Inquiry into improving the delivery of respectful relationships and sex education relevant to the use of technology in Queensland state schools

Submission No 015

Queensland Family and Child Commission
Submission

To: **Education, Tourism, Innovation and Small Business Committee**   **Date:** 11 August 2017

Topic: Inquiry into improving the delivery of respectful relationships and sex education relevant to the use of technology in Queensland state schools

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Submission summary:

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) is pleased to provide a submission to the Education, Tourism, Innovation and Small Business Committee inquiry into improving the delivery of respectful relationships and sex education relevant to the use of technology in Queensland state schools.

The QFCC has a statutory function to promote and advocate the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. This submission will focus on broader efforts to keeping children and young people safe from harm, including promoting online safety, which may help to inform any improvements to respectful relationships and sex education in Queensland state schools.

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Prevalence of sexting, non-consensual sharing of sexual images and other sexualised use of technology

Recommendation

- Strategies for online exploitation should be similar to those for offline exploitation
- Improvements to online safety programs should consider the disproportionate risk factors experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

It is clear sexting, non-consensual sharing of sexual images, and other sexualised uses of technology are increasingly prevalent internationally.[1] Improvements in technology which deliver great benefits to children and young people can also bring new risks.

The QFCC has worked directly with children and young people to develop education and communication strategies around online safety. It is important to hear the views of children and young people, to deliver targeted communications strategies that effectively create awareness and promote safe behaviours.

The risks of online exploitation were highlighted by the Queensland Organised Crime Commission of Inquiry report, delivered 30 October 2015.[2] Following this report, Ms Annastacia Palaszczuk MP, Premier and Minister for the Arts, asked the QFCC to lead an initiative to improve online safety. The result is Out of the Dark (OOTD), which aims to reduce children's and parents' vulnerability to grooming offences.

The broad intent of OOTD is to raise awareness of the risks associated with online child exploitation to improve the online experience and safety for children and young people, and increase communication between parents, children and young people to support online safety.

As part of the OOTD initiative, the QFCC surveyed existing international research on online safety to to support children and young people to safely navigate new technologies.

Research

Research shows young people at risk of online sexual abuse are those who
- are sad, lonely, and feel that something is missing from their lives
- are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender persons
- want to explore sexuality in what may seem to be a safe setting
- have an immigration background, which can be linked to economic difficulties
- have a disrupted family environment (e.g. through illness or breakdown of relationships)
- have already been sexually abused.[3]

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[1] Sentencing Advisory Council, *Classification of child exploitation material for sentencing purposes: final report*, http://www.sentencingcouncil.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/531503/cem-final-report-july-2017.pdf, July 2017, accessed 26 July 2017, p, 10.

[2] Queensland Organised Crime Commission of Inquiry, *Queensland Organised Crime Commission of Inquiry: final report*, http://www.organisedcrimeinquiry.qld.gov.au/, 2015, accessed 26 July 2017.

[3] Ainsaar, M. and Lööf, L. (eds.), *Online behaviour related to child sexual abuse: literature report*, Risktaking Online Behaviour Empowerment through Research and Training (ROBERT), Council of the European Baltic States: European Union, http://www.childcentre.info/robert/public/Online_behaviour_related_to_sexual_abuse.pdf, accessed 26 July 2017.

Many of the identified risk factors for online abuse are the same as for other forms of child sexual abuse. This suggests prevention strategies for online exploitation should be similar to those for offline exploitation.

Increasingly, social media is replacing more open spaces such as chat rooms. This shift has reduced the number of solicitations from unknown adults.

However, studies show most sexual abuse is perpetrated by people already known to victims. Social media, which connect users with existing relationships, may increase risks to children and young people from the adults they know.[4]

Furthermore, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are disproportionately likely to experience identified risk factors for sexual abuse, and as a result may be at increased risk of online sexual exploitation. Police and health data show Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are at greater risk than non-Indigenous children of experiencing sexual abuse.[5]

Increasing access to the internet, especially through the rollout of the National Broadband Network (NBN) in regional communities, could increase the risk of online exploitation. If the NBN offers sharply increased speed and access to new technologies, this could increase risks to children who have limited previous experience with the internet, and have limited awareness of potential dangers.

These disproportionate risk factors experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people should be considered while designing improvements to respectful relationships and sex education programs.

Advantages and disadvantages in current respectful relationships and sex education strategies

Recommendation

- Respectful relationships and sex education programs be delivered to a minimum standard in all state schools.
- If evaluation of these programs demonstrates value and behaviour change, consideration should be given to making the program mandatory in all schools, including independent and Catholic schools.

As part of the OOTD initaitive, the QFCC undertook a cross jurisdictional scan of the resources available through education departments and police services.

Education departments across the country now have policies which cover child exploitation, bullying and sexting. There are also policies being implemented allowing teachers to confiscate mobile

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[4] Mitchell, K. J., Jones, L. M., Finkelhor, D., & Wolak, J., 'Understanding the decline in unwanted online sexual solicitations for U.S. youth 2000–2010: Findings from three Youth Internet Safety Surveys'. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 37*, 2013, 1225-1236, p. 1233.

[5] Child Family Community Australia, *Child protection and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children fact sheet – August 2017*, https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/child-protection-and-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-children, accessed 10 August 2017.

devices until the end of term if being used in classrooms and until the end of the school year for continued misuse.

The QFCC found Queensland had the only education department in Australia with a dedicated Cybersafety and Relationship Management team focused on education and investigation. Queensland was also unique in providing information about risk factors for online safety on the Department of Education and Training website.[6]

The Queensland Department of Education and Training developed the *Respectful relationships education program* to align with reforms to end domestic and family violence. It is aimed at students from prep to year 12 and focuses on influencing behaviour change.

This is done through challenging attitudes about violence and gender construction known to lead to violence, while also supporting students to develop pro-social behaviours that lead to equitable and respectful relationships. A strengths-based approach underpins the development of respectful relationships knowledge and skills.[7]

Another program currently in place in Queensland is the *Daniel Morcombe Child Safety Curriculum,* a joint initiative between the Department of Education and Training and the Daniel Morcombe Foundation. This aims to support schools and teachers in the promotion of safety for all students in Queensland.

This curriculum includes lessons about personal safety and awareness, cybersafety and telephone safety. The lesson content aims to develop student knowledge and skills to recognise, react and report when they are unsafe.[8]

While these programs are highly valuable, they are not compulsory in state schools. School-based decisions are made in consultation with the local school community as to what programs are delivered and to what degree.

Consideration should be given to delivering these programs to a minimum standard in all state schools.

If evaluation of these programs demonstrates value and behaviour change, consideration should also be given to making the program mandatory in all schools, including independent and Catholic schools.

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[6] Department of Education and Training, *Protecting students from suspected harm*, http://education.qld.gov.au/parents/school-life/health-wellbeing/student-protection-policy.html, accessed 26 July 2017.

[7] Department of Education and Training, *Respectful relationships education program*, http://education.qld.gov.au/parents/information/respectful-relationships/index.html, accessed 26 July 2017.

[8] Department of Education and Training, *Daniel Morcombe Child Safety Curriculum*, http://education.qld.gov.au/parents/school-life/child-safety-curriculum.html, accessed 26 July 2017.

Improving the delivery of respectful relationships and sex education in Queensland

Recommendation

- Organisations already contributing to online safety programs, such as the QFCC's Out of the Dark initiative, could be consulted on new online safety strategies.
- If the Queensland Government establishes an eSafeQ Commissioner, this officer could work with the Department of Education and Training to maintain and update curriculum material on sex education and respectful relationships.
- Prevention targeting young children could involve sexual abuse education about recognising abuse and disclosing to a trusted adult.
- The QFCC's consultation with young people has shown some types of educational materials may be successful in promoting behaviour change, including:
    - serious and believable stories presented in short videos
    - colourful, brief written materials
    - apps that provide humorous ways to respond to solicitations
    - peer-to-peer support.

Prevention and communication initiatives

The QFCC recommends establishing groups or committees comprised of experts in online safety, and children and young people, to provide advice on developing respectful relationships and sex education in Queensland.

These groups could be modelled on the OOTD Steering Committee and working group established by the QFCC to advise on and help design the OOTD initiatives.

OOTD Steering Committee members are:
- Cheryl Vardon, Principal Commissioner, Queensland Family and Child Commission
- Jonathan Rouse, Detective Inspector, Taskforce Argos, Child Safety and Sexual Crime Group, Queensland Police Service
- Cheryl Scanlon, Queensland Police Service
- Hetty Johnson, Founder and Chair of Bravehearts
- Hayley Stevenson, Executive Director, Student Protection, Department of Education and Training
- Julie Inman-Grant, eSafety Commissioner, Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner, and
- Andrew Mills, Queensland Government Chief Information Officer, Department of Science, Information Technology and Innovation.

The working group included young ambassadors from YFS, a service that supports vulnerable children and families, and representatives from the Ted Noffs Street University. The QFCC also held a series of design jams with students and graduates from Queensland tertiary institutions, to hear from young people about further activity required to keep young people safe online.

The QFCC held a week of events between 7 and 11 March 2017, designed and facilitated with young people for young people. These events, linking the QFCC to a wide range of individuals and organisations working on online safety programs, included:
- a Learning Forum for professionals in the child protection sector
- a visit by the Principal Commissioner, QFCC, to a Brisbane secondary school, and
- the OOTD Expo, a public event held at the State Library of Queensland on 11 March 2017.

Stallholders at the OOTD expo included:
- Daniel Morcombe Foundation
- Carly Ryan Foundation
- Office of the Children's E-safety Commissioner
- Queensland Police Service
- Bravehearts
- Alannah and Madeline Foundation
- Parentline and Kids' Help Line
- YFS
- Life Education
- Department of Education and Training Cyber Safety and Reputation Management Team
- Health Reimagined
- eSafe Education, and
- Eyes Open Social Media.

It may be helpful to continue consulting with these organisations when developing new approaches to online safety, including initiatives in the state school curriculum.

Sentencing Advisory Council report

In July 2017, the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council released the report, *Classification of child exploitation material for sentencing purposes*. The report contains a recommendation to establish 'an eSafeQ Commissioner position to meet the challenges associated with online offending and protect Queensland children and families in the virtual environment'.[9]

The report suggests the issue of sexting would be addressed by the eSafeQ Commissioner, designing interventions to assist parents to talk to their children about online safety. The Commissioner could also be responsible for developing consistent messaging around online safety, and promoting targeted education campaigns.[10]

If established, the QFCC recommends the eSafeQ Commissioner work with the Department of Education and Training to maintain and update curriculum material on sex education and respectful relationships, to keep this material up to date with changing technology.

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[9] Sentencing Advisory Council, *Classification of child expoitation material for sentencing purposes: final report*, p. 96.
[10] *Ibid.*

Improving the delivery of respectful relationships and sex education

Overall, QFCC research and consultation with children and young people indicates efforts to prevent online sexual exploitation should:
- focus on sexual harassment from peers
- address research-based risk factors
- address the same issues addressed in offline sexual exploitation prevention efforts, such as assertive behaviour
- involve active learning
- include several sessions, and
- have clear and specific learning objectives.

The QFCC's consultation with young people has shown some types of educational materials may be successful in promoting behaviour change, including:
- serious and believable stories presented in short videos
- colourful and brief written materials
- apps that provide humorous ways to respond to solicitations, and
- peer-to-peer support.

Although the most common form of online child sexual exploitation involves older children, most online child sexual abuse images depict children under 12 years, including infants.[11] Prevention targeting young children should involve sexual abuse education about recognising abuse and disclosing to a trusted adult.

Professionals working with children and young people should understand that the challenge of online safety is not insurmountable. Individuals and groups already talk about and engage in education programs about healthy relationships, assertive communication, and protective behaviours in relation to offline abuse.

Prevention requires increasing the emotional and social wellbeing of children and young people, and building confidence across the sector.

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[11] Cybertip!ca, *New study highlights need for education and collaboration to address child sexual abuse websites*, https://www.cyberaide.ca/app/en/media_release_cybertip_csa_analysis, 2009, accessed 26 July 2017.