



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Online bullying, abuse and harassment service receives over 900 complaints in first six months

Hundreds of people have reported personal harm caused by digital communications - but there is still confusion about the service launched under the Harmful Digital Communications Act.

Online safety organisation Netsafe has managed over 900 complaints of personal harm caused by digital communications since the launch of its online bullying, abuse and harassment service. Netsafe was announced as the agency to manage complaints under the Harmful Digital Communications Act one year ago today, and the service has been open for six months.

Of the 936 complaints received, approximately 61% came from women, 36% from men and 3% from people identifying as gender diverse. Around 17% of the complaints Netsafe has managed were from 10-15 year olds, 16% were from 16-21 year olds, 36% from 22-40 year olds and 27% from 41-64 year olds - highlighting that online harm can be experienced by people of any age.

Over the last six months the not for profit organisation has faced two key misconceptions about the service. The first is that the agency is an advocate for the complainant, when it is actually an independent intermediary.

Netsafe Chief Executive Martin Cocker says that the second misconception is that the service is being used to stifle people's rights. "The service is designed to protect everybody's rights – to free speech and to participate online without being harassed and abused.

Our role is to help both parties understand their rights and responsibilities under the Act, and to help resolve complaints without the need for cases to go through the District Court. During Netsafe's process, any decision to remove, change or keep content online is entirely up to the parties involved," says Cocker.

Netsafe was chosen to receive, assess and investigate complaints of harm caused by digital communications under the Harmful Digital Communications Act in 2015. The free service is available to all New Zealand internet users experiencing online harassment, offering help and advice to resolve complaints.

The Harmful Digital Communications Act was passed in 2015 to provide a quick, efficient and affordable legal avenue to get help for those receiving serious or repeated harmful digital communications.

Netsafe's findings are based on complaints of personal harm caused by digital communications received between 21 November 2016 and 21 May 2017.

People in New Zealand who need help with online bullying, abuse and harassment can contact Netsafe for information and advice seven days a week. Contact Netsafe by calling toll free on 0508 NETSAFE or by visiting [netsafe.org.nz](https://www.netsafe.org.nz)

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About Netsafe

Netsafe is an independent not for profit focused on online safety. We're committed to helping everyone in New Zealand take advantage of digital opportunities by providing support with managing and resolving online safety challenges.