

28 July 2017

Committee Secretary
ETISBC
Parliament House
BRISBANE 4000
Sent by email: etisbc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

**INQUIRY INTO IMPROVING THE DELIVERY OF RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS
AND SEX EDUCATION RELEVANT TO THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN
QUEENSLAND STATE SCHOOLS**

This submission is prepared in response 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 North Queensland Women's Legal Service Inc (NQWLS) is a not for profit specialist community legal centre operating from offices in Townsville and Cairns. Established in 1996, it has been operating continuously providing free legal services and community legal education to women who live in North and Far North Queensland, particularly in the areas of family law and domestic and family violence.

Since 2016, NQWLS has worked with local schools and youth groups, delivering respectful relationships programs which include information about the legal implications and consequences arising from certain behaviours within relationships. NQWLS has four (4) staff who are accredited Love Bites facilitators.

As a specialist community legal centre, we also receive requests from schools to provide legal information sessions to students and staff about a range of legal issues that may affect the school community.

We note that there are a number of issues that the Inquiry will consider and NQWLS wishes to address the following:

1. The extent to which students use technology to create, send or view sexualized content, and the prevalence of unsafe or risky use of technology.
2. How respectful relationships education and sex education relevant to the use of technology could be improved in state schools.

The extent to which students use technology to create, send or view sexualized content, and the prevalence of unsafe or risky use of technology.

In the past year, NQWLS has presented respectful relationships programs which include the legal implications of unhealthy relationships to over 100 students aged between the ages of 14-18 years. The NQWLS program includes asking the students about whether it is okay for technology to be used in the context of sexualised behaviours and when that behaviour may *not* be okay. In the context of these discussions, we obtain the opinions of the students and have an honest and frank discussion about their experiences. During the discussions we can explain the potential **legal consequences** of using technology for sexualised behaviours, such as sexting and sending, storing or producing sexual images.

From the discussions that we have engaged in, it is clear that risky behaviour is common practice. The students do not seem to shy away from discussing the topic and often talk about the topic as though it is a 'normal' part of growing up. It is not until we discuss and explain the legal implications of the behaviours, that their opinions often change.

In light of the information that we have obtained from students responses in the course of our work, we have formed the view that these risky behaviours using technology are highly prevalent in schools.

Recommendation 1: NQWLS recommends that the issue of unsafe or risky use of technology by students, in the context of sexualised behaviours, should include information about the far-reaching legal consequences as a key feature of programs used for sex education and respectful relationships education in schools.

How respectful relationships education and sex education relevant to the use of technology could be improved in state schools

NQWLS provides free legal services to women who reside in North and Far North Queensland. More than 60% of our clients have been affected by domestic and family violence. The majority of these matters have involved children. For many students their first experience of an intimate / family or sexual relationship is often from witnessing their parent's interactions within the home.

For some of the students these family interactions can be defined as acts of domestic violence.

NQWLS strongly believes that in order to change the prevalence of domestic and family violence in our society, we must educate the younger generations about respectful relationships and what is, or is not, a respectful relationship.

We therefore submit that all Queensland state schools should prioritise educating their students about respectful relationships and the legal implications of using technology in a sexualised manner.

We believe this education should involve external organisations from the community sector, with relevant expertise in both the **legal** and **social impacts** and **consequences** that can occur when students engage in certain behaviours.

It is NQWLS' experience that respectful relationships education and sex education in Queensland state schools *is greatly improved* as an outcome of the collaborative work done through our partnership with the host schools.

As an example, NQWLS uses legal knowledge to underpin the delivery of respectful relationships education to schools. We believe that the students participate, engage and feel comfortable discussing topics with the NQWLS lawyers as presenters of the information because they understand the lawyers have experience in dealing with the consequences of the behaviours being discussed, and because they are not involved in their day-to-day lives at school or home.

As a result of the students feeling comfortable in sharing their thoughts and experiences during discussions, they achieve a greater level of understanding and learning about their choices, behaviours and responsibilities within the context of a dating or intimate relationship.

Recommendation 2: Respectful relationships education and sex education in Queensland state schools should involve external organisations from the community sector, with relevant expertise in both the **legal** and **social impacts** and **consequences** that can occur when students engage in certain behaviours. Relevant organisations with expertise would include community legal centres and domestic violence resource services.

NQWLS is committed to continue its vital work in Queensland schools and thank you for the opportunity to make submissions to the Inquiry. We look forward to the Committee's findings.

Yours faithfully



Sharell O'Brien
Supervising Solicitor