

Launch of the ACMA Cybersmart website

Senator the Hon. Stephen Conroy, Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate, delivered the following speech on Monday 13 July 2009 at Beth Rivkah Ladies College, Melbourne, to launch the website.



Welcome to everyone here this morning. It is great to see so many people here for the launch of this valuable program. I would especially like to thank Beth Rivkah Ladies College for hosting us today.

I would also like to acknowledge the presence of members of the government's Consultative Working Group on Cyber-Safety.

This group is a significant part of the government's broad effort to create a safer environment online. We are working in a number of ways to ensure that families and young people have the confidence to enjoy the fantastic opportunities presented by the internet and other emerging technologies. The internet offers huge opportunities for education, social interaction, innovation and convenience—and it is important that all Australians have the best chance to enjoy the benefits.

Young people are among some of the most avid technology users in our community. Kids today have grown up with the internet and mobile phones. They are always connected and often deeply engaged with new social networking services. Young people are often the first to engage in new activities online.

Unfortunately, however, they are often the first to experience cyber-safety problems such as cyber-bullying, invasions of privacy, and content which could be harmful to them.

It is therefore important that young people have the information and skills necessary to make smart decisions online.

It is important that teachers and parents are empowered to provide the right advice to their students and children.

It is important that they are not fearful or intimidated by new technologies or the level of competency young people have in using them.

We have to remember that while young people are digital natives and have a wealth of digital experience, sometimes there is no substitute for life experience. In this case there is an important role for parents, teachers and other influential adults to play.

It is worth noting the strong demand for existing cyber-safety programs.

The ACMA has received no less than 1,262 individual registrations for its Professional Development for Educators program. Some 100,000 copies of a new resource kit for families and libraries have been distributed. The ACMA's Cybersmart Detectives activity has been undertaken by 300 schools in the last year alone. In addition, significant new research has been conducted by the ACMA and commissioned by the Department in the area of cyber-safety.

I would like to congratulate the ACMA today for the launch of its new Cybersmart website and online helpline. This tool is a great addition to the range of cyber-smart education and information resources being made available to young people. It also goes a step further and provides age-specific resources for teachers and parents.

The ACMA website will make an important contribution to cyber-safety education by providing targeted

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information and practical tools. The Schools Gateway is a particularly significant addition, providing accessible and engaging resources to help schools develop and implement their own cyber-safety programs.

I am pleased to note these types of tools are exactly the type of things young people are telling us are needed to create a safer online environment.

The government is currently taking advice from a group of 305 school students from across Australia on how to best address cyber-safety issues. I have taken part in discussions in this Youth Advisory Group online forum and am pleased to note the high level of passion these students have for creating a better environment for their peers. So far the online forum has received around 3,500 posts on cyber-safety, from more than 6,190 general posts as of 8 July.

In addition, face-to-face meetings with kids from participating schools are progressing well and 14 of the 15 schools have been visited by our Youth Advisory Group leaders. The 15th school will be visited early next week.

The government's Youth Advisory Group will be consulted on the new ACMA website, as will other key stakeholders such as the Consultative Working Group and its cyber-bullying subcommittee. This is part of the proposed continuous improvement to the site. Like any website the new Cybersmart website is a work in progress.

However, the site already includes targeted content for different age groups and a dedicated online counselling service provided by Kids Helpline. The helpline is for young people who have experienced cyber-bullying or other negative experiences online. The helpline ensures confidential advice and support from counsellors who are trained in listening to children and have expertise in cyber-safety advice and assistance.

So, thank you again for being here and thank you to Beth Rivkah Ladies College for hosting us today.

Congratulations to the ACMA for this important launch of the new Cybersmart website. This program is a great addition to the range of efforts being made by the government and other organisations in the community to create a safer online environment. Education in this area, as in all areas of life, will help ensure young people and families get the very best out of the online environment.

Thank you. 🍷

Visit the new Cybersmart website at www.cybersmart.gov.au.