

## *Foreword*

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### Mission statement

Young Media Australia (YMA) exists to promote a quality media environment for Australian children and to raise community awareness of the needs of children and young people in relation to print, electronic and screen based media.

### Who we are

YMA is Australia's only national advocacy organisation representing the interests of children and young people in relation to print, electronic and screen based media.

### What we do

YMA collects and disseminates information, conducts research, and provides advice, education and training on the impact of print, electronic and screen based media.

### How we do it

YMA represents community concerns about the inmpact of print, electronic and screen based media on children and young adults to legislators, regulators and the media.

## *President's message*

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*Parents are not being given a clear message that media effects on children are important. There is a growing body of evidence to suggest there is a correlation between violence packaged as entertainment in print, electronic and screen based media and the increased risk of the use of aggression by children and young people and, as they age, insensitivity to the use of violence, and fearfulness about the world they live in.*

*The challenge for media, today and in the future, is to find ways to ensure that media experiences support the healthy development of children rather than hinder it, expand their horizons rather than diminish them, and provide pleasure rather than cause fear and anxiety.*

*Young Media Australia's advocacy addresses these issues and more. We provide a unique information service based on the results of national and international research into the effects of media on children and young people. Strategic alliances give us a voice in classification coding, the setting of regulatory standards, and community education programs that inform and encourage parents to provide positive media experiences for their children. Given the number of recommendations emerging from inquiries into the exposure of children to inappropriate media content, Young Media Australia will be actively seeking the support of public and private sector sponsors to further its work in 2000 and beyond, with particular reference to violence in the community.*

Mrs Barbara Biggins OAM  
Executive Director (Hon)  
Young Media Australia

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## *Executive summary*

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### **Corporate profile**

Young Media Australia (YMA) is a not-for-profit advocacy organisation with a national focus on the interests of children and young people in relation to print, electronic and screen based media.

YMA is the registered business name of the Australian Council for Children's Films and Television (ACCFT). The ACCFT is a national, not-for-profit community organisation structured as a company and limited by guarantee. YMA's principal objective is to stimulate and maintain public interest in the provision of suitable film, television and video entertainment programs for children. Its operating base and major services are located in Adelaide, South Australia.

YMA was established in 1993 by the ACCFT and the South Australian Council for Children's Films and Television Inc (SACCFT) to provide a shop front for their services and activities. In 1995 SACCFT merged with ACCFT with the resulting entity operating under the business name, Young Media Australia. Drawing on the accumulated knowledge, experience and reputation of the ACCFT, which grew from a community based advocacy group formed in 1957 to become incorporated in 1976, YMA's charter is to operate as a national organisation in terms of advocacy for the media needs of children and young people, and to serve the information needs of its national membership.

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### **The need for leadership in advocacy**

There is growing concern among parents, health providers and educators, that the influence of inappropriate, easily accessible, print, electronic and screen based media may have a negative effect on the attitudes and expectations of children and young people to the extent that it affects their health and their relationships with family, peers and society in general.

Parents supplied with well researched information and clear expressions of community opinion are best placed to mediate their children's experiences of media.

Through representation at national and international conferences and inquiries, YMA maintains a watching brief for Australian parents on all issues involving print, electronic and screen based media, including computer based interactive entertainment, and its impact on children and young people.

### **Activities and Services**

YMA promotes the provision of quality media product for children through a range of education programs for parents and professionals working with children designed to encourage positive media experiences for children and young people.

It fosters informed public opinion and debate on children's media issues, with particular reference to violence and advertising directed at children and young people.

YMA provides up-to-date information and education on issues of violence, advertising, classification codes, self regulatory codes and the maintenance of quality quotas for children's programs.

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YMA representatives regularly act as consultants to government, health authorities, and the media in relation to classification, standards, codes, programming and the social health impact of mass media, including the Internet.

### **How YMA makes a difference**

YMA's achievements as an advocacy organisation acting in the interests of children and young persons in relation to print, electronic and screen based media are widely acknowledged by government, educators, parent organisations and representatives of the media. For example:

*'The Australian Broadcasting Authority has found Young Media Australia to be an active and informed participant in the ABA's inquiries for many years. Its continued active support of regulation and various well argued submissions in regard to the Australian Content and Children's Television Standards has been of assistance in the process involved in determining standards.'*

Gareth Grainger, Deputy Chairman, ABA.

YMA has lobbied successfully for maintenance of children's quality quotas on Australian television, the universal classification of home videos, classification of computer games, a review of sponsored segments and host-selling in children's programs, a review of the use of 0055 and 1900 telephone numbers and greater community and regulatory attention to the effects of media violence on children.

YMA has produced innovative educational and media awareness packages such as OFF'n'ON: healthy use of TV, a guide to healthy media choices by children and young people; Does media violence hurt your children?, a parents' guide; and CyberSafety, a workshop program for parents on the positive use of the Internet.

Young Media Australia now offers 24-hour national and international access to information and opinion on child related media issues via its website **[www.youngmedia.org.au](http://www.youngmedia.org.au)**

### **Strategic Alliances**

Increasingly, YMA is called upon by researchers and authorities across a wide range of disciplines to provide essential information and support, to promote the benefits of positive media experiences for children and young.

Among the many collaborative initiatives in which YMA has been involved is the production of Getting in the picture: a parents and carer's guide for the better use of television by children, published by the Royal Australasian College of Physicians Division of Paediatrics.

### **Challenges ahead**

YMA will continue to focus attention on community concerns relating to print, electronic and screen based media and the interests of children and young people as we move into 2000 and beyond.

Major issues to be addressed include the rising incidence of violence as entertainment in film, television and video and computer games, the influence of advertising, and inappropriate material available on the internet to children and young people.

YMA also will increase its input into research into the influence of print, electronic and screen based violence and inappropriate content on the emotional development of children and young adults, with particular reference to the rising incidence of community based violence.

## *Corporate profile*

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Young Media Australia is the registered business name of the Australian Council for Children's Films and Television (ACCFT). The ACCFT is a national, not-for-profit community organisation structured as a company limited by guarantee.

YMA's principal objective is to stimulate and maintain public interest in the provision of print, electronic and small screen entertainment for children and young people. Its operating base and major services are located in Adelaide, South Australia but it maintains a national monitoring brief with directors residing in, or responsible for constituencies covering all states and territories, and with links to education, health and early childhood development.

YMA was established in 1993 by the ACCFT and the South Australian Council for Children's Films and Television Inc (SACCFT) to provide a shop front for their services and activities. In 1995 SACCFT merged with ACCFT with the resulting entity operating under the business name, Young Media Australia. Drawing on the accumulated knowledge, experience and reputation of the ACCFT, which grew from a community based advocacy group formed in 1957 to become incorporated in 1976, YMA's charter is to operate as a national organisation in terms of advocacy for the media needs of children and young people, and to serve the information needs of its national membership.

YMA is an organisation unique in Australia in its focus on informing public debate and discussion about the social impact of the media on the young.

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Its strengths lie in its extensive information collection networks in Australia and overseas, and its acknowledged integrity as a leader in advocacy for the interests of children and young people in relation to print, electronic and screen based media.

Historically, and over the past decade in particular, YMA has developed a high media profile as an authoritative source of information on a range of issues resulting from public interest in the possible causes of increased community based crime.

In addition, YMA has developed a range of income generating interactive learning packages for parents, educators and caregivers to encourage quality media experiences for children and young people, and provides opinion and advice on a consultative basis to government, the media and organisations in education, health and early childhood development.

However, it relies on financial support from governments, philanthropic organisations, the media, the entertainment industry, membership and individual donors to underwrite the cost of its activities and initiatives.

## *The need for leadership in advocacy*

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There is growing community concern that inappropriate print, electronic and screen based media may have a negative effect on the attitudes and expectations of children and young people to the extent that it impacts on their health and their relationships with family members, peers and society in general.

It is acknowledged that the federal government puts significant funding into classification and regulation of the media in an effort to provide people with useful information to help them make choices about media experiences for children. That is helpful, but it goes only part of the way to providing a clear message that media effects on children is an important issue.

Even parents who recognise the risks of, say, media violence, may feel powerless to prevent their children imitating screen violence in the playground as a way of resolving conflict, based on the 'violence works, violence wins' example seen on the screen.

Parents supplied with good information and encouraged by clear expressions of community opinion and support are best placed to mediate harmful media experiences.

YMA provides up-to-date information and education on issues of violence, advertising, classification guidelines, standards, self regulatory codes and the maintenance of quality quotas for children's programs. Through representation at national and international conferences and inquiries, it maintains a watching brief for Australian parents on issues involving print, electronic and screen based media, including the Internet and computer based games for solitary participants.

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The need for community support for parents was the platform on which YMA based three of its recent parent education projects.

The first, *OFF'n'ON: healthy use of TV*, for parents and children, contains information about the role of television in children's lives, facts and figures about the impact of advertising, stereotyping and violence on children and young people, and strategies for encouraging an on/off approach to viewing.

The second, *Does media violence hurt your children?* Is built around an education booklet and guide sheets. The program is designed for parents and caregivers.

The third, *CyberSafety*, is designed to provide parents with an introduction to positive use of the internet, and direction on guiding their children towards safe and useful online experiences.

However, YMA's leadership in advocacy for the interests of children and young people in relation to the media goes beyond educating and informing parents. YMA representatives are continuously lobbying governments, regulators and the media for greater recognition of the need for a healthy media environment offering positive media experiences for children and young people.

## *Services and activities*

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YMA operates from a shop front secretariat situated in the Adelaide CBD. This shop forms the hub of its national activities and serves as a resource centre for educational material for parents, teachers, health professionals, child care professionals, home carers, representatives of the media and others who support the notion of a positive print, electronic and small screen environment for children and young people.

The shop front showcases all YMA products including *OFF'n'ON*, a guide for children's professionals, *CyberSafety*, an introductory course for parents and carers, *Talking Back*, an information kit for consumers, and small screen, a monthly newsletter highlighting national and international initiatives to minimise harmful content in the media and promote quality product.

It also houses an extensive library of papers presented at national and international conferences convened to debate the issues of media violence and inappropriate programming for children and young people. This material is continually updated and upgraded, and is recognised as a useful resource for academics and regulators in the continuing debate about setting standards.

YMA also produces a range of community education programs. A recent successful initiative has been the development of an education program for parents, introducing them to positive use of the Internet. Packaged as a series of workshops with supporting material including YMA's widely distributed *CyberSafety* manual, this has been trialled in South Australia and is now available throughout Australia.

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YMA is also actively involved in national and international research projects driven by consumer concern, either as a collaborative partner, consultant or adviser. One such project addressed the effects of the level of television advertising aimed at children, resulting in the YMA publication, *Sugar Shows & Fast Food Frenzies* .

It maintains a high profile at national and international conferences held to debate the influence of the media on children and young people, presenting on such issues as *Can Parenting Mitigate Risk in Film and Television*, *Caring for Children in the New Media Age*, and *Developing Child, Developing Media*.

In addition, YMA provides consultants and advisors to work with program producers, regulators and government authorities on matters relating to standards, and seeks to build and maintain positive relationships with print, electronic and small screen media representatives to encourage positive media experiences for children and young people.

## *How YMA makes a difference*

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YMA has a long history of achievement as an advocacy organisation acting in the interests of children and young adults in relation to print, electronic and screen based media. This history is widely recognised by governments, educators, parent organisations and representatives of the media. For example:

*'I would [like to] take this opportunity to recognise the achievements of Young Media Australia, and to acknowledge the significant role they play in the community.'* The Hon K Trevor Griffin, LL.M, MLC former Attorney General, SA.

*'The Australian Broadcasting Authority has found Young Media Australia to be an active and informed participant in the ABA's inquiries for many years, Its continued active support of regulation and various well argued submissions in regard to the Australian Content and Children's Television Standards has been of assistance in the process involved in determining standards.'* Gareth Grainger, former Deputy Chairman, Australian Broadcasting Authority.

*'I would also like to take this opportunity to thank you for the assistance of Young Media Australia on the Children and Content On-line Task Force [which] was of great assistance in preparing the Task Force Report which will be forwarded to the Minister for Communications, the Information Economy and the Arts, along with other government agencies.'* Professor David Flint, Chairman, Australian Broadcasting Authority.

*'I was very impressed by Young Media Australia's initiatives, particularly in the CyberSafety project, as I believe it is imperative that our children are educated in the use of the Internet.'* Teri Whiting, Chairman, South Australian Film Corporation.

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YMA has also opened up a valuable pathway for the exchange of information and research on media related issues with its website <http://www.youngmedia.org.au> which provides 24-hour access to information and events of interest to parents, students, educators, government, and representatives of the media. Unsolicited responses from users indicate YMA has established a profile as a leader in advocacy on media issues affecting children and young people not only in Australia but also around the world. For example:

'A very helpful site to gather information for research.' F.M., University of Utrecht, The Netherlands.

'Thrilled to see how much good work is going on in Australia to benefit your future, your children, your youth. You are a great resource.' R. A., New Haven, Connecticut, USA.

'We've added you to our Links page on our website.' D.G., Geneva, Switzerland.

'Greetings from Young Irish Film Makers. A great site. Keep up the good work.' M.K., Kilkenny, Ireland.

'A very helpful and informative site. Keep up the excellent work!' C.C., London, UK.

YMA has lobbied successfully for maintenance of children's quality quotas, the universal classification of home videos, classification of computer games, a review of host-selling in children's programs, a review of premium charge telephone services, and greater community and regulatory attention to effects of media violence on children.

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YMA has also responded to community concern about the lack of educational material available to help parents, teachers and children manage media experiences to ensure more positive outcomes, with interactive media awareness kits and community education programs. For example:

*OFF'n'ON*, which helps children make judgements about what is 'real' and what is not, stereotyping, and how to deal with anxieties which may arise from something they have seen on television, and takes parents, teachers and child care professionals through issues of violence, advertising, the need for cultural diversity and mental health, with strategies for dealing with them;

*Put me in the Picture*, a seminar package supported by a 15 minute video designed to give producers and programmers involved in the production and presentation of children's films and TV a better understanding of portrayal of cultural diversity in productions aimed at children and young people; and

*CyberSafety*, which takes parents, educators and caregivers through an introduction to positive use of the Internet, with a course based on workshops supported by course notes and the YMA *CyberSafety* manual.

YMA also maintains a monitoring role in relation to the interests of children and young people in print, electronic and screen based media available in Australia, exchanging information and research with national and international organisations working to minimise the harmful effects of the media experience.

## *Strategic alliances*

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The activities, services and achievements of YMA are well recognised in the community.

YMA's advocacy for the interests of children and young people in relation to print, electronic and screen based media aims to educate, rather than promote censorship of the media, in its endeavours to promote quality media experiences for appropriate age groups.

This has led to the establishment of strategic alliances between YMA and representatives of the media - for example, the South Australian Film Corporation.

Mutually beneficial partnerships with representatives of government, and public and private sector businesses and organisations, universities and media, have resulted in the development of programs and projects promoting the need for better management of media issues including cultural identity, inappropriate advertising, and inappropriate distribution and programming. These include:

*Put me in the Picture: cultural diversity in children's media*, funded by the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, and supported by the South Australian Office for Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs;

*CyberSafety*, a community education program to introduce parents and carers to the positive use of the Internet, supported by the Department of Communications and the Arts, the James N. Kirby Foundation, Microsoft, The Book Shelf, Nickelodeon, Parenting SA, and the South Australian Film Corporation;

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*Talking Back: information for media consumers*, with assistance from the Federal Bureau of Consumer Affairs and the Law Foundation of South Australia; and

*Does media violence hurt your children?*, in collaboration with the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and the Australian College of Paediatrics, with financial support from the Myer Foundation.

A number of alliances have resulted in support of ongoing YMA activities. The Myer Foundation, for example, has provided a grant to fund organisational commitments.

Concerns about the mental health of children and young people exposed to media violence and inappropriate role modelling have led to collaborative partnerships with such organisations as Living Health SA, the de Lissa Institute for Early Childhood and Family Studies, and the Women's and Children's Hospital (SA).

The booklet, *Getting in the picture: a parents and carer's guide for the better use of television by children*, was produced by the Royal Australasian College of Physicians Division of Paediatrics with YMA consulting.

Strategic alliances have also been formed with international organisations undertaking research into media issues involving children, such as the Centre for Communication and Social Policy at the University of California, Santa Barbara, USA; the International Centre of Films for Children and Young People, in Montreal, Canada; and the UNESCO International Clearinghouse on Children and Violence on the Screen, at Göteborg University, Sweden.

## *Challenges ahead*

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YMA will continue to focus attention on community concerns relating to print, electronic and screen based media and the interests of children and young people as we move into 2000 and beyond.

Major issues to be addressed include the rising incidence of violence as entertainment in film, television and video and computer games, and inappropriate material available to children and young persons on the Internet.

YMA will maintain its collaborative partnership with the New College Institute for Values Research at the University of New South Wales as co-hosts of regular international conferences on the effects of violence and the developing debate on what constitutes harm in print, electronic and screen based media. It will maintain its collaborative links with the Australian Broadcasting Authority to review standards and regulations. It will continue to provide advice, opinion and information to national and international governments, social health organisations, educators, parents, and the wider community.

YMA will build relationships with organisations and individuals representing print, electronic and screen based media, and work with them to encourage positive media experiences for children and young people.

YMA will increase its input into research undertaken by organisations and agencies examining the influence of print, electronic and screen based violence and other harmful material, with particular reference to the growing incidence of violence in the community.

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In order to meet these challenges, YMA must be able to count on the continuing support of federal and state governments, public and private sector businesses and organisations, and the media, as well as its membership.

The service YMA provides to authorities, agencies and organisations committed to the healthy emotional development of children and young people is unique in Australia. It is well recognised nationally and internationally.

*Support for YMA may be seen as an investment  
in the future of Australian society.*

*Young Media Australia*

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