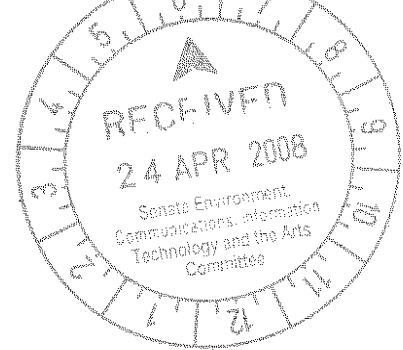


Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communication
and the Arts
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600



Dear Secretary,

**Re: Submission to the "Inquiry into the Sexualisation of Children
in the Contemporary Media Environment"**

We appreciate, and strongly support, your committee in undertaking this inquiry. Governmental acknowledgment/"notice" of this issue is long overdue. It is hoped that recommendations of substance and practicality will be the result, and that governmental and non-governmental agencies and institutions, alike, will be able (and willing) to proceed, in a timely manner, with their implementation.

We apologise for presenting this to you past the deadline, and hope that it is still able to be accepted. Family circumstances prevented us from being able to prepare this response more quickly.

Summary

- **PREFACE.** The context of sexualisation of children comes from: direct media targeting; from unintentional exposure to adult media "messages"; from sexualised peer and adult behaviours.
- **TERMS OF REFERENCE A (TA).** "Sources" of premature sexualisation of children in the media come in many formats (radio, TV, magazines, billboards, internet, etc), also highly relevant to the impact these formats have are their timing; locale and size and content.
- **TA. "Beneficiaries"** of sexualisation are (1) corporate, for-profit organisations/ institutions (including fund-raising "arms" of sporting groups) and (2) ideologies associated with the arts-music-dancing; education and "alternative" and New Age philosophies.
- **TERMS OF REFERENCE B (TB).** "Evidence" of short and long-term effects of sexualisation can be found via both the resources listed: publications (reports, discussion papers, articles, research, and a public letter); and additional named organisations.
- **TB. "Effects"** gleaned from these resources, and others, are discussed: **body image problems; parent-child relationships; holistic human development; sexual abuse:abused and abuser; more sexual "harms" and consequences; alcohol/drug abuse; sexuality as power.**

- **TERMS OF REFERENCE C (TC).** Consideration is made of an example of the current effectiveness of media regulation: the **operations of the Advertising Standards Bureau (ASB)**
- **TC.** “Lessons” are explored deriving from the consideration of the example of the ASB: **lack of transparency; appeal accessibility; self-regulation; ads: multiple versions?; ramifications of multiple versions of ads;”prevailing community standards”; “health and safety”.**
- **TC.** “Strategies”, based on **regulation**, are proposed/considered in order to prevent/reduce child sexualisation: **regulation: self-regulation or community/government based?; regulation: centralised or decentralised?; regulation: a Federal Children’s Commissioner?; regulation: centralising aspects of the complaints process?**
- **TC.** “Strategies”, based on **education**, are proposed/considered: **role for community education: “health and safety”; role for community/formal education: holistic development; role for community/formal education: bullying; role for formal education: corporate “partnerships”?**
- **CONCLUSION.** Recommendation is made that the **major focus be on media regulation.** Serious consideration needs to be made of establishing a **centralised media regulatory body** (“overlying”, but not extinguishing individual media sectors); and /or a **centralised complaints processing “agency”**; and a **discreet “agency” or secretariat whose director and staff are charged with advocating and acting on behalf of children’s and young people’s “best interests”** in regards to media impacts/influences on them. It is also suggested that the organisation **Young Media Australia** has experience and expertise which could be a significant resource in the formulation of this new agency/secretariat.
- **CONCLUSION.** Recommendations are also made in regard to **formal and community-based education** with the aim of **(1)** “changing (media/ “beneficiary”) hearts”, ie. helping them to understand, especially, “health and safety” issues and **(2)** helping to ameliorate/counteract, in some measure, the impacts of media, and other sexualised “messages” being received by, and so negatively influencing, children’s lives and development.

Preface: The context of media influences affecting the (premature) sexualisation of children

Sexualisation - “the act of giving someone or something a sexual character” - is facilitated by the intentional targeting of children by the media. However, it is propagated, perhaps even more powerfully, by children’s unintentional exposure to adult sexual content, and by subsequent exposure to both peer group and adult attitudes and behaviour which have also been formed by that content. Ideally, all these contexts/influences, will be able to be considered by this inquiry.

For the purpose of being as concise as possible, the following comments will not always make distinctions between these different contexts.

Terms of Reference - A. "...Sources and beneficiaries of premature sexualisation of children in the media"

(1) Commercial, for-profit organisations/institutions (including fund-raising "arms" of a wide variety of sporting groups)

"Sources". Media influence can be exerted in a number of ways including by the format chosen by which to relay a "message"/advertisement; by the timing and/or locale or size of the presentation of that message; by the nature of the content itself (objects, ideas, events, etc.) which the media are representing. All these categories of "sources" of media influence are applicable to the promotion of premature sexualisation in children by this sector of our society. They include:

- formats of "messages"/advertising such as via the TV, radio, newspapers, magazines (children and adult), outdoor and "indoor" billboards/moving displays, mobile phones, the internet
- timing of messages, as during normally child accessible hours, or at times when children would likely be present due to a special event (sporting, public celebration/commemoration, etc.);
- locale and/or size of messages relative to proximity/impact on children's eyes, such as at train/tram/bus stops; vicinity of schools/along school routes and public highways; in convenience stores, groceries, newsagents, boutiques, hairdressers, gyms, at children's parties, sporting events, shopping centres, outdoor malls and public spaces;
- content, such as sexualised clothing and sportswear, child "fashion"/child fashion models, toys/games, cartoons, "reality" and other kinds of programs/performances/ "contests" which depict/promote sexualisation, etc.

"Beneficiaries": Child Sexualisation = Profit. It is likely that from this sector of our society the greatest number of perceived "beneficiaries" of the premature sexualisation of children are found. It, ostensibly at least, seems to have been deemed that selling sexualisation to children (and their parents) will provide greater commercial benefits/ profits than selling age-appropriate products.

We, however, believe that this premise could/should be challenged, by either the commercial entities themselves, or by independent investigation. An example which comes to mind is the discovery, by US filmmakers in recent years, that more profits can be made, if targeting a children's audience, by producing "family-friendly" movies, that is, ones which are non-sexualised, with themes appropriate to their interests and stage of development.

In the area of children's clothing, the designers of "Barbie" labelled clothing may already be aware of this kind of appeal, appearing to offer of a number of lines of more age appropriate wear. They appear to recognise also that, similarly to organic food, people are prepared to pay extra for the quality goods they are seeking for their children. (If this is a consistent pattern in their clothingwear, it is ironic given that "Barbie" dolls themselves are so highly sexualised, as well as being icons of popular consumption.)

In relationship to the effectiveness of using sex as an advertising tool (for whatever product), a British brand consultancy, Headlight-Vision, found that :

"...youths were bombarded by sexually explicit advertising to the point where the ads no longer moved them." ("Sex fails to sell to young", The Herald Sun, 01/09/04)

Another survey about television programming conducted by Newspoll, found that the ABC (broadcaster of the "Rage" music video programs) had experienced falling support for its programming among young viewers. In the 14-17 yr age group, the belief that ABC programs were "very good" fell from 21% to 8% over a 2 year period. The reasons for this had then been identified. ("It's not our ABC, say switched-off young viewers", The Age, 05/09/04)

(2) Ideologies associated with the arts-music-dancing; education; and "alternative" and New Age philosophies

"Sources". Sources of media influence by this sector can be the same as with the commercial sector, but may also include:

- formats such as textbooks, computer games, children's internet sites (as "Club Penguin"), personal communications;
- content such as **art exhibitions/programs** (a recent Melbourne exhibition displayed depictions of female genitalia, a 2006 TV arts/history program was found by the ACMA to have breached the relevant code in relationship to timeslot and sex and nudity) **music lyrics, music video clips, dance performances/lessons/ clothing/make-up, sex education classes** (notorious for disseminating information which provides affirmation/acceptance of sexualised behaviours and exposes many children to otherwise unknown adult information), **bullying** over appearances or behaviour ("too fat", "too overdeveloped", "too girly"), **children's fantasy programs, child marriages/pregnancies**

"Beneficiaries": Child Sexualisation = Child and Adult "Freedom". This sector, while generally non-commercial/non-profit in goals and "missions", is probably the more influential. It not only provides the underlying rationale, but also a level of "passion" and momentum, to the operations/goals of the commercial sector in this area, as well as promulgating its own agenda.

The "beneficiaries" from this sector are the various ideologies being promoted, the relevant common themes of which could be said to be:

- *"No restrictions are to be placed on our rights and freedoms, including the right to free expression"*
- *"Children are just small adults and therefore have the right to access (i.e., not be "quarantined" from) adult behaviours and freedoms."*

The ramifications of these influences are not only the overt sexual behaviours we are quite often surprised by seeing in children these days, but also other consequences which impact on/unfold in their lives with much more destructive results.

Terms of Reference - B. "...Evidence on the short- and long-term effects of viewing or buying sexualising and objectifying images and products and their effects on cognitive functioning, physical and mental health, sexuality, attitudes and beliefs"

(1) "Evidence". Evidence can be found for both short and long-term effects of sexualisation via resources such as the ones listed below:

Publications

American Psychological Association (www.apa.org), Washington, D.C. USA
“Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualisation of Girls” (2007)

The Australia Institute (www.tai.org.au), Innovations Bldg, Eggleston Rd, ANU ACT
 Discussion Paper, No. 90 (October 2006): **“Corporate Paedophilia:
 Sexualisation of Children in Australia”** by Emma Rush and Andrea
 La Nauze

Discussion Paper, No. 93 (December 2006- revised): **“Letting Children be
 Children: Stopping the Sexualisation of Children in Australia”** by
 Emma Rush and Andrea La Nauze

The Australian Psychological Society (www.psychology.org.au)
“Helping Girls Develop a Positive Self Image” (“a tip sheet for parents of
 girls of all ages”), 02/10/07

“Unleashed” (www.abc.net.au/unleashed)
“The Sexualisation of Children” (includes pictures of sexualising ads) by
 Julie Gale (of “Kids Free 2B Kids”), 03/03/08

Women’s Forum Australia (www.womensforumaustralia.org), Canberra, ACT 2601
“Faking It” (research paper in the form of a glossy magazine), author Selina
 Ewing, editor Melinda Tankard Reist, 2007

The Weekend Australian newspaper
“Weekend Australian Magazine”, Phillip Adams column of 18-19/11/06
 (subject: corporate paedophilia)

The Australian Newspaper
“Letter to the Editor” (subject: support for the Australia Institute’s
 discussion paper, “Corporate Paedophilia” and for Phillip Adams’ above
 mentioned column) Signed by 12 professionals who work in the fields of
 child health, welfare or media: **Dr. Neil Wigg; Dr. Joe Tucci; Prof. Dorothy
 Scott; Jane Roberts; Rita Princi; Prof. Frank Oberklaid; Dr. Louise
 Newman; Bernadette McMenamin; Dr. Patricia Edgar; Emeritus Prof.
 Freda Briggs; Steve Biddulph; Hon Terry Aulich; 06/12/06**

Additional Organisations

Australian Family Association (www.family.org.au)

Australian Fashion Council (2007 forum on underweight fashion models)

Concerned Women for America (www.cwfa.org)

Kids Free 2B Kids (www.kf2bk.com)

Kids Help Line (statistics) (www.kidshelp.com.au)

Young Media Australia (www.youngmedia.org.au)

(2) “Effects” of sexualisation. Some of the harmful effects of premature child sexualisation which have been highlighted by the above listed resources, as well as others, are as follows:

- **“Body image” problems** . One of the most obvious effects of the sexualisation of children is their increasing obsession with body image and appearance (a phenomenon also mirrored in adults, where the sexual value of being “desired” has superseded the more proportionate wish to be merely “admired” by peers.)

It is understood, from a news program this past week (Ch. 7), that the Victorian Government is in the process of establishing a “body image code” for advertisers, an apparent acknowledgment of new surveys which have found that body image is the “number one concern of young Australians”.

Problems generated by body image concerns lead on, in turn, to **eating disorders**, **lack of self-confidence** and even **self-loathing** in children, both girls and boys, in increasing numbers, and at younger and younger ages. At the extreme, and only too common now, are instances of **self-harm**, **the life-threatening illnesses of anorexia and bulimia**, **depression** and **suicide**.

In 2006, a newspaper article (“Stick thin models to move over”, The Age, 20/10/06) reported, in regards to **anorexia and bulimia**, that there had been “*a three-fold rise in hospital admissions for children as young as 10 in Melbourne in the past two years.*” It was also reported that the fashion industry, magazine and newspaper editors had joined together to “*tackle the trend of rake-thin models being portrayed as the perfect shape.*”

Within the last week, France, the ostensible “capital of fashion”, has begun the process of enacting legislation which will make it “*illegal to incite extreme thinness*” and which, if passed, fashion industry experts claim will be “*the strongest of its kind anywhere [and]... could send shock waves through the industry worldwide.*” (“French law to block anorexia websites”, TheAge, 17/04/08)

- **Parent-Child Relationships.** Further, new battles are now being provoked between parents and children over consumption and consumer products – clothing, food, activities – which are believed, by either parent or child, to address the pressures being felt over body image/appearance concerns.

Media commentator, Phillip Adams has commented powerfully on this problem for families:

“The age of innocence? Long gone. And the corporate pedophiles move in on our kids so that they’ll wear, eat, drink and play their mass-marketed products. And if the parents don’t comply with the child’s implanted desires...then fracture lines can appear within the family. Parents who resist or who simply cannot afford to comply with these hammered, hypnotic demands are, all too often, seen as failing their children [our emphasis].”

- **Holistic Human Development.** Perhaps the greatest harm of all that comes from this focus on the “exterior” child, is that it very prematurely closes childrens’ worlds – both boys and girls – to the interests, personal development and relationships which are beyond the very narrow cultural norms currently being propagated.

It can, further, damage the relationship between boys and girls themselves, making physical attractiveness/appearance a most valued trait (along with the “availability” of the “commodity” which appears to be being offered.). Mutual hostility can then be generated by the insecurities and unfulfilled expectations subsequently experienced. This can lead to fewer healthy interactions and friendships, and potentially, to even more violence (rather than “love”) between the sexes. (Boys/men, in particular, need to be honest, and outspoken, about the real feelings they experience in regards to sexualisation/sexualised images, particularly of girls/women.)

Our society has, until relatively recently, overwhelmingly valued/rewarded “substance” over “form” in people. Social and cultural “flourishing” and even

survival, have depended on it! How much lost human potential may we now be facing?

- **Sexual Abuse: Abused and Abuser.** Increased sexual abuse is also the result of premature sexualisation. It is incredibly ironic (not to mention tragic) that our society, which now so widely recognises the harms of this abuse, and speaks out so loudly against it, now provides, simultaneously, the environment/"context" for its continuation, and even increase. It not only encourages children to portray themselves as sexual beings, but, even more destructively, to simultaneously violate their own deeper identity, and natural sexual latency, by encouraging them to also think of themselves in that way.

The consequences of this for children and society are two-fold:

Firstly, children's own self-portrayal and behaviours are becoming more, rather than less, affirming to sexual offenders. Such offenders (who are increasingly both men and women) are now more aware of, and feel disgust at, their own actions which are presently so widely recognised/understood to be unacceptable, and with lifelong consequences for victims. Paradoxically, many offenders themselves have also had disturbed childhoods, including sexual and/or psychological abuse.

Perhaps as a result of this, many offenders are also drawn to children emotionally, and seek to spend time with them. This can, in today's environment, lead even more easily to unintended consequences. One self-confessed offender describes an otherwise innocent encounter he had with children in this way:

"The kids pulled down their shorts. They weren't wearing underpants – it was at their own initiative. I didn't discourage them and my acceptance of their behaviour encouraged them." ("Lust and self-loathing" by Natalie O'Brien, The Weekend Australian, 24-25 April 2004)

Secondly, as previously alluded to, children who have been abused/sexualised often become sexual offenders themselves. Child protection consultant, Karen Flanagan, in an article published in the British "Journal of Sexual Aggression" (2004) reported that "*early intervention in **children's sexual behaviour** [our emphasis] is the most effective way to stop them becoming pedophiles...*" (ibid.) The sexual offender quoted above said that he "*was 11 when he realised that something was wrong with him.*"

It appears that the reason why early, healthy, experiences are so formative for children is that, by the time they are teenagers, they go through a second wave of rapid brain development similar to that experienced when they were toddlers. Jay Giedd, chief of brain development at the National Institute of Mental Health in the United States further explains this development thus:

*"But this time, the brain isn't producing as many new connections as it is getting rid of unused ones... **The connections that are used will flourish. The ones that aren't used will wither and die.** [o.e.] *The pruning takes place through modelling [the behaviour of others]... and trying it out.*" ("Why teens need you at home", by Lynne C. Cook and Michelle Hamer, The Age, 07/01/05)*

- **More sexual "harms" and consequences.** Since children's premature sexualisation inherently encourages sexual behaviour then, as with adults, this exposes them directly to **sexually acquired disease** and **unwanted pregnancy**, the negative consequences of which are well-known.

However, children are also at greater risk of other harms as well, such as that due to their as yet underdeveloped bodies - particularly, reproductive systems - and gender identities. A Deakin University lecturer found that the “labels” most feared by Australian schoolchildren were, for girls; “*slut, frigid, or dyke*” and for boys; “*girl, geek or gay*”. It seems remarkable that all but one of these names had to do with a perceived, and feared, sexual identity. (“Frigid, gay, geek: giving a label to teen angst”, *The Age*, 22/07/05)

- **Alcohol/Drug Abuse.** While binge drinking/drug abuse is presently a relatively rare occurrence in children's lives, in the current context of external pressures toward sexualisation, it provides a highly probable flow-on activity as children grow toward their teen years.

If the message being given is that to “be cool” is to “be sexual”, then drinking and/or taking drugs past one’s self control/natural inhibitions, facilitates this. (Even adults do this, and for the same reasons, and, this is already been seen by many young people.) The numerous dangers to mental and physical health inherent in the excessive use of alcohol and drugs, especially in the young, are also widely known and acknowledged.

- **Sexuality as Power.** No longer portrayed as a most precious “gift of self” in a loving, exclusive, mature and committed relationship, sexuality is now widely represented to children (or seen by them) as a way: to “be exciting”; to capture attention; to be “desired”/win favouritism (often including material benefits); to provide means to another end (winning something; support for educational purposes; benefits for another family member) etc.

Two examples of children using sex in this way have been reports that:

- children are offering sex for alcohol: “*Under-age drinkers [as young as 11] have offered sex for booze to try to get adults to buy them alcohol*” (“Sex for booze shock”, *The Herald Sun*, 28/08/06)
- children are initiating/participating in pornography on the internet: “*There are now emerging regularly in Melbourne, cases of girls as young as 11 posting sexually inappropriate photographs of themselves on websites under porn-cliché headings such as ‘hot groovy chick’*” (“Kids in porn net” by Neil Mitchell, *The Herald Sun*, 08/02/07)

If children are taught to think (unnaturally) of themselves as sexual objects, and as “commodities” which can be used/abused for benefits, and where benefits for certain behaviours then become a part of a child’s normal expectations of “reward” and/or how “success” is achieved in life, then why would this “conditioning” change as they enter into adulthood? This, then, has ramifications for the whole of their lives: for their future personal relationships, self-esteem and identity, and for their mental/physical health and safety. Beyond that, it has important ramifications for integrity and cohesion in society, a society in which all must be able to live and thrive.

Terms of Reference - C. “...Strategies to prevent/and or reduce the sexualisation of children in the media and the effectiveness of different approaches in ameliorating its effects, including the role of school-based sexuality and reproductive health education and change in media advertising regulation such as the Commercial Industry code of Practice and the Commercial Radio Codes of Practice.

(1) Consideration of the Effectiveness of Current Media Regulation: Example: the Advertising Standards Bureau (ASB)

(a) Features of the ASB:

- administers the Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA) codes (ethics, food and beverage, advertising and marketing communications to children, FCAI motor vehicle code);
- national, self-regulating, self-funding (via a voluntary levy system);
- advertisements are not screened before public release;
- action is not taken until there are complaints from the public;
- the complaints process does not require a response from the advertiser in question;
- if a complaint is upheld, in the absence of an advertiser response, it appears that the only current sanction is that *"the Board may [o.e.] forward its case report to appropriate government agencies and media proprietors."*

(b) Examples of complaint determination/outcomes

- **"10 most complained about advertisements in 2007":** The number of complaints received was 875+ (All numbers, for some reason, were given as an approximation, "+"). Of these, only the complaints of 165+ people were upheld, representing only 3 of the 10 advertisements.

Only one of these 3 gave as a ground of complaint, "portrayal of sex/sexuality/nudity" and this was for a toddler in a singlet and nappy! However, the common ground for complaint against all 3 of these ads which were required to be modified or withdrawn, was **"health and safety"**

On the other hand, all of the top three ads which were ignored by the ASB (but receiving 540+ complaints between them!), had "portrayal of sex/sexuality/nudity" as one of their grounds for complaint. These were the Nando's pole-dancing ad, the "Want longer lasting sex?" billboard and the Frucor-V animated ad which portrayed an amorous young and old couple

- **Jan-March 2008:** A total of 101 complaints listed as "dismissed", a total of 10 listed as "modified/discontinued". (It appears that these website numbers may merely reflect the number of particular ads subject to complaint, rather than the actual number of individual complaints received.)
- **Observations about a random sample of dismissed cases, March 2008:** The actual number of complaints against each ad was not clearly given; only a sample of complainants remarks were made public; the advertiser's response was often internally inconsistent (as an example, recognising/applauding as sexual one double entendre, dismissing complaints about another which was even more objectionable); and the version of the ad described by the complainant/s can be substantially different than that described/claimed by the advertiser to have been the one presented.

(c) Recent positive actions by the ASB and advertisers:

- **Appeal process.** The ASB has established an appeal process which began this month. It has appointed an "independent reviewer" as a part of its

“commitment to international best practice in advertising and self-regulation”. It is notable, however, that not every judgement will be accepted for review, and that “The cost of lodging a request for review is \$500 for complainants, \$1000 for complainants from Incorporated Associations and \$2000 for advertisers” (“Independent Reviewer Appointed”, AdStandards News, 03/08)

- **Update of code.** The “AANA Advertising to Children Code” is now known as the “AANA Code for Advertising and Marketing Communications to Children” and has a new section on “Sexualisation”, section 2.4
- (d) Comments/Lessons from the ASB:**
- **Lack of transparency.** As noted above, features of the complaints process lack public transparency (numbers of actual complaints, full text of complaints). This impacts on the ASB’s accountability for their decisions.
 - **Appeal accessibility.** While offering an appeal process is certainly desirable, it is being made very inaccessible, both by its “terms of reference” and, even more so, by its cost. Even without the above constraints, such an added layer of procedure often requires more time and effort than ordinary complainants can afford to provide.
 - **Self-regulation.** The success of self-regulation is always problematic, but is made even more so when funding depends on those being regulated and where there are few, if any, sanctions at hand for the regulator. A major weakness with the ASB is that it appears that the targeted advertiser has no requirement to respond at all, either to take part in the complaints process or to address negative rulings in his/her absence, and further, may not even be referred to an outside body for action.
 - **Ads: multiple versions?** As noted above, a number of case reports exhibited a great disjuncture between what the complainant (in good faith) saw/heard and what the advertiser claimed had been presented. In these instances, no notice appeared to be taken by the ASB of this phenomenon, rather the advertiser’s claims were the ones accepted. The possibility/existence of a different version of an ad was admitted by the advertiser who described different locales (on a bed, on a beach and in a bedroom) used for different versions of the ad.

An explicit acknowledgment of the existence of this modus operandi among advertisers was noted in a newspaper article describing the pop video with the dance track, “Call on Me”, said to be “one of the dirtiest of all times.” It reported that:

“It was so explicit producers have made 2 versions – a ‘clean’ one for children and a ‘late’ night one for older viewers”
 (“Anger at pops ‘dirtiest’ video”, The Herald Sun, 10/10/(07?))

- **Ramifications of multiple versions of ads.** Since it is possible that complainants are seeing versions of ads that are not the ones claimed by the advertisers then (1) the ASB, and other media regulatory bodies, are, understandably, making inaccurate determinations; (2) if advertisers are

directly to blame, then they should be called to account, and if they are indirectly to blame because of poor in-house or external distribution procedures, then they should also be required to make changes: (3) if media outlets are responsible for mix-ups, or other ways that provided ads can be compromised in relationship to children's accessibility, then they also must be made accountable; (4) if there are potentially other mechanisms, such as the ability to remotely or otherwise access/alter ads when in "dissemination" mode, then these, too, need to be identified and eliminated as much as possible. (However, as more and more modes of communication become digitised in the next few years, this may also become more difficult to do.)

- **"Prevailing community standards"** – Surely this standard is being flouted when viewers make 540+ complaints about 3 advertisements (one of them alone with 300+ complaints), all of which are then dismissed! This response exhibits a massive effort and level of concern on the part of ordinary members of the community. The ASB, as currently operating, (and perhaps not unlike other media regulatory bodies) appears to be either unable, or unwilling, to respond to the requirements of its own code/s in this matter.
- **"Health and safety"**. The ASB appears to easily recognise the "health and safety" issues in some advertisements, but not in others. "Sexualisation" must also be made to be seen as, perhaps, predominantly a "health and safety" issue (as vs. an exclusively sex/nudity issue). The new section on "sexualisation" in their children's code (Section 2.4) may help to facilitate this.
- **ASB/AANA acknowledgement of need for improvement.** A late but welcome degree of recognition has been made of community concerns about children's sexualisation and their previous indifference to them.

(2) A Consideration of "Strategies" to Prevent/Reduce Child Sexualisation

As has been noted, strategies will need to be multi-faceted in order to eliminate/ameliorate child sexualisation which can derive from either the direct targeting of children, or from the general environment where children interact with peers and adults whose behaviours/viewpoints may also be sexualised.

- **Regulation: self-regulation or community/government based?** It is arguable that the **formulation of codes of conduct** need to be "owned" by the industries/sectors themselves who, also, have the best knowledge about their arena of operations. However, it would seem that these codes should also cover minimum requirements of social benefit and effectiveness. The community/government should provide encouragement/incentives for industries to understand and take seriously the potential impacts of their behaviours on society, and the standards required to address these. Perhaps external consultations and/or research including focus group studies should become minimally expected input into the design codes of conduct. Further, procedural issues such as transparency, due process (including mechanisms for appeal and requirements of cooperation from industry group members), and effective sanctions should also be required features. Numbers of complaints should also be considered a strong indicator of "prevailing community standards" and not be able to be dismissed without direct

response/acknowledgement. Perhaps a “threshold” should be established, beyond which an offending message/ad must automatically be modified or withdrawn.

However, the actual **administration and funding of a code of conduct** by the industry to which it is applied, invites clear conflicts of interest. It is, therefore, substantially in the interest of the community to address this via the establishment of an independent body/bodies, but which, however, might then be mutually funded by both government and industry. (This could also address any prohibitive costs that might otherwise arise, and then devolve to those trying to access such bodies.)

- Regulation: centralised or decentralised? It is arguable, generally speaking, that decentralisation offers the benefits of remaining closer to the issue “on the ground”, thereby, also, being able to develop highly relevant and specialised expertise. However, this can also mean, in some cases, that a viewpoint or operational mode develops which cannot see the “forest” beyond the “trees”, and/or which simply lacks the capacity to address issues at the “forest” level.

In the case of **media-based industries**, it has probably arrived at this latter scenario, due to the relentless advance of innovations in communications technologies. If media is still expected to operate in the service of community, rather than in the service of “self”, it would seem, then, that the need for an all-encompassing framework has arrived. A single regulatory structure could administer in a more effective way, (perhaps even by mutually agreed consolidations), the current range of media codes of ethics and conduct (advertising, film, computer games, music, press, internet, etc.), particularly if it also acts to retain the specialised knowledge from each sector (perhaps locating it in individual secretariats). It would then also be equipped to address the increasing number of overlapping issues being thrown up by new technologies and scenarios.

If media regulation is centralised, then the “**best interests of children**” can more easily and effectively be addressed, as roles, responsibilities and accountability should/would be made much clearer. Perhaps another discrete secretariat could be created, with the secretary/director/commissioner being given specific responsibilities for “**media, children and young people**”

An organisation which would be an excellent resource, either for consultation or “secondment”, is **Young Media Australia**, the Australian Council on Children and the Media, based in Glenelg, South Australia. It has 50 years of experience in advocating for children’s best interest in the media and has, over the years, been influential both nationally and internationally. It has been the source of such highly respected experts in this field as CEO Barbara Biggins, OAM and Dr. Patricia Edgar, AM, author and also founding director of the Children’s TV Foundation. YMA regularly produces research reports, makes submissions (including, undoubtedly to this inquiry), and has been publishing a monthly news review, “Small Screen”.

- Regulation: a Federal Children’s Commissioner? We believe that this proposal is unnecessarily broad in scope and because of that, fraught with problems and unforeseen consequences. A significant underpinning document/authority of this office would likely be the “UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)” which, during many recent years, has been used to

challenge the authority of parents over what has been determined, by use that document, to be the “rights of the child”. This includes such things as children’s rights to privacy over their parents’ needs, and responsibilities, to know about, understand and protect them. (And in the case of children’s premature sexualisation, such “rights” may actually be diametrically opposed to the aim of eliminating/ameliorating this impact in their lives.)

- **Regulation: centralising aspects of the complaints process?** Irrespective of any other centralisation, it would seem, at least theoretically, that providing a central screening “agency” for complaints, would be a very practical and desirable way to facilitate people’s access to individual media complaint/feedback processes. It currently is very difficult for ordinary people to know, and to find out, which regulatory body to access, and then, how next to proceed with that access. This facilitation might include universalising the complaint process/es across all media bodies, as well as standardising rules regarding mandated response times, etc.

However, such an “agency”, and the activities it oversees and undertakes, must itself be made highly accountable and transparent, due to being entrusted with such a pivotal, “gate-keeping”, role. Ideally it should be independent of government, even while government ensures it has adequate funding. An annual report and audit could provide needed oversight. Monthly/bimonthly reports could also be required, and these could automatically be made available to parliamentarians, and by request, to the public. These could largely be a collection of statistics, but could also concisely draw attention to the current media issues being encountered during the given time frame.

- **Role for community education: “health and safety”.** “Sexualisation” needs to be widely recognised as a major health and safety issue (in all its aspects) just as, in recent times **smoking** and **junk foods** have been portrayed. Even more relevant are recent public campaigns in the area of sexuality, such as those designed to prevent the spread of **HIV-AIDS**, and the human papilloma (**HPV**) virus associated with cervical cancer. “Sexualisation”, however, is not only a physical risk to children but is also a mental and developmental danger (as has already been noted). Thus, health and safety risks are so acute as to not only threaten individual children, but also the very fabric and future of our society. Therefore, as with other public health issues (such as those above), these risks need to be widely known, causes understood and preventative actions be undertaken.

-**Role for community/formal education: holistic development.** Children need to be encouraged to engage in, and call upon, all aspects of their personalities and talents. This can be done through a **wide range of activities**. These activities might include various **sports**. However, in recent times, even sports have been invaded by commercial/ideological interests such that, for example, clothing for netball teams have become a problem, even for mature women:

“Skimp, tight-fitting uniforms are keeping women from sports such as netball. A worrying drop in netball participation rates is partly to blame on women’s body image in relation to short netball skirts and all-in-one Lycra body suits, a report commissioned by Netball Australia has found” (“Skimpy dress code delivers a body blow to netball numbers”, The Age, 08/02/07)

There is also another approach. Since modelling of other's behaviours (peer and adult) plays such a pivotal role in children's development, the potential for positive results from this natural process can be "harnessed" (and the potential for negative outcomes be actively lessened). Firstly, **role models** (male and female) which exemplify the accomplishments, talents and attributes of the human person, and ways in which these can be pursued in life, can be found and commended to children. Secondly, to lessen negative outcomes, **adult sexualisation itself** needs to be addressed, naturally "filtering down" to children as it does, via these same modelling behaviours. But, additionally, it also has the potential to damage adults themselves to such an extent that it, directly or indirectly, affects their capacity to properly care/provide for children's security needs and other broader "interests".

Parents themselves also need to be kept current/educated on issues affecting their children, and what is deemed to be current "best practice" on ways to address these. They also might be informed about kinds of action which can be taken on both a community as well as personal level.

We strongly believe that **sex education in schools (as vs. in the home) is neither the nor an answer** to the problem of the premature "sexualisation" of children. Rather, it can **contribute to "sexualisation"**, as many parents around the world have found, to their horror. It not only provides acceptance/affirmation of existing sexualisation, it also goes further, providing otherwise unknown (and unsought) adult information about sex, sometimes in most shocking and horrendous ways (as in being required to make clay depictions of genitalia, or being shown how to fit condoms on bananas.)

If providing information for "**informed consent**" is the primary aim, then such a premise is also a false one. Firstly, who controls the type, method of dissemination, completeness/ appropriateness, etc. of the information then to be provided by individual teachers, even if, ostensibly, there is a "vetted" curriculum being followed? Secondly, what capacities for judgement can children be truly expected to have? (They are not allowed to vote because of this.) Thirdly, it is an enormous falsehood to propose/maintain that children have "free choices" about their sexuality. They have been conditioned in certain ways (often through the experience of great fear), and find themselves in environments no elements of which are under their control, even if they, in theory, can say, in a given instance, "yes" or "no". Additionally, many prior experiences by children have taught them about the real potential for negative ramifications from a "wrong", "free choice".

Self-esteem, body image and safety issues can all be addressed by promoting a child's holistic development, together with the continuing education of parents.

- **Role for formal/community education: bullying.** A relatively recent development (in its current degree of expression/importance), which runs parallel and also augments/intensifies the process of "sexualisation", is bullying, "the use of strength or power to intimidate". This attacks children at the heart of their unique-self and gender identities. No longer "just" a face-to-face confrontation (which more and more can often include actual violence), bullying increasingly utilises media technologies to disseminate (up to 24 hrs a day) its destructive message/s. It has perhaps reached a point now where a broad range of answers are needed, including via both formal and community education, but also through government via oversight of children's safe use of telecommunications technologies.

A new educational approach in schools was trialled over 2 years in Sydney, and might be effective at community level. It involved 4000 students and treated bullying as a behavioural issue rather than a social one and was deemed to have a positive outcome:

“Rather than saying ‘stop bullying kids’, this intervention tells kids ‘this is how we expect you to behave’ which is based on treating each other with respect... That demystifies bullying, so everyone has a common understanding of what bullying is.” (“New approach to bullying” by Bridie Smith, The Age, 12/07/07)

- **Role for formal education: corporate “partnerships”?** The Deputy Prime Minister has very recently foreshadowed upcoming government action to encourage much greater corporate involvement in schools. Given the current problems (“sexualisation” being only one of the many) people and communities face which derive from corporate/commercial values (“profits first, people second”, or last!), then such an initiative seems unwise in the extreme, and particularly in regard to issues of “sexualisation”. An especially salient comment, by a child psychologist, in relation to corporate vs. parental/children’s interests in this area follows:

“Parents hate advertising, they see the corporate world increasingly as their blood enemy in their efforts to raise their children.” (“Steve Biddulph – on the sexualisation of children”, 12/04/07, found at www.kf2bk.com)

Conclusion

Due to the substantial harms being done by the premature sexualisation of children (as canvassed above), and the very foundational/powerful role that all sectors of the media play in this (as also previously delineated), we believe **the major focus of change should be directed at media itself.**

To date, self-regulation has failed. It is, further, unlikely that very recent modifications, those which, for instance, have been made by the ASB/AANA, will be enough to make any real difference. (It is heartening, however, to believe, hopefully, that there is now developing a sincere awareness of the negative impacts of media influence on society in regard to this issue).

The means for communities/government to ensure that change is adequate, is via increased regulation of the behaviours/operations of media. Due to the galloping advances in communications technologies, to be effective, this may require establishing a **centralised regulatory body**, and/or, at the least, a **centralised complaints process** providing easier access for complainants.

The establishment of an **independent regulatory body/agency/secretariat which has as its focus children’s “best interests”** in regard to the media, should also be seriously considered.

Education, especially on the “**health and safety**” impact of children’s sexualisation, also needs to be widely undertaken, particularly at community level. It is hoped, firstly, that commercial/ideological sectors/“interests” will respond positively once

ramifications for society are fully understood by them. Secondly, education will help, in some measure, to ameliorate the harms currently being experienced.

"It seems that we have reached the point when adults' right to media expression has come into direct conflict with children's right to grow up in a non-toxic environment". (UK educational expert Sue Palmer in "From Bambi to Bimbo" by Emma Rush, Melbourne's Child, April 2007)

We believe children's interests are the most important here. Children are the most vulnerable; we, adults are the ones responsible for their healthy growth into adulthood; and, they are the future of society, responsible themselves, in the end, for the continuing wellbeing of us all.

Thank you for your consideration of this (late) submission. (We are: a retired lawyer/academic, a science graduate/librarian)

Sincerely yours,



Pamela Stamm (Mrs.)

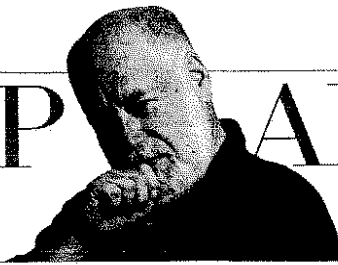
Attachments enclosed are copies of:

Phillip Adams column of 18-19/11/06 (The Weekend Australian Magazine)

Letter to the Editor in response to it and signed by 12 professionals in the area of children's health, welfare or media (The Australian, 06/12/06)

A brochure about **Young Media Australia** (and published by them)

PHILLIP ADAMS



“CORPORATE PEDOPHILIA”

Headlines hammered and talkback hummed. On television, PR flacks feigned outrage that their employers could possibly be branded child exploiters, let alone molesters. Retail giant David Jones was apoplectic, threatening legal action against the two academics who had dared to raise the issue of the sexualisation of children in advertising. It sounded like the Vatican at the beginning of the moral panic about priests and kids. All pieties and denial.

Corporate pedophilia. I coined the term in this column in 1995 to describe a phenomenon I'd been campaigning against for 30 years: the abuse of children. No, not by priests or scoutmasters, but by companies. The targeting of ever-younger children by marketers determined to turn kids into customers, into little economic units, a new form of child labour. Whereas children in Victorian England had been sent down coalmines and shoved up chimneys, we sent ours into the satanic mills of the shopping malls – to influence what their parents bought, or to buy junk in their own right.

In newspaper columns and conference speeches, I would try to alert parents and teachers to what was happening: **the ruthless abbreviation of childhood by companies after a fast buck.** A war on childhood waged by local and global corporations employing designers, researchers, child psychologists, TV producers, billion-dollar budgets and, yes, retailers of everything from hamburgers to increasingly technological and violent toys.

Yes, the sexualising of children was part of my argument – the way that top fashion houses were using barely pubescent models, the bombardment of the very young with sex and violence in an uncensored world. But I was, and remain, just as concerned with mass marketing aimed at kids who've barely learned to walk. Bras for eight-year-olds? Guns for their little brothers? Accelerated adulthood long before the teenage years – unprecedented pressure on

parents from kids who themselves are subject to peer pressure in the school playground, orchestrated by highly paid executives who recognise no age of consent. Pedophilia on a global scale that parents couldn't or wouldn't see.

With four daughters, I was never comfortable with *Young Talent Time*, in which little girls were encouraged to vamp and eroticise. It wasn't cute. It was as dumb and reckless as the parents of poor JonBenet putting her into moppet beauty pageants. In the light of her terrible fate, most parents would now see that clearly. But then? *Young Talent Time* rated its head off. And now? Fashion victimhood at five. Society accepts what should be unacceptable: the pressures of adolescence on kids who are still watching *The Wiggles*.

There are no more secrets with kids, and too few taboos. Children see the lot on the six o'clock news – the corpses piling up in Iraq, the gory details of

gangland killings, even paroled pedophiles being hunted down by local vigilantes. There's not much you won't learn by watching *Law & Order* with mum and dad or *Sex And The City* with big sister. And that's before you factor in the music videos. Blowjob? Anal sex? You're never too young to learn. And the dangerous brew of sex and violence boils over in the video games that the corporate pedophiles market – a business that now out-grosses Hollywood.

The report that David Jones found so insulting (which targets a range of retailers and labels) couldn't be more moderate. Written by Emma Rush and Andrea La Nauze and published by The Australia Institute, it tells an obvious truth: that there is a continuum between sexualising little kids in marketing and the full-blown pedophilia that infects the internet. We are outraged by child labour in Third World countries, by child soldiers in Africa, by child prostitution for Western pedophiles in Asia. Yet we don't see what's happening

all around us, because it has become utterly familiar. Normal, unremarkable, acceptable.

In the past the sexualising of kids came about indirectly, primarily through the exposure of the young to representations of teen and adult sexuality in popular culture. But now? Now it is as direct as skilled marketing can make it – with companies bombarding kids with images for that specific purpose.

They should be ashamed of themselves for doing it. We should be ashamed of ourselves for tolerating it. Yet the sexualising of children is only one aspect of that wider, deeper issue. Let kids believe in Father Christmas and the Tooth Fairy, just a little longer before allowing them to be recruited as cannon fodder for the corporations. Let their imaginations grow stronger before being subjected to the professional imaginings of mass culture, where the advertising jingle replaces the nursery rhyme and the 60-second spot becomes the fairy story. ☉

GOODBYE THE SPICE GIRLS



On May 31, 1998, Geri Halliwell announced she was leaving one of the most successful bands in pop history. Her departure (she cited irreconcilable differences) marked the beginning of the end for the Spice Girls, the emblems of '90s Girl Power. In 1994, (from left) Melanie Chisholm, Emma Bunton, Melanie Brown, Victoria Adams and Halliwell answered an ad and beat hundreds of applicants to become Sporty, Baby, Scary, Posh and Ginger Spice. Post-Ginger, the final four called it quits in 2001. Halliwell released three solo albums while Posh achieved lasting celebrity by marrying footballer David Beckham. *Helen O'Neill*

The Editor
The Australian
letters@theaustralian.com.au

6 December 2006

Dear Sir,

The serious problem of marketing and media practices that promote the early sexualisation of Australian children was well explored in The Australia Institute's October report "Corporate paedophilia". The many letters to the press, articles, and current affairs segments at that time, showed that this problem is of serious concern to many sections of the community. Phillip Adams gave further prominence to the issues in the *Weekend Australian* magazine of 19 November.

It is vital for children's health and wellbeing that the issues remain in the spotlight, and that appropriate and decisive action be taken

We, the undersigned professionals, have worked for many years in the fields of child health, welfare, or media. We believe that the early sexualisation of children has serious consequences for children's development and psychological health.

Commercial forces turn children into consumers. This is bad enough when it compromises health by encouraging them to consume bad food, cigarettes and alcohol. But when commercial forces turn children into sexualised commodities, it corrodes the core of the developing child. These practices set up young children for inappropriate and dangerous roles and behaviours, and make them more vulnerable by far, to sexual danger and harm.

We believe that this is an issue which, if left unchecked, can have serious and costly consequences for the welfare of children, and for the community as a whole.

Parents and caregivers can help by avoiding sexualised products for their children, such as makeup, bras and skimpy clothing for the very young, many music video programs, and "adultified" children's magazines. Government agencies responsible for child health and protection need to urgently examine what supports can be offered.

Those who choose to market to children in this way should bear the primary responsibility for the adverse outcomes of their practices. We note the recent formation of the industry umbrella group, the Australian Marketing Communications Alliance. Member companies are proposing to combine their interests to "fight attacks on advertising and marketing communication" and "underlying threats to free enterprise". We hope that they would also be open to hear, and to respond to, the reasonable and serious concerns of the community.

Phillip Adams threw out this challenge at the conclusion of his article: "They (those marketing to children) should be ashamed of themselves for doing it. We should be ashamed of ourselves for tolerating it."

Yours sincerely

- Dr Neil Wigg. President, Paediatric and Child Health Division of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians.
- Dr Joe Tucci. CEO, Australian Childhood Foundation
- Prof Dorothy Scott. Director, Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia
- Jane Roberts. President, Young Media Australia
- Rita Princi. National Convenor, Australian Psychological Society: Child, Adolescent & Family Interest Group; Princi Consulting
- Prof Frank Oberklaid. Director, Centre for Community Child Health, Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne
- Dr Louise Newman. Director, NSW Institute of Psychiatry
- Bernadette McMenamin AO.
CEO, Childwise Australia
- Dr Patricia Edgar AM. Author and Founding Director, Australian Children's TV Foundation
- Emeritus Professor Freda Briggs AO,
Child Development, University of South Australia
- Steve Biddulph, Psychologist, author, and Australian Father of the Year 2000.
- Hon Terry Aulich. Executive Director, Australian Council of State Schools Organisations

For more information or to arrange an interview, please call,

Dr Joe Tucci (Vic) on 0418 991 766, or
Dr Patricia Edgar (Vic) 03 9457 1441, or
Jane Roberts (WA) on 0410 509 685, or
Dr Louise Newman (NSW) on 0418 453 447

YMA'S ACHIEVEMENTS

Over 50 years YMA has:

- supported parents and professionals with information and advice on media issues
- adapted to changing times and technology
- made countless submissions to media inquiries, and reviews of industry codes
- conducted surveys of community opinion
- acted as a conduit to regulators and industry for parents' concerns about the media
- provided information and advice on media issues to parents and professionals
- been influential in the acceptance of the need for effective children's TV standards, contributed to revision of those standards and defended them when under attack
- played a major role in the implementation of a classification system for home videos, similar to films
- played a key role in TV licence renewal hearings
- provided film screenings for children on Saturday afternoons all over Australia
- presented 10 International Film festivals
- served on advisory councils to TV stations and networks.

To find out more about the other information and services provided by YMA or if you wish to support our work by becoming a member go to the YMA website or contact us at:

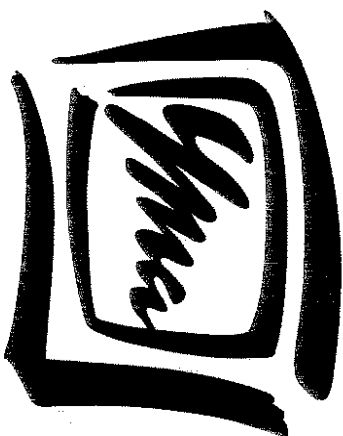
info@youngmedia.org.au

Visit the YMA website
www.youngmedia.org.au

Phone the YMA Helpline
1800 700 357 (national freecall 24/7)

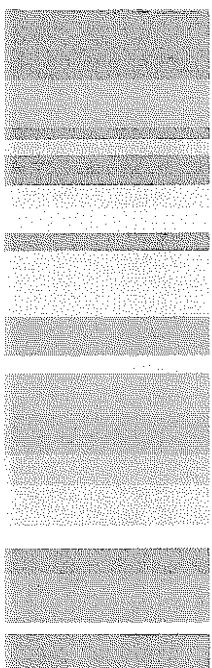


Young Media Australia
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Geelong SA 5045
Ph (08) 8376 2111



YOUNG MEDIA AUSTRALIA

Promoting Healthy Choices
and Stronger Voices
in Children's Media



WHO WE ARE

Young Media Australia (YMA) is a unique national community organisation with a strong interest and expertise in the role that media experiences play in the development of Australian children.

YMA is recognised as a peak source of information on the impact of media on children and young people.

We advocate for children's rights to live in a media environment that supports their healthy development, expands their horizons and provides them with pleasure.

Young Media Australia (YMA) is a not for profit company with a national Board representative of major child focussed organisations in Australia.

Patron: **Steve Biddulph**

President: **Jane Roberts**

Vice President: **Elizabeth Handsley**

CEO: **Barbara Biggins OAM**

WHAT YMA PROVIDES

- the YMA website www.youngmedia.org.au
- a wealth of media-related information
- the popular child-friendly movie review service, **Know Before You Go**: accessed via YMA website; brief versions weekly in Adelaide Advertiser
- the YMA Helpline **1800 700 357** (national freecall 24/7): information and support about media issues by phone
- parent media awareness programs and fact sheets
- submissions to government and regulators
- media interviews on current media issues
- conferences & conference papers
- the monthly news review: **small screen**.

CURRENT AND RECENT PROJECTS

Mind Over Media: early choices for healthy development. A series of fact sheets for early childhood professionals and caregivers.

Through Thick or Thin: Moderating the impact of food advertising on children's obesity and body image.

Reducing Real to Real Violence: Early intervention in metropolitan Adelaide to minimise harm from media violence.

Know Before You Go: Getting the best out of screen media for young children.



An Australian Government Initiative



CURRENT ISSUES

- collects research and information about the impact of media on children's development
- supports parents with information and strategies for positive media use
- advocates for the needs and interests of children in relation to the media.
- food advertising and children's health
- sexualised images of children in media
- improving the usefulness of classification systems
- internet and mobile phone use & safety (including cyberbullying)
- children's TV standards.

AWARDS

YMA has received a range of awards over many years; most recently a National Child Protection Award 2005.

