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Centre Against Sexual Violence Inc.

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To whom it may concern

**Submission to: Queensland Parliament
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 Centre Against Sexual Violence Inc. (CASV) is a not-for-profit non-government community organisation funded by the Queensland State Government. The core business of the organisation is to provide sexual assault counselling, advocacy and support to all women 12 years and over residing in the Logan, Beaudesert and Redlands region who have experienced sexual assault at any time in their life.

The CASV welcomes and supports the Inquiry. As a sexual assault counselling and support service that also provides community education in Queensland State schools the CASV would like to put forward further suggestions and support for improving delivery of respectful relationship education relevant to the use of technology as follows:

The Prevalence of sexualised content and unsafe use of technology by students:

Clients of The Centre Against Sexual Violence present having experienced various kinds of technology assisted sexual abuse or assault including: sexting, non-consensual sharing of images, pressure to participate in or watch pornography, victimisation on revenge porn sites, cyberstalking and repeated requests for sexualised photographs. This type of victimisation is particularly prevalent amongst school aged clients of the service, a trend that has steadily been increasing over the past 3 years at CASV. The use of technology assisted abuse, harassment and bullying is increasingly prevalent in Australia. Technology is now an intrinsic part of our society. In the Don't Send that Pic (Plan International and Our watch March 2016) Australian girls and young women aged 15 – 19 years reported endemic levels of abuse and harassment online. The recent Human Rights Commission report into sexual assault and harassment in Australian Universities found that among university students more than one in five (22%) students experienced technology-based sexual harassment in 2016, including repeated or inappropriate advances on email, social networking websites and internet chat rooms and sexually explicit emails or SMS messages. The report repeatedly highlighted a lack of awareness of rights, or avenues for support for victimised individuals, witnesses or bystanders.

Current technology is used to coerce women and children into sexual abuse through online grooming, it is used as a means of sexually abusing vulnerable individuals (e.g. pressuring them to post explicit images or to perform sex acts on camera), and it is also used as a way to silence victims. For example

a victim might be less likely to seek help or disclose abuse if a perpetrator threatened to disseminate sexualised photographs of them. Public humiliation online has a potentially wider audience and increased invasiveness, reaching young people in their homes or bedrooms. The sexualisation of girls and women online coupled with the invasive and often violent portrayal of sex acts in pornography are also sending harmful messages about gender in our community. In the absence of effective school based education and despite often well-meaning efforts of parents and guardians young Queenslanders are often being educated about how to be in relationships or negotiate sexual relationships via inappropriate and or violent internet content.

Compared to Queensland state schools, are there advantages or disadvantages in the ways that other states and territories deliver sex education, respectful relationships education and education about at-risk behaviour and the use of digital technologies?

Whilst harassment and abuse online can and does happen to anyone there are gendered patterns that show young women and girls are particularly susceptible to abuse online. The work of Our Watch and the Victorian schools is current best practice for Healthy Relationships education in Australia. The seven core elements of good practice are:

- Address the drivers of gender-based violence,
- Have a long term vision, approach and funding,
- Take a whole school approach,
- Establish and include mechanisms for collaboration and coordination,
- Ensure integrated evaluation and continual improvement,
- Provide resources and support for teachers,
- Use age-appropriate, interactive and participatory curriculum.

These elements are not evident in current Queensland efforts to provide Healthy Relationships Education. The CASV is prepared to support a curriculum based program that is informed by specialist violence against women and children's services, to ensure that services are accountable to the victims of abuse. Young people need to be supported to make ethical decisions but the result must be that all women, children and men are safer from violence.

The CASV has a history of providing Healthy relationships and Primary Prevention Education in Secondary schools in Logan and the Redlands. Current practice varies greatly between schools and is often seen as an add on and rarely prioritised. The CASV would promote the holistic inclusion of all sexual assault and harassment education including via technology to Healthy Relationships education. This education would be embedded in the curriculum and seen as a high priority. Currently the CASV involved in the presentation of the Love Bites program. This is being presented as a limited one day program. There is inadequate opportunity to address all issues and little time to ensure that young people are given the skills and tools to critically analyse what they view on social media, the portrayal of gender relationships through invasive and widely available pornography, information on rights and where to seek help, or how to be active bystanders where they witness abuse or harassment. In the absence of a curriculum embedded policy to address all forms of violence with a focus on ending gender based violence, programs like Love Bites provide at least some skills and support for students

Schools cannot be asked to deal with this global issue on their own. The whole community, government and individuals need to take responsibility for addressing the ethical use of technology, sex education, sexual violence and relationships. The expertise of sexual assault services should inform curriculum development and can play a crucial role in ongoing accountability. The increased safety of women and children needs to be the priority of any Healthy Relationships education. Parents and teachers should be provided with all the support they need to assist young people to act ethically and to be safer online. Young people's voices need to be heard so adults can assist them to negotiate the quickly changing online world. There has been little involvement of young people in the media

around this topic. According to Albury, Crawford, Bryon & Matthews, (2013), discussions on sexting inadequately engages with young people's concerns around this practice. It is rare for young people's opinions to be voiced in media coverage. Young people who themselves use technology to abuse another also need to be provided education and support to change their behaviours.

What are the potential benefits of students being better informed about the risks behind the use of technology in a sexual nature?

The CASV supports young women and girls who have been victimised online. The effects can be devastating and often result in disruption to education, mental pain and anguish, isolation from family and friends, disruption to schooling or to dropping out of school all together. Victim blaming is normalised in our experience. Judging of young women or girls who might have been photographed being sexually assaulted or for sharing a coerced sexual photograph or even one that was originally taken by consent is often brutal and uncompromising. Victims of sexual assault have always been shamed into silence but with the advent of technology the shaming can be instantly widespread on social media. Blaming women or girls for being involved in coerced sexual behaviours is rampant. Any education that could prevent the abuse of survivors or limit ongoing victimisation is welcomed.

Curriculum based healthy relationships education can also equip young people with skills to critically evaluate: pornographic material, the sexualisation of women and girls, enhance their decision making for their own relationships, and to be active ethical bystanders. If ethical discussion about online behaviours is normalised in our community healthy conversations between young people and their parents, teachers and significant role models can transpire.

The Queensland government has put significant investment into the area of Domestic Violence. A commitment to effective curriculum based Healthy Relationship education has the potential to change the gender based attitudes that perpetuate violence against women and children. Whilst the CASV supports any moves to assist and support young Queenslanders to make better decisions and be protected from online grooming in the use of technology, this issue should not be dealt with as a standalone issue. We urge the Queensland Government to adopt a whole of government response to sexual violence prevention, similar to the one being developed in New South Wales. https://www.women.nsw.gov.au/violence_prevention/nsw-sexual-assault-strategy

The CASV appreciates the opportunity to provide input and suggestions from the perspective of victims/survivors of sexual assault towards the Inquiry into improving the delivery of respectful relationships and sex education relevant to the use of technology in Queensland state schools. We hope that you will find this submission useful. The CASV will look forward to some of the above suggestions given due consideration in the development of a safer outcome for all survivor/victims of sexual assault and with a view to eliminating this preventable violence.

Yours sincerely

Katrina Weeks
On behalf of the CASV Association

Reference

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<https://www.plan.org.au/~media/plan/documents/reports/dont-send-me-that-pic.pdf>