

Annual Report 2019 – 2020

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); SAASPC (SA Association of School Parent Communities).

ACCM 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 2019 - 2020

President Professor Elizabeth Handsley

Vice President Vacant

Directors (State) Assoc. Prof. Wayne Warburton

Dr William Garvey

Prof. Elizabeth Handsley

Leon Straker *(until Nov 2019)*

Michael Nuttall

Dr Donna Odegaard AM

Assoc. Prof. Michael Nagel *(until Nov 2019)*

Kevan Goodworth

New South Wales

Victoria

South Australia

Western Australia

Australian Capital Territory

Northern Territory

Queensland

Tasmania

Directors (Corporate Membership)

Beth Blackwood

Leah Mertens *(until Oct 2019)*

CEO, AHISA

AEU

Appointments

Honorary CEO Barbara Biggins OAM CF

Company Secretary Kate Martin

Treasurer Vacant

Auditor Ascensio Accounting

President's Message

ELIZABETH HANDSLEY

It's hard to start off writing about 2019-20 without resorting to clichés that I'm sure everybody is sick of by now, but seriously ... unprecedented ... challenging ... seeing what's really important ... finding new ways Yep, all of that.

Not that we ever lost sight of our vision of helping families gain maximum benefit and minimum detriment for children in a changing media environment. It's just that the change took off in a way that required even more ingenuity than we usually display.

Our biggest triumph in the year of COVID, in my view, has been in adapting our movie review service *Know Before You Go*, when the cinemas closed down and families were stuck at home with their own devices, to focus on streaming content. We've been able to mine a rich seam of movies and provide advice and guidance in finding the best content, for children of different ages, in the new context in which families have found themselves. This has included reviewing some movies that I loved as a child! (And some I was a bit scared by.)

The change has applied not just to the platforms but to the format of our reviews, as two of our reviewers have started sharing their insights via video. Please check these out if you haven't already, as we're all very proud of how warm and engaging the videos are, as well as being highly informative. Well done, Daniela and Martha.

The pandemic also meant we were unable to run some planned fundraising activities, but that glass turned out to be half-full as it also meant we qualified for some government assistance, that has in turn facilitated these new services.

With all that in mind, it is strange to cast our minds back to last October, when we travelled to Sydney for the conference on *Digital Environments and Developing Minds: What Professionals, Producers and Policy Makers Need to Know*. We curated the content and the conference was run by the Australian Council for Educational Leaders. The depth of content illustrated our extensive knowledge and international contacts in this field.

The biggest news of the regulatory year was the government's review of the National Classification Scheme for publications, films and games. As we are aware of how little help families are currently getting (except from us!) in choosing appropriate films and games, our submission argued for a radical overhaul of the NCS to introduce age-based categories that align with developmental stages. As well as putting our written submission in, ACCM was consulted twice during the review process, and at the time of writing we are awaiting the outcome of deliberation by the Commonwealth and State ministers. Given everything else that's going on, we believe this may take some time, so feel free to contact your local members and government contacts about what you would like to see happen.

In other news on the children's media scene, the eSafety Commissioner has taken on the provision of services to families for internet safety; and a new Centre of Excellence on the Digital Child, based at QUT, kicked off. ACCM has pledged to provide in-kind support to the Centre, which should offer more Australian research insights as time goes on.

As always, it's my humble privilege to thank all the people who keep this organisation thriving: donors, Board and Executive members, staff and last but not least our indefatigable CEO, Barbara Biggins. Well done to everybody for getting through a difficult year and setting us up for more success and impact in the coming one.

REPORT

Information collection, review, and distribution

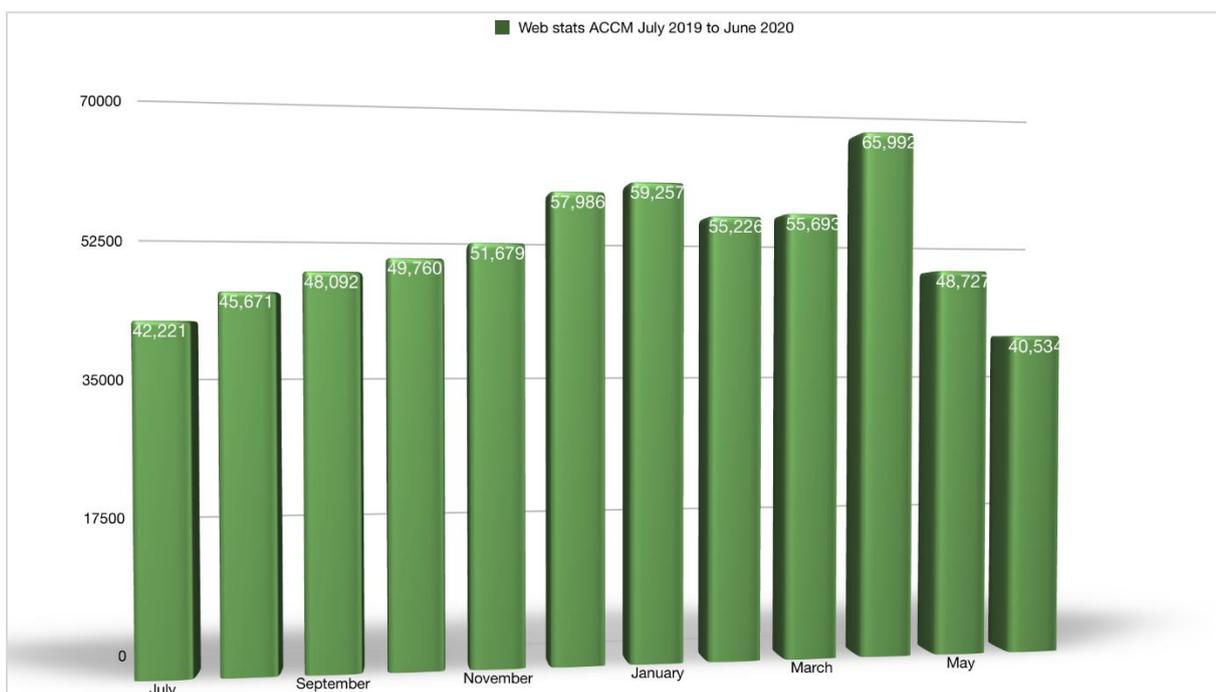
Research collection and review

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 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. The website also carries the *Know Before You Go* movies reviews, and *Know Before You Load* app reviews, and the Children and Gambling Watchlist. Nick Fedorowytch of [go create](#) has provided website hosting and support. During the Covid-19 lockdown, ACCM created a new *Choosing movies for children* page designed to help parents find enjoyable and age-appropriate movies for their children, on streaming and ondemand services.

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, for those aged 4+, and for those classified G. Movies with high search rates included *My Spy*, *StarWars: The Rise of Luke Skywalker*, and *Jumanji*. The number of monthly website visits this year steadily rose to a high of 65,992 in April, dropping back to 40,534 as the Covid-19 shutdown continued.



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 2800, up from 2400 in 2019. A feature of latter months has been the placement of videos of two of our movie reviewers discussing a weekly movie recommendation. These are now also posted on Facebook with *101 Dalmatians* attracting 2900 views; *Cat in Paris* - 2200; *The one and only Ivan* – 2100; *Swallows and Amazons* - 2600; *Flubber* - 3400 and *Old Yeller* - 3300 views.

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. 800 recipients (up 60 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 (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 18th year. Our 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 close to 1300 movies, ranging from golden oldies to the most recent titles released in cinemas. During the second half of this year, with the closure of cinemas during the pandemic, the movies chosen for review have mostly been on streaming or ondemand services. The movie reviews have attracted increased interest this year with visits rising from an average of 35,000 in 2019 to 50,000 in 2020.

After 13 years of financial support from the SA Labor Government, a change of government led to the cancellation, at June 30, 2019, of the program under which ACCM's movie and app review services programs were funded. An appeal for public support raised sufficient funds for ACCM to continue the reviews for the first 9 months of the financial year. Federal and SA Government Covid-19 grants for not-for profits and Jobkeeper allowances have supported the services to the end of 2019-2020 year.

A total of 111 movies were reviewed in the past financial year: 31 G-rated, 60 PG-rated, 15 M-rated, and 5 MA15+. 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 movies such as *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker*; and *Spider Man: Far from Home*. The characters from these films are well known to young children through toys and other associated merchandise. The M-rated movie, *Annabelle Comes Home*, was reviewed as it included child characters and had been promoted to a family audience during a televised football match. 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. Five M rated movies were judged to be unsuitable, even with parental guidance, for those under 15: *Jojo Rabbit*; *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark*; *After*; *The Goldfinch*; and *Annabelle Comes Home*. The reasons for the recommendations included: extreme violence; scary scenes; mature themes; heavy and frequent drug and alcohol use; sex scenes; and potentially harmful messages. The five MA15+ rated movies were also chosen for review due to child/teen appeal. These were: *Birds of Prey (and the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn)*; *Good Boys*; *IT: Chapter Two*; *The Australian Dream: Adam Goodes*; and *Child's Play*.

As well as appearing on the ACCM website, 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:

- I love these reviews! With an anxious/sensitive kiddo it's really important for me to know exactly what's in a film before deciding if it's suitable for her.
- I wish I knew about this service earlier. It's very useful.
- My children still get scared by a number of scenes even in G rated movies, so I have found the Know Before You Go website very helpful.

ACCM has continued to supply movie reviews to the Raising Children Network (RCN).



In the 2019-2020 financial year, ACCM supplied a total of 91 *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 6 years old. Reviewers with tertiary child development qualifications have reviewed 26 apps this year, a significant drop due to the loss of SA Government funding at end of June 2019. The data base now holds close to 800 apps. The Children and Gambling Watch list has had 2 apps added to it this year.

Of growing concern has been the evidence that significant numbers of game apps are covertly tracking children and gathering their personal data without consent.

ACCM has gained a project grant which will enable it to work more extensively in this area over the coming year, to produce resources for parents, and to reframe its app review service.

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 conferences and seminars

ACCM uses its extensive research base, and networks both national and international, to present events on topics of interest and concern, to inform parents and professionals. It was only able to present one event this year, with public events being cancelled from March onwards.

Sydney October 2019 ACCM partnered the Australian Council for Educational Leaders to present the *Digital environments and developing minds: what professionals, producers and policymakers need to know* in Sydney, on October 28. ACCM curated the content of the conference, utilising 18 presenters and panel members from the US, the Netherlands and Australia.

Brochures

ACCM researches and writes brochures on a range of topics. It also has brochures which promote its review services. A range of brochures were distributed at a GenNext Adelaide seminar attended by 800 children's professionals in July. The *Digital environment and developing minds* conference in Sydney in late October provided another opportunity for distribution. Further opportunities were limited as public events were cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions.

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 QUT.

Advocacy

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.

Submissions to the Classification Review Board: From time-to-time ACCM has made a submission to the CRB when distributors of films likely to be seen by children have sought a lower classification.

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.

ACCM lodged 3 such complaints this year.

Trailers in cinemas for movies of higher classification than the feature: this year ACCM reviewed the trailers which accompanied features in cinemas attended by our reviewers. ACCM found that of 80 movies, 27 (or 33%) were accompanied by trailers of movies or promotions for games that either were, or later were shown to be, of a higher classification than the feature to be screened. The vast majority of these were for yet-to-be-classified movies. These findings were conveyed to the Classification Policy Branch.

Review of the regulation of classification 2020: from July-Oct, ACCM surveyed parents' satisfaction with the information provided by the National Classification Scheme (NCS). This survey, promoted by several prominent online parenting sites, found that more than 75 % of Australian parents of young children say the PG category for films, games and apps is too broad. And 88 % of them think an age-based system would be more useful to them than the present one.

ACCM was consulted twice by the NCS Reviewer during the progress of this review. ACCM expended a major part of its resources over several months, researching and presenting its major submission arguing for an age-based classification system to replace the present NCS.

Submissions to media inquiries

ACCM made the following submissions this year

2020

- [Submission to the Review of the AANA Food and Beverage Advertising and Marketing Communications Code, June 10, 2020](#)
- [Summary of submission to the National Classification System review, May 11, 2020](#)
- [Submission to the National Classification System review, February 26, 2020](#)

2019

- [Submission to the AANA Code of Ethics Review, October 18, 2019](#)
- [Submission to the ACCC's Digital Platforms Inquiry consultation, September 12, 2019](#)

Media Interviews

ACCM President Professor Elizabeth Handsley, Executive Member Dr C. Glenn Cupit, and other spokespeople for ACCM took part in media interviews throughout the year, about 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.

Executive Committee of the Board

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.



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

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 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. He's been nominated for multiple journalism awards and still freelances for local publications.

Reviewers

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

Finance Officer

The position of Finance Officer was held on a volunteer basis by Helen Shaw and Anne Anastasiou for the first quarter. Accounting services have been provided by Paul Rugari for most of the financial year.

Acknowledgements

Accommodation

Our office is located on the first floor on the corner of Partridge and Bath St Glenelg. We greatly appreciate 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. We 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 from July 1, 2019 after the cessation of SA government grants. We are grateful to the many individuals who have provided tax-deductible donations to support our work.
- Tim Nicholls of User Friendly Computers provides essential IT support.
- Former ACCM office holders and staff who have provided wise counsel along the way: Anne Anastasiou, Helen Shaw, and Caroline Donald.
- Nick Fedorowytch of *Gocreate* supports the development and maintenance of our website.
- Ramesh Manocha of Health Ed provides display space for ACCM at his conferences, and has helped distribute ACCM surveys.
- Many more individuals give their expertise, advice and time to assist our organisation to promote healthy choices and stronger voices in children's media.