

Submission to Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee

Enhancing Online Safety for Children Bill 2014
and the Enhancing Online Safety for Children
(Consequential Amendments) Bill 2014.



PROJECT ROCKIT
January 2015

Introduction

PROJECT ROCKIT is a youth-driven movement tackling (cyber)bullying¹ and building social leadership in Australian schools. PROJECT ROCKIT was launched in 2006 by two Melbourne sisters ([Rosie and Lucy Thomas](#)) with the aim of building spaces where all young people have access to respect, acceptance, creative expression and real social leadership, regardless of their popularity, grades, reputation, sexuality or cultural background. Bullying, whether it occurs online or offline, robs people of these opportunities. Initial pilots of the PROJECT ROCKIT workshops indicated that *94% of young people would recommend PROJECT ROCKIT to other schools* and indeed, the program has now reached over 100,000 students around the country.

PROJECT ROCKIT reaches young people through two key mechanisms:

- 1) Face-to-face workshops: We send young people into schools to run credible, engaging and psychologically safe workshops that empower students to stand up to (cyber)bullying.
- 2) Online workshops: We reach school students in all corners of the country with our Australian-first eLearning curriculum, developed *by* young people *for* young people.

As an independent social enterprise, PROJECT ROCKIT proudly works *with* government, industry and community stakeholders to achieve outcomes that *solely* serve the interests of young people. We are extremely proud of the young people whom we serve. In our experience, the vast majority of young people are genuinely horrified by the impacts of (cyber)bullying on the lives of those affected, but do need our guidance about how they can safely stand up and be part of the solution. We acknowledge and celebrate that supporting young people in navigating the complex challenges of the digital world they inherit is a shared experience for government, industry, families, educators... and us.

Our response

In 2014, PROJECT ROCKIT teamed up with researchers to develop The Digital Jigsaw campaign, aimed at recruiting young people to participate in an anonymous, online survey tapping their understandings and opinions about (cyber)bullying and its social and legal consequences. This campaign generated data used in the final report prepared for the Department of Communications, *Research on youth exposure to, and management of, cyberbullying incidents in Australia* (the SPRC Report). We refer to findings as published in this report throughout our response.

We appreciate this opportunity to respond to the *Enhancing Online Safety for Children Bill 2014*. In general, we believe that this proposed legislation is a positive step towards building a safer digital world for Australian young people and children. Our three overarching propositions are as follows:

1. Young people must be actively included and informed of the proposed scheme
2. Tackling (cyber)bullying requires a *real* team effort between government and industry to address (cyber)bullying *where* and *how* it most commonly occurs
3. (Cyber)bullying is a complex social problem that cannot be fixed with technological and legal safeguards alone. Therefore, education targeting social interventions should be the chief focus of the Children's E-Safety Commissioner role

¹ NOTE: At PROJECT ROCKIT, we consider bullying and 'cyber-bullying' as intersecting issues and therefore represent these issues jointly as (cyber)bullying.

1. Young people must be actively included and informed of the proposed scheme

It is important that young people understand the legal frameworks that affect their engagement in the online world. However, as identified in the SPRC Report, the current laws surrounding (cyber)bullying are confusing and largely unknown to young people. As identified in the SPRC Report, approximately half of participating young people identified that they have only some or limited understanding of the current legal consequences for young people (under 18) who bully others online. This statistic echoes our day-to-day experiences working with young people at PROJECT ROCKIT. The proposed scheme poses an opportunity to break the disconnect between (cyber)bullying, young people and the law. In order for young people to be responsible digital citizens, they must be made aware of the new scheme, how it works and what this specifically means for them.

For the proposed scheme to be effective, it must be presented to young people in age-appropriate and youth-friendly terms. For example, the majority of the young people PROJECT ROCKIT work with daily are not receptive to being referred to as “children,” and more importantly, do they identify themselves as children. As social media use in a legal context tends to begin at 13+ years, many people between the ages of 13 to 18 may not necessarily believe that a *Children’s* E-Safety Commissioner can help them. These issues need to be actively addressed to ensure that the support is accessible for those who need it most.

Similarly, we advocate for young people’s active participation in the complaints process outlined in the scheme. It is well documented that parents and guardians are not the first point of help seeking for young people experiencing (cyber)bullying. For example, the SPRC Report cites only 23% of young people being (cyber)bullied as having told a parent. For this reason, we strongly support the inclusion of young people who are unsupported by adults to be active participants of the complaints process.

2. Tackling (cyber)bullying requires a *real* team effort between government and industry to address (cyber)bullying *where* and *how* it most commonly occurs

As young people who set out to tackle bullying, hate and prejudice when we were quite fresh out of school ourselves, our experience of working with social media corporates has been overwhelmingly positive. Without exception, every ‘large social media site’ with a physical presence in Australia has welcomed our efforts, extended our learning and shared their approaches to online safety with complete transparency. This has enabled us to develop credible programming, support and strategies that in turn empower young people to peacefully resolve issues of (cyber)bullying through their own means. Extending on this teamwork, we have joined forces in multiple high impact campaigns that have brought together government, community organisations, and school communities. For example, refer to our partnership in the [Be Bold. Stop Bullying campaign](#) (with Facebook and headspace) and jointly developed and co-branded [tip sheets](#) (with Twitter). These efforts are demonstrative of the genuine commitment from industry to dealing with (cyber)bullying and related impacts for young people. They also show just what we can achieve when we work together on these issues. We are concerned that the proposed complaint-handling scheme could be seen by young people and parents to position the major social media platforms as opponents to online safety, rather than enablers of it.

We recognise the efforts of large social media sites with a physical presence in Australia. However, we are also aware of offshore platforms (like Snapchat, Qoohme and Ask.fm) with a rapidly growing usage among young Australians and that are largely unchartered by adults. This is evidently a fast-changing space with new social media sites emerging weekly to meet the hunger of young people. Given that the new scheme

specifically targets long-standing platforms that are already actively dealing with (cyber)bullying, we are concerned that anyone who is calculating enough to use social media as a weapon will be compelled to utilise the very platforms not included in this scheme, in an attempt to avoid detection. We therefore believe that the Children's E-Safety Commissioner should largely focus on pioneering better standards across the entire social media and online gaming industries. As a result, this would bolster the credibility of these changes to young people as a genuine effort to create a safer online world.

3. (Cyber)bullying is a complex social problem that cannot be fixed with technological and legal safeguards alone. Therefore, education targeting social interventions should be the chief focus of the Children's E-Safety Commissioner role

(Cyber)bullying is a complex, multifaceted problem. This issue does not represent a failure of technology or social media, rather it is a social problem that plays out online. Sometimes, harmful content seen online marks only the tip of an offline iceberg. In our work with young people, we see that the damaging effects of (cyber)bullying are often further confounded through a myriad of other behaviours – exclusion at school, the spread of rumours, repeated attacks across multiple platforms, physical threats, name-calling and other means of victimisation. This damage cannot be prevented simply by rapidly removing harmful content from social media, only for abuse to resurface in other ways. Therefore, the rapid removal of harmful content should be considered a final resort in a broader support system.

We would therefore argue that the balance of the Children's E-Safety Commissioner's resources should be directed towards preventative education for young people about (cyber)bullying, primarily through school-based interventions. We whole-heartedly believe that this is where the government can achieve the most genuine positive impact. Supporting this view, the SPRC Report cites 88% of respondents having identified school as being one of the best places to get information about (cyber)bullying. However, we would argue that truly impactful learning extends beyond simply providing such information and also addresses the social issues that underpin (cyber)bullying. Here is an opportunity to provide strategies that young people can use to resolve less extreme conflicts themselves and to safely navigate the ever-changing digital world. At PROJECT ROCKIT, we regularly ask young people: When you see (cyber)bullying, are you going to be part of the problem or part of the solution? Now we want to assist the Australian government in being part of the solution. We propose that the Children's E-Safety Commissioner would benefit from utilising PROJECT ROCKIT to deliver such learning, in continuing partnership with industry and other stakeholders. Additionally, we extend the offer to meet with members of the committee to share our unique experiences working at a grass roots level with the incredible young people of Australia.