



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

INQUIRY INTO CYBER-SAFETY

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this submission please contact:

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INTRODUCTION

Berry Street welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Parliament of Australia's Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety. In particular we welcome the opportunity to highlight some of the key challenges and issues facing our most vulnerable children and young people and the adults who care for and educate them, when faced with engaging with modern technologies.

We would also welcome the opportunity to discuss further any aspects of this submission with the members of the Joint Select Committee.

Berry Street believes *all children should have a good childhood - growing up in families and communities where they feel safe, nurtured and have hope for the future.*

PROFILE OF BERRY STREET

Established in 1877 as the Victorian Infant Asylum, Berry Street chooses to work with children, young people and families with the most challenging and complex needs, including those for whom we are often the last resort.

These children and young people have suffered great distress and significant harm growing up in families where violence, chronic neglect, substance abuse, mental illness, and poverty have prevented them from having a good childhood. Incorporated under the Associations Incorporation (Amendment) Act 1997 with a voluntary Board of Directors, Berry Street is now the largest independent not for profit child and family welfare organisation in Victoria.

All of Berry Street's services:

Forge strong relationships with our clients and help restore a belief in themselves and the future - *because we know that learning to trust again is the essential step in healing.*

Stick with these children, young people and their families - *because we know that in the past they have been let down far too often.*

Help children and young people recover from the trauma of violence and neglect - *because we know that a good childhood is a vital prerequisite for the development of a healthy, functioning adult.*

Build on strengths, looking beyond behaviour to the core issues - *because we know this works and is the best way to help children and young people recover from trauma.*

Include family members and other significant people in planning and caring for children and young people - *because we know it is critical to strengthen connections and maintain positive relationships.*

Are respectful of culture and religious affiliations - *because we know how important these are in developing identity.*

Involve our clients in planning, decision-making and the way we help meet their needs - *because we know that having some control in their lives helps healing and builds resilience.*

Promote a better understanding of the critical link between a good childhood and healthy adults - *because we know that a good childhood is every child's birthright, that it is the foundation of healthy adult development, and that this means a better society for us all.*

Berry Street provides an extensive range of services for children, young people and families across rural, regional and metropolitan Victoria. We work from 20 offices and a further 34 worksites, with the majority of services in the Gippsland, Hume, North & Western Metropolitan and Southern Metropolitan regions. Berry Street employs approximately 385 (EFT) staff and has the support of over 250 volunteer caregivers and in excess of another 200 other volunteers. The budget for 2007/08 is more than \$33 million. Our greatest challenges today arise from the dreadful impact on children and their families of domestic violence, substance abuse, mental illness, poverty and unemployment.

Our services cover 8 main service types:

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

While we choose to work with clients with the most complex needs, we also look for opportunities to strengthen communities. We focus on the early years, financial inclusion and capacity building in rural communities.

DISABILITY SERVICES

Physical and intellectual disabilities and mental health issues are common for our children, young people and families. Although a relatively small part of our service mix, we run 2 very successful youth outreach programs for those young people who have an intellectual disability and very challenging behaviours.

EDUCATION

The development of our education service is a relatively new initiative for Berry Street and is a result of too many of our children and young people either being excluded from school or dropping out. We run an independent school, with campuses in Noble Park and Morwell, and an extensive range of education programs. We are also a Registered Training Organisation and work in mainstream schools.

FAMILY SERVICES

Our family services help parents manage their children better and help resolve conflict between them and their adolescents. We also play a lead role in the delivery of a comprehensive set of services for families suffering family violence, help women keep themselves and their children safe and provide a contact service for parents who cannot manage safe access arrangements for their children.

HOME BASED CARE

Home Based Care relies on the willingness of accredited foster carers, who want to help children and young people recover from the trauma of family violence and child abuse and neglect. These exceptional people are supported by our professional staff, who also work with the children and their families.

RESIDENTIAL CARE

Berry Street's residential care program is often the "last resort" for young people whose traumatic childhood means they can't be managed by other services. Trained staff live with and look after up to 4 young people in 20 houses across Victoria.

THERAPEUTIC SERVICES

We know that care alone is not sufficient to help children and young people recover from the trauma of family violence and child abuse and neglect. Through Take Two, a developmental therapeutic service for clients of the Victorian Child Protection system, and other counselling programs, we work intensively with the distressed child or young person and often their carer, to help them understand their pain and learn to trust again.

YOUTH SERVICES

We know that adolescence is a "window of opportunity" to help young people recover from traumatic childhoods. Our youth services include counselling, outreach, life skills, mentoring, accommodation and employment programs.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Berry Street believes that all children should have a good childhood, growing up in families and communities where they feel safe, nurtured and have hope for the future. This vision informs our approach to all aspects of our work. It is as relevant in the context of cyber-safety and digital inclusion as it is in our provision of foster care, residential care or family violence prevention programs.

The growing body of research addressing issues of technology use, digital inclusion and cyber-safety among children and young people tells us that we are increasingly seeing digital engagement as a key component in modern childhood. This in turn tells us that there is a new 'domain' in which children and young people must learn to operate safely and responsibly; childhood is still played out in playgrounds, schools, homes, streets, towns etc., but it is also now explored and played out in a digital sphere.

Berry Street believes that providing a safe and nurturing environment is the responsibility of *everyone*. We also believe that to provide that environment it is important to be *aware* of and to *manage* the risks, but not to be driven by them.

"Technology offers extraordinary opportunities for all of society including children and young people"¹

The positive potential that digital technology offers children and young people today is something that Berry Street is committed to making available to children and young people in OoHC and Alt.Ed. At the same time, however, the way in which cyber-safety and digital technologies are approached for vulnerable children and young people needs to be informed by their complex circumstances and histories.

Children and young people in OoHC are among the most vulnerable in our society. Experiencing, as they do, significant barriers to education, these are the children and young people who are frequently channelled into alternative education streams. In both their home and school lives they all too often miss out on what might be considered 'normal' childhood experiences and development. This, in turn, impacts on their capacity to develop the skills and personal resources to aspire to, and engage in, adult employment opportunities, or to connect to their community, their friends and family or to access other life opportunities.

Furthermore, children and young people in OoHC have typically come into care as a result of sustained abuse or neglect within their family. The consequences of trauma experienced in early childhood can be physical, emotional, mental and developmental and contribute to a child's resilience or lack thereof in later life.

Berry Street's cyber-safety project, **BeNetWise²**, is currently working to address the specific issues of digital vulnerability experienced by children and young people in OoHC and Alt.Ed., and the challenges faced by an under-skilled workforce when it comes to supporting them to engage with technology.

¹ Byron, Dr. T, 2008 p.3 *Safer Children in a Digital World: The Report of the Byron Review* Department for Children, Schools and Families, Nottingham, UK

² A partnership with the Department of Human Services and the Victorian Child safety Commissioner, funded by the Telstra Foundation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our experience as providers of OoHC for over 130 years, and of Alt.Ed. programs for more than fifteen years, combined with our current work to understand and address cyber-safety within this context, informs the following recommendations:

1. That digital technology be understood first and foremost as a ***hugely positive tool***, enabling children and young people to access a world of resources, knowledge, information, experience, connections and communities that enrich and improve their lives.
2. That children and young people are seen as the ***experts of their own experience*** and as such are considered key participants and informants in the process of defining cyber-safety and approaches to it.
3. That digital literacy be seen as a priority area for development among children and young people who experience barriers to traditional forms of education and development, ***because it is their right*** to have the same opportunities as their 'mainstream' peers.
4. That restrictive and/or punitive measures that promote removing or limiting access to technology, either as a blanket approach to cyber-safety or as a consequence for inappropriate behaviour on, or offline, are recognised as ineffective in isolation. Instead, ***a holistic approach*** incorporating youth engagement, dialogue between adults, children and young people and an openness to exploring alternative options should be the aim.
5. That cyber-safety is understood as a social and behavioural concept in which ***working to promote and role model positive and responsible online behaviour*** is key, as opposed to 'managing' the technology itself.
6. That ***supporting vulnerable children and young people to engage*** positively with digital technology be seen as a priority and that the complex contexts in which they live and develop be recognised in strategies that are developed.
7. That ***no single solution*** is sought - cyber-safety is an ongoing journey, requiring ongoing dialogue and resources - a range of tools, strategies and responses should be considered.
8. Online issues are recognised to often reflect and/or stem from behaviour that is occurring, or issues that are experienced, in the offline context. The ***wealth of experience that already exists*** in ensuring the day-to-day safety and stability of children and young people should be explored, and the potential for adaptation and application to online contexts be considered.
9. That ***capacity building*** among those working with and caring for 'at risk' children and young people is considered a priority.
10. That significant consideration be given to how concepts of digital engagement and cyber-safety can be ***embedded in early years and youth work practice*** through training, adaptation of professional development and education campaigns, with particular attention given to how to address these issues when working with 'at risk' groups.
11. That ***further research*** be conducted into cyber-safety, digital technology and vulnerable children and young people.

RESPONSE TO THE INQUIRY INTO CYBER-SAFETY

Berry Street is a comparative newcomer to the cyber-safety discussion. The nature of our work with at risk children and families means that we approach the issues of digital inclusion and cyber-safety with a focus on how these issues affect some of the most vulnerable children and young people in our communities; those in Out of Home Care (OoHC) and Alternative Education (Alt.Ed.).

With this in mind, this submission will respond to those areas highlighted in the Joint Select Committee's Terms of Reference that:

- have a bearing on Berry Street's work;
- may benefit from existing knowledge that we have as an agency working with and caring for children and young people affected by trauma, neglect and abuse; and
- where we have gained knowledge through our cyber-safety and digital inclusion project **BeNetWise**, which may contribute to the debate.

BENETWISE - CYBER-SAFETY FOR 'AT RISK' CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

Background

A project, in 2008, to put computers and internet access into all residential units in our residential care programs revealed significant issues concerning skill, knowledge, confidence and capacity among both staff and the young people in their care in relation to basic ICT use as well as safe and responsible digital engagement.

Further exploration of existing literature relating to young people and the use of digital technologies³ has given us an understanding of the link between the vulnerable and risky behaviour that we see in the children and young people we work with, and their increased vulnerability in an online environment.

This information, combined with our extensive expertise in working with and caring for some of Victoria's most vulnerable children and young people, led us to develop **BeNetWise** in 2009. This project, funded by the Telstra Foundation and carried out in partnership with the Office of the Child Safety Commissioner and Victoria's Department of Human Services, is a cyber-safety project. The target audience for the project includes staff, carers and educators in the OoHC and Alt.Ed. sectors, and the children and young people for whom they care.

Objectives

The intention is to:

- Raise awareness within the sector and among policy-makers and funding bodies about the benefits of access & equity to technology for vulnerable children & young people.
- Raise awareness among staff, carers, educators, children and young people about cyber-safe practices and the risks that can be involved in engagement with technology.
- Increase access and use of the internet among children and young people in OoHC and Alt.Ed.
- Increase connection of children and young people in OoHC and Alt.Ed. to family and friends (where appropriate) via technology.
- Enable children and young people in OoHC and Alt.Ed. to build on ICT skills for use in e-learning and broader education opportunities.

³ Internet Safety Technical Taskforce 2008, *Enhancing Child Safety & Online Technologies: Final Report of the Internet Safety Technical Task Force to the Multi-State Working Group on Social Networking of State Attorneys General of the United States*, Berkman Centre for Internet & Society, Harvard University

- Increase confidence among staff, carers and educators to engage with young people through technology
- Increase the capacity of all stakeholders to engage safely and positively with technology.

Outputs

BeNetWise is developing resources under three output areas:

1. **A website** containing advice, guidance, information, resources and links to trusted sites that outline strategies and approaches for promoting Responsible Digital Citizenship *within the specific contexts of OoHC and Alt.Ed.*
2. **Training** for staff, carers, educators, children and young people in the OoHC and Alt.Ed. sectors in Responsible Digital Citizenship and positive engagement with digital technology to enable children and young people to fulfil their potential.
3. **An advocacy strategy** to bring the OoHC and Alt.Ed. sectors and the bodies that fund and support them (including government bodies) to an understanding of the importance of equity and access to quality technology and the skills to use it responsibly for children and young people who are experiencing disadvantage.

Methodology

The project has been guided by a Governance Group and a Reference Group (see Appendix 1 for full details of membership) with extensive combined experience in the OoHC and Alt.Ed. sectors as well as youth mental health, ICT, technology and young people, cyber-safety and e-learning. In addition we engaged the expertise of Robyn Treyvaud⁴ as a cyber-safety consultant to the project.

The first four months of the project saw broad sector consultations during which the project manager and cyber-safety consultant ran nine workshops across the Victoria. The workshops provided participants with a combination of ‘Technology and Youth 101’, an understanding of the project’s aims and objectives and an opportunity to air their concerns, tell their stories and inform the project’s development. A total of 94 individuals attended the workshops, representing OoHC and Alt.Ed. providers across the state (a full list of agencies represented is provided as Appendix 2).

All workshop participants completed surveys aimed at providing **BeNetWise** with a clearer understanding of the current technological environment in which staff, carers and educators are operating (see below for further details).

Following the statewide consultation with staff, carers and educators extensive consultation with young people in the OoHC and Alt.Ed. sectors has commenced. A group of eight ‘Youth Networkers’ (young people nominated by staff and carers for their existing knowledge of or engagement with technology) has been formed to help develop the consultation process with other young people. They are developing a series of consultation forums for young people as well as engaging students at the Berry Street school campuses to provide feedback and to explore cyber-safety strategies. In addition an online survey has been developed for distribution to young people (a paper version is also available for those without access to internet or for whom technology is a barrier).

It is notoriously difficult to directly engage children and young people in OoHC in research. They are necessarily well protected by the organisations that care for them and communication must often be delivered via a worker or a carer who may, or may not see the project as a priority. Barriers to their participation include:

- lack of staff resource to support youth engagement;
- lack of literacy (and therefore the need for adult support to facilitate engagement or for more time-consuming and costly methods of individual consultation);

⁴ Robyn is the Founder and Director of Cyber Safe Kids, www.cybersafekids.com.au

- disinterest in the subject matter on the part of young people; and
- apathy that comes from growing up in a system where their ability to control what happens to them is limited or non-existent.

We are aware that these factors may mean that our consultation with young people is more limited than that we were able to achieve with adults in the sector.

In our consultation with agencies and their staff, carers and educators it was also apparent that the sector as a whole does not yet feel an urgency in regards to issues surrounding cyber-safety and engagement with digital technology. This may also act as a barrier to engaging young people.

Barriers aside, **BeNetWise** operates on principles of youth participation and the belief that children and young people are the experts of their own experience. The consultation of and engagement with young people as active participants in the development of the resources (and ultimately in the delivery of the training and resources in future projects) is key to how **BeNetWise** understands cyber-safety and Responsible Digital Citizenship.

Outcomes to date

The information being gathered via consultations and a review of literature are being used to directly inform the development of the website, training and advocacy strategy.

To date we have formed working groups to guide the specific development of each area. A draft advocacy strategy is underway, and several actions have already been implemented, including presentations to: the inaugural Privacy Conference in Victoria; the COST180 conference of international researchers; the Children In Residential Care (CIRC) providers forum for The Department of Human Services; and various sector-specific forums.

A draft Information Architecture has been developed for the website, a designer engaged and a web development agency has also been engaged.

The development of training includes:

- Finding ways to embed messages and information into existing training undertaken by staff, carers and educators;
- Exploring the most effective way to ensure that Alt.Ed. programs include cyber-safety and digital engagement in their curriculum;
- Developing stand-alone resources to embed in the website and make available for people to access and utilise in their own exploration of cyber-safety and Responsible Digital Citizenship; and
- Developing a pro-active training program to push the messages and build capacity throughout the sector.

Resources will include audio, visual and text-based information developed by and for the sector as well as links and information from trusted third party sources. The pro-active training approach is intending to use a train-the-trainer model and to engage young people in both developing the program and delivering it to their peers and to the adults who care for and support them.

The project is currently aiming for a launch of the training and website in September 2010.

CONTEXT AND ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH CHILDREN IN OoHC CURRENTLY ENGAGE WITH TECHNOLOGY

For Children & Young People in OoHC and Alt.Ed.

BeNetWise has been developed in response to the lack of cyber-safety strategies aimed at the most vulnerable children and young people. The project is founded on the belief that, as a sector, we are further disadvantaging the already marginalised children and young people in our care by not addressing barriers to quality technology access:

*"Technology is part of a child's life and learning today and is a growing part of their identity, connectedness, community participation and future civic engagement."*⁵

Fundamentally we see technology as an enabler; it provides us with knowledge, resources, connections and an avenue for expression and exploration. For children and young people growing up today digital literacy and an ability to engage with digital communities is as vital to their development as effective, active and engaged citizens as basic literacy and numeracy were to previous generations.

Through our own experience as a provider of OoHC and Alt.Ed. programs we are acutely aware of the paucity of consistent, quality access to technology provided to children and young people through ours and others' services.

The absence of digital technology as a positive engagement and learning tool in the lives of children and young people in OoHC and Alt.Ed. means that this group, who already experience multiple barriers to education and employment, are pushed yet further behind the proverbial eight ball.

The lack of access to quality technology is reflective of a fundamental lack of resources as well as a widespread culture of risk-aversion, techno-anxiety and lack of confidence and capacity across a sector that, until relatively recently (with the advent of online databases for client records and tracking), had little cause to interact with technology.

Added to this, and of concerning significance, is research published as part of a report to the State Attorneys General of the United States that informs us that where a child or young person is considered 'at risk' in the offline world, they are more likely to be at increased risk, and to engage in risky behaviour, in the online world⁶. This work is of particular relevance to Victoria's children living in OoHC and to the need for **BeNetWise**. Offline factors cited by the report as indicating vulnerability include those who have experienced parental conflict, sexual or physical abuse, psychosocial problems (such as substance abuse, sexual aggression and poor bonds with caregivers) and/or risk-taking behaviours⁷. These are all issues commonly encountered in the lives and behaviours of children and young people in OoHC and Alt.Ed.

However, what is clear on reading the growing body of literature addressing issues of cyber-safety is that the public perception of what is to be feared in an online environment (often driven and fed by sensationalised media attention to isolated events) does not always match what is *actually* posing a risk to our children and young people⁸;

⁵ Edgar, D & Edgar, P 2009, *VCAA Discussion Paper: Television, Digital Media & Children's Learning* http://114.76.100.85:8080/PatriciaEdgarAndDonEdgar/selectedarticles/02_Media%20VCAA%20Final%20Draft_PartA.aspx (viewed 10/6/2010)

⁶ Internet Safety Technical Taskforce 2008, *Enhancing Child Safety & Online Technologies: Final Report of the Internet Safety Technical Task Force to the Multi-State Working Group on Social Networking of State Attorneys General of the United States*, Berkman Centre for Internet & Society, Harvard University

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Internet Safety Technical Taskforce 2008; Online Safety and Technology Working Group June 2010; Cross, D et al. 2009.

- ‘Stranger Danger’ and the concept of anonymous online predators is still a concern for many that is perpetuated by the media⁹, whereas, the more prevalent danger is known to come from a closer circle of those we know face-to-face.
- An understanding of children and young people as naïve victims of online abuse or solicitation is unhelpful. US Research indicates that in most cases ‘victims’ are fully aware of the sexual intentions of the person they are chatting with online¹⁰.
- The same research also indicates that “most of the time the solicitors are youth or young adults; 43% of the perpetrators of sexual solicitation are known to be other minors”¹¹, which contradicts the traditional image of an older male seeking out young girls.

These inaccuracies pose a two-fold challenge for the work of **BeNetWise**; on the one hand, we face the challenge of overcoming an embedded culture of fear-based and risk-averse responses to incidents of concern, built on many years of risk analysis and planning in response to the challenging and often destructive behaviours of our clients. On the other hand we must remain alert to the fact that while the “statistical probability” of something heinous occurring as a result of a child or young person’s online interactions “is extremely low”¹², the extreme vulnerability of many of the children and young people with whom we work means that they are more likely to fall within that small number of victims. It also means that the consequences experienced by this group, who may lack the resilience to recover from trauma, are far greater.

The pervading culture of risk-aversion is fostered by a (very valid) fear of further damaging already-traumatised children and young people, and to some extent driven by a fear of negative media attention. The result is a tendency to avoid confronting those things that are not readily amenable to legislative or policy control, such as engagement with technology.

For Staff, Carers & Educators in OoHC and Alt.Ed.

BeNetWise consultations across Victoria have sought the views, experiences and input of OoHC staff and foster carers and Alt.Ed. teachers to inform the development of cyber-safety resources and strategies. These consultations have revealed that, at the very most, agencies are providing access to technology that is highly filtered and monitored. In the case of access for employees, over 85% of workshop participants indicated that their workplace has some level of filtering in place, with nearly 35% indicating that there was a high level of internet filtering. This tells us that staff themselves are restricted in what they can and cannot access on the internet, which could be argued to obstruct their ability to adequately support and guide the children and young people with whom they work. Furthermore, we found that only 62% of people could confidently say that all staff in their organisation even have access to the internet: - that means that there is a proportion of staff working with at risk children and young people who don’t even have access to the technologies we are talking about for their work.

At the start of each consultation workshop participants were asked for one word that reflected how they feel about technology. The majority indicated feelings ranging from indifferent to terrified, including words like ‘overwhelmed’, ‘daunted’, ‘frustrating’, ‘isolating’ and ‘frightening’. Positive reflections painted a picture of a ‘challenging’, ‘exciting’ world of ‘endless possibilities’.

Anecdotally we heard that in the majority of cases organisations are not currently providing young people in residential care with access to computers or the internet in their residential units. There appears to be growing pressure to do so, and in some cases projects are underway

⁹ <http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/south-australia/carly-ryan-a-loving-girl-who-fell-prey-to-an-online-predator/story-e6frea83-1225822697469> (viewed 8/7/10)

¹⁰ Internet Safety Technical Taskforce 2008, *Enhancing Child Safety & Online Technologies: Final Report of the Internet Safety Technical Task Force to the Multi-State Working Group on Social Networking of State Attorneys General of the United States*, Berkman Centre for Internet & Society, Harvard University

¹¹ Ibid, Appendix C, p. 20

¹² Online Safety and Technology Working Group 2010, p.12, *Youth Safety on a Living Internet: Report of the Online Safety and Technology Working Group*, http://www.ntia.doc.gov/reports/2010/OSTWG_Final_Report_060410.pdf

to roll out computers for units, but this seems to be accompanied by trepidation and hesitation on the part of management and, in many cases, the staff in the units.

Discussions in the consultation workshops indicated that fears circulate around very practical concerns:

- how to monitor what young people are doing online;
- how to keep the hardware secure in a sometimes volatile environment; and
- how to educate young people about safety online when the staff themselves have little to no understanding of the concepts.

On digging deeper into the concerns about what young people will access, a range of fears were raised, From the less obvious to the more concerning and the extremely dangerous:

- health effects of prolonged computer and mobile phone use such as carpal tunnel syndrome and vitamin D deficiency;
- bullying;
- the financial implications for young people who run up multiple contract mobile phone bills that they don't pay;
- online predators;
- online-initiated sex work or drug dealing.

When asked in a survey about their skill and confidence levels in relation to using technology the vast majority of staff, carers and educators indicated a level above six on a scale of one to ten. However, in the workshop discussions this was revealed to be conditional: amongst their peers they felt confident and rated their skill levels as relatively high, but when considering their skill in relation to children and young people, participants reflected a far lower level of confidence in their own ability.

When asked what sort of training they would be interested in, participants requested everything from basic mobile phone use (in one session a participant's phone kept ringing because, she confessed, she had no idea how to turn it off), to online navigation, and how to access educational programs.

Fears & Concerns

While there is a very apparent gap in research into the specific issues facing children and young people at risk in their engagement with technology, the **BeNetWise** consultations have provided some clarity for us in regards to both the levels of fear and concern among staff, carers and educators, and the digital realities for the children and young people in their care.

"we are now able to seek solutions as a society which are fact-based, not fear-based"¹³.

Encouragingly, and arguably in some contrast to the findings of key research¹⁴, when we asked young people in OoHC and Alt.Ed. if they have ever talked to an adult about issues they have faced online, although the split is 50/50 between those who have and those who have not (in responses to date - the survey remains open currently), not one respondent chose the third option: "I never would". This is perhaps a reflection of an earlier response indicating that over 76% of those surveyed believe that adults either sometimes or always understand how important technology is in the lives of children and young people.

The fears held by young people in relation to technology use revolve primarily around practical issues such as losing access to technology, be that through viruses, bad internet connections, computers crashing, flat batteries or loss of phones and contacts.

¹³ Online Safety and Technology Working Group 2010, *Youth Safety on a Living Internet: Report of the Online Safety and Technology Working Group*, http://www.ntia.doc.gov/reports/2010/OSTWG_Final_Report_060410.pdf

¹⁴ Cross. D et al 2009, *Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study (ACBPS)*, Child Health Promotion Research Centre, Edith Cowan University, Perth

Some responses also noted concerns about having their social networking accounts hacked into and the threat of paedophiles or “dodgy people”, however these were only a small number of responses.

Young people report frustrations with technology relating almost entirely to low-quality hardware and internet connections, including:

- crashing computers
- slow internet
- equipment breaking down and not working
- viruses (some education is required in relation to where a virus might come from)
- spam emails

Thus, the frustrations and fears are probably not dissimilar to those held by their ‘mainstream’ peers. Their risky behaviour, however, may differ.

Risky Behaviours of Vulnerable Young People

In the **BeNetWise** survey young people are asked to self-report on their risky and/or illegal behaviour. While we are aware that some young people did not report behaviour that, anecdotally, we are aware they are engaging in, the picture is still one of high-risk behaviour. In addition we have gathered anecdotal evidence of some of the behaviour staff, carers and educators are particularly concerned about.

Probably in line with the behaviour of their ‘mainstream’ peers, over 76% of respondents to date have indicated that they have lied about their age online and just under 70% have chatted with people they don’t know face-to-face. We found that 46% had been bullied via mobile phone or the internet, and 38.5% had bullied others in this way. Hacking and cracking into the social networking sites of other people also figured relatively highly on the list of risky behaviours.

Bullying was an issue raised by staff, carers and educators in consultations. In some cases staff were aware of particularly vicious bullying being perpetrated by young people in their programs against others (the victims were not necessarily in their programs). They confessed to being at a loss for how to address this, particularly when the young people in question expressed an intentional desire to cause harm to the person they were bullying.

Of significant concern are the interactions involving naked or semi-naked photographs of young people and their peers. Between 7 and 15% of respondents indicated they had either sent, requested or received naked or semi-naked photographs of themselves or others online or via mobile phone. In consultations staff, carers and educators told us that they were concerned about the growing trend in ‘sexting’ among their clients. More concerning were the stories about teenage girls using photographs of themselves in suggestive poses and varying states of undress to barter with strangers as well as their peers for drugs, phone credit and cigarettes.

In the course of this project we have also seen evidence of young people using their social networking profiles to publicise gang affiliation and to boast about gang-related violence.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF TRAUMA & ABUSE HISTORIES IN A DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

Berry Street's Take Two program has been delivering services to trauma-affected children and families since 2004. The program is informed by international and national research and understanding (current and ongoing) about the impact of trauma and abuse on child development.

In addition to the circumstances that reduce opportunities for access to technology discussed above, children and young people residing in OoHC or learning in Alt.Ed. environments are often further disadvantaged by the impact of the trauma and abuse that has resulted in their removal from their family, into state care.

Early childhood trauma can result in a range of developmental setbacks including affect dysregulation - disturbance to the child's ability to regulate their own behaviour and responses, and their capacity to recognise and react appropriately to danger. We know that abuse and neglect in the early years of a child's life can result in responses ranging across Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety, conduct and attachment disorders, depression and dissociation and disengagement in the face of danger.

"many young people who have been traumatised cannot teach themselves to be safe, as they lack a baseline for understanding what 'safe' feels and looks like"¹⁵.

If a child cannot understand what 'safe' looks or feels like, how can they be expected to make choices that are protective of themselves and others.

Where a child has experienced abuse or neglect at the hands of their caregivers their experience of seeking safety through those caregivers may have been met with such inconsistency and unpredictability that they have developed an inability to regulate their own safety as an adolescent¹⁶.

In an online context this means that the efficacy of traditional cyber-safety strategies, many of which rely on a child or young person being able to assess situations, encounters and content for their impact on their safety, must be called into question for this group.

Furthermore, we are aware that children and young people who have suffered trauma and abuse often experience difficulties in building and maintaining relationships, and can be prone to engaging in risky and/or self-destructive behaviours such as substance abuse, self-harm, absconding, aggression towards others, exploitation by others and criminal behaviours. In an online context it is reasonable to predict that these behaviours may translate into seeking out risky internet environments, online communities that promote self-destructive behaviours and ways in which to perpetrate aggression towards others.

The victim-perpetrator paradigm is key to our approach. In the context of cyber-safety, an overlap between victim and aggressor¹⁷ is apparent. A child or young person seeking out risky situations and/or perpetrating abuse or bullying online may also be a victim in similar scenarios.

¹⁵ Van der Kolk 2001, cited in Federico, M, Jackson, A & Black, C 2005 p.9, *Reflections on Complexity: Take Two First Evaluation Report - 2004 - Summary Report*, Berry Street Victoria Take Two School of Social Work and Social Policy, LaTrobe University, Bundoora, Australia

¹⁶ Federico, M, Jackson, A & Black, C 2005 p.8, *Reflections on Complexity: Take Two First Evaluation Report - 2004 - Summary Report*, Berry Street Victoria Take Two School of Social Work and Social Policy, LaTrobe University, Bundoora, Australia

¹⁷ Internet Safety Technical Taskforce 2008, Appendix C, *Enhancing Child Safety & Online Technologies: Final Report of the Internet Safety Technical Task Force to the Multi-State Working Group on Social Networking of State Attorneys General of the United States*, Berkman Centre for Internet & Society, Harvard University

Furthermore, research shows that retaliation in response to cyber-bullying may occur “to counteract negative emotions about having been bullied”¹⁸.

Contrary to traditional victim-based approaches to cyber-safety, an understanding of the impact of trauma and abuse histories indicates a need for alternative strategies recognising the sometimes *risk-seeking* behaviour of vulnerable children and young people. Such approaches must emphasise the importance of a broader behaviour management approach to supporting vulnerable children and young people.

To some extent the suite of approaches that could be applied to keeping a traumatised young person safe online are similar to those available to tackle offline behaviour issues, such as:

- Positive role modelling
- Creating safe environments
- Building strong relationships
- Open dialogue
- PACE - Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy
- Empowerment

While there are additional complexities presented by digital technological environments, the more we see them as an extension of offline environments, the easier it will be to apply the knowledge we already have to keeping vulnerable children and young people safe and engaged.

¹⁸ Beran, T & Li, Q 2007, ‘The Relationship between Cyberbullying and School Bullying’, *Journal of Student Wellbeing*, Vol.1(2), p.15-23, viewed 9/7/10, <http://www.ojs.unisa.edu.au/index.php/JSW/article/viewFile/172/139>

SOLUTIONS & WAYS FORWARD

While we are acutely aware of the risks and vulnerabilities posed by digital environments for the OoHC and Alt.Ed. communities, it remains Berry Street's priority to see technology first and foremost as an enabler and a positive tool for the engagement and development of the children and young people with whom we work.

"Avoid scare tactics and promote the social-norms approach to risk prevention"¹⁹.

Digital technology opens doors, offers opportunities, provides knowledge and experiences, connects communities, educates and informs. Even faced with the risks, it would be hard to justify preventing any child or young person from having access to such positive possibilities, especially given that the same risks exist in the offline world.

Given that child and youth engagement with technology is taking place, whether adults are ready or not, it is fair to conclude that doing nothing is not an option any more; nor is restricting or removing technology access as a protective or punitive measure.

Filters that limit access and punitive approaches that remove access as a consequence of 'bad behaviour' are likely to have limited effect without a "multi-pronged approach that privileges effective responses to online threats over gimmicks, and which promotes tools and technology that really work"²⁰.

Berry Street would strongly support a model promoting *"non-fear-based, social-norms education, which promotes and establishes a baseline norm of good behaviour online... digital citizenship and media literacy as the cornerstones of Internet safety"*²¹.

Building Capacity

Cyber-safety is the responsibility of every person. It is about how we conduct ourselves online and the choices we make. However we know that:

- Not everyone understands how to use technology or engage with it effectively or positively; and
- Perceptions of safety and positive choices are subjective and can depend upon a person's life experience

Our experience with **BeNetWise** has taught us that there is significant work required to bring many agencies, staff, carers and educators as well as some children and young people into the digital age. They want and need to build their skills, gain knowledge and increase their confidence in an online environment. There is also a need to provide positive experiences and opportunities to engage in positive learning through digital technology to vulnerable children and young people who, without guidance, are at risk of centring their activities around negative online environments or pursuits.

Staff, carers and educators undergo training in a broad range of role-related topics and areas. There are opportunities to embed digital inclusion components in existing training. Furthermore, formal academic training for youth workers, social workers, community welfare workers etc. offer an opportunity to ensure that those who will care for and work with vulnerable groups are aware of and engaged with the issues from the start.

¹⁹ Online Safety and Technology Working Group 2010, p.17, *Youth Safety on a Living Internet: Report of the Online Safety and Technology Working Group*, http://www.ntia.doc.gov/reports/2010/OSTWG_Final_Report_060410.pdf

²⁰ Sue Hutley quoted in Sharp, S 2010, Internet filter 'won't protect kids', *The Age Online*, viewed 9/7/10, <http://www.theage.com.au/technology/technology-news/internet-filter-wont-protect-kids-20100708-102ap.html>

²¹ Online Safety and Technology Working Group 2010, p.6, *Youth Safety on a Living Internet: Report of the Online Safety and Technology Working Group*, http://www.ntia.doc.gov/reports/2010/OSTWG_Final_Report_060410.pdf

Youth Engagement and Leadership

Berry Street has a strong commitment to youth empowerment and participation. We believe that effective services and programs are informed by the experiences and expertise of those who are engaged in them. This applies to the development of digital inclusion and cyber-safety strategies.

*"Respect young people's expertise and get them involved in risk-prevention education."*²²

We have seen in our own consultations that the concerns, uses and even language surrounding technology can differ widely between adults and young people. It would be naïve to assume that we, as adults, could develop strategies that adequately comprehend the role of technology in the lives of young people, without them driving the development of those strategies.

As 'digital natives' the next generation is in a frustrating position. While the services, organisations and programs that support and care for them are still being run by 'digital immigrants', they, and we, are faced with a culture gap that can only be bridged by working together.

*"minors themselves... have a role to play in improving their own safety online and that of their peers"*²³

Human Rights

Berry Street believes that equal access to quality digital technology should be considered a right for all children and young people in Australia, not a privilege. Furthermore, all children and young people have the right to be safe in the online environment, as they do in the offline world. Cyber-safety is about the wellbeing of the whole community, and as such it is a whole-of-community concern.

We have previously referred to technology as an enabler and a connector. This is all the more relevant to children and young people in OoHC if we look through the lens of human rights.

The Charter for Children in OoHC was developed by the Department of Human Services and the Office of the Child Safety Commissioner in consultation with young people in the care system and launched in 2007. The Charter reflects other national and international rights frameworks, but succinctly highlights some of the significant differences that exist between these children and young people and their 'mainstream' peers. For example:

- The right *"to know information about me will only be shared in order to help people look after me"* reminds us that children and young people in OoHC do not control their own information. This raises issues of privacy among other things.
- The right *"to keep in contact with my family, friends and people and places that matter to me"* is a clear reminder that children and young people in OoHC often don't live with the people who are important to them.
- The right *"to be able to develop life skills and grow up to be the best person I can"* raises the awareness that for these children and young people gaining life skills as a matter of course as one grows and develops is not a given.

While these rights highlight the barriers children and young people in OoHC face, they are also signposts to the ways in which positive, constructive and safe engagement with digital technology can play a significant role in ensuring the rights of these vulnerable children and young people are upheld.

²² Online Safety and Technology Working Group 2010, p.7, *Youth Safety on a Living Internet: Report of the Online Safety and Technology Working Group*, http://www.ntia.doc.gov/reports/2010/OSTWG_Final_Report_060410.pdf

²³ Ibid, p.4

If we take the rights noted above alone there are clear benefits of engaging with technology: the ability to control their own information and to choose with whom they share it is empowering; using social networking sites to maintain contact with family and friends who live far away fosters the important relationships in a child's life; and accessing information about how to look after themselves and their home, or where to find local services and events are all part of developing the life skills a young person needs to live independently.

Digital technology's capacity to assist children and young people in OoHC to exercise these rights is currently under-utilised.

Research Gaps

Evidence drawn from **BeNetWise** is not based on a formal research model. Sample sizes were relatively small, but they do provide a 'tip-of-the-iceberg' glimpse of some of the challenges and issues that require further research.

In reviewing the literature around cyber-safety and digital engagement we found gaps in knowledge. We also heard questions and concerns from people during consultations that have exposed further gaps:

- ***What does 'at risk' mean in an online world?***

Very little in the existing research explores what it means to be vulnerable in an online environment. There is research that identifies the factors that put children at risk, but we found nothing to indicate what that then means in terms of their experiences. Furthermore it is unclear what the impact is of the 'digital divide' - does disadvantage create the digital divide or is the digital divide now a factor in rendering a person disadvantaged?

- ***What does cyber-safety look like for those with learning and developmental disorders?***

Where a child or young person can engage in a discussion about cyber-safety, but is unable, for various reasons, to process those messages and apply them to a practical scenario, how can we ensure their safety?

- ***How can privacy be protected?***

In a statutory care arrangement strict laws exist around the privacy of children and young people. These rules are intended to protect them, but in an online context (and often in an offline context too) they present yet another barrier to being 'normal'. Children cannot post photographs of their friends in care or be identified as living in care. Where a court has ruled that no contact be permitted between a child and their birth family, social networking sites become a danger-zone for unlawful and risky communication, even stalking and pursuing.

- ***How can trauma & abuse be better understood in the online world?***

The gaps in relation to the impact of histories of trauma and abuse on online behaviour are varied:

- How do trauma & abuse affect a child's ability to stay safe when they don't *know* safe?
- When a child has experienced trauma and abuse (including sexual abuse), how does that affect and/or drive behaviour such as sexting?
- What are the long-term effects of exposure to pornography for children who have experienced trauma and abuse (including sexual abuse)?
- If a child has experience violence and sexual abuse, how does exposure to violent and sexualised games affect them?
- What does the transition from victim to perpetrator and/or vice versa look like in the digital context?
- In an online environment, what is 'normal' adolescent risk-taking behaviour as opposed to risk-taking driven by broader behavioural issues?

Opportunities for Cooperation

As we have noted previously, cyber-safety and the promotion of responsible digital citizenship is the responsibility of the whole community. As public understanding of risks increases, so do the opportunities for collaboration and cooperation. A crisis-response strategy is important, but, as we have indicated before, it should be part of a broader suite of strategies that prioritise preventative action and social responsibility.

A core value of Berry Street is '*Working Together*'. We have a strong history of collaboration and partnerships in our work. We are excited to be a partner in a submission to the Federal Government to form a Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) focusing on technology and wellbeing for young people. This approach will see a broad range of community, government, academic and corporate partners working together to better understand and enable digital engagement as a means for promoting wellbeing among young people.

Our CRC submission and our long-term aspirations for **BeNetWise** are to adapt the frameworks developed for the OoHC and Alt.Ed. sectors for other vulnerable groups, such as Indigenous youth, CALD communities and homeless young people. In order to do this we will need to rely heavily on our existing networks and the development of further networks.

Role of CSO's, Carers & Educators

The *in loco parentis* role of CSO's is important. It reflects the obligation and responsibility we have to ensure that, like our biological children, our statutory children are afforded opportunities, tools, education and resources to reach their potential.

Life skills are often considered something to teach to a young person so that they can leave care equipped for independent living. This underestimates the value of life-long learning, which should be part of the culture in which we raise children, in and outside the care system. It also under-estimates the importance of ensuring that a young person leaves care or education *connected* to their community.

The internet and digital technology plays a vital role in building that culture and facilitating independent learning and community connectedness. It is also key to modern-day rites of passage and the exploration of identity that is a 'normal' part of growing up.

CSO's, carers and educators should provide children and young people with the role models and the safe environments in which to explore the digital world safely, just as we should be expected to do in the offline world.

CONCLUSION

It is one thing to know our role as CSO's, carers and educators, and quite another to put it into practice. We have identified the gaps in research, skills and knowledge and in resources. Any genuine attempts to address the digital divide, cyber-safety and issues of digital inclusion must recognise that, in order to bring vulnerable children and young people to a level comparable to their 'mainstream' peers, there is a great deal of work to be done.



Governance and Project Working Groups

Governance Group

Chair	Sheree Limbrick, Director - Statewide Programs, Berry Street
Project Partners	Judith Rose, Senior Program & Policy Advisor, DHS Megan Scannell, Senior Project Manager, OCSC
Project Manager	Lauren Oliver, Youth Empowerment & Participation, Berry Street

Reference Group

Chair	Sheree Limbrick, Director - Statewide Programs, Berry Street
Members	Robyn Treyvaud, e-Learning & Cyber-safety Darren Kane, Internet Trust & Safety, Telstra Angela Boundy, Senior Business Specialist, Telstra Darren Lewin Hill, Policy and Project Leader, CWAV Vivienne Halat, Senior Program and Policy Advisor, DHS Jim Oommen, Senior Project Officer, OCSC Michelle Blanchard, Research Project Manager, Inspire Foundation Andrea Dwyer, Program Development Manager, Anglicare Janine Slinger, Foster Carer, Anglicare Nick Halfpenny, Manager - Quality & Review, Mackillop FS Michael Biassizo, IT Manager, Berry Street Karla Lopez, Senior Psychologist, SECASA Dr. Sophie Reid, Research Fellow & Psychologist, Murdoch Institute Tim Hardiman, Youth Affairs, Victoria Police
Project Manager	Lauren Oliver, Youth Empowerment & Participation, Berry Street

Working Groups

Website:

Chair	Lauren Oliver, Youth Empowerment & Participation, Berry Street
RG Members	Robyn Treyvaud, e-Learning & Cyber-safety Darren Kane, Internet Trust & Safety, Telstra
External Members	Dana Morton-Kehle, CIRC Education Worker, Berry Street Stacey Joyce, Senior Education Advisor, ACMA Yola Armstrong, Communications Officer, Berry Street Sylvia Guidara, Educator, Digimuve

APPENDIX 1 – Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety: Inquiry into Cyber-Safety

Training:

Chair	Lauren Oliver, Youth Empowerment & Participation, Berry Street
RG Members	Robyn Treyvaud, e-Learning & Cyber-safety Vivienne Halat, Senior Program and Policy Advisor, DHS Jim Oommen, Senior Project Officer, OCSC Michelle Blanchard, Research Project Manager, Inspire Foundation Janine Slinger, Foster Carer, Anglicare Brenda Nash, Learning & Development, Centre for Excellence
External Members	Pam Miranda, Manager - Learning & Development, Berry Street Lisa Waite, ACMA Dinna Tayao, GreenPC Katie Hooper, Foster Care Association of Victoria

Advocacy:

Chair	Lauren Oliver, Youth Empowerment & Participation, Berry Street
RG Members	Robyn Treyvaud, e-Learning & Cyber-safety Darren Lewin Hill, Policy and Project Leader, CWAV Jim Oommen, Senior Project Officer, OCSC Michael Biassizo, IT Manager, Berry Street
External Members	Peter Laws, IT Manager, Wesley Mission Leah Kemp, Manager - Media & Communications, Berry Street Foster Carer PR/Media expert

APPENDIX 2 – Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety: Inquiry into Cyber-Safety

Agencies Represented at BeNetWise Regional Workshops

- Anchor Foster Care
- Anglicare Victoria (various offices)
- Ballarat Community Health
- Berry Street
- CARA Inc
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
- City of Ballarat
- Community Connections Warnambool
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (various offices)
- Department of Human Services (various offices)
- Familycare
- Gippsafe Employment & Transitional Training Centre
- Glastonbury Child and Family Services
- Goulburn Valley CASA
- Lisa Lodge
- MacKillop Family Services
- Menzies Youth Services
- Mirabel Foundation
- Office of the Child Safety Commissioner
- OzChild
- Quantum
- Respite Care
- St Lukes' Anglicare
- Salvation Army (various offices)
- Sandhurst Diocese
- South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault
- Spiritwest Services - Fresh Program
- Victoria Police
- Workways Wodonga
- YWCA Victoria