

## **SEXUALISATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

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# INQUIRY INTO THE SEXUALISATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

## THE AUSTRALIAN FAMILY ASSOCIATION

### SUPPLEMENTARY SUBMISSION

6 April, 2016

The AFA Submission focuses on the Safe Schools Coalition program (SSCA) as it is embedding the sexualisation of children and young people in the very education system – in the schools. The AFA view is it is very serious that the SSCA program is sexualising children and young people in the school system and that the Inquiry should be apprised of the sexualising content of the program. Other Submissions deal with sexualising of children and young people in other contexts, through advertising and the media.

### TERMS OF REFERENCE

The AFA submits that the SSCA program falls within the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry in that it:

1. **Is sexualising children and young people in electronic and print media.**
2. **Is exposing children and young people in NSW to sexualised images and content in electronic and print media in the schools.**

SSCA sexualises children and young people in that its promotional material and content encourages students to:

- question their sexual orientation and gender identity;
- adopt a label such as gay, lesbian, queer or “pansexual”;
- view all forms of sexual activity as acceptable, normal and safe;
- experiment with sexual activity and to decide for themselves when they are ready to do so;
- connect with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) adult groups outside the school;
- seek advice from teen sex advice websites such as Scarleteen (which gives advice such as on how to restrain a sex partner with rope, use of sex toys such as dildos vibrators and how to masturbate using electric tooth brushes and shavers) and the NSW group Twenty10 which in January held a “hands on” workshop including an “Intro to Kink and BDSM” and “Hands on exploration with toys, tools and safe sex devices.”
- believe that gender is fluid and is how you feel and not determined by your “wibbly wobbly bits” or by your DNA. The SSCA program promotes the theory of gender fluidity which has no basis in science and centres their sexual identity on feelings which during adolescence especially can be very changeable and confusing for them.
- seek to change school policy to allow for eg boys who “identify” as girls to use the girls toilets and change rooms and to wear whatever part of the school uniform they feel comfortable with. A minus18 poster show a young boy in a girl’s school dress. STANDOUT (page 34) advises students: “Schools that .... that maintain restrictive policies around uniform, personal records and access to bathroom facilities could be breaking the law”;

- consider experimental gender transition treatment as a valid option.
3. **Is advising children and young people how they can get around present measures to regulate sexualised imagery** in contexts where children or young people could be exposed to it.
  4. Is actively hindering parents rather than **assisting parents to fulfil their responsibility to protect their children** from sexualised images or messages.

SSCA is cavalier in its attitude to any need to consult parents for consent to what their children are being exposed to and to advice to teens to deceive their parents about what they are accessing online.

Minus18 has specific advice for students on how to hide their browsing history so parents wouldn't know what they are accessing.

SSCA resource STANDOUT (page 18) advises students to ask teachers to unblock restricted websites which are blocked by the Department of Education internet filtering system: "Can you access websites from school computers that give information about gender diversity, same sex attraction or being intersex? Some students don't have access to the internet at home, or **it is monitored by their family so having access at school is really important.** Try accessing the website [minus18.org.au](http://minus18.org.au), [safeschoolscoalition.org.au](http://safeschoolscoalition.org.au) or some of the groups listed at the back of this guide. Are any of them blocked? If so, for what reason? Speak to a teacher about the importance of allowing students to access them at school, and let them know why this matters."

SSCA resource *Guide to supporting a student to affirm or transition gender identity at school* states that parental consent is not strictly required for the school to assist a student in their gender transition – that is up to the school to decide "whether it would be appropriate to involve the student's parents(s) or guardian(s)." The *Guide* stresses that it is the choice of the student. SSCA research quotes a case where teachers allowed a student to leave school without parental permission to attend medical appointments for gender transitioning treatment – "My teachers broke multiple rules to allow me to leave school without my parents' permission for medical appointments." The approach appears to be to treat parents as the "enemy" of their children's well-being and happiness and the "school" as knowing better.

5. **is a "related matter"** within the Terms of Reference in that it is a program that is delivering a sexualised message and sexualised images to children and young people in schools where they are an even more captive audience than as consumers of advertising, whether on TV, social media, smart phone, computer or billboard.

**Background on the SSCA is also a related matter.** The SSCA program was facilitated by the misleading research and extensive lobbying of researchers from the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society (ARCSHS), La Trobe University:

- The false notion that 10% of students are same sex attracted has been promoted widely by ARCSHS researchers and was used to justify the implementation of and to

get funding for the SSCA program. This figure is based on various ARCSHS studies which are inaccurate and misleading.

- There is significant evidence from a number of sources, including the ARCSHS, of a strong association between early sexual debut and same sex attraction. There is also evidence of a strong association between early sexual debut and self-harm and suicide-related behaviour. However this association is dismissed in ARCSHS research.

Another **related matter** is that **bullying** is a widespread problem in Australian schools with potentially serious consequences for victims. The aim of anti-bullying programs should be to prevent all forms of bullying regardless of who the targets may be. The National Safe Schools Framework recommends a whole-school, multifaceted approach to the prevention of bullying. The SSCA program, which is specifically targeted at the LGBT group, is therefore inconsistent with the National Safe Schools Framework recommendation.

There are any number of alternative, all-inclusive anti-bullying programs for schools to adopt according to what is appropriate for them. Just a few are Friendly Schools Plus, Better Buddies, Bully Busters, the No Bully program (claims to have remedied over 90% of cases of bullying via its intervention program “helping kids to help other kids.”)

Most tellingly Roz Ward one of the main architects of the Safe Schools Coalition program in Victoria said openly at a Safe Schools National Symposium in June 2014 that the SSCA program is not about bullying, it’s about “...gender and sexual diversity. About same-sex attraction, about being transgender, about being lesbian, gay, bisexual – say the words – transgender, intersex ....” (youtube video of her statements – “aussie safe schools leader admits program is about gay activism not bullying”)

Another **related matter** is SSCA’s **presentation to children and adolescents of irreversible gender transition treatment as a valid option**. This is sexualising children and leading them to actions that are dangerous to their physical and mental health.

Gender transition treatment is in conflict with the views of leading medical professionals that gender dysphoria is a psychological condition that should be treated with counselling rather than surgery and hormone therapy. Gender transition treatments do not treat any underlying mental health issues and there is significant evidence that patients who have transitioned gender continue to suffer serious mental health issues and are at greatly increased risk of suicide in comparison to the general population. Allowing a program into NSW schools that promotes such treatment to children and young people means the government, the Minister for Education representing the government, is responsible for the risk to the mental health and well-being of those children and young people who may embark on gender transitioning treatment as a result.

## **FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS**

On 18 March federal Education Simon Birmingham announced that the federal government will seek to address shortcomings in the SSCA program with immediate action:

- to amend some lesson plans,
- to restrict the program to secondary school settings,
- to have all third party branding removed from SSCA resources and that any reference to third parties be limited to organisations funded by governments for provision of mental health and counselling services, and
- to require agreement of relevant parent body for a school to participate,
- to require parental consent for participation in lessons or activities.

It is up to SSCA whether it will agree to these changes. The federal government funding will in any case cease in June 2017 and will not be renewed.

Despite the amendments required by the federal government, serious problems with the program remain:

- The theory of gender fluidity under-pinning the program.
- Promotion of experimental gender transitioning treatment to children and young people.
- The removal of third party or outside links does not extend to links to organisations that receive government funding for GLBT counselling or mental health services. Minus18 is funded by the Victorian government for such purposes and so links to and from the minus18 website would remain.

NSW government schools are run by the government and it is the NSW government's responsibility, and in particular the Minister for Education, to ensure children and young people are not being prematurely sexualised in government schools. The Minister for Education, on behalf of the government should examine the SSCA closely as to whether, as the AFA submits it does, it:

- sexualises children in electronic and printed media;
- exposes children and young people to sexualised images and content in electronic and print media;
- recommends to children and young people how to get around government regulation of online content by asking for websites that are blocked at home because of sexualised content be unblocked at school,
- rather than assisting parents in fulfilling their responsibility to protect and educate their children in matters of sexuality seeks to have children and young people hide their online browsing history from their parents and to ask to have access to sexualised content at school that may be blocked at home.

The AFA submits that, in these very direct and immediate ways the SSCA program sexualises children and young people within the very education system itself and exposes them to premature sexualisation and puts them in danger of sexual abuse.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The AFA requests the Committee to consider the following in place of the Recommendations in the AFA original Submission to reflect the recent development of the Birmingham Review of the SSCA.

### **That the Committee recommend:**

- **That the NSW government ban Safe Schools Coalition Australia from all schools in NSW.**
- **That the NSW government set up a full inquiry into the Safe Schools Coalition Australia program.**
- That an immediate investigation be made by the Children's Advocate to establish whether SSCA has influenced students to become involved in adult oriented organisations or online communities that may place them at risk of harm.
- That an urgent investigation be made by the Children's Advocate to establish the number of students who have been influenced by SSCA materials or linked organisations to seek gender transition treatments.
- That investigation be made by the Children's Advocate into the "Claude: Safe Play Workshop" which was held on the premises of the organization Twenty10 on 19<sup>th</sup> January, 2016.
- That the promotion to children and young people of sadomasochistic practices and sex aids be banned by the NSW Government.
- That school Sex Education curricula in NSW schools strongly discourage any form of early sexual activity as this is known to have a strong association with self-harm and suicide related behaviour.
- That the government set up an inquiry to establish whether the Sex Education Curriculum being taught in NSW schools is not sexualising children and young people and that it is based upon sound medical evidence.
- That the effectiveness of existing anti-bullying strategies and programs in NSW schools be re-evaluated by the Department of Education.
- That investigation be made by the Children's Advocate to establish whether publically funded organisations such as Family Planning NSW are, through their resource materials and web content, sexualising or promoting the sexualisation of children and young people.

- That investigation be made by the NSW Government to establish the amount of public funding received by SSCA through supporter and partner organisations which are funded by the NSW Government.