

Annual Report 2020 – 2021

Australian Council on Children and the Media

Incorporating
Young Media Australia



Australian Council on Children and the Media
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The Australian Council on Children and the Media (ACCM) is Australia's peak body representing children's interests as digital and screen media users.

Vision

Children's safety, wellbeing and rights as users of digital and screen media are paramount.

Mission

To support children's healthy development and protect their rights and interests as digital and screen media users by assisting families and children's professionals, and by influencing decision-makers.

Values

- Child-centred: children's rights and healthy development are everybody's business. (It takes a village ...)
- Research-led: children's interests are best supported from a strong evidence base.
- Parent-friendly: parents deserve significant support in giving their children a good start as digital and screen media users.
- Access-equality: all children deserve free access to quality digital and screen media; all parents should have free access to ACCM's services.

Mandate

As Australia's peak body representing children's interests as digital and screen media users, ACCM provides information, tools and resources to empower families to nurture their children in a safe and stimulating environment, while being a voice for evidence-based policy and practice at the societal level.

ACCM:

- is a national not-for-profit community organisation, structured as a company limited by guarantee, and incorporated in Victoria (1957).
- is registered for GST, has tax deductible status and is a Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR).
- has a national Board representative of all Australian States and Territories and its corporate membership.
- has a comprehensive organisational membership.
- Board members are volunteers and receive no remuneration for their contribution to the organisation.

What ACCM does

ACCM:

- collects and reviews research and information related to children and the media.
- provides information and advice on the impact of print, electronic and screen-based media on children and young people.
- advocates for the needs and interests of children in relation to the media.
- conducts and acts as a catalyst for relevant research.

How ACCM does it

Both directly and via its information and parenting arm, ACCM:

- provides information including movie and app reviews to parents and caregivers via the Children and Media website www.childrenandmedia.org.au. Fact Sheets relating to children and media use are also available via the website.
- conducts community seminars and national conferences on current issues.
- represents community concerns about the impact of print, electronic and screen-based media on children and young people to legislators, regulators and the media.
- promotes discussion and debate via Facebook, Twitter and media interviews.

Organisational Structure

Patrons



Baroness Susan Greenfield CBE



Steve Biddulph AM

Board of Directors 2020 - 2021

President Professor Elizabeth Handsley

Vice President Assoc. Prof. Wayne Warburton

Directors (State) Assoc. Prof. Wayne Warburton

Dr William Garvey (*till June*)

Prof. Elizabeth Handsley

Linda Savage (*from September*)

Michael Nuttall

Dr Donna Odegaard AM

Kevan Goodworth

Vacant

New South Wales

Victoria

South Australia

Western Australia

Australian Capital Territory

Northern Territory

Queensland

Tasmania

Directors (Corporate Membership) Beth Blackwood

Richard Kwan (*from February*)

AHISA

Kiratech

Appointments

Honorary CEO Barbara Biggins OAM CF

Company Secretary Kate Martin

Treasurer Vacant

Auditor Ascensio Accounting

President's Message: Prof. Elizabeth Handsley FAAL

2021 has been a year of exciting activity and change for ACCM, including an in-principle decision to change our name (so watch this space). In spite of ongoing struggles with funding since the SA government stopped supporting our film and app review services in mid-2019, the team has kept working to rebuild and find a way into the future.

We have produced a new statement about our vision, mission, values and mandate, and we've sharpened our focus on promoting ourselves and our unique and much appreciated services.

In our role of providing support for parents and families, we have branched out into new fields while building on our strengths. Having secured funding for two related projects on privacy (our thanks to ACCAN and the SA Law Foundation), we have extended our app review service, *Know Before You Load*, while developing a distinct resource on privacy law. The first project been a major focus for the year, partnering with US tech firm AppCensus to analyse the way Android's most popular apps extract children's personal information. Even more importantly, the project has revealed who is receiving that data when it is passed on. This information is being added to our app reviews, and we have also produced a valuable set of resources for helping parents to understand the risks, and to act to minimise them.

As we have worked on these projects we have become ever more aware how urgently they are needed, in a world where persuasive design techniques are used to keep children glued to their devices. The movie review service, *Know Before You Go*, has remained strong, and we have extended it to content on streaming services as well as what comes out in the cinema.

The high point of the year in our other key role, advocacy, came when I was reading the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's new *General comment on children's rights in relation to the digital environment* (GC25), released in March. Being pleased but a little surprised at how much the comment aligned with ACCM's values of incorporating research in decision-making about children's media use, I checked our submission on the draft comment, and saw it had been adopted word for word! It's great to know we are able to influence important processes like that.

Meanwhile the review of the National Classification Scheme, into which we had put considerable time and effort, has been frustratingly buried in some government office while we await a review of the whole media regulation landscape. This doesn't bode well, as broad-ranging reviews of the media present a grave risk of what we in the trade call a race to the bottom. It will be harder than ever to keep children's needs front and centre.

Another front for our advocacy is also proving to be something of an uphill climb, as we try to persuade the government to recognise the role of media violence as a contributing factor in violence against women. So far we have written to one Minister seeking a chance to discuss the connection, but we've received the brush-off. We'll keep trying.

As always I have to extend my sincere gratitude to everybody who contributes to our activities – from the Board, to the Advisory Committee, to the office staff (paid and volunteer), our reviewers and of course our brilliant and indefatigable Hon CEO, Barbara Biggins. None of this would be possible without such a passionate and thoughtful team, and I look forward to seeing what we can achieve in the years to come.

REPORT: Information collection, review, and distribution

Research collection and review

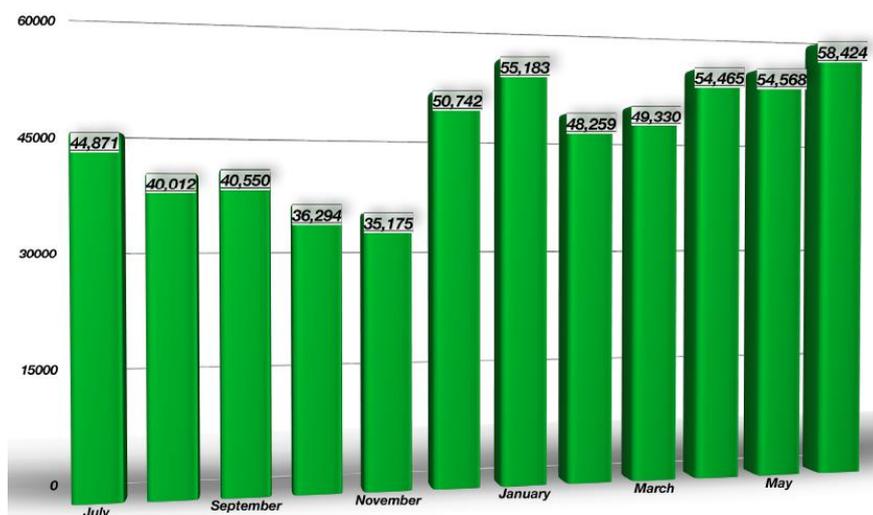
This continues to be a core activity of ACCM with current research findings providing the evidence base for ACCM projects and articles, parent strategies, and advocacy. The latest research is reported in *small screen*, and in ACCM's regular *e-bulletin*. World-wide research studies continue to support ACCM's platform that screen use, particularly in early childhood, needs to be managed with considerable care, not only to provide enjoyment, but also to promote healthy development and prevent the risk of harm to children's cognitive, social and emotional, and physical development.

Children and Media Website

The ACCM website has continued to provide the latest news about children and screens from around the world, lists of relevant research, information for parents about managing media, and details of ACCM's latest campaigns and how to take action. The website also carries the *Know Before You Go* movies reviews, and *Know Before You Load* app reviews. New features include the unique list of top apps played by children with their associated AppCensus tracking data, and a resource page providing an analysis of Australian privacy law as it relates to children online. Nick Fedorowysch of [go create](#) has provided website support.

The movie review section of the website continued to be the most frequently visited during the year, with the high use pages being for those aged 4+ and for those classified G. Of interest is that movies with high search rates included movies classified M such as *Godzilla vs Kong* and *Fast & Furious 9*. The number of monthly website visits this year fluctuated from a low of 35,175 in November, through 55,183 in January, to a high of 58,424 in June.

Web Stats ACCM July 2020 to June 2021



Social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube)

ACCM has used its Facebook page extensively this year to draw attention to movies reviews, events, current issues, to engage with parents and professionals, and to raise its profile. Facebook followers now number 3200, up from 2800 in 2020. Offers of tickets for school holiday movies, provided by distributors, were also posted this year.

small screen

Published monthly, this is a unique review of developments in children's media in Australia and overseas, plus the latest research citations. *small screen* is distributed, mostly by email, to approx. 900 recipients – members, subscribers, politicians and media representatives. It is also sent to researchers and libraries overseas. A limited number of print copies are produced.

ACCM E-Bulletin

This free email-based publication is sent fortnightly to almost 900 subscribers (consistent over 12 months) who have nominated to receive the listing of the latest news articles, research, reviews, events, due dates for submissions and more. ACCM uses the web-based *Mail Chimp* to produce and send out the *E-Bulletin* and other campaign emails. This enables us to produce consistently attractive emails, receive reports on recipient take-up and manage subscriber lists. It also allows recipients to subscribe or unsubscribe themselves easily. The *E-Bulletin* is also available from the *Latest news* section of the website.

ACCM's Knowledge Base

ACCM's knowledge base has developed from its ongoing reviews of the research in this field, its years of experience with Australia's media regulatory system, and feedback from the community. This underpins ACCM's services, activities and advocacy including the following:

***Know Before You Go* movie review service (KBYG)**

This award-winning service is now in its 20th year. ACCM's team of reviewers, all with tertiary child development qualifications, reviews all new G, PG, and those M and MA15+ movies promoted to or likely to appeal to children. The provision of this detailed information, which enables parents to make age-appropriate choices for their children and to avoid potential harm, is unique in Australia.

The database of movie reviews now holds over 1600 movies, ranging from golden oldies to the most recent titles released in cinemas, or hosted on streaming services. The movie reviews have attracted consistent and growing interest this year, with a monthly average of 47,150 and a steady climb from February to peak of 58,400 visits in June.

Since the loss of the SA Government's support for the movie and app review services in June 2019, raising funds to keep these services available and free to all, has been a constant struggle. Public donations have been critical in supporting their continuing provision.

A total of 99 movies were reviewed in the past financial year. These movies consisted of 67 cinema releases and 32 from streaming services, which were predominantly from Disney+ (17) and Netflix (12). The movies reviewed included: 26 G-rated, 59 PG-rated, and 14 M-rated. The M-rated movies chosen for review were, as usual, those likely to appeal to children or teens, or which contained child characters, and included superhero and popular franchise movies such as *Wonder Woman 1984*; *Godzilla vs Kong*; and *Fast & Furious 9*. The characters from these films are well known to young children through toys and other associated merchandise. The M-rated movie, *The Witches*, was reviewed as it included child characters and was based on the well-known children's book of the same name, by Roald Dahl. The majority of reviewed M rated movies were assessed by ACCM as unsuitable for children up to the ages of 13-15, with parental guidance recommended for those in the 13-15 age range in most cases. Two M rated movies were judged to be unsuitable for children under 14: *The Craft - Legacy*; and *Ascendant*. (The latter was the subject of a complaint by ACCM to the Classification Board). The reasons for the recommendations included: violence; scary scenes; drug use; substance abuse and addiction; sexual violence; and coarse language.

A new section was added to the website, viz *Special collections*. These include lists of reviewed movies with themes for special occasions, such as School holidays, Christmas, and Easter. In addition, abbreviated reviews have been posted on ACCM's Facebook site, and listed in fortnightly *E-Bulletins*.

The importance of the *KBYG* service has been reflected in unsolicited emails of appreciation. Testimonials received this year include:

- *You do great reviews - I find them more useful than Common Sense Media. Especially appreciate the breakdown of what would be scary for different age groups; the way you list every scary thing makes it easy for me to quickly scan and see if there's any red flags there for me/my kids.*
- *Reliable. Less prudish than US equivalent. Would like more movies reviewed, including more foreign movies that are apparently appropriate for children.*
- *Thank you! the OFLC PG & M ratings are too broad. the USA Commonsense site is skewed by the USA take on Violence (OK, resolution by force (good) and nudity and sex rates R, while sexualized children are cute.*



ACCM has continued to supply movie reviews to the Raising Children Network (RCN). In the 2020-2021 financial year, ACCM supplied a total of 98 *Know Before You Go* movie reviews for inclusion on RCN's website.

***Know Before You Load* app review service (KBYL)**

The *Know Before You Load* service is now 7 years old. Reviewers with tertiary child development qualifications have fully reviewed 20 apps this year, a significant drop due to the loss of funding for this service. However, the provision of a grant from the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) in September, has enabled the development of a unique new feature to be added to the standard app review. This feature has been added to approx. 90 additional new titles. The data base now holds close to 900 apps.

The focus of the ACCAN grant was to provide parent-friendly analyses of the tracking behaviour of apps as children are using them. These analyses developed by the US AppCensus group show what types of data are being collected and to whom it is being sent. ACCM has applied these to those Android apps most popular with children over the past year.

Of particular concern for ACCM has been the steady growth of the use of persuasive design techniques in children's apps that keep children overly-engaged with their screen entertainment.

New projects:

Apps can track: privacy tips and checks

In late August, ACCM was advised of its success in obtaining a grant from the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) to conduct a project designed to help protect children when using online apps. ACCM partnered with researchers from Macquarie University to develop innovative resources to help parents understand the importance of protecting children's privacy when online, to identify the risks and to take preventive action. ACCM also partnered with AppCensus (US) to identify the personal data-gathering behaviour of those apps most popular with children, and to provide that information in an easily accessible format. The new web section was launched on June 10 and the list of app checks will be updated into the next financial year.



Australian privacy law: is it protecting our children when online?

In October, ACCM was successful in gaining a grant from the SA Law Foundation. This project had the dual purpose of supporting families in protecting their children's privacy online; and empowering them to participate in law reform activities aimed at strengthening the current protections. Families need to know the current state of the law, and especially its limitations, so that they do not experience a false sense of security when facilitating children's access to online content. The material to be produced derived from legal research, and should lead to better-informed citizens.

Brochures

As part of the *Apps can track* project, ACCM produced a leaflet outlining the aims and outputs from the new AppCensus analyses that are now included in its app reviews, plus a promotional poster. There are continuing supplies of brochures promoting the *Know Before You Go* and *Know Before You Load* services.

Partnering with ARC Centre of Excellence

ACCM has committed to providing in-kind information and research input to the newly established Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence, *Digital Child*, based at Queensland University of Technology.

Advocacy

Classification of films, television and their trailers

Review of classification regulation: since actively participating in the federal government's review of Australia's classification regulation between December 2019 and March 2020, ACCM has been waiting for its outcome.

The Reviewer's report was lodged with the Minister for Communications at the end of May 2020, and consultation began soon after with state and territory ministers (as required by the cooperative classification agreement). Neither the Reviewer's report nor any government comment has been released.

The National Classification Scheme must be changed to make it evidence-based, and to provide more age-based ratings under the age of 15 years. The Scheme should also be extended so that it applies to all commercial screen material on and offline, so that consumers have a consistent and reliable system to deal with.

The classification of TV trailers for films remains a significant problem for parents of children who have been upset by unexpected exposure to scary trailers in family-style programs and weekend sport on TV.

Privacy law and protections for children online

ACCM's privacy law analysis and resources: The provision of a grant from the Law Foundation of SA in October, enabled ACCM to commission a professional review of Australian privacy law as it relates to children online, to post this on the ACCM website, and to supplement this with a set of resources for parents which explain the law and its deficiencies, and provide guidance with protecting their children's privacy.

Federal Attorney General's review of the Privacy Act 1988 commenced in October, and ACCM lodged its first stage submission in late November. A second stage is expected in 2021. ACCM has collaborated with Reset Australia in campaigns urging significant change to the Act to more effectively protect minors.

Food advertising: ACCM supported the Obesity Policy Coalition's campaign *Brands off our kids: 4 actions for a healthy childhood free from unhealthy marketing*.

Submissions to media inquiries

ACCM made the following submissions this year

- Submission to Department of Communications, Media Reform Green Paper: May 2021
- [Submission to the Australian Communications and Media Authority, Changes to the Australian Content and Children's Television Standards](#), December 2020
- [Submission to the Review of the Privacy Act 1988](#), November 2020
- [Submission to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child](#), November 2020
- [Submission to the Department of Communications, Cybersafety and the Arts on Supporting Australian Stories on our Screens](#), July 3, 2020

Media Interviews

Throughout the year, ACCM President Professor Elizabeth Handsley, Vice-President Associate

Professor Wayne Warburton, Advisory Committee member Dr C. Glenn Cupit, and Hon CEO Barbara

Biggins took part in interviews on a diverse range of topics, for ABC radio, Channel 7, and for both state and national newspapers.

Administration

Board of Directors

The Board of the Australian Council on Children and the Media has met monthly by teleconference/ Zoom. Members of ACCM's Advisory Committee attend the meetings as observers. The Board is chaired by Professor Elizabeth Handsley (R) and supported by Company Secretary Kate Martin and Hon CEO Barbara Biggins.



President, ACCM
Prof Elizabeth Handsley



Barbara Biggins OAM CF - Honorary Chief Executive Officer

Barbara has been a volunteer with the organisation since 1973. After periods as President of both the South Australian and Australian Council for Children's Films and Television, she now coordinates the day-to-day activities and projects of ACCM, utilising her extensive knowledge and background in Australian broadcasting and regulation.



Kate Martin - Company Secretary, Administration and Resource Officer

Kate started at ACCM in January 2019 after a decade as SAPPA's representative on the Executive Committee and a project volunteer. She is a retired teacher and principal, with a 47-year career with the SA Education Department.



Dr Debra Dickinson - Reviews Coordinator and Project Officer

Debra started with ACCM in June 2019, taking on the role of Reviews Coordinator. Debra is a registered teacher with a PhD in Education. Before joining ACCM, Debra undertook contract work with the Australian Association for Environmental Education.



Kurtis Eichler - Publications, Projects and Research Officer

Kurtis started at ACCM in June 2019 after working at regional and metropolitan newspapers for almost a decade. Kurtis left for full time work in May 2021.

Reviewers

ACCM has maintained a team of ten movie and app reviewers.

Finance Officer

Accounting services have been provided by Paul Rugari of Savant.

Acknowledgements

Accommodation

ACCM's office is located on the first floor on the corner of Partridge and Bath Street, Glenelg. ACCM greatly appreciates the support given by the Romeo family this year.

Support

ACCM thanks the many persons and institutions which have provided support over the last year. ACCM could not survive as an organisation without this.

- Thanks to ACCM Patron Steve Biddulph who has shared ACCM information and surveys on his Facebook sites.
- Thanks to the donors big and small who have enabled ACCM to continue operating after the cessation of SA government grants. ACCM is grateful to the many individuals who have provided tax-deductible donations to support its work.
- Judy Bundy of SAASC has provided hours of volunteer support.
- Tim Nicholls of *User Friendly Computers* provides essential IT support.
- Nick Fedorowytch of *Gocreate* supports the development and maintenance of ACCM's website.
- Many more individuals give their expertise, advice and time to assist ACCM to promote healthy choices and stronger voices in children's media.

Grants

ACCM gratefully acknowledges the grants provided by the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) and the Law Foundation of SA. ACCM also thanks Macquarie University and AppCensus our partners in the ACCAN project.



Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN)

The
LAW FOUNDATION
of SA Incorporated



Macquarie University
Department of Psychology



AppCensus