alannah & madeline foundation

Ground Floor, 387 City Road
South Melbourne VIC 3205
Postal address
PO Box 5192
South Melbourne VIC 3205
Phone 03 9697 0666
Email info@amf.org.au
ABN 96 514 115 810
alannahandmadeline.org.au

Young People's Foreword to *'The internet needs fixing': Children and Young People's Vision for Australia's Digital Duty of Care, 2026*

As participants in the Alannah & Madeline Foundation's Youth Engagement Program, we are proud to present this report highlighting child and youth responses to the Australian Government's exposure draft for the Digital Duty of Care.

As youth advocates, we believe that the whole community has a responsibility to provide young people with the education they need to understand and uphold their digital rights. And we are committed to the principle that young people must be deliberately involved in decisions that affect us.

We have seen firsthand how effective youth participation can be when it is intentionally 'baked in' to systems and institutions from the start. Tweaking the format of a workshop or choosing more accessible technology are just two examples of how to remove barriers and instil young people with the confidence to participate or even lead important processes.

As young people, we have lived experience of how digital technology has affected our lives, where it adds value and where it leads to risk. For people our age and younger, there is no clear dividing line between being online and everyday life. Digital spaces are where we learn, connect, explore our identities and make sense of the world. Our goal should be to empower young people to participate in these digital spaces; we cannot 'protect' them through exclusion.

But the harms are ever present: cyberbullying can feel inescapable and suffocating, following us past the school gates and into our homes; social media can intensify comparison and insecurity; feelings of inadequacy caused by constant exposure to unrealistic standards for physical appearance or lifestyle have led many young people to take drastic and unhealthy measures.

Young people today must navigate grooming, bullying, abuse, deepfakes and an endless stream of misinformation and harmful content. Women, ethnic minorities, gender diverse people and other vulnerable groups experience vicious online hate and discrimination.

Children, young people and their families struggle to stay informed and safe. We should not be expected to carry the entire burden of managing risks created or amplified by platforms; the platforms themselves must take responsibility for foreseeable harms arising from the way their products are designed and operated.

We believe the best approach is one that recognises young people's agency and prioritises digital-literacy education while also implementing clear, legally enforceable accountability mechanisms for technology companies. The Digital Duty of Care is currently our best chance to secure that future.

We hope this report helps decision-makers understand both the complexity of young people's digital lives and the importance of co-designing solutions.

Anna Z

A youth advocate sitting on multiple advisory groups with for-purpose organisations and government agencies, I am passionate about promoting children and young peoples' safety and wellbeing. My work is informed by my lived experience of online trauma and abuse that translated to in-person risks, and by a belief in community support and advocacy as tools for healing, empowerment and recovery. I believe this report matters because young people have a right to be safe from abuse, harm and digital coercion.

Caiden B

I've become increasingly aware of the volume of misinformation young people have to contend with online, while algorithms and serve up sensational content as if it were reliable information. At the same time, compulsive scrolling and addiction can gradually subsume our daily lives. These experiences have made me question why so much responsibility for navigating online harms is placed on young people themselves.