

October 21, 2009

## **Barnardos Call for Greater Protection for Children Online**

Filed in Telecoms, Post &#038; Mobile Phone TechnologyGovernmentNon-Gov. Org. on October 21, 2009

The Minister for Children, Barry Andrews TD, today launched a report published by Barnardos entitled Three Hazards - Child Protection in the Electronic Age. The report highlights a number of dangers faced by children and young people, and calls on the government to take action to minimise the risks to them.

Introducing the report, Barnardos CEO Fergus Finlay said: "The report highlights three of the main hazards facing children and young people in the age of the computer and the internet, including; privacy and protection, the security of data and the ever increasing market for child pornography. The report makes recommendations on the steps necessary to minimise risk to young people."

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Barry Andrews T.D., welcomed the report saying, "I expect the publication by Barnardos of Three Hazards - Child Protection in the Electronic Age to play a significant role in the formulation of Government policy in this area. The development of new age media brings many benefits in terms of social networking, accessibility and educational opportunity. However, new media represents a very powerful medium for the proliferation of material and data that gives rise to child protection concerns. There is a responsibility on content providers, service providers, parents, Government and wider society to protect children in the digital age."

The Barnardos report deals with issue of privacy and protection for children, especially in the age of social networking. On the internet, anyone can pretend to be anyone else - a ten-year old can pretend to a lot more maturity than they have, and a fifty-year old with an interest in grooming can pretend to be a teenager. Without adequate security, the policing of the internet to protect children is extremely difficult, and there are few if any standards in application.

It highlights that an enormous amount of data relating to children and young people is held on the internet by a variety of people such as schools and colleges, government departments, the health system, and a host of private providers of services. Standards of security are hugely variable, and are not covered by law as they should be.

In addition the report looks at the enormous market on the internet for child sexual abuse imagery, and the way in which the technology is used and manipulated by people with an interest in paedophilia. The pornography industry is now considered to be one of the fastest growing criminal activities on the internet today, and approximately one fifth of all Internet pornography is child pornography or CSAI. New technology such as inexpensive digital cameras and internet distribution has made it easier than ever before to produce and distribute child pornography.

The Barnardos report Three Hazards - Child Protection in the Electronic Age makes a number of recommendations to Government and other agencies to minimise the risk to children and young people. They are as follows:

- 1) Urgent consideration should be given to the development of a commercially viable Age Verification and Identity Management (AV/IDM) program for children.
- 2) A number of amendments are necessary to the Data Protection Act, to create a criminal offence for persons who represent themselves as a child when contacting children through electronic means; to create an offence for any organisation to display personal data belonging to a child; and for other reasons.
- 3) It must become a legal requirement that all data held in respect of children is subject to proper legal controls and standards. Any organisation wishing to store data relating to children must be licensed to do so. The powers and remit of

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the Data Protection Commissioner must be extended to cover this area.

- 4) A dedicated Paedophile Investigation Unit should be established within the Garda Siochana and publicised in a similar manner to the level of visibility of the UK's CEOP to deter paedophiles operating through Ireland
- 5) The development of legislation (Child Exploitation Material Site Notice and Take Down (Blocking) Policy) to enable the Gardai to operate a blocking system for content on the internet that involves the criminal exploitation and abuse of children. This system would operate, as in other jurisdictions, by internet service providers being advised of the existence of websites carrying such material, and being ordered to take them down. The system must be mandatory for all providers.
- 6) The development of a targeted communications campaign, focussed on parents and children separately, outlining the dangers of online/internet activity.
- 7) The creation of a simple but effective 'Panic Button' on sites facilitating interactivity involving children that allows a child that is worried about a developing difficulty to get immediate support from an agency such as Child Line, Parent Line, Hotline, An Garda Siochana, or other organisations participating in this service. This exists in the UK and is highly successful as both an outlet for a concerned child, and a deterrent to a person behaving in a manner not appropriate to that child.
- 8) The restructure of the Office of Internet Safety to ensure that it is independent of all vested interests, and placed on a statutory footing.

The report is the result of a study undertaken by Pat McKenna for Barnardos.

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Editors Note:

Pat McKenna is Director of Trusting Software, an internet security company providing consulting, solutions, education and media support in the area of child safety in computing through ChildWatch.ie. Pat McKenna has been in IT for 15 years and has created patented solutions in the field of identity management and 2 Factor Authentication. As such, he was eminently qualified to address the issues of risk from the perspective of an internet and digital expert.

A copy of the report is available, to request one, please contact Barnardos.

Barnardos supports children whose well-being is under threat, by working with them, their families and communities and by campaigning for the rights of children. Barnardos was established in Ireland in 1962 and is Ireland's leading independent children's charity.