COMMISSIONER FOR CHILDREN
T A S M A N I A

Commissioner for Children's Consultative Council

Submission to:

The Joint Select Committee on Cyber Safety

INQUIRY INTO CYBER SAFETY

June 2010

INTRODUCTION

The Internet and associated technologies are a way of life for Australian young people. Indeed a 2008 national survey of internet use showed that almost all (95.1%) young Australians use the internet or a mobile phone to source information, communicate and interact.[1and2] Therefore, to maintain the safety of children and young people as consumers they need to be engaged with during any consultation process.

The Commissioner for Children's Consultative Council (CCC) is set up under section 81(1)(a) of the *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997*, to assist the Commissioner in the performance of his functions and powers under the Act.

The CCC members are all under the age of 18 from a diverse range of backgrounds and regions of Tasmania and share their views with the Commissioner for Children on issues affecting children in Tasmania to help him in his work. This year the issues that were discussed originated from the Commissioner's office and the Council themselves. The issue of bullying has been a priority for the CCC, with members carrying out research and preparing The Bullying Report 2009 which was presented to the Minister for Human Services and the Premier of Tasmania.

The issue of cyber safety was raised by the CCC in the context of their work on the bullying report which led to the Commissioner for Children requesting the CCC to seek and share their views, concerns and most importantly solutions relating to Cyber-Safety and for these views to form the basis for this submission.

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[1] Ewing, S. Et al (2008) *The Internet in Australia*, ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries Digital Futures Report, Melbourne.
[2] Australian Interactive Media Industry Association Mobile Industry Group (2009) 'Special Topic: Mobile Commerce' *Australian Mobile Phone Lifestyle Index 5th Ed.*

METHODOLOGY:

The children and young people of the CCC were asked questions to elicit their views on a series of issues regarding cyber safety. They were asked to respond with their own views as well as seeking the views from their peers. A variety of media was used to elicit the responses including email and the CFC web based Forum and responses collated. Limited analysis has been applied to the responses received allowing the views of the children and young people as consumers to form the findings for this submission.

During a fortnight in June 2010 45 responses were received from young people aged 12-18. Of these 45 responses 11 were from members of the CCC and 34 from friends or siblings of the Council members. Unedited quotes have been included.

The following questions were asked:

1. Where do you think you are the safest when you are browsing the Internet? (at school, home, online access centre, etc).
2. Why do you think that location is the safest?
3. When browsing the Internet, do things you see influence you and your opinion about things?
4. Whose responsibility is it to promote cyber safety? (adults, teachers, carers, etc.)
5. What are some practical solutions that a Government could implement to ensure that young people are safe online?

DISCUSSION:

1. Where do you think you are the safest when you are browsing the Internet? (at school, home, online access centre, etc).

When asked this question the majority of young people surveyed thought they were safest when they were either at home or at school (18 young people responded school, 22 responded home).

Of the remainder, three young people believed that no matter where you are you aren't safe on the Internet. One respondent said *'No matter where you go there will always be the Internet and there will always be the risk of cyber bullying.'*

Two young people were not sure what it meant to be safe on the Internet so responded as 'unsure.'

2. Why do you think that location is the safest?

Young people had a variety of reasons why they believed their stated location was the safest.

Those who responded believing home was the safest suggested that it was safest because parents did not have to *'constantly look over their shoulder watching what I'm doing on the Internet.'* Many saw their home as the safest location due to the ability to have anti-virus software, and being aware that their parents limited websites that they can and cannot access. Other respondents drew an instant connection with home being automatically safe because they have the opportunity to ask their parents, and that parents make their home environment safe.

The majority of young people who believed it was safer to be online at school said that it was due to the restrictions a school places on a student's access. Many respondents referred to an Information Technology Agreement, which they signed at the start of the year that outlined their limitations and also the consequences if they tried to exceed those restrictions. Young people also believed that they were protected online at school, as they were aware that schools ban 'naughty sites, block social networking and have the ability to monitor emails.'

Those who believed that no matter where they were they were not safe in question one responded that the location of browsing the Internet was irrelevant because they have an individual responsibility to maintain their own safety.

3. When browsing the Internet, do things you see influence you and your opinion about things?

Half of the young people, 24 out of 45 respondents believed that the things they see online does influence their opinion about things, and 21 believed that what they consumed online had no influence whatsoever on their opinions on things.

Specifically, 5 out of 24 referred to not taking anything seriously that they saw on social networking websites such as Facebook, Bebo or MySpace. One respondent spoke of Facebook and said 'If I read things on there and you can't understand if the person is sarcastic or not, this only influences my opinion of them, not the issue they are talking about.' Another respondent said that they are selective when browsing online therefore they don't become influenced and only consume 'independent press or blogs and try to stay away from tabloid journalism and big companies.''

Two respondents said that it depends on the presentation of the website and the argument the website presents. One respondent said '*yes, sometimes because people have strong opinions on things and sometimes tell you that your own opinion is incorrect. They also have it fancy on the Internet so its more inviting.*'

Another two respondents didn't see the issue with the Internet influencing them as they thought the purpose of being online was to '*become informed and learn to either change or form your opinion.*'

One respondent of 21 young people who said the Internet had no influence whatsoever said:

'*Things like the news that is on webpage's like Hotmail and school pages do have a subtle influence on me but its not so big that it changes my opinion or outlook on a situation. I will forever remain my own self with my own views and values and I feel that I am to stubborn to listen to what tabloids have to say.*'

4. Whose responsibility is it to promote cyber safety? (Adults, teachers, carers, etc.)

Just over half, 25 of 45 respondents, believed that it is not one person, group or sectors responsibility to ensure young people are safe online. That it is everyone's responsibility.

One respondent said that they believe that not many people are aware of how to be safe online therefore it is everyone's responsibility:

'*It is everyones responsibility to promote cyber safety because we not only need to teach our selves, we also need to teach others. I am sure there are more than one or two teachers, students, and*

parents who dont know the basics of cyber safety and who could gravely benefit from it.'

Ten respondents believed that it was a school or parental responsibility to make young people aware of cyber safety. However, 4 out of 10 of these respondents believed that they did not think this was possible 'because many teachers wouldn't know themselves to stay safe online.'

Six respondents believed it was the Government's responsibility to ensure that young people are safe online and that they could do this by education campaigns or greater monitoring of websites.

One respondent believed that young people have the ability to make themselves safe online or to make themselves unsafe online.

'I think it is everyone's in particular those in responsible of the site itself. I find a very limited number of people read the 'Terms and Conditions' and if they do it is because they are quite bored. Any site can be safe if it is used correctly, but it can just as easily be un-safe if used incorrectly. There needs to be a heavier focus on what is appropriate and what is inappropriate.'

Two respondents were unsure where the responsibility lies to ensure young people are safe online.

The final question considered by the CCC looked at possible solutions to the issue of cyber safety and forms recommendations from the CCC for the purpose of their submission.

5. What are some practical solutions that a Government could implement to ensure that young people are safe online?

One third of responses, 18 out of 45, suggested that the most practical solution is to create awareness regarding the importance of cyber safety, specifically in regard to the consequences, which can occur while online. Respondents went on to see this awareness happening as a multi-faceted approach including education within a national curriculum, online advertisements on websites, especially social networking sites and real life stories highlighting the consequences if you are not safe online.

Four young people said that education is the key however it must not be *'boring.'* As one young person said *'they must educate us, not lecture us.'*

One third of respondents, 12, believed that technology could ensure young people are safe online. Young people specifically mentioned the use of Internet filters at home, school and Internet café, or some sort of function that blocks identifying information such as age, address or phone number and reminds the consumer of the possible implications if they send such information.

One respondent said that *'a decision needs to take place whether we need to have online social chat rooms for kids and young people where children who don't know each other can connect, because this is where lots of bullying can take place.'*

This respondent goes on to say that if the Government is going to restrict anything from young people they need to consult with young people to ensure they have a say:

'But if you are going to ban anything, they need to talk to us to make sure it's the right decision.'

One respondent implied that nothing needs to happen as it is up to young people themselves in regards to cyber bullying.

'Kids will learn that if they are cruel or rude, they get erased, and won't have any friends so they will stop.'

Ten young people believed that parents, teachers and the community need to be educated about the risks and then they can ensure young people are aware of it.

'A lot of older people don't know much about the Internet, so if they were aware we could be too.'

SUMMARY:

- Young people believe they are the safest at home or school when online browsing the Internet.
- School and home are the safest as they are aware that there is online security software, and there is an adult they can always ask questions of.
- Young people believe that it is everyone's responsibility to ensure people are safe online.

- Young people want to see more education not just for them, but for teachers and their parents.
- Any awareness campaign must attempt to be engaging, and have a role of educating, not lecturing.
- Software can have a greater role in protecting young people online.
- Children and young people want to be involved in any major decision that affects their experience online.

Thank you.

Children's Consultative Council members

Commissioner for Children, Tasmania
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