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Official Committee Hansard

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON CYBER-SAFETY

Cybersafety for senior Australians

WEDNESDAY, 9 MAY 2012

CANBERRA

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON CYBER-SAFETY

Wednesday, 9 May 2012

Members in attendance: Senators Bilyk, Pratt and Mr Hawke, Ms Marino, Mr Perrett and Ms Rishworth

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

1. the nature, prevalence and level of cybersafety risks and threats experienced by senior Australians;
2. the impact and implications of those risks and threats on access and use of information and communication technologies by senior Australians;
3. the adequacy and effectiveness of current government and industry initiatives to respond to those threats, including education initiatives aimed at senior Australians;
4. best practice safeguards, and any possible changes to Australian law, policy or practice that will strengthen the cybersafety of senior Australians.

WITNESSES

LITTLE, Ms Vanessa Kaye, Australian Library and Information Association 1

LITTLE, Ms Vanessa Kaye, Australian Library and Information Association**Committee met at 16:29**

CHAIR (Senator Bilyk): I declare open the public hearing for the Joint Select Committee on Cyber Safety's inquiry into cyber safety for senior Australians. This is the second public hearing undertaken for the committee's inquiry. I will ask a member to move that the committee authorises audio broadcasting of the evidence about to be given at the public hearing this day.

Mr HAWKE: So moved.

CHAIR: I welcome Ms Vanessa Little, representing the Australian Library and Information Association. ARIA is the peak body for libraries in Australia, including the over 450 public libraries across the nation. Public library membership on average is 50 per cent of Australians. Many libraries are reporting a growth in use from the increasingly ageing Australian population.

Thank you for your submission, which we have numbered six. Before proceeding I remind you that this is a public hearing and is being recorded for Hansard and for audio broadcast.

Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath I should advise you that this hearing is a legal proceeding of the parliament and warrants the same respect as proceedings of the House and the Senate. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. Would you like to make an opening statement.

Ms Little: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. For the next week I am Vice-President of the Australian Library and Information Association, after which I become President. Libraries are about literacy and literacy includes a range of things, not just reading and writing—although I should not say 'just'. It includes a range of other literacies and one of those is digital literacy. Sitting within digital literacy is the very important issue of cyber safety. It is one that libraries throughout Australia take very seriously. In our school libraries, librarians are spending a lot of time working with young people on developing their digital literacy skills. In our government and business libraries, law libraries, government department libraries and perhaps even in your own parliamentary library librarians are working with our workforce to assist them to develop digital literacy skills, in particular around cyber safety. But of most interest to this committee is the fact that our public libraries are working extensively with a full range of the community on cyber safety and digital literacy development.

As you have rightly said, about 50 per cent of Australians are members of their public library. They do not have to be a member of the library, though, to come in and take advantage of the services. So, some of the people who may attend our programs and come and learn how to use computers and use the internet safely may in fact not be registered users, so it is a bit hard to quantify that. Some libraries have more membership than others. For example, my library here in the ACT has about 60 per cent of our community as members.

One of the important things about public libraries is that we are considered in the community to be very trusted. When the surveys are done about what places in the community are trusted—a lot of local government authorities do those sorts of surveys—what is trusted and valued is often the public library. We are often beaten by the garbage collection for the most important public service provided by local government, which is always something we want to beat! I am not sure if you have heard of the theory of the third place. The first place is home and the second place is where you go to work—it is another trusted place. Increasingly, there is research showing that the third place is your community place, the place where you go to be part of your community and, increasingly, people are identifying that as libraries.

As you rightly say, the use of libraries is increasing. My own library has had a 14 per cent increase in loans in the last 12 months, and there has been an astronomical growth in visits, as well. So the community is coming back to public spaces. I like to think that we are in competition with Westfield and we are winning. We have a full range of people coming to us. We cater for everyone from the homeless right through to people with very high levels of education. We cover a broad age group; it is a very indicative slice of the community.

On the programs that are already being run in public libraries around the country, many, many of us run internet and computers for seniors. Some of them are done by staff and some by wonderful volunteers or computer societies. Some of them are interestingly done as intergenerational programs—which are fantastic—where young people from the local community are brought in to teach the seniors in their local community how to use computers and 'how all of this stuff works', which is what the seniors say to us.

We have another lot of programs in libraries, particularly in my library here in Canberra. We call ours 'technology tasters'. A lot of seniors come to us and say: 'What's that thing called Twitter? Is Facebook okay and what would I do if I wanted to be on Facebook and talk to my grandchildren?' We do a lot of that kind of work as

well. A lot of it is one-on-one and a lot of it is also computer sessions. We also offer online tutorials. Some people do not want to self-declare. They do not want to say, 'I don't know how to use this stuff,' but they are willing to book a computer at the public library and sit down to do a self-paced, teach yourself kind of thing. We cater for people from a range of different perspectives. There are libraries from Millicent in the south-east of South Australia, right through the country into the very heart of the Northern Territory offering these services to communities, particularly to seniors.

One of the important things which is going to help us improve those services is the NBN rollout. A number of us have libraries that are NBN sites and ours is on the way here in Canberra at Gungahlin. A lot of the sites are very small and those libraries will be able to offer a huge amount more, not just teaching people, 'This is how to use the computer, this how to use the internet safely and this is what you look for to make sure that the site is safe,' those sorts of things, but we are also going to be teach people how to use some of the high bandwidth technologies using video conferencing and those kinds of things. A number of libraries are already moving down that path. They have been fortunate enough to win funding from the Commonwealth government and a number of us are expecting to link in with the NBN as it rolls out.

ALIA believes that an informed constituent is an empowered constituent and that that is much better than using filters or blocks on the internet. For a number of reasons, we all know that the unscrupulous will always get through any filters. If people believe that the filters are doing the job for them, then they are even more vulnerable. We know that a lot of senior people are very trusting, that seniors have come to trust the bank manager and people they deal with. We do not believe filters are an answer for that reason but of course for us as librarians our business is about freedom of information. We believe it is much better to have someone empowered and skilled, informed and making good decisions about what they are reading and then, being informed, able to constrict that.

In summary, public libraries particularly are already in this space. We are doing a lot of good things. Of course it is never enough but we are in the business of lifelong learning and assisting people with their self-directed learning. We offer a full range of things to assist seniors and very often we are the place they come to ask, 'What is this stuff and how can I use it? Will it blow up in my hands? How can I trust what I read?'

CHAIR: Thank you. On behalf of the committee, I congratulate you on being president-elect and president from next week. When people go to libraries and learn how to use Facebook, do you teach them about the privacy settings and how to use those sorts of things?

Ms Little: Absolutely.

CHAIR: What do you do for seniors to help them understand the significance of being safe in the cyber world?

Ms Little: We talk to them about it a lot. We tell them about the dangers. Generally in my experience they already know that this is a dangerous place to be because they read the newspapers and they watch TV. They ask lots of questions about how to be safe and we show them, particularly Facebook. We find with the general internet that when you put in a query you come back with a lot of stuff and sorting out the good from the bad is just experience. We talk to them and put a very special focus on it, 'This is the stuff you can do, this is how good the technology is but be careful with these kinds of things.'

CHAIR: In your submission you state that senior Australians are at risk online because they lack confidence and skills in the use of new technology. Are libraries currently providing assistance to people who will become seniors in the near future, say from about 45 on, people for whom it is not something they have been brought up with? There are still a whole lot of people in that age bracket.

Ms Little: Absolutely. We run a range of internet awareness programs and computer awareness programs for people, and many times we will do a one-on-one. Often somebody comes in and says, 'My children are all interstate and I want to be able to talk to them online,' or 'I need to pay these bills but I do not want to pay the fee for sending a cheque. Can you show me how to do this?' So we develop a rapport with them. We show them how to use these technologies. We have computers throughout our libraries available for community use. Increasingly we have Wi-Fi. Often these people do not bring in a computer, although often children or grandchildren will give grandma or grandpa their old computer and expect them to be able to use it. We get many requests about some old clunkers, I can tell you. We set up the conversation, we show them and then we invite them to programs and activities to help them. Yes, we go right across the board. Obviously the young people do not need us to show them how to use the technologies, but sometimes it is a bit frightening about the level of trust seniors have. They are worried about the technology but then when they get to know it they need to know that, if you are reading something that is too good to be true, it probably is too good to be true.

CHAIR: Do you think overall that they are understanding that?

Ms Little: Yes, they are. They are hearing and reading these things and they are ultra cautious. You really have to encourage very strongly some people to get involved in the technology. I ran a program some time ago when I lived and worked in Adelaide about getting more people online. It is very much about finding the hook for people. For a lot of seniors it is about communicating with family interstate and overseas. For some people it is their passion. We find that a lot of people get involved through libraries in genealogy and that is the hook for them. It is finding the hook for them and then working with them to develop their skills.

CHAIR: On page 7 of your submission you list nearly a dozen services libraries could provide with additional funding and support. Would you like to expand on that committee?

Ms Little: The submission just says that these are the things we already do and could do more of. As you may have read, we work with the Alannah and Madeline Foundation around cybersafety for children. They have little buttons which they provide to you electronically, which we have put on all of our computers—most libraries would have it. Kids can click on that and it tells them, 'Be careful of this, don't do that, have you thought about this?' We think one for seniors might be it really good and it could be rolled out very easily and quickly and get attention through the media. Of course, if we had more money we would run more programs. At the moment it is fitted in among all the other things library staff have to do or it is done by volunteers who have only limited time.

We provide services within our libraries but we would also love to be out in the community more. Some of us have the luxury of having enough staff and we can do some of that but nowhere near enough. We also know that some of the most marginalised people in the community do use us. A lot of homeless people come to libraries but then there are other people who see a library building as a bit of a barrier. We would love to be working with seniors groups and special interest groups. The program I spoke about when I was working in Adelaide did specifically that. We went out to nursing homes and senior citizens clubs, to the football clubs, to the pubs—we had a series of cuts in our program. We worked with people where they were comfortable and where they felt they could engage with the technology. There are a lot more of those things we could do. We could certainly do a lot more homebound if we were able to. Most libraries run a homebound program so for people who are frail aged or laid up because they have had an accident we deliver material. We could train those volunteers to also teach people how to use computers and how to use the internet safely. They are already police checked and they are already changed them being in people's houses. They already have a rapport with each person. In Canberra, for example, 400 people receive that service. So there are opportunities there. Also we know that when people gather around an interest they become really enthusiastic. So one of the things we would love to explore is how to create seniors' special interest forums and those sorts of things so that they can be teaching each other. There are a lot of opportunities for us. We have a really good base and we have the trust and reach into the community. I often say to my staff, 'If one of the major corporates had a 62 per cent market penetration, they would be pretty happy.'

Mr PERRETT: Further to that, can you reach beyond who comes through the door? Would more resources still go to only whoever comes through your door?

Ms Little: No. More resources would enable us to get out more into the community. To use again my own library as an example, we have a slightly different structure here in Canberra but our staff are encouraged to go out to community groups to liaise with those groups, to work out what their needs are and help to address those needs. To roll that out across the country would be fabulous. Library people are very good at getting out and networking. Most of us know all of the community groups in our local community.

ACTING CHAIRMAN (Mr Hawke): Thank you for all of that information. You mentioned an analogy about competing with Westfield. Why are people returning to libraries? Is it the technologies which are mainly available there?

Ms Little: Partly, and I think people are wanting a community place. They want to come somewhere they feel comfortable and feel a sense of connection to. Certainly we run a lot more programming than ever before—health programs, parenting programs, kids programs. All of the libraries across Australia to one extent or another are drawing more people in because we see ourselves as being not just books in books out, as people might think we are, but we are lifelong learning facilitators—I know that sounds like jargon. We have always been there for people's self-development and for people's lifelong learning. They are learning beyond the education sector. We find a lot of people are coming in for that. We are getting a lot of people coming in for the technologies and that depends on what socio-economic area you might be in. For example, my last library was in Broadmeadows in Hume City Council in Melbourne. A lot of people relied on computers in a library for their internet access. We find that people in Canberra who will rely on us are the people who have fallen between the cracks with. So even in a community like this where there is a high degree of computer ownership, there is still a group of people who really need us.

ACTING CHAIR: Concerning the structure of your organisation and cybersafety for senior citizens, do you have examples or reporting in relation to problems of cybersafety nationally or do you have a system where you would hear about it? Could you inform the committee of any experiences you have had, even colloquially, about the prevalence of cyber safety threats at libraries or people experiencing that in those places?

Ms Little: We do not collect that data, to be honest, but that is not to say that we could not get it. We collect a lot of data about libraries and their use and those kinds of things. I cannot say that anecdotally we have had a lot of problems because people come in and they are supported. I could not speak for every other library in the country but we could certainly find that out or get case studies for you, if you are interested.

ACTING CHAIR: It should be interesting, if you have examples of things that could be relevant, by state. You mentioned earlier filtering and a few things like that. That is what I am getting at, in a sense. Every library takes its own cyber safety precautions I imagine.

Ms Little: Absolutely, yes. We are vigilant about making sure that our internet access is watched by the staff and that people sign up and accept rules when they sign up to use it. In my own case you have to use your library card in order to be able to access the system.

ACTING CHAIR: So everybody is identified who uses a library system?

Ms Little: Not always, no—and certainly not with our wi-fi. There is a delicate balance between privacy and safety.

ACTING CHAIR: That is partly why we are here: so the balance is—

Ms Little: That is exactly right. Libraries take it very, very seriously. For example, we try not to have computers set up for community members that are in little corners; they are out in the public area where people are able to use them, but they are also being monitored.

Mr PERRETT: But not the wi-fi.

Ms Little: Yes, with the wi-fi we keep an eye on people for sure. But, if someone is sitting in a corner, we have to make sure—

ACTING CHAIR: With their own devices and things, yes.

Ms Little: But we wander past and make sure that they know we are there.

ACTING CHAIR: Do you know of any libraries that do run a system? You mentioned library cards. There would be no-one on a system there that would not be known, for example?

Ms Little: There would not be on our own system; the wi-fi is different. We do that for entirely different reasons—certainly not to know who is doing what but because it enables us to have the community book their own computers so that staff do not sit there, which is also a privacy issue, and write, 'Vanessa Little wants computer No. 3 at four o'clock on Friday.' It is very staff intensive; it is also open to a lot of abuse by the kids who want to be funny and change people's names around; and it lacks privacy.

So we have put this system in—you have a library card, you swipe the library card and you book online what computer you want, and then it just lets you use it. We do not do it for management purposes of cybersafety; we do it for management purposes of privacy and our own staff time.

Ms RISHWORTH: I had the privilege to launch the Willunga digital hub at last Thursday, and I have a question about that. Obviously it was at the Willunga library, and that local library was very involved in setting that up and will be critical to its implementation. Are the digital hubs, as they have been rolled out, discussing through your organisation? How are they working? It was very clear that digital literacy was low. What do you see as some of the new things that you will be able to do in those digital hubs?

Ms Little: The digital hubs will give us an opportunity to give people access to services that require high bandwidth. In the early days, I think it is going to be things like video conferencing, and, in the case of Canberra, it will be access to the assembly—our Twitter cabinets and those kinds of things—but I think it will morph into more of an access point for a whole range of other services, like e-health, access to lawyers and access to educational programs overseas. You can see a time when there might be a very talented musician in Willunga who takes a master class from somebody in London. It will grow, and people will test it out and change it and see how it will roll for them. There is a lot of work still to be done in early-on digital literacy—how to use a computer, what it can be used for—and then the digital hubs will give us an opportunity to expand that unbelievably.

ALIA does run an informal network of digital hub libraries and, as we identify where the next NBN rollouts are, we invite the library people from those areas to come on board. It is not a given that the libraries will win the

NBN money, but we give them every assistance to put together their proposal and there is another organisation, Public Libraries Australia, who have a little grant that they can give people as well. So we give them every support to put in their bid, and we keep talking about how we are going and what we are doing and what programs we are putting in place.

Ms RISHWORTH: Have libraries been applying for Broadband for Seniors kiosks or been part of that program?

Ms Little: Some libraries have. It has not had a wide take-up in libraries, but there have been some libraries that have picked it up.

Ms RISHWORTH: I am aware that in my electorate a lot of the broadband kiosks for seniors have been in community associations or community locations, because they are both usually run by councils. Do you know whether or not there has been any assistance from libraries to help out as an outreach to some of those broadband kiosks?

Ms Little: I imagine that there is, and it would depend very much on the council. Often the library and community centres will be in the same area of councils, so I would be surprised if there was not. But it would, I guess, depend on the personnel involved and the councils.

Ms RISHWORTH: So more of the library focus has been on taking that next step with the digital hubs rather than the seniors kiosks, which is effectively—

Ms Little: Yes. Where the digital hubs or where the NBN is coming in, most definitely libraries are seeing it very much as an opportunity to expand what they are doing. We see this stuff as business as usual: for us, this is no different to teaching someone to read or write. This is the next literacy on the horizon, and there are many others. There is health literacy and democracy and literacy—there is a whole range of them—and we see this as business as usual. We just continue to grow as much as we can our services.

Ms MARINO: I am late, so I apologise if any of these questions have been asked already. Do you have information on the number of seniors who are using internet services through libraries in Australia?

Ms Little: We do not have them at the moment; we could try to get some for you. I am not sure how accurate they will be. Some libraries collect a lot of data about who comes in and who participates, and others have a feeling that it is a bit of an internet privacy area. We can certainly try to make some inquiries and try to get something to you. I know that I can do that for you in my own library.

Ms MARINO: That would be great, thanks. What about engagement in smaller regional communities and areas? There are some communities that use school libraries as well as the school itself. Do you have any numbers on the schools and communities around the country that have that shared—

Ms Little: The joint-use libraries?

Ms MARINO: Yes.

Ms Little: We can certainly get that for you. I do not have it off the top of my head, but it would be well known. It is mainly in small rural communities, as you say, and by far the largest number is in South Australia. I think, from memory, having managed the public library system in South Australia, that there are about 40-odd in South Australia. I can certainly find that out for you.

Ms MARINO: Given what is happening with the internet and the issue of cyberattack and spam and a range of things, how frequently do libraries, to your knowledge, have to deal with this type of issue?

Ms Little: The spam issue is usually dealt with by your employer body, so the council ICT department will have as many spam filters as they can possibly have and will deal with it in that way. My own ACT government does the same over our networks.

As far as problems with individuals being bullied or anything in the libraries are concerned, I do not have any data but can certainly put something out to my colleagues around the country to see whether they have had any experience of it.

Ms MARINO: I am speaking along the lines—depending on the types of business that people are conducting using those computers in those locations—of things such as passwords and other that they would be communicating and using for a whole raft of services and supports. I just wonder if any of those people have experienced—

Ms Little: Certainly I can see whether I can get some anecdotal evidence for you. When people come into libraries and ask for our assistance, we are very diligent about giving people the full story and giving them support to do things safely. So, if somebody was to walk in and just use our services without seeking assistance,

obviously they would be a bit at risk just the same as they would be if they were at home. But when they come in and say, 'Can you help me with this?' or we see them struggling a bit or we see them walking in and wanting to know something, we jump in and assist. A lot of our programs are around how to be safe and how to look for the good stuff and not the bad stuff on the internet. Believe it or not, we get quite a number of people who want to get onto Facebook so they can see what their grandchildren are up to!

Ms MARINO: Given the need to change passwords on a regular basis and the issue for seniors, perhaps those who become sick or other, what would you recommend as a safe and secure way of managing passwords for seniors in the latter part of their lives?

Ms Little: That is a very interesting question; I do not know that I have ever considered that. May I take it on notice and ask my staff what they do?

Ms MARINO: Yes. I would be really interested in—

Ms Little: My staff deliver the programs, and I would really like to be able to give you accurate information.

Ms MARINO: Thank you.

Senator PRATT: You have been face to face with a lot of senior citizens who are coming to terms with their computer use. There is a bit of embarrassment when people are victims of fraud or a romance scam or something like that. Are you finding that people find it difficult to make those disclosures? How do you support them when they do? How can you encourage them to come forward and report them to the right places?

Ms Little: I am not aware that people are disclosing to us. Again I will take that on notice to ask some of my staff and the staff of some my colleagues, because they are the front-of-house people. We are finding that the proactive way is the way that we are operating, certainly at my level. It is: educate people first up—help them to understand what the implications are of what they are entering, help them understand all these fabulous things they can do—but, just like in the real world, you have to be careful about who you are talking to and making sure that they are authentic and those kinds of things. So we do take much more of a proactive approach. I will ask and get back to you as to whether there is any evidence of—

Senator PRATT: In my experience people are reluctant to talk about it.

Ms Little: Absolutely. With another hat on, I can tell you that people are also very reluctant to tell us that they have reading and writing problems; but we can very often work it out when they come into libraries.

CHAIR: Ms Little, thank you for attending the hearing today and giving evidence. Should the committee have any further questions, the secretariat will seek comment from you at a later date.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Hawke**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 17:02