

Annual Report 2018 – 2019

Australian Council on Children and the Media

Incorporating
Young Media Australia



Australian Council on Children and the Media
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Mission Statement

The Australian Council on Children and the Media (ACCM) (incorporating Young Media Australia) supports families, industry and decision makers in building and maintaining a media environment that fosters the health, safety and well-being of Australian children.

What we do

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 we do 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.

Who we are

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 that includes ECA (Early Childhood Australia), ACSSO (Australian Council of State Schools Organisations), APPA (Australian Primary Principals Association), AHISA (Association of Heads of Independent Schools Australia), AEU (Australian Education Union), Parenting Research Centre, Council of Mothers' Union in Australia Inc., SAPPA (South Australian Primary Principals Association).
- Board members are volunteers and receive no remuneration for their contribution to the organisation.

Organisational Structure

Patrons



Baroness Susan Greenfield CBE



Steve Biddulph AM

Board of Directors 2018 - 2019

President	Professor Elizabeth Handsley	
Vice President	Vacant	
Directors (State)	Vacant	New South Wales
	Dr William Garvey	Victoria
	Prof Elizabeth Handsley	South Australia
	Prof Leon Straker	Western Australia
	Michael Nuttall	Australian Capital Territory
	Assoc Prof Michael Nagel	Queensland
	Dr Donna Odegaard AM	Northern Territory
	Phillip Spratt	Tasmania
Directors (Corporate Membership)	Beth Blackwood	AHISA
	Leah Mertens	AEU

Appointments

Honorary CEO	Barbara Biggins OAM
Company Secretary	Kate Martin/Anne Anastasiou
Treasurer	Vacant
Auditor	Ascensio Accounting

President's Message

ELIZABETH HANDSLEY

In 2018-19 ACCM continued to be active and influential in providing reviews, information and advocacy services to Australian parents and caregivers, to children's professionals, and to the government and industry. It has again promoted better supports for parents of young children to help them navigate an increasingly complex screen environment.

ACCM is trying to increase community and government awareness that the ongoing everyday exposure of children to content that is exploitative, addictive, or age-inappropriate, is as important as mitigating the more extreme, but less frequent, dangers associated with online media use. ACCM is one of a very few national organisations in Australia providing parents with tools for healthy media management.

ACCM's review tools *Know Before You Go* and *Know Before You Load* for movies and apps are unique in Australia. KBYG reached 17 years of operation this year, and KBYL 5 years. The SA Attorney-General funded KBYG for 12 of these years, and KBYL for 5 years, but the new government announced late in 2018 that it was discontinuing the program under which these services were funded. This came as a big blow, and has deprived us of a stable funding base from June 30. For the first half of 2019, finding new ways to raise funds has occupied much of our time. We thank those who have donated generously to our fundraising campaign, and we continue to explore new avenues.

Consistent with our commitment to quality, age-appropriate content, our advocacy efforts have been focussed on classification. This includes the effectiveness of the National Classification Scheme (NCS) for movies and games and the need for an age-based system; the manner in which programs and trailers are classified for screening on television; and supporting community concerns about this. ACCM has been preparing for a federal review of the NCS soon.

ACCM has worked with the Australian Council for Educational Leaders to develop a national conference on Digital environments and developing minds: research and strategies for professionals, producers and policy makers. Featuring two overseas researchers, this was postponed from its original date of June 3 to October 28, 2019.

ACCM presented community events, including the *Little Big Shots* film festival for children run in OSCHS across SA, and an evening seminar to enable parents and teachers to hear Dr Susan Linn, visiting US child psychotherapist and founder of the Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood. Special thanks to Kate Martin for her very effective work in making *Little Big Shots* a success, all performed as a volunteer and company secretary.

The past year has seen the departure of a number of long term staff including Administration Officer Anne Anastasiou; Movie Reviews Coordinator and Webmaster Caroline Donald; Events and Publications Officer Clare Phillips; and Administration Assistant Rebecca Kevern. Martha Depasquale, Deb Dickenson, Kurtis Eichler and Kate Martin are now providing very able support.

But once again I have to highlight the extraordinary contribution that Barbara Biggins, our Hon CEO, continues to make to the organisation. Barbara is always on top of the latest research and policy developments, and always working hard to ensure that we are able to continue to fulfil our mission. This includes meeting the ongoing challenges associated with managing our staff and resources to get the maximum impact. It is a pleasure and an honour to work with her.

Thanks to Barbara, and the staff, our Board and Executive members and everybody who works so hard to make this organisation successful. I hope that in the coming year we can consolidate the strengths we have been developing through this difficult period, and move into a new era of prosperity.

REPORT

Information collection, review, and distribution

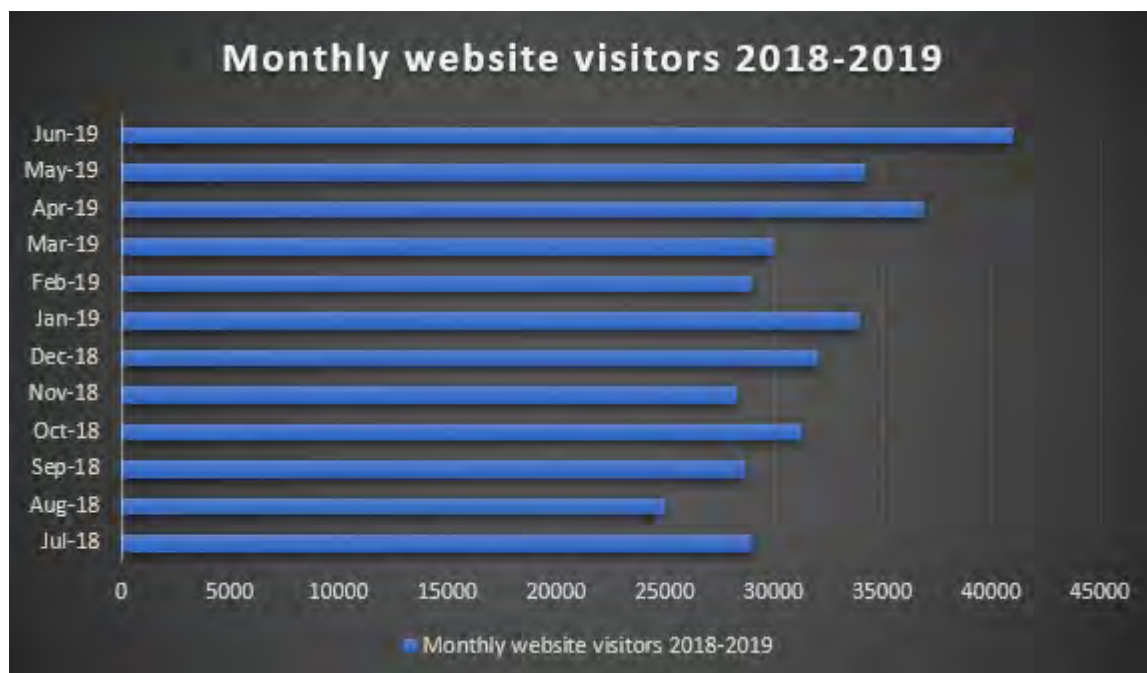
Research collection and review

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*, via ACCM's regular *E-Bulletin* and on ACCM's Web site. Research studies continue to support ACCM's platform that media use, particularly in early childhood, needs to be managed with considerable care, 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 child-centred movie and app reviews, the Children and Gambling Watchlist, the latest news about children and media from around the world, lists of current research, information for parents about managing media, and details of ACCM's latest campaigns and how to take action. Nick Fedorowytch from [go create](#) provides website hosting and support.

The movie review section of the website continued to be the most frequently visited during the year, with the highest use pages being for those aged 13 and 14 years old. The average number of monthly website visits this year was 31,500 with increases generally around school holiday times but with an overall upward trend in use to end June.



Social media

Increasingly Facebook and Twitter have been used as a method to connect and interact with a wider audience. We have used them to promote our website, latest news, seminars and conferences, and to engage with parents and carers. Our Facebook page has grown by 15 per cent to 2400 likes in the past 12 months.

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 about 500 recipients (up 15 per cent in 12 months), 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 (up 30 per cent in 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 evidence base underpins a number of activities and endeavours including the following:

Know Before You Go movie review service (KBYG)

This award-winning service is now in its 14th year. The Australian Council on Children and the Media (ACCM) has greatly valued the support of the SA Government which enabled it to provide these services to the SA parent and carer community, and has promoted wide recognition of this. Our surveys show the community has much appreciated the provision of this information which enables them to make age-appropriate choices for their children and to avoid potential harm. The provision of such information is unique in Australia. ACCM, together with many parents from around Australia, are disappointed that the Government is unable to continue this support.

The ACCM website now has almost 1200 movie reviews. We continue to review all G and PG rated films and M-rated films which are likely to appeal, or be promoted, to children.

We have four regular movie reviewers, all with early childhood qualifications. A total of 82 movies were reviewed in the past financial year - 14 G-rated, 43 PG-rated, 25 M-rated. The M-rated movies chosen for review were, as usual, those likely to appeal to children, including superhero movies such as *Avengers: Endgame*; *Once upon a Deadpool*; *Aquaman* and *Captain Marvel*. The characters from these films are well known to young children through toys and other associated merchandise. The M classification of the majority of M rated movies was found to be warranted, with most of them 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, even with parental guidance, for those under 15: *Alita: Battle Angel* and *Harmony: The Five Frequencies Saga*. In both, there was deemed to be extreme violence and mature themes.

As well as appearing on the ACCM website, abbreviated versions of KBYG reviews have been printed weekly in the local South Australian Messenger Newspapers, and in OSHC (Out of School Hours Care) newsletters.

The importance of the KBYG service has been reflected in unsolicited emails of appreciation.

Testimonials received this year include:

- *The reviews are super helpful with the level of detail and information - perfect to help me decide whether a movie is appropriate or not for my kids. Thank you!*
- *I think this is a very valuable service for parents, families, and also teachers. I think this service gives reasonable and accurate information in regards to media reviews for young people, which assists in enabling informed media choices. The reviews give a detailed and valuable insight, in addition to the Australian classification. I personally think this is a service that should be expanded, not diminished. I am very disappointed this service is no longer government funded, as it is a service that supports families.*

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

The *Know Before You Load* service is now 5 years old, and has been supported by funding from the Attorney General of South Australia. 104 new apps have been added to the site bringing the total number of apps reviewed to almost 800.

In the past 12 months ACCM app reviewers have noticed a growing trend for developers to use a range of tools that engage children with gambling. In this year, ACCM has noted the growth of “loot boxes” within games as a way to monetise and increase returns from games for developers.

These have recently received media attention in Australia with gambling experts raising concern about the potential for mobile app games (that appeal to children) to set up normalised gambling behaviours.

Children pay real money for a loot box for a chance that the content might increase their odds of winning, or provide real advantages within the game (that would usually take hours of game play to achieve). In addition, some ‘loot boxes’ include a feature that randomly allows the player to ‘get lucky’ and be offered more advantages, thus increasing the incentive to buy. While this trend appears to have started on Xbox or PC computer games (most recently *Star Wars Battlefront 2*), gambling experts are warning that ‘it’s in mobile games where gambling mechanisms like loot boxes are nearly ubiquitous, often overlooked, and potentially most problematic’. From its app reviews, ACCM compiles the Children and Gambling WatchList to signal to parents, those apps that contain these and other simulated gambling elements.

Partnership with Messenger Press

Messenger Press weekly local newspapers in South Australia have carried abbreviated *Know Before You Go* movie reviews in the “what’s on” section of their publication, with links to the full reviews on the ACCM website.

Raising Children Network



ACCM has continued to supply movie reviews to the Raising Children Network (RCN). In the 2018 – 2019 financial year, ACCM supplied a total of 72 *Know Before You Go* movie reviews for inclusion on RCN’s website.

Brochures

ACCM’s brochures continue to be in demand from parents and educators, and have been distributed at ACCM parent seminars and national conferences in Sydney, and at seminars run by other organisations (such as Generation Next).

ACCM Reviews free app

ACCM has widely promoted the availability of this free app to access to its reviews, since its development early in 2016. Apple and Android versions are available.

ACCM in the Community

Classification of films, television and their trailers

ACCM has been active in classification issues related to both the National Classification Scheme (for cinema films and games) and to free-to-air TV. ACCM has made submissions to the Classification Review Board when distributors of films likely to be seen by children have sought a lower classification (eg *Bumblebee* and *Hellboy*). ACCM has engaged from time to time with federal Classification policy staff with regard to our view that an age-based NCS would more effectively protect children.

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. The role of the Commercials Advice Division of Free TV Australia (now called Clearads) in the classification of such trailers needs further investigation, including their level of child development expertise. ACCM has lodged several complaints about trailers. These were found by the ACMA not to meet the classification guidelines, but the networks reliance on the third party advice of Clearads excused them.

ACCM has begun preparation for a campaign to have an age-based classification scheme introduced when the Federal Government conducts a review later this year.

Little Big Shots film festival for children in Adelaide

ACCM used a different model than previously - the best of overseas and local short films went to the children rather than the children coming to the films. Forty five Out of School Hours Care services and three schools saw **Little Big Shots film festival for children in Adelaide** "in house" via USB, enabling them to feature the films as part of a broader creative learning program.

ACCM Seminars and Conferences

Adelaide May 2019 *The Hostile takeover of childhood - protecting children from hidden online marketing* with Dr Susan Linn. ACCM presented an evening seminar for parents and teachers with Dr Susan Linn, visiting US child psychotherapist, founder of Campaign for a Commercial -Free Childhood, and expert ventriloquist. Susan's visit to Adelaide was supported by MGM Wireless and Concordia College.

Sydney August 2018 ACCM hosted a seminar in Sydney called *Strategies for Struggles with Screens* on Thursday, August 9, 2018 at the Presbyterian Girls College and it was a conversation between Dr Michael Rich and Dr Justin Coulson.

Sydney October 2019 ACCM also partnered the Australian Council for Educational Leaders in planning a national conference in Sydney, This conference has had to be moved from June to October.

Working with other community agencies:

President Elizabeth Handsley and Hon CEO Barbara Biggins have participated in working parties set up by other NGOs, including Early Childhood Australia's Digital Policy group.

ACCM has also liaised closely with the Australian Children's Television Foundation and Screen Producers Australia in relation to the Government's review of Australian and Children's Content Standards and have continued to work on Early Childhood Australia's Digital Policy group until the release of ECA's report in December.

Advocacy

Submissions to inquiries

ACCM has researched, prepared and lodged the following submissions during the 2018-2019 period:

- Submission to the Classification Review Board on review of the film, *Hellboy*, April 4, 2019
- Submission to ACCC Inquiry into digital platforms, February 21, 2019
- Submission to the review into the non-educational use of mobile devices in NSW schools October 2018, November 15, 2018
- Submission to the House Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport, Inquiry into sleep health awareness in Australia, November 5, 2018
- Submission to the Department of Communications Reviews of the Enhancing Online Safety Act 2015 and Online Content Scheme 2018, August 23, 2018
- Submission to the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee Inquiry into gaming micro-transactions for chance-based items 2018, August 7, 2018

ACCM also participated in the debates about the need for regulatory action on ads for gambling within live sports programs on Free to air T V, and online, and highlighted related issues in its monthly news review *small screen*.

Letters to Ministers

In the wake of the announcement in December by the SA Government that it would not fund ACCM's review services from June 30, ACCM has written to both the SA Attorney General seeking a review of this decision, and to the Federal Minister for Communications Mitch Fifield seeking federal funding. Both requests were denied, Further letters to State and territory Attorneys General (responsible for classification) and to Federal, State and Territory Ministers for Child Protection seeking funding support have not been successful.

Consultations

Professor Elizabeth Handsley and Barbara Biggins were consulted on a number of occasions by Federal government policy staff on issues related to classification.

Media Interviews

ACCM President Professor Elizabeth Handsley, Executive Member Dr C. Glenn Cupit, and other spokespeople for ACCM took part in a range of media interviews on diverse topics throughout the year.

Administration

Board of Directors

The Australian Council on Children and the Media's ten member Board meets by teleconference.

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee of the Board of the Australian Council on Children and the Media meets monthly in Adelaide. This committee includes three representatives of the Board, representatives of the organisational members and other individuals selected for their expertise. It is supported by the ACCM's Hon CEO Barbara Biggins and Kate Martin, Company Secretary.

Members who attended Executive meetings this year included: Dr C Glenn Cupit (formerly UniSA); Karl Brettig (Communities for Children); Judy Bundy (SAASSPC); Jacqueline Stratfold; Kate Martin; Rae Taggart (SAPPA); Dr Lesley-Anne Ey (UniSA); and Prof Leon Straker (Curtin Uni).



Professor Elizabeth Handsley - President

A Professor of Law, with an expert knowledge of media law as it relates to children, Elizabeth represents ACCM in the media and chairs the monthly meetings of the Executive Committee of the Board of the Australian Council on Children and the Media.



APPA Executive Officer Michael Nuttall - Board member

Michael Nuttall, Executive Officer of the Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA), oversees the operations of the Canberra-based national office and represents APPA in various national forums. Prior to joining APPA in 2010, Michael taught in and led primary schools in both NSW and the ACT over a twenty-five year teaching career, including some twelve years as a primary school principal.



AHISA Executive Officer Beth Blackwood - Board member

Beth was appointed Chief Executive of the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia three years ago after a 30-year career in the education sector as a teacher, principal, head of department and other leadership roles. Beth is committed to the education and equality of young women.

Current ACCM staff



Barbara Biggins OAM - 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 co-ordinates the day-to-day activities and projects of ACCM, utilising her extensive knowledge and background in Australian broadcasting and regulation. Her dedication to the organisation and leadership of the staff team is invaluable to the running and success of ACCM.



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.



Helen Shaw - Volunteer Finance Officer

Helen volunteered her time and skills in financial management on a regular basis throughout this year.



Dr Debra Dickinson - Reviews Coordinator

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 was doing contract work with the Australian Association for Environment 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. He's been nominated for multiple journalism awards.

Staff Retirements

Caroline Donald retired in December 2018 after 12 years as Movie Review Coordinator, Webmaster and Research Officer. Her extensive child development expertise was a valued resource to ACCM. Caroline has returned for some periods to provide support and training to new staff.

Anne Anastasiou, who served the organisation over many years as Administrator and Finance Officer, retired from her appointment as Company Secretary in May 2019.

Other resignations included **Clare Phillips** (Development and Events Officer) in March 2019 and **Rebecca Kevern** (Administration Assistant) in January 2019. **Martha Depasquale**, long time movie reviewer, filled the position of Movie and App Reviews Coordinator from January to May, when she left to have her third child. **Nick Richter**, long time App Reviewer, coordinated the Review Services for June.

Reviewers

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

Acknowledgements

Accommodation

Our office is located on the first floor on the corner of Partridge and Bath St Glenelg. We thank the Romeo family for their continued support.

Support

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

- The Attorney-General of South Australia provided support for ACCM's *Know Before You Go* movie review service, and the *Know Before You Load* app reviews until June 30, 2019.
- Thanks to the donors big and small who have enabled ACCM to continue operating from July 1, 2019 after the cessation of the above grants
- MGM Wireless and Concordia College supported the presentation of Dr Susan Linn's seminar in May 2019.
- Presbyterian Ladies College hosted the *Strategies for Struggles with Screens* in August 2018.
- Lachlan Coles (film editor) creates the highly professional and punchy DVDs used to open ACCM seminars.
- Tim Nicholls provides essential IT support.
- Nick Fedorowytch of *go create* supports the development and maintenance of our website.
- *Designworks Advertising* has designed and printed posters, brochures and banners.
- Ramesh Manocha of Health Ed provides display space for ACCM at his conferences.
- We are grateful to the many individuals who have provided tax-deductible donations to support our work.
- Many more individuals give their expertise, advice and time to assist our organisation to promote healthy choices and stronger voices in children's media.