

Battle to make sex abuse documentary accessible

By Deborah Snow

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EDUCATING TEENS

Battle to make sex abuse documentary accessible

Deborah Snow

Producers of a documentary aimed at educating young teens about the dangers of online sexual predators are battling to overturn a classification ruling that would severely limit the film's potential reach into schools.

The documentary, titled *The Children in The Pictures*, focuses on the work of specialist Queensland police unit Task Force Argos and the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE), a federal agency.

The carefully constructed film contains no graphic images but showcases the methods used by police to battle the rising tide of child sexual exploitation on the dark web and the ways in which predators – impersonating naive young teens – can lure youngsters into providing imagery that is then used to blackmail them into traps they can't easily escape.

Despite circumspect handling of the material, a four-person panel from the federal government's Classification Board slapped an MA15+ ruling on the film on August 13, with the consumer advice of "strong themes and references to child sexual abuse".

Producers Simon Nasht and

Tony Wright are appealing against the decision, backed by a number of experts in child psychology and education who say a less restrictive M rating would better serve community interests.

In their appeal, Mr Nasht and Mr Wright argue that the classification is detrimental to the use of the film as a valuable teaching resource, is "counterproductive to

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ACF head Dr Joe Tucci

the safety of young people" and is not supported by evidence or informed by an understanding of the issues explored in the film.

Mr Nasht told the *Herald* that globally, sexual exploitation of children and young teens was "#MeToo" in scale and urgency.

"Obviously we advocate the film should be used with care in schools and teacher guidance, which is why we are working with ATOM [Australian Teachers of Media] and other experts to prepare extensive support materials and teacher guides," he said.

He said the aim of the project

was to help youngsters in year 9 and above understand the risks they face online. In 2020, the US National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) reported the existence of 70 million child sexual abuse files, many of which would circulate indefinitely, Mr Nasht said.

Dr Joe Tucci, head of the Australian Childhood Foundation, told the *Herald*: "I believe young people will appreciate the knowledge they can get from this movie. It's them who are affected by this crime.

"Withholding it from 14 and 15-year-olds does not do them any benefits – it only keeps them in the dark about how this kind of crime works, the deceptions that offenders use to manipulate the truth and manipulate them."

Childhood education expert Professor Kerryann Walsh, from the Queensland University of Technology, said the documentary would be better suited to a less restrictive M rating.

"Kids need to be given agency and trusted to make sense of this," she said. "They need safe entry points into this kind of material where it can be discussed in a regulated, caring, supportive space."

The film is slated to run on SBS towards the end of October.