



# Intergenerational Attitudes towards Social Networking and Cybersafety

A Living Lab

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Research  
Report

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# Preface

In December 2010, the Australian Government and Cooperative Research Centres Program announced a \$27M investment towards the establishment of a world class research centre. The first of its kind, it is dedicated to working with young people to develop and trial new technologies designed to improve mental health and promote wellbeing.

Led by the Inspire Foundation, an international non-government organisation, the Cooperative Research Centre for Young People, Technology and Wellbeing (YAW-CRC) brings together 63 partners in an enviable mix of world class youth researchers across 13 universities, innovative thinkers from industry and business, and mental health and youth advocates across the non-government and government sector. Driven by the vision and passion of young people, the federal government's investment is matched by over \$80M in cash and in kind contributions from YAW-CRC participants.

*Never before have the Australian youth and mental health sectors united so cohesively behind a single vision: to use technologies to ensure that young Australians are given the opportunity to grow up safe, happy, healthy and resilient.*

YAW-CRC's research agenda has been developed with over **600 young people**. It focuses on achieving change through collaboration and partnership between researchers and end-users, defined as young people, parents, professionals and members of the community. YAW-CRC's work is organised into three separate but complementary research programs:

- **Program One: Safe and Supportive:** explores technologies as settings to promote cybersafety and strengthen the resilience and wellbeing of ALL young people.
- **Program Two: Connected and Creative:** examines how technologies can enable the good mental health of young people who are vulnerable or marginalised.
- **Program Three: User Driven and Empowered:** investigates how technologies can facilitate good mental health for young people experiencing mental health problems.

Technology has significantly changed the way in which young people interact with one another and the world around them. The majority of young Australians use the internet or a mobile phone to source information, engage and construct and maintain social networks. Technologies have dramatically transformed young people's relationships with one another, their families and communities. Young people's online behaviour is often not well understood resulting in a 'digital disconnect' between young people's use of technology and the knowledge and concerns that parents, professionals and community members share about this use.



This research report presents the findings of a small-scale pilot study conducted by a collaborative team: the Inspire Foundation, the University of Western Sydney and Murdoch University. It is the first report to be produced under the banner of YAW-CRC and, in the lead-up to the launch of the CRC, represents a joint commitment by the research partners to responding to the cybersafety challenge in ways that meaningfully account for young people's experiences and actively promote intergenerational dialogue.

In this research, a 'living lab' was created in which young people designed and delivered a three-hour workshop on social networking and cybersafety for adult participants. The researchers captured the dialogue between young people and adults and make key recommendations relating to future cybersafety education models. Fundamentally this project places young people at the forefront of decision making in relation to cybersafety – it positions them as educators and partners with their parents and members of the community in finding solutions to keeping safe online. This unique methodology in which young people, researchers and adult members of the community are equal provides significant insight into bridging the 'digital divide' and reducing the 'disconnect' across generations. The recommendations reported herein will directly inform YAW - CRC's holistic approach to cybersafety.



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# CRC for Young People, Technology and Wellbeing

## Essential Partners



## Supporting Partners



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# Executive Summary

This project aimed to investigate the intergenerational dynamics shaping attitudes towards and usage of social networking services (SNS) and cybersafety. The project entailed establishing a 'living lab' experiment in which four young people designed and delivered a 3 hour workshop on social networking and cybersafety for adult participants. Researchers observed the living lab in process in order to document and analyse the intergenerational conversations. The key findings addressed three main questions and can be summarised as follows:

## What is the nature and scope of adults' concerns about young people's use of social networking services?

Prior to attending the workshops, our adult participants were concerned about the kinds of activities their children engage in online. Not surprisingly, their fears centred primarily on the risks that are conventionally highlighted in cybersafety education campaigns and the mainstream media; namely, cyberbullying, identity theft, and other forms of predation. A number of them expressed concern that their children were not equipped to deal with these threats. The living lab provided an opportunity for adults to **engage in dialogue** with our young participants about these concerns.

## What is the nature and scope of young people's understanding about the risks and opportunities of SNS and related practices?

Our young participants had wide ranging **media literacy skills** (comprising technical skills through to critical literacy) that they had gained primarily through informal learning processes. While our young participants acknowledged that formal cybersafety education had alerted them to a range of **online risks** they might face, their strategies for dealing with these risks had been developed predominantly through trial and error and through knowledge sharing with their peers. They were much better equipped to deal with online risks than our adult participants often presupposed. We might conclude from this that **informal learning** is a valuable way of learning how to use SNS and keep oneself safe online.

## What are potentially effective ways to overcome generational knowledge gaps about young people's social networking practices and their relationship to cybersafety?

This project's most significant finding is that the model of social networking and cybersafety education we trialled successfully established a setting in which to engage young people and adults in intergenerational conversation that led to:





- The **demystification** of social networking services and an increased understanding for adults about the role of social networking in young people's lives
- A greater level of **familiarity** and comfort for adults in navigating the technologies and services their children use
- A **better understanding** by adults of how they could assist their children to participate online in a smart, safe and responsible way
- A **sense of achievement and self-efficacy** for the young participants

The living lab resulted in a shared belief by both young and adult participants that a workshop developed and led by young people constitutes a productive way for adults to learn more about how social networking operates and how to keep oneself safe online. In particular, the living lab provided a non-hierarchical space of **intergenerational dialogue and learning** that generated mutual respect between the young people and adult participants. This in turn helped to dismantle common assumptions underpinning the generational divide concerning the value of social networking and young people's capacity to keep themselves safe online. Parent participants gained an understanding of what their children are actually 'doing' on SNS, and felt able to talk more confidently to their children about privacy settings and personal content, alleviating some of their concerns about the potential dangers of online social networking.

Adult participants reported that the living lab was a valuable way of learning because it was **self-directed, informal and fundamentally experiential**. It gave adults the opportunity to experiment with the technology in a supportive environment. They reported that this familiarity helped to ease their concerns about their children's safety online and gave them practical strategies that they could use to guide their children in managing their online identities. In the process of the living lab, adults shifted from an initial focus on the technical aspects of cybersafety (information security and privacy settings) towards the recognition that keeping safe online was also about their children developing the skills to negotiate online relationships in relation to broader structures of social support. Further, parents were reassured by the fact that the young participants' safety was strongly informed by the knowledge and skills they use to be smart, safe and responsible in the offline world.

Young people reported that the Living Lab empowered them and promoted their expertise. Young participants felt that a generational misunderstanding around the positive value of engaging with SNS fuelled adults' concerns about how young people used them. As such, young people enjoyed the opportunity to share their technical knowledge about how SNS work; to challenge adult's perceived negative attitudes towards 'youth'; and highlight for adults the benefits they associated with their social networking use. Upon conclusion of the workshop, our young participants expressed a **significant sense of achievement and pride** in being able to teach adults something that was important to them and central to their own lives. Several of the young people were very enthusiastic about conducting further workshops, and in particular were keen to teach key decision-makers, for instance within government, with a view to impacting upon policy around social networking.

Finally, the findings of this project demonstrate that a series of guiding principles should be applied in the development of future cybersafety education models. Future models must: be developed in





partnership with young people and acknowledge their expertise; be experiential as opposed to didactic; combine online and face-to-face delivery; have scope to meet the specific technical skills needs of adults, as well as providing capacity for high level conversations about the socio-cultural dimensions of young people's technology use; and be flexible and iterative so that they can keep pace with the emergence of new online and networked media technologies and practices.

## Introduction

Almost all young Australians are online with 90% of 16 – 29 years olds using the internet daily (Ewing et al, 2009:2; Nielson, 2010a). Use of Social Networking Services (SNS) is quickly becoming the number one online activity, with 83% of young people reporting they use SNS on a regular basis (Nielson 2010a). In the 16 – 29 year old category, the popularity of SNS is greatest amongst younger age groups, with 90% of 13 - 17 year olds and 97% of 16 - 17 year olds using SNS (ACMA 2009a). Young people are also increasingly accessing SNS 'on the move' via their mobile phones. Currently, 26% of SNS users already access these services via their mobile devices (Nielson, 2010a).

In Australia a range of actors including government (eg: Department of Broadband, Communication and the Digital Economy), statutory bodies (eg: Australian Communications and Media Authority), non-government organisations (eg: Alannah & Madeline Foundation 2009; Inspire Foundation; NAPCAN) and inter-sectoral and independent consortiums (Technology and Wellbeing Roundtable, the Safer Internet Group), have sought to understand and respond to the risks and benefits for young people of digital practices, including SNS. This encompasses research into young people's use of SNS (eg: Third and Richardson, 2009; ACMA, 2009a; ACMA, 2009b; ACMA, 2010), a major evaluation of existing evidence on cybersafety (Dooley et al, 2009), and programs to address cybersafety and promote safe online practices, including the use of SNS (Alannah and Madeline Foundation, ACMA, Inspire Foundation, NAPCAN). Although there are many potential benefits of SNS (Collin et al, forthcoming), there are persistent concerns about the effects of SNS on young people's safety and wellbeing (ACMA, 2009; Dooley et al, 2009) and there remain many questions about the best way to understand and address the risks and benefits of SNS for cybersafety in both policy and practice.

Conventional approaches to promoting cybersafety amongst young people tend to focus on risk management, typically through educational and regulatory approaches focused on young people. Thinking about cybersafety in these terms fails to acknowledge young people's expertise in technology and the use of the internet. It is vital that we incorporate young people's perspectives into the cybersafety debate in ways that empower young people and develop meaningful policy and programs (Wierenga, 2003, Oliver, et al, 2006). Most cybersafety programs are delivered through the school setting, which are typically removed from other settings (such as the family and



work) and social relationships (with peers, parents and other adults) in which young people regularly engage.

As a consequence of the focus on cybersafety and risk management, there is relatively little evidence pertaining to adults' concerns about young people's SNS use. Further, we are yet to develop comprehensive strategies to support adults to understand how SNS 'work' for young people (both technically and socially); how young people effectively integrate SNS into their everyday lives; and the benefits SNS can offer young people. As such, a generational knowledge gap continues to shape policy and programmatic responses. In this project, we move from thinking about cybersafety to thinking more broadly in terms of digital citizenship.

This report presents the key findings from a pilot project that studied young people's social networking practices and their strategies for engaging in smart, safe, respectful and responsible online behaviour. The project engaged young people as project partners and placed their views, experiences and skills in using SNS at the centre of its approach. Innovative methodologies, outlined below, were utilised to explore both the potential for youth-led strategies to identify and respond to the risks and benefits of SNS.

This project was designed in response to the following research questions:

- What is the nature and scope of adults' concerns about young people's use of social networking services;
- What is the nature and scope of young people's understanding about the risks and opportunities of SNS and related practices;
- What are the ways young people protect themselves from a range of risks in online spaces; and,
- What are potentially effective ways to overcome generational knowledge gaps about young people's social networking practices and their relationship to cybersafety?

This research seeks to inform debates about cybersafety and digital citizenship and contribute to the policy and programmatic responses required to support the positive use of online and networked technologies.

This research acquired ethics committee approval from the University of Western Sydney (H8546) and Murdoch University (2010/223).



# Methodology

Research used to inform policy and programs on cybersafety tends to privilege quantitative research using randomised control trials, national representative surveys and group studies where the sample can be generalised to the population (eg. Dooley et al, 2009). While it is critical that policy and program design is informed by the best possible evidence on prevalence and usage, these studies are limited by the need to presuppose how young people use new technologies and their views and beliefs about the role these technologies play in their everyday lives. The rapid development of new technologies and digital practices, as well as the ability for people to participate without being evaluated by others (Vromen, 2007: 52), highlights the importance of incorporating youth-centred, qualitative and innovative methodologies into mainstream research and policy processes.

This project brings together two innovative methodologies: Living Lab (Levén & Holmström, 2008) and Interrupted Spaces (Bolzan and Gale, under review). These two methodologies and the methods used to generate data are briefly described below.

## Living Labs and Interrupted Spaces

A 'living lab' is "a user-centric research methodology for sensing, prototyping, validating and refining complex solutions in multiple and evolving real life contexts" (Eriksson et al, 2005, p. 4). The living lab method does not simply observe subjects but engages participants in the process of creating or modelling a 'real life' activity, effectively integrating both research goals and participant experience. A living lab thus simulates a particular social context that allows researchers to observe and analyse 'authentic' interaction. In this project, the living lab approach was used in the initial workshops for young people, where they were prompted to design the structure and content of their interaction with parent participants. In particular, young people explored and developed 'real life' scenarios that could then be worked through with parents as a basis for intergenerational experiential learning in the living lab.

'Interrupted spaces' (Bolzan and Gale, under review) is a methodological approach located in an interruption in the usual life worlds (habitus) of our research participants. In this project the interruption takes place by acknowledging and casting young people as experts in the field of SNS and positioning the adults as the 'students'. This methodology is a form of participatory action research (PAR) (Blaikie, 2007) though it differs from the more usual PAR methodologies, which are based on a plan, implement, reflect cycle which then informs subsequent action (Humphries 2008). In this project the living lab was not intended to be evaluated and used to inform another cycle of action. Rather we were interested to see what transpired when young people were placed in, and enabled to work from, a position of greater knowledge than adults.



# Recruitment and Data

Four young people aged 17-21 (three females and one male) were recruited for the project via the Inspire Foundation’s existing youth networks. Five adults aged 42-53 (three females and two males) were recruited by email via the Inspire Foundation’s Supporters network.

Data was gathered in two phases as described in Table 1.

**Table 1. Research phases, methods, aims and analysis**

Phase	Aim	Method	Analysis
<p><b>Phase 1</b></p> <p>Workshop with Young People</p> <p>3hr workshop</p> <p>Conducted 3 weeks prior to Living Lab</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify the role of social networking in young people's everyday lives</li> <li>- Identify the strategies young people use to keep themselves safe when interacting online</li> <li>- Draw upon young people's experiences interacting with adults to identify what young people think are the gaps in adults' knowledge about how young people use social networking and keep themselves safe online</li> <li>- Skill young people about how to communicate with adult participants effectively in the Living Lab context</li> <li>- Develop a structure for the Living Lab workshop (see Attachment 1)</li> <li>- Develop a series of experience-based scenarios through which to educate adults about social networking and cybersafety</li> </ul>	<p>Mind Mapping</p> <p>Focus group discussion and brainstorm</p> <p>Group scripting of workshop structure and scenarios</p>	<p>For each phase high level analysis was undertaken using:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Process reflection</li> <li>- Thematic / Discourse analysis</li> <li>- User interaction analysis</li> </ul>
<p><b>Phase 2</b></p> <p>Living Lab with Young People and Parents</p> <p>2 hour session with young facilitators and adult participants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Come together as a team</li> <li>- Review workshop structure and roles</li> <li>- Collect information on demographics, technology use, knowledge and attitudes of adult participants</li> <li>- Provide adults with introductory overview of SNS (group)</li> <li>- Observe the nature, content and dynamic of a computer-aided dialogue between young people and adults where: young people are positioned as 'expert'; scenarios can be used to prompt questioning and problem-solving</li> <li>- Explore, separately, young people's and adults' experiences and views of the Living Lab</li> </ul>	<p>a) Pre-workshop observation and discussion with young people</p> <p>b) Paper administered survey for parents</p> <p>c) Group discussion and SNS.101 presentation (audio recording)</p> <p>d) One-on-one computer aided dialogue between young people and parent (recorded using Silverback software)</p> <p>e) Vox-pop style debrief drawing on 'most-significant change' methodology</p>	

All conversations were audio or video recorded and the results of group brainstorming processes were documented for analysis by the research team.



# Living Lab Scenario-Based Learning: Two Snapshots of our Participants' Experiences

## Snapshot 1: Jimmy and Michelle

**Jimmy:** early 20s, male, student; **Michelle:** 42, female, business manager/events, mother of two primary school-aged girls

Jimmy adopted the role of 'teacher': talking in the third person and about what 'you' would do - as opposed to what 'he' does. The conversation was a mixture of content on technical skills (how to use SNS), social/cultural relevance of SNS to young people's lives and higher level conversations about how SNS is shaping community, family and peer relationships. This included how different SNS related to each other and the networks and pathways between them eg: sharing content and contacts between Facebook and twitter. The tone of the conversation was one of curiosity, not concern or fear. Michelle was interested in how she could manage content for her own SNS use and curious about the life-cycle of SNS: "when my kids are your age will MySpace even exist?"

This pair had an open conversation, led by Michelle's questions. They did not stick to the scenarios – although one was raised by the researcher. This was the scenario where a parent overheard their child talking about 'friending' an ex-teacher of the opposite sex. In responding to the scenario Michelle focused on having a difficult conversation with her child. In doing so she acknowledged the need to understand how SNS sites work and why her child would want to friend such people, but most significant for her was being able to communicate effectively with her children around these difficult issues.

The computer used in this session was placed in 'no man's land' – neither took 'ownership' of the technology. They sat apart from each other with the computer between them. Jimmy was much more forthright in using the technology and Michelle sat back and was reticent to 'take control' of the devices (laptop and iPhone). When he did engage physically with the technology Jimmy moved easily between face-to-face, laptop and mobile device. He tended to 'control' the space, but invited Michelle to explore. He primarily used the technology to demonstrate functionality and safety mechanisms.

Michelle was overwhelmingly positive about young people leading the session. Her very first comment was on the novelty and usefulness of young people leading the training: "I think this is a great idea - to turn the facilitation around. You could set up a whole program with young people doing this because we (adults) really need to learn it". She went on to comment on the lack of time parents' have to explore and learn through using the technology.



## Snapshot 2: Maggie and Zoe

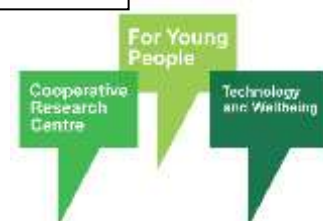
*Zoe: early 20s, female, student; Maggie: 51, female, HR manager, mother of two teenage boys*

Although the scenarios were raised by the researcher at various points, Maggie and Zoe did not work through them in a considered manner; rather, issues raised in the scenarios were briefly discussed. For example, Zoe related her personal experience of being 'stalked' online and offline by an ex-boyfriend, and said that she switched her Facebook settings to 'friends only' and changed her mobile number (she showed Maggie the Facebook settings page and how to change various settings). Zoe summed up this experience by saying 'you have to know how to take care of yourself on the internet'. In the more general context of cyberbullying, Zoe commented that one of the useful things about text-based communication is that bullying messages can be 'saved and used as evidence', whereas in face-to-face communication it often comes down to one person's word over another's. She also said that 'bullying happens everywhere' and that you just had to learn strategies to deal with it, whether online or offline.

Maggie was the main instigator of the conversation, and asked a lot of questions relating to the 'why' of social networking. i.e. Why do young people spend so much time on Facebook? What is the attraction? Zoe used Facebook primarily as a way to 'know' what her friends were up to – literally enabling her to 'browse friends' – and as a cost-free mode of texting/communicating. Yet importantly she also used it as a way to support her friends when in need. She told the story of her best friend who was having a 'bad time' with her parents and was temporarily thrown out of home; Zoe created a 'friends' group' on Facebook (restricted to a small group of friends) that invited everybody to say 'great things' about her best friend to 'make her feel better', and was very proud of the fact that it worked to cheer her up. She also mentioned that groups on Facebook 'let you share funny stuff' with friends, and that it worked a bit like Chinese whispers. It was clear that after hearing this story Maggie empathized and understood how SNS could be used as way to support and strengthen friendships.

Maggie and Zoe had in-depth conversation about 'friendship' and what 'friend' meant in the context of Facebook. Zoe said that everyone (all her friends) understood that the word friend in Facebook meant something quite different than how it is commonly understood. That is, in Facebook the term is largely functional or instrumental, simply describing someone who is allowed to see your content, and that many Facebook friends are not 'real friends'. She stated that when younger (15-16) she accumulated friends as an indicator of popularity or 'status', even when she had never met them face-to-face, but as she got older she became more discerning, and that now most of her Facebook friends are people she also knows offline, and that she uses Facebook as a way to consolidate existing friendships. Zoe also commented on the need to 'filter' Facebook friends, to manage content from people who she didn't know very well or 'wasn't that interested in' (during the interaction she complained about one Facebook friend who kept 'clogging up her feed').

Maggie sat directly in front of the computer, but did not touch the mouse, while Zoe sat to the side and (rather awkwardly) showed her different aspects of Facebook. Given that the screen showed a site of 'personal ownership' – i.e. Zoe's Facebook page – possibly Maggie felt she didn't have a right to navigate or interact with the content, but preferred to wait for Zoe to show her things and 'reveal' only what she was prepared to show an adult she didn't know. Most of the time Maggie and Zoe talked directly to each other without interacting with the screen. However, during conversation the screen worked as a visual distraction – they would look at the screen rather than each other while talking.



# Summary of Key Findings

The living lab was set up to investigate the intergenerational dynamics shaping attitudes towards and usage of social networking and cybersafety. It successfully established a setting in which to engage young people and adults in conversation that led to:

- The demystification of SNS and an increased understanding for adults about the role of social networking in young people's lives
- A greater level of familiarity and comfort for adults in navigating the technologies and services their children use
- A better understanding by adults of how they could assist their children to participate online in a smart, safe and responsible way
- A sense of achievement and self-efficacy for the young participants

Below we outline the potential of the living lab to address a range of issues pertaining to young people's use of online and networked media, and in particular, SNS.

## Fostering Intergenerational Dialogue

*"It gave me a chance to ask questions you want to ask your children but are too embarrassed to ask"*

*"Reversing the roles is fantastic"*

The living lab provided a non-hierarchical space of intergenerational learning, and generated mutual respect between the young people and adult participants. Importantly, it also worked as an 'interrupted space', disrupting the well-rehearsed ways adults and young people relate to each other and learn by reversing the roles of 'teacher' and 'student'. Particularly in the one-on-one sessions, there was a significant amount of 'higher level' conversation about the broader social and cultural effects of social networking, and how SNS are shaping community, family and peer relationships. Parents were very keen to understand more about the ways that social networking was integrated into young people's friendships (eg: when they used SNS as opposed to other forms of mediated communication; what they talked about; what kind of language they used), how social networking might change workplace cultures and education practices into the future. The young people's workshop revealed a number of assumptions young people have about parents and adults, and that they often underestimated what adults knew about social networking and media technologies more generally. When asked what they thought adults knew about SNS, young people largely felt it was 'not much', and that adult perceptions of SNS were primarily negative. For example, there was a common view that adults thought SNS is used to 'meet strangers', 'yell anonymously at people', 'procrastinate' and 'prey upon vulnerable children and





young people'. Yet in the questionnaire, adults named a number of social networking sites and 3 of the 5 indicated using them personally. Although adults were concerned about the time young people spend using SNS (and therefore the potential for procrastination) and the potential for their children to be exposed to predators, they were not overly concerned that young people use SNS to meet strangers.

The living lab had the effect of promoting young people's expertise, giving them the opportunity to share their knowledge across the generational digital divide. One young participant noted that it is rare that young people have the opportunity to show adults what they know and that it made him feel good. In this sense, it appears that the experience of the living lab validated and empowered young people. Further, explaining to adults why they use and value SNS, along with the range of strategies they use to manage their online presence constitutes a self-reflective practice that helps young people to better understand their own practices and acknowledge the expertise they have.

The living lab as a setting provides an opportunity for young people and adults to share their views in an open forum, rather than relying on the assumptions and fears that frequently circulate in the popular media. Indeed, one young person expressed the strong view that parents' fears and concerns about their children's SNS practices were best addressed through improving communication between parents and their children about their online social interactions.

## Participant-centred youth-led models of cybersafety education for adults that demystify young people's online and networked practices

The living lab resulted in a shared belief by both young and adult participants that a workshop developed and led by young people constitutes a productive way for adults to learn more about how social networking operates and how to keep oneself safe online.

In questionnaires and the living lab, parents highlighted a number of challenges they face in getting up to speed with new technological developments and understanding how their children use emerging interfaces. In particular, parents noted that they experience difficulties finding the time to learn how to use new technologies and explore the possibilities they offer by 'just fiddling around'. Further, a couple of parents stated that they lack the confidence to experiment with social networking in case they 'stuffed everything up'. Also, some adults' access to SNS was often restricted because they worked in environments where SNS were blocked or banned.

For the adult participants then, the living lab was a valuable way of learning because it was self-directed, informal and fundamentally experiential. As one adult put it: "*This is better than going to courses to learn*



things.” Further, it provided parents with a supported environment in which to explore the technology and its potential *with a young expert user*. Our adults said:

*“The young people have been there, done that, and can talk from experience.”*

*“It was very refreshing to speak to someone who is young, open and frank.”*

*“Instead of having adults come to schools to talk about cybersafety, [we should] get young people to share their real life experiences. Alana had a wealth of things to share that either she or her friends had done.”*

*“This was a really innovative way to do it. It was so unusual it took me by surprise. It was good to get the insider’s perspective.”*

Adults noted that this one-on-one contact with young people helped them to better understand the range of activities young people participate in online. This experiential mode was key to the success of the living lab. By providing a space in which to both capture and share the wide range of adults’ and young people’s lived experiences, this format fostered meaningful dialogue about social networking and cybersafety practices.

## Supporting adults to learn technical skills in social networking and cybersafety they can use to guide their children in making smart, safe, respectful and responsible decisions online

There was strong interest across the group of adults – regardless of familiarity or skill level – to learn more about how SNS work. However, adults felt they lacked both the opportunity and the confidence to simply ‘play’ with SNS and learn how they work. By contrast, our young participants advocated that, in order to learn how to use social networking sites, ‘you just do it, sit down and play with it’. That is, they emphasised the necessity to experience and experiment with the technology. The learning space created by the living lab gave adults the opportunity to undertake this ‘play’ in a supported environment. However, many of the adults were reluctant to take control of the computer and explore, even with a young person guiding them. This is in part due to user-interaction issues relating to the specific physical set-up of the living lab that we discuss in further detail below. However, it was also clear that, at least initially, many of the adults expected to be taught, in a formal rather than an experiential mode, how to use SNS.



Nonetheless, it was encouraging to see that during the living lab, conversations between the adults and the young participants helped to familiarise adults with the technical features of SNS (and, in particular, Facebook). Much discussion in the SNS:101 session revolved primarily around the issue of how much information young people put up online and how that information could be kept secure through the use of privacy settings. This appears to be a key concern for adults whose children regularly use social networking interfaces. Similarly, conversations during the living lab initially tended to focus quite heavily on the issue of privacy settings. Adults appeared to consider this an important mechanism for ensuring their children's safety in the context of their online social interactions, and they were very curious to know how these settings could be optimised.

However, aside from demonstrating how they used privacy settings to restrict which of their Facebook friends had access to particular kinds of information, the young participants also spent considerable time walking the adults through a range of other technical strategies they had developed to keep themselves safe online. These included, for example, not accepting 'strangers' as friends and blocking unwanted approaches. This information was clearly useful to parents, with one commenting that it was *"very reassuring to hear the real experiences and see what they actually do."* The young participants emphasised that, whilst formal/school-based cybersafety education had alerted them to many of the risks of online social interaction, many of the practices they had developed to keep themselves safe online had been learnt either from other young people, or through trial and error. Whilst this was initially met with raised eyebrows from some of the adult participants, adults felt that this was important information for them to have.

## Familiarising adults in the 'hands-on' use of SNS in ways that demystify their children's online practices

The living lab setting enabled the adult participants to gain an insight into how young people engage with an SNS such as Facebook. While the initial 'SNS:101' session provided a technical overview of how SNS work, the flexibility and openness of the one-on-one sessions gave the adults an opportunity to ask questions tailored to their own knowledge and experience. Parent participants gained an understanding of what their children are actually 'doing' on SNS, and felt able to talk more confidently to their children about privacy settings and personal content, alleviating some of their concerns about the potential dangers of online social networking.

Parents also reported an increase in their understanding of the complex range of social networking activities, including both SNS proper (e.g. Facebook) and other services that facilitate social interaction and collaboration. Several parents commented that before the living lab they wouldn't have said they



knew much about social networking, yet could now recognise that when using services such as Flickr (uploading images, posting text, sharing interests etc) they were in fact engaging in a form of online social networking, sometimes even with people they didn't know. Parent participants said that this realisation made them more comfortable with their children's networking practices, as they could understand the appeal of such activities.

## Addressing adults' concerns about their children's technology usage

In the context of the living lab adults gained a more nuanced understanding of the social contexts shaping young people's cybersafety. That is, they shifted from an initial focus on the technical aspects of cybersafety (information security and privacy settings) towards a recognition that keeping safe online was also about their children developing the skills to negotiate online relationships in relation to broader structures of social support. For example, one young participant emphasised during the living lab that if she found herself in a situation she didn't know how to negotiate, she would seek the advice of others. The young participants also noted that friends keep an eye on each other and *"will sometimes step in to say 'this person doesn't seem safe'"*. Adults reported that this insight into the ways peer relationships supported young people's online social interactions was comforting, with one parent noting that:

*"It was reassuring. If they don't know how to deal with it they reach out to parents or their friends"*

Further, parents were reassured by the fact that the young participants' safety was strongly informed by the knowledge and skills they use to be smart, safe and responsible in the offline world. As one young participant commented, *"Whenever I'm unsure, I fall back on the things my parents have told me about keeping safe generally"*. Again, this knowledge inspired adults' confidence in young people's capacity to engage in online interactions in responsible and risk-minimal ways:

*"It gave me confidence to hear that they are not sucked into a real black hole and lose all rational thought"*

*"My young person [participant] uses the same moral compass in her face-to-face world as in the online world"*

Many of the adults who participated expressed concerns in the questionnaire and during the living lab about the amount of time their children spend using SNS. They were particularly concerned that their



children's online social interactions took time away from other activities and opportunities to socialize face-to-face. These fears were somewhat allayed when young participants demonstrated that, although it was easy to lose track of time when using SNS, they had developed effective time management skills. For example, one participant (a university student) explained that she logged off Facebook when she had work to do. Further, the young participants talked in depth about the specific role social networking has in their everyday lives, with the effect that adult participants came away with an appreciation of the ways the young participants sought to balance online time with other aspects of everyday life:

*"It (SNS) has got its place but it's not the only thing she does in her spare time. She does things with friends. It's only part of the way they do things."*

Adults also expressed a concern that SNS had 'cheapened' the notion of friendship. Young participants were adamant about dispelling this notion, talking in depth about the ways they distinguish between the variety of friendships in which they engage. Whilst our young participants had broad online networks, they tended to communicate primarily with a small circle of friends with whom they also had regular face-to-face contact. They explained that, when they first joined Facebook, the emphasis had been on accumulating friends and expanding their networks. However, as they had matured, and as Facebook and other SNS had sedimented as a key feature of their everyday experience, the emphasis had shifted from accumulating friends to enriching existing 'close' friendships. Once this had been explained, adult participants appeared to be able to relate to and recognise commonalities with their own beliefs about and experiences of friendship.

## Insights into the **positive impacts of social networking on young people's lives**

In the first workshop young people were invited to discuss the things that adults needed to know about young people's social networking. In addition to wanting to share their technical knowledge about how SNS work and to challenge adult's perceived negative attitudes towards 'youth', young people also expressed a strong desire to highlight for adults a number of benefits they associated with their SNS use. Young participants felt that a generational misunderstanding around the positive value of engaging with SNS fuelled adults' concerns about young people's use of SNS. In particular, they identified the following positive impacts of SNS:

- develop social skills
- explore and 'try on' different identities: "you can be someone you can't offline"
- keep in touch with friends and family - especially with those who are a geographically distant
- address feelings of social isolation - especially for those without a mobile phone



- access a 'hard copy' of their inter-personal interactions. For example, if being bullied via SNS, unlike face-to-face bullying, young people could access concrete evidence of bullying in the form of screen grabs and transcripts
- create a personalised space that expresses their identity and over which they have control and ownership
- support their friends in a range of ways such as helping them work out personal issues or assisting one another with study

The positive impacts of SNS identified by our young participants are consistent with the findings surveyed in *The Benefits of Social Networking Services: A Literature Review* (Collin et al, 2010). For example, research shows online settings can be important spaces for young people to develop social skills that translate into offline settings (Third and Richardson, 2010), and experimenting with different social identities is an important aspect of adolescent development and the transition to adulthood (Donnelly, 2008: 4).

## Skilling young people in developing and delivering workshops for adults

The young people demonstrated an ability to conceptualise and present the necessary technical skills and social contexts that would effectively bridge the intergenerational knowledge gap around the use and experience of social networking.

During the workshop, young people were highly enthusiastic about the opportunity to share their expertise with adult participants. While it had been assumed by the research team that more experiential learning techniques would be used, such as workshopping the scenarios, the young people also expressed interest in developing and conducting an introduction to SNS to be delivered to the whole group. This is because the young people thought some of the parents would not have the necessary understanding of social networking sites to fully engage in the scenarios. Using the initial workshop to co-create the living lab with the young facilitators was a key strength of the methodology, supporting them to take ownership and feel confidence in the living lab process.

Upon conclusion of the workshop and in follow-up email correspondence, our young participants expressed confidence in their abilities to deliver the living lab workshop to adults. They clearly felt a significant sense of achievement and pride in being able to teach adults something that was important to them and central to their own lives. Several of the young people were very enthusiastic about conducting further workshops, and in particular were keen to teach key decision makers, for instance within government, with a view to impacting upon policy around social networking.



# Suggested Improvements to the model

## Improving the physical/technological setup and workshop structure to enhance engagement by adults

In order to facilitate discussion of the scenarios in the living lab, it may work better to provide a computer-free space for a period of time, rather than have participants focused on the screen for the entire interaction. It is well documented in user-interaction studies that screens demand attention and tend to impede co-present (face-to-face) communication. In order to work through the scenarios in more depth participants needed an informal 'conversational space'. As such, the research team recommends that future living labs are structured as follows:

- i) SNS:101 – delivered one-on-one in a 'show-and-tell' format in front of the computer.

Walking the parent through an experiential learning experience framed around the creation of a SNS profile and linking/working across the web to build that profile and contact other adult participants could create structure without making the session too rigid.

- ii) Experiential learning session

Workshop experience-based scenarios as a group, with young people leading and moderating the discussion. This would give participants the opportunity to work through the scenarios in more detail, and drawing upon a broader range of young people's experiences to do so.

Adequate time needs to be allocated to each of these activities. During the living lab, it took adults and young people a bit of time to 'warm up' before their discussion got going. However, once the conversation gained momentum, the adults found that they had many more questions than could be answered in the time available. It is suggested that a 2 – 2.5 hour timeframe (with a short break) is appropriate for the workshop structure described above.

## Gender factors shaping engagement

In order to optimise the positive impact of the living lab, two key gender considerations need to be taken into account:





i) As noted above, some adults found the experience of being taught by a young person challenging. Our experience demonstrated that this discomfort was exacerbated when the disruption of the usual teacher/student relationship was accompanied by the disruption of dominant gender relations (ie: adult man taught by young woman). Adults might be asked to nominate whether they have a preference for working one-on-one with a male or female young person so that they are given the opportunity to feel most comfortable.

ii) The majority of parent participants were curious about whether there were any differences in the ways that young men and young women used SNS and practiced cybersafety. One parent suggested that it would be good to have two adults taught by two young people (one male and one female) in order to address this curiosity:

*“It would be good to have males and females and to learn if they do things differently.”*

## Selecting **youth mentors**

Whilst adult participants were very impressed by the range of experience the young participants shared, they suggested that it would be useful to them to work with slightly younger participants in the living lab in order that they could work with young people that are more immersed and perhaps have less of a critical understanding about their social networking and cybersafety practices. For example, one adult suggested:

*‘I’d love to see year 10 students doing this. They may not be so well adjusted and you could learn what some of the pitfalls are.’*

## Recruiting **adults**

It is possible that, because the living lab reverses the usual power relationships shaping cybersafety education (whereby young people are positioned as the subjects requiring education), parents may have felt uncomfortable about registering to participate. Attitudes towards who the subjects and agents of ‘education’ are in the context of SNS and cybersafety were illustrated in the process of recruitment where the assumed, or perhaps desired, role of schools in the delivery of such workshops became apparent. When asking advice from various people (including parents) about the recruiting process, the most common suggestion was to engage school representatives such as principals, school counsellors and parent and teacher council chairs. Such suggestions were not just couched in terms of the logistics of contacting many parents at once, but also in terms of the influence and authority these people had to encourage parents to participate.



# Conclusions

Evidence from this pilot suggests that the kind of intergenerational dialogue fostered by the living lab can play an important role in producing better understandings of both young people's knowledge and experiences of SNS and cybersafety, and addressing adult concerns and curiosities. This space of intergenerational exchange also provides adults with the opportunity to learn new technology skills from expert users in an informal and self-directed setting.

The living lab also demonstrates the value of novel and innovative approaches to cybersafety education that bring together young people and adults in collaborative and experiential learning with and through everyday use of online and networked technologies. Whilst our young participants acknowledged the value of conventional cybersafety education for alerting young people to the range of risks they potentially face online, they also emphasized that the majority of effective strategies they had developed for keeping safe online had been learnt informally through a process of trial and error, and often in consultation with peers. Having young people share this expert know-how with parents has the potential to address adults' concerns to a greater extent than has been possible to date using conventional cybersafety education strategies because it gives adults an intimate window onto what young people actually do online. This model of cybersafety education also has the potential to validate and strengthen young people's knowledge and experience.

The findings reported here demonstrate that the following guiding principles should be applied in the development of future cybersafety education models:

- Development must be undertaken in partnership with both young people and adults in order that cybersafety education can both be inclusive of young people's voices and expertise, and address adults' concerns and curiosities.
- Models for cybersafety education must acknowledge the technical and social expertise of young people by positioning them as experts.
- Models must be experiential – they must engage parents in learning about the social, technical and cultural dimensions of SNS through doing.
- The ideal model will combine face-to-face with online delivery.
- The ideal model will have scope to meet the specific technical skills needs of adults, as well as providing capacity for high level conversations about the socio-cultural dimensions of young people's technology use.
- The ideal model will be flexible and iterative so that it can keep pace with the emergence of new online and networked media technologies and practices.



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# Appendices

## Appendix 1. Living Lab Program

**Date:** Friday 12 November 2010

**Time:** Team Prep - 5.30 - 6.30pm; Workshop - 6.30 – 8.30pm

**Location:** Inspire Foundation, 102 Beattie Street Balmain

**Resources:** 4 Mac Laptops with Silverback software installed; Butchers paper; pens; post-it notes; tea, coffee, snacks; audio recorder; flip cameras.

Time	Activity	Objective	AV
6:30	Welcome, Project overview.	Establish expectations and comfort of group	
6:40	Survey		
	Introductions	Intros, Establish group dynamic	
6:50	Social Networking Services 1.01	Overview of SNS by a young person	
7:00	1 on 1 Young people with Adults on a computer Q&A: Young people lead: 'things you've always wanted to know but been too afraid to ask'... Scenarios to support discussion	Young people and adults discuss SNS.	2 Mac Laptops + 2 Mac Comps (+ remote & silverback) NB: Comps: login = General Psw = general
8:10	Debrief / vox pops: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What did you learn?</li> <li>• What were you surprised by?</li> </ul> <p>Adults and young people in separate groups.</p>	Hear what adults and young people experienced	Flip Camera's
8:25	Next steps, thank you and finish		
8:30	Finish		



## Appendix 2. Living Lab Scenarios

1. You are growing more and more concerned about who your teenager is connecting, talking and sharing content with online. In particular, you are concerned that you have overheard them talking with a close friend about being in touch with a former teacher and another older person that you don't know. What should you do?
2. Your teenager broke up with their girlfriend or boyfriend three months ago after a six month relationship during which they were very close. Their ex was very unhappy about breaking up and hasn't been able to let go. They keep trying to contact your teenager by mobile phone, online chat, Facebook and other online means. This is distressing your teenager and she/he doesn't know what to do. How can you help?
3. Over the last couple of months, your teenager seems to be very unhappy. He/she has stopped seeing their friends and has expressed reluctance to go to school or to participate in their usual social activities. At the same time, you have noticed that they are checking their mobile phone and Facebook page very regularly and with nervousness. You suspect they may be being bullied or a victim of 'sexting' but they haven't talked to you about it. How can you address this?
4. Your teenager seems to suddenly be using the internet and their mobile phone more than normal and you are worried about how much it is going to cost at the end of the month. They are on internet and mobile phone plans (that you have agreed to pay for) that have what you decided together were reasonable limits. If they exceed their monthly limits on their mobile or the internet these will incur extra costs that are charged at a very expensive rate. Your teenager has assured you that they are being responsible with the costs but you don't understand what they are doing on the internet and their mobile phone so this hasn't made you less concerned. What can you do?
5. You've noticed that your teenager is online virtually all the time. They spend a lot of time in their bedroom either on their mobile phone or on their laptop. They don't seem to be participating in sports and other face-to-face activities as much as they used to. When they are with the rest of the family, they only seem to have one ear on what's going on in the room around them and are constantly checking and using their mobile phone. You have nothing in principle against them using social networking but you are worried that they are not interacting enough in face-to-face situations. What can you do?



# Biography of Authors

**Dr Amanda Third** (Research Program 2 Co-Leader, YAW-CRC) is Senior Lecturer in the School of Humanities and Languages, and a member of the Centre for Cultural Research at the University of Western Sydney. Dr Third has a research interest in young people's everyday use of online and networked technologies and the potential for new technologies to support young people's wellbeing. She has conducted several large externally funded projects with organizations using technology to support young people, and is currently the Chief Investigator on an ARC Industry Linkage project entitled "Young People, Technology and Wellbeing Research Facility". She has been a member of the Technology and Wellbeing Roundtable since 2008. In 2009 Dr Third was awarded the Murdoch University Medal for Early Career Research Achievement.

**Dr Ingrid Richardson** (Research Program 2 Co-Leader, YAW-CRC) is Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Arts, Education and Creative Media, and Director of the Centre for Everyday Life at Murdoch University, Western Australia. She has published articles and book chapters on the cultural effects of new and emerging interfaces, including mobile media, the internet, Web 2.0, games, urban screens, and virtual and augmented reality. Dr Richardson has also led or collaborated on a number of large externally funded projects that focus on young people's use and experience of new media and communication technologies, including the Nintendo DS, the mobile phone, interactive television, mobile weblogs and social networking. She is a member of the ARC Cultural Research Network, and recipient of the Vice Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Early Career Research (Murdoch University, 2008).

**Dr Philippa Collin** (Research Program 1 Leader, YAW-CRC) is a Research Fellow in Applied Politics in the Centre for Citizenship and Public Policy at the University of Western Sydney. She has worked for the past decade in the NGO sector, primarily for the Inspire Foundation where she was the Managing Director, Research and Policy. Philippa has also taught Governance and Civil Society in the Masters of Public Policy program at the University of Sydney. Her research and practitioner expertise in participatory approaches has a focus on young people and use of new technologies and new media. She has provided research, training and facilitation to a range of clients including the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme, ACT Department Disability, Housing and Community Services, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth and the Whitlam Institute at the University of Western Sydney.

**Ms Kitty Rahilly** is a Research Officer at the Inspire Foundation and holds a Bachelor of Economic and Social Sciences (Hons I). Prior to her work at Inspire, Kitty gained research experience into young people and technology through her honours thesis, looking at global citizenship of young people in online communities, and as a research assistant for Oxfam Australia's youth programs. At Inspire she has worked on a number of research and action research projects on the role of the internet and associated technologies in promoting young people's community and political participation and their mental health and wellbeing. She also has extensive experience working with young people having been a volunteer teacher, co-ordinated events for Oxfam's International Youth Partnerships, conducted workshops for Inspire's various youth focused programs and supervised peer researchers.

**Professor Natalie Bolzan**, Margaret Whitlam Chair of Social Work lectures in the School of Social Sciences at the University of Western Sydney. Prof. Bolzan has published widely and led several large-scale projects. She is a member of the Sustainability and Social Research Centre, which is concerned with research that





contributes to social transformation through a focus on equity, access, social inclusion and participation as well as human rights. Her principal area of research is concerned with exploring the ways in which marginalised groups such as the young or those with mental illness are able to resist or alter their marginalised status and achieve agency. She is particularly interested in methodologies that seek to engage young people in research that concerns them. Her most recent projects have included; children's participation in decision making; examining the mental health of young asylum seekers; exploring resilience and social engagement of young people, particularly marginalised young people; and the participation of young people in out of home care in decisions which affect them.

