among non-drinking young people, and increased consumption among their drinking peers<sup>34</sup>.” The Australian National Council on Drugs has demonstrated that adolescents are less likely to drink and less likely to engage in binge-drinking if parents or caregivers actively disapprove of this behavior, while adolescents whose parents or caregivers display a permissive attitude towards alcohol consumption tend to drink more,<sup>35</sup> and a paper from the German Institute for the Study of Labor “confirm[s] the existence of significant peer group influences on the consumption of alcohol and on the truant behaviour of adolescents.”

This research, generally supports the conclusion that young people face a range of powerful factors that can influence their behaviour when it comes to underage drinking, including advertising, parental example, and peer group pressure. Having access to materials online which promote, advertise or condone such behaviour is not one of those powerful factors. For example, a research report into *Consumer Perceptions of Alcohol Advertising and the Revised Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code* conducted by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing showed that of the 70% of survey

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<sup>32</sup> AIHW, 2008, *2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: First Results*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra. Viewed online 5 April 2007 at <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail?id=6442468084>

<sup>33</sup> AIC, 2008, *Positive drug test (%) for offence*, 'Drugs and Offending Online', Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra. Viewed online 5 April 2011 at <http://data.aic.gov.au/duma/duma.html>

<sup>34</sup> Anderson, P, 2009, *Does marketing communication impact on the volume and patterns of consumption of alcoholic beverages, especially by young people? – A review of longitudinal studies*, presented at the European Alcohol and Health Forum, Brussels, 11 March 2009. Viewed online 6 April 2011 at [http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_determinants/life\\_style/alcohol/Forum/docs/science\\_o01\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/alcohol/Forum/docs/science_o01_en.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> Frye, S, Dawe, S, Harnett, P, Kowalenko, S & Harlen, M, 2008, *Supporting the families of young people with problematic drug use – investigating support options*, Australian National Council on Drugs, Canberra. Viewed online 6 April 2011 at [http://www.ancd.org.au/images/PDF/Researchpapers/rp15\\_supporting\\_families.pdf?phpMyAdmin=rGQ2XkOOsKjMp24r2sFwuVc5ibb](http://www.ancd.org.au/images/PDF/Researchpapers/rp15_supporting_families.pdf?phpMyAdmin=rGQ2XkOOsKjMp24r2sFwuVc5ibb)



respondents who had used the internet, only ten per cent of this group reported having seen any advertising or promotion of alcoholic drinks while online<sup>36</sup>.

Essentially, placing an undue emphasis on the promotion of alcohol consumption or alcoholic drinks online diminishes the attention given to the promotion of alcohol consumption in other areas of young people's lives. Therefore, YACSA suggests that the laudable objective of reducing the prevalence of underage drinking can be more effectively achieved through early intervention and education initiatives.

## Underage Smoking

In contrast to the section above, the promotion of underage smoking online may have significant impact on young people's decision to smoke. This is especially concerning given the fact that Australian legislation limits the conventional advertising techniques available to tobacco companies. This means, from the perspective of those companies, that the internet "holds much potential as a vehicle for both promoting smoking and advertising tobacco products"<sup>37</sup>. Therefore, in this limited area, YACSA is a strong proponent of increased regulation – not of the internet or young people's access to it, but to the ways in which tobacco companies are permitted to advertise online.

In advocating this position, YACSA is conscious of the *Tobacco Products Advertisements (Prohibition) Act 1989* (the *TAP Act*), which is the piece of legislation outlining how such products can currently be advertised, as well as the *Tobacco Advertising Prohibition (Film, Internet and Misleading Promotion) Amendment Bill 2004*, which was proposed to strengthen the *TAP Act's* capacity to deal with online advertising. The objectives of the 2004 amendment bill were as follows:

*"...to ensure that the intent and operation of the TAP Act maintains pace with technological advances in advertising and remains current and effective by adding Internet advertising to the means of tobacco advertising which are prohibited, to prohibit the offering for sale of tobacco products on the Internet, and to prohibit the use of certain words in advertising which are misleading, deceptive and are not conducive to public health"<sup>38</sup>.*

In 2005, the Department of Health concluded that the *TAP Act* was working well to protect the Australian public from advertising messages, and no changes to the *TAP Act* were made<sup>39</sup>. YACSA holds that the objectives outlined above are more pressing than ever given the pace with which advertising technology is advancing. We therefore strongly argue for the *Tap Act* to be amended accordingly. In this way, young

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<sup>36</sup> King, E, Taylor, J & Carroll, T, 2005, *Consumer Perceptions of Alcohol Advertising and the Revised Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code*, Research and Marketing Group, Department of Health and Ageing, Sydney. Viewed online 6 April 2011 at [http://www.alcohol.gov.au/internet/alcohol/publishing.nsf/Content/consum-percept/\\$FILE/consum-percept.pdf](http://www.alcohol.gov.au/internet/alcohol/publishing.nsf/Content/consum-percept/$FILE/consum-percept.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> Freeman, B & Chapman, S, 2007, *Is "YouTube" telling or selling you something? Tobacco content on the YouTube video-sharing website*, 'Tobacco Control', vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 207-210. Viewed online 6 April 2011 at <http://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/16/3/207.full>

<sup>38</sup> *Federal legislation*, 2011, 'Tobacco in Australia – Facts & Issues – A comprehensive online resource', The Cancer Council. Viewed online 6 April 2011 at <http://www.tobaccoinaustralia.org.au/chapter-11-advertising/11-3-federal-legislation>

<sup>39</sup> Ibid



people's exposure to "prolific and accessible"<sup>40</sup> smoking imagery will be reduced, without the associated curtailment of their internet use.

### **Identity Theft & Breaches of Privacy**

In addressing the linked issues of identity theft and young people's privacy online, YACSA supports the position of our national peak body, the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC), namely that online privacy protection policy in relation to young people needs to be co-developed with young people, evidence-based, and focus on empowering individual users through education<sup>41</sup>.

AYAC, like YACSA, holds that technology should be seen as an enabler of positive behavior and help-seeking for young people, and that a multi-faceted educative approach is more effective in helping young people manage their privacy online than restricting young people's access to and use of technology. In fact, children and young people are already adept at recognising and avoiding privacy pitfalls online, with more than 92% of young people viewing their online privacy as "very important"<sup>42</sup>, a figure reinforced by information from the Office of the Privacy Commissioner showing the number of young Australians concerned about internet privacy has quadrupled in the past two years<sup>43</sup>.

As with other aspects of the cyber-safety debate, YACSA argues that identity theft is a crime regardless of how it is carried out, a position echoed by the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), which states that although the methods used in identity crime have changed, traditional measures used to protect identity from this type of crime remain important<sup>44</sup>. The AIC goes on to suggest that one should "never give out personal information to a person you don't know or trust, or if you are unsure the person is who they claim to be. This includes requests for information via emails, letters, SMS, phone calls, letters or any other means"<sup>45</sup>.

Accordingly, education programs for parents and caregivers regarding privacy issues online should focus on further empowering young people<sup>46</sup>, and giving parents and caregivers the skills to work with children and young people in protecting their privacy online. This is especially important given that young people's knowledge and understanding of online technology and engagement can far exceed that of other generations<sup>47</sup>, a point also established elsewhere in this submission.

Having said this, it is also true that websites frequented by children and young people often have privacy policies that are wordy and difficult to understand. YACSA would strongly support AYAC's proposal that the government implement strategies to promote the use of youth-friendly, plain language privacy

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<sup>40</sup> Freeman & Chapman, 2007

<sup>41</sup> AYAC, 2011, *Submission in response to 'the adequacy of protections for the privacy of Australians online'*, Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, Surry Hills, NSW.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 6

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 6

<sup>44</sup> AIC, 2007, *Protecting personal identity*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra. Viewed online 11 April 2011 at <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/crm/41-60/crm056.aspx>

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p. 7

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 7





policies for online services, so young people can make an informed decision about disclosing their personal information<sup>48</sup>.

## Supporting Schools

The Joint Select Committee's Terms of Reference places particular emphasis on investigating ways to support schools to change their culture to reduce the incidence and harmful effects of cyber-bullying, including by increasing awareness of cyber-safety good practice, encouraging schools to work with the broader school community, especially parents and caregivers, to develop consistent, whole school approaches, and analysing best practice approaches to training and professional development... to enable school staff to effectively respond to cyber-bullying<sup>49</sup>.

In responding to this section of the Terms of Reference, YACSA would like to re-iterate our concern over the language used when considering issues of online safety. As covered elsewhere in this submission, the use of the prefix "cyber" suggests the bullying that can take place online is a separate problem that can be solved if only we had the right technology-based solutions. This is not the case – what is required is exactly the approach mentioned in the Terms of Reference, but with the removal of the aforementioned prefix.

Essentially, YACSA supports any and all programs and initiatives that work with whole-school communities, including parents and caregivers, to reduce the incidence and harmful effects of bullying, and that provide young people and school staff with the knowledge, skills and support to effectively respond to bullying. By all means, such programs and initiatives should include elements of internet safety, but only in the context of it being another tool that can facilitate bullying activities.

A list of current anti-bullying programs would be too extensive to include in this submission, as would an examination of the wide range of organisations that are working in the field of bullying prevention. Therefore, YACSA will limit our comment in this area to encouraging the government, schools, corporate bodies, and non-government organisations to continue funding and supporting measures that provide young people with the information they need to understand, resist and prevent bullying.

## An Online Ombudsman?

The Australian and New Zealand Ombudsman Association (ANZOA), the peak body for ombudsmen in Australian and New Zealand, defines two types of Ombudsman offices: Parliamentary ombudsmen, who take complaints from citizens and constituents about government agencies, and industry-based ombudsmen, who take complaints from customers of companies providing particular services such as telecommunications, banking, insurance, investments, energy, water and public transport<sup>50</sup>.

Clearly, the creation of an Online Ombudsman would fall within the second category. This would mean the ombudsman could not act unless a specific complaint was made by an individual against a specific

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 6

<sup>49</sup> *op cit*, Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety Terms of Reference, 2010

<sup>50</sup> ANZOA, 2010, *Essential Criteria for Describing a Body as an Ombudsman*, Australian and New Zealand Ombudsman Association. Viewed online 4 April 2011 at

[http://www.ombudsman.gov.au/docs/anza/anza\\_essential\\_criteria\\_for\\_describing\\_a\\_body\\_as\\_an\\_ombudsman.pdf](http://www.ombudsman.gov.au/docs/anza/anza_essential_criteria_for_describing_a_body_as_an_ombudsman.pdf)



company. The ombudsman would then make the decision whether or not to investigate, then carry out an investigation, then make recommendations as to what course of action the company should take to rectify the situation.

In other words, the problem being investigated would likely remain an ongoing problem for the length of the investigation. While this is not such a problem in the case of, for example, a dispute over a telephone bill investigated by the telecommunications ombudsman, it would be much more relevant in the case of bullying or harassment via the internet. In such a case, the harm caused by the bullying or harassment taking place would be in no way alleviated or lessened by the fact that the ombudsman was investigating the complaint.

Furthermore, there would not even be a guarantee that the ombudsman's eventual recommendations would have any impact. Often, any bullying and harassment that takes place online is transmitted via social networking sites such as Facebook or MySpace. These are companies owned and operated outside of Australia, and as such an ombudsman would have no formal power to compel them to comply with any recommendations, such as to remove offensive or bullying content from their sites.

Thus, the proposed Online Ombudsman would not protect an individual young person who complains of online harassment or bullying, nor would they necessarily have any impact on the operations of the companies and websites involved. An Online Ombudsman would simply add another layer of bureaucracy, when cyber-safety issues are already being considered and addressed by schools, police, and other government and non-government bodies.

Instead, YACSA would argue that any role and responsibility for cyber-safety issues undertaken by an ombudsman, could be equally well-served by the establishment of a national Guardian for Children and Young People. Such a position would be able to identify and pursue many issues relevant to the lives of children and young people, including cyber-safety, and in so doing arguably bring greater resources and knowledge to bear on those issues.