

Groups unite to fight school text bullies

by Lisa Sloan

The Internet Safety Group (NetSafe), Vodafone and Telecom are working to promote their 'txt bully' campaign in schools, and help victims fight back against text bullying.

Although the campaign was introduced in July 2004, it has been stepped up in the wake of recent text bullying cases. Representatives from the NetSafe, Vodafone, Telecom and the police met in March to address bullying and harassment linked with mobile phones. The campaign is now being promoted in schools nationwide.

Through 'txt bully', students can call Vodafone or Telecom and report details of threatening text messages. Vodafone users can text the word 'Ignore' to 220 to stop receiving messages from

a particular phone number. Victims are encouraged to tell a trusted adult, and to call the police if messages are life threatening.

Victims can also call NetSafe and speak to an adviser, who will recommend a suitable course of action. The service is confidential and focused on finding solutions that work for the individual, such as informing a teacher or parent, confronting the bully, or contacting the police.

Claire Balfour, NetSafe's school education manager, says 'txt bully' is effective because it shows victims there are people who can help. "There's a voice there, a human being," she says.

NetSafe was founded in 1998 and is a non-profit service providing cyber-safety education for schools, businesses, parents and community organisations. The



PHOTO: LISA SLOAN

"It is a silent and secretive method of bullying."

Ministry of Education-approved 'kit for schools' was given to all schools in 2003 to encourage safe computer use, and their

services also include education on cellphone etiquette.

A NetSafe study of students aged 12 to 19 in January 2005 showed 23 per cent had received an offensive, pornographic, abusive or threatening text message on their cellphone. Of these students, 46 per cent admitted to having sent an abusive message to someone else.

Westlake Girls High School has found 'txt bully' and NetSafe's services helpful to combat the problem. Principal Alison Gernhoefer says they have been valuable in the school's fight against all types of bullying. "We believe bullying is destructive of human relationships and text bullying is just a part of it," she says.

Text bullying has become a problem because it is anonymous. "It is a silent and secretive method of bullying," says

Balfour. She says the problem lies in text bullies who do not realise the harm they can cause. "They don't mean it to be quite as devastating as the technology makes it."

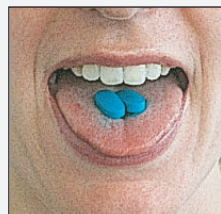
Balfour explains bullying has always been a problem in schools, and cellphones only provide another way for it to happen.

"Taking away phones doesn't solve it. These issues have always been there. It's part of the territory."

Lee Chisholm, operations and training manager of NetSafe, agrees bullying is part of school life. "It happens anywhere, to anyone at any time," she says.

Any student who feels threatened by text bullying can call NetSafe on 0508 638723 or Vodafone and Telecom's free customer services from their mobile phone.

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Campaign fails to drive safety message home

by Dan McCabe

Despite a \$100,000 advertising campaign and tough police measures drivers are still speeding past schools.

Police issued more than 6310 speed camera notices and 1058 officer-issued tickets around schools during February.

Despite advertisements running throughout February, the figures for March were worse, with speed cameras recording 6537 notices outside schools.

"We are very disappointed to see just how many people still have not got the message," said superintendent Dave Cliff, national road policing manager.

The Land Transport Safety Authority "Speed Kills Kids" advertising campaign featured prominently in print and radio. All provincial and metropolitan newspapers published the adverts that aimed to make motorists aware of the risk they pose to kids and of the new police policy.

On February 7, police adopted a strict enforcement of a 5km/h tolerance within 250 meters of schools.

Police normally give drivers a 10km/h leeway over the speed limit, but in an effort to reduce speed around schools they now ticket anyone driving over 55km/h.

Andy Knackstedt, LTSA media manager, says it's disappointing the advertising campaign didn't reduce the number of people speeding past schools. Knackstedt thinks in the long term the advertising campaign and police crackdown will pay off.

"To really change people's perceptions you have to enforce the law, you have to give them tickets to get the message across. Advertising campaigns work in conjunction with the work police do on the roads," says Knackstedt.

Knackstedt says that children are vulnerable on the roads due to their unpredictability.

"School children don't have the cognitive ability that adults do. Kids' behaviour around roads



PHOTO: DAN PILKINGTON

ON PATROL: Drivers are still speeding past schools.

is unpredictable. They can just jump out in front of cars."

In the last five years more than 1200 New Zealand child pedestrians have been killed or injured during school terms.

In Auckland alone there were 236 road crashes involving 5 to 14 year olds during a five-year period ending in 2003. Sixty-two per cent of these occurred on the way to and from school.

The number of motorists speeding past schools highlights the need for 40km/h school speed zones, according to Auckland City Council.

The council is currently trialling a 40km/h zone at St. Joseph's School in Onehunga.

A number of schools across Auckland have written to the council requesting the implementation of a 40 km/h school speed zone at their respective schools.

Of the 165 primary, intermediate and secondary schools in Auckland City, 100 are currently being investigated as to their suitability.

Claire Dickson, senior traffic co-ordinator for the council, says that a lack of funding means only a limited number of schools will receive school speed zones.

"We will work on a priority basis. Primary schools are where the main risk is."

A school speed zone system

costs between \$45,000 and \$65,000 due to the technology involved.

High visibility electronic road signs display an illuminated fluorescent 40km/h speed limit automatically at set times during the start and end of the school day.

Schools can write in requesting a school speed zone. The council will then investigate the history of crashes near the school and the average speed of passing vehicles.

Judy Parr, principal of Bayfield School in Herne Bay, has written to the council expressing an interest in establishing a school speed zone.

A growing number of Bayfield School pupils are walking to school. The school has six walking school buses.

Parr says a school speed zone would be greatly beneficial.

"Hopefully that would then slow motorists from 60km/h to 50km/h."

In recent months two Bayfield School students have been knocked over by cars running red lights.

The number of drivers speeding past Bayfield School is on the rise. In 2003 the school sent 15 infringement reports to the police; in 2004 this number rose to 28, and last year blew out to 38, says Parr.