



Stop It Now!

Preventing child sexual abuse

About the Project

[The Men's Project](#) at Jesuit Social Services, in collaboration with the University of Melbourne, has assessed the feasibility of a [Stop it Now!](#) service in Australia that prevents child sexual abuse and offending involving child exploitation material.

Stop it Now! is a program that currently operates successfully in North America, the United Kingdom and Ireland, and the Netherlands (Brown, Jago, Kerr, McNaughton- Nicholls, Paskell & Webster, 2014). The program's key feature is a phone helpline for people who are worried about their sexual thoughts and behaviours, as well as parents, family members, and professionals who come across child sexual abuse.

As part of this work, The Men's Project at Jesuit Social Services has completed consultations with stakeholders including the Department of Health and Human Services (Victoria), the Department of Justice and Regulation (Victoria), the Department of Social Services (Commonwealth), the Australian Federal Police, the Department of Home Affairs, Victoria Police, Google, Forensicare, On the Line, Kids Helpline, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family welfare, academic experts and *Stop it Now!* providers in other jurisdictions.

Based on these discussions, we recommend the establishment of *Stop it Now!* in Australia. Our report outlines considerations for program development, including: the scope of the program and who it is targeted at; governance; integration and partnership with services in different jurisdictions; staff capability; legal issues; and resourcing.

the men's project

A Jesuit Social Services initiative



themensproject.org.au

The Issue

There are currently no large-scale national early intervention programs in Australia for people who are worried about their sexual thoughts or behaviours in relation to children (McKibbin, Humphreys & Hamilton, 2017). The gap in preventative interventions for potential perpetrators was identified by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and *Stop It Now!* was highlighted as a potential model to adopt in the recommended National Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Strategy (Royal Commission, 2017).

The Need

Child sexual abuse is a significant problem in Australia and worldwide. Being abused as a child can have lifelong consequences, including: depression; self-harm; relationship and social engagement difficulties; sexual dysfunction; substance abuse; physical health issues; and criminal and antisocial behaviour (Paolucci, Genuis & Violato, 2001). This human and economic cost can be devastating and there is also significant cost involved in the judicial response to perpetrators (Saied-Tessier, 2014).

The best available evidence suggests:

- Approximately 20% of girls and 8% of boys have suffered child sexual abuse before the age of 18 years with over two-thirds abused by someone they know (Pereada, Guilera, Forn & Gómez-Benito, 2009; Stoltenborgh, van IJzendoorn, Euser & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2011)
- Males account for the vast majority of sex offences (Royal Commission, 2017) and it is estimated that about 3–5% of the male population has paedophilic disorder (a person who has a sexual interest in pre-pubescent children who may or may not act on these feelings) (Seto, 2008).
- Many adults first commit sexual abuse offences when they are in their late twenties or thirties (Smallbone, Marshall & Wortly, 2008) although most minor-attracted persons become aware of their sexual interests much earlier (B4U-ACT, 2011).
- Shame, stigma and justice consequences are barriers to potential offenders accessing help if services are not anonymous and confidential (Evans & Cubellis, 2015).

What we are proposing

We propose to implement a *Stop it Now!* style program in Australia that will provide anonymous, safe and confidential service for people worried about their sexual thoughts and behaviours in relation to children and young people. This early intervention service will target anyone in a position to influence child safety, including potential perpetrators of sexual abuse, their family members, friends, colleagues as well as professionals. We are proposing:

- a phone helpline and text contact facility which balances engagement with accountability, provides information, completes safety planning based on a comprehensive risk assessment and facilitates referrals for additional assistance (in compliance with legal and mandatory reporting obligations)
- a website with advice, self-help materials and guidance to raise awareness around child abuse as well as links to a network of partner agencies who would refer to and receive referrals from *Stop It Now!* Australia.

We propose that the service is situated outside of government but that the governance framework promotes partnership with law enforcement agencies, services working with offenders supported by local service directories, technology companies, and victims-survivor services. An Australian *Stop it Now!* would be positioned as a secondary prevention initiative, which would require strong promotional activity at a primary prevention level that should complement other primary prevention activity in the National Child Abuse Prevention Strategy.

The helpline and text contact facility would be staffed by a small but highly skilled clinical team with experience in: mental health; law enforcement; domestic and family violence; and sexual abuse services. At least two practitioners should be available at the national phoneline at any time, with one able to perform a supervisory role and provide secondary consultation on cases. In addition, coordinators would be responsible for establishing appropriate referral pathways for specific states and territories.

We are also proposing to undertake a further piece of work called the Worried About Sex and Porn Project for children and young people (WASAPP). This action research project will co-design an online early intervention for children and young people with problematic sexual behaviours. The online intervention will be separate from, but aligned with, the Australian *Stop it Now!* service.

Budget

Stop It Now! is relatively low cost compared with in-person programs. The Royal Commission noted that telephone and online interventions can be as effective as face-to-face services, are cost-effective, and can be accessed from regional and remote areas (Royal Commission, 2017). Further, the economic savings as a result of preventing child sexual abuse are large. The economic evaluation in the UK found estimated benefits of up to £6.15m per annum – over 15 times larger than annual costs (Bowles, 2014).

We estimate that a national pilot over four years could be delivered at a cost of approximately \$2m per year. This includes costs for: a project lead for the first two years to oversee program establishment; a phonenumber operations manager/supervisor; scale up from one counsellor (equivalent) receiving calls in year one to four in year two; staff training; information technology/participant management; practice framework and website development; legal compliance; promotional and marketing expenses; evaluation; and two location specific co-coordinators with responsibility for two states each. Lower cost state-specific pilots could also be pursued as a first step. Over time, as establishment and promotional costs decrease, the annual cost of running the service will decline.

The level of likely demand for a service such as *Stop It Now!* in Australia is not known. However, the Phoenix House experience in Bundaberg, commencing in 2006 and running for about a decade, suggests a *Stop It Now!* service in Australia would be both useful and well-used. Phoenix House experienced more demand for its service in the Bundaberg region than it was able to meet. This is similar to the UK experience – the 2014 evaluation found an average of 2,199 calls went unanswered each month, often more than four times the number of calls answered (Brown et al., 2014).

Next Steps

In partnership with the University of Melbourne, we are seeking funding for a four-year pilot of a *Stop it Now!* service. Over the four years, *Stop It Now!* would be developed, delivered and evaluated.

About Jesuit Social Services and The Men's Project

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation working to build a just society where all people can live to their full potential. For over 40 years we have worked with people on the margins of society, including those involved in the criminal justice system. This includes working with serious violent and sex offenders on their release from prison to support a successful transition back into the community, lower the risk of recidivism and improve community safety.

Drawing from this experience, The Men's Project has been established to provide leadership and to develop new approaches to reduce violence and other harmful behaviours prevalent among boys and men, to build new approaches to improve their wellbeing, and to keep families and communities safe.

About the University of Melbourne

The University of Melbourne is the leading centre of higher education and research in Australia, consistently ranked among the leading universities in the world. Established in 1853, the University of Melbourne is a public-spirited institution that makes distinctive contributions to society in research, learning and teaching and engagement. With a world class reputation for research excellence, the University collaborates across research, industry and public sectors to undertake globally competitive and innovative research that generates the knowledge and resources to solve Australia and the world's biggest problems.

The Violence Against Women and Children Research and Evaluation Group in the Department of Social Work at the University of Melbourne focuses on informing policy and practice to improve the circumstances for those affected by child sexual abuse and family violence, for women, children and men. We partner with governments, non-government organisations and peak bodies to further the evidence base to support reform and advocacy to end violence and abuse against women and their children. Our research is interdisciplinary and we provide leadership in the MAEVe network (Melbourne Alliance to End Violence Against Women and Children) and the SAFER Families Centre for Research Excellence. Our lead researchers are specialised in domestic and family violence; child sexual abuse; evaluation; and Indigenous research.

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Download the report

Download your copy of *Stop It Now!: A Scoping Study on Implementation in Australia* at: <https://jss.org.au/what-we-do/the-mens-project/stop-it-now/>

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