Media release

Kids Helpline and Optus shine a spotlight on making the internet a safer and more responsible place for young people on Safer Internet Day

Kids Helpline and Optus come together on Safer Internet Day to promote the positive power of digital technology and support children to stay safe online.

Safer Internet Day, celebrated globally on February 11 across 150 countries, aims to raise awareness around the importance of working together to create a better internet. This event is led in Australia by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner to encourage parents and caregivers to "start the conversation" about online safety.

"Safer Internet Day is a way of dealing with internet safety and is something parents, young people and the entire community need to commit to if we are to promote the positive use of technology in our communities," said **yourtown** Chief Executive Officer Tracy Adams.

Ms Adams said Optus Digital Thumbprint with Kids Helpline is a free program for Grades 1-6. It uses Optus technology to bring qualified Kids Helpline Counsellors into primary school classrooms throughout Australia. It is a great example of this year's theme of working together – school/s, corporate, service provider and young people.

From January to December 2019 a total of 13,035 Prep to Grade 6 students from 166 schools across Australia have participated in 413 Digital Thumbprint sessions as a national early-intervention and education program.

"This year's Safer Internet Day will see 18 interactive workshops booked through 13 primary schools to engage over 500 students in fun and interactive workshops facilitated by the Optus Digital Thumbprint with Kids Helpline program. The free in-school workshops focus on teaching young people to be safe, responsible and positive online. Students are taught how to have safe interactions online and how easily information can spread, enabling their understanding that the same rules of good behaviour and kindness that they are taught in the playground also apply online.

"Programs like this are crucial for ensuring children learn about online safety from an early age and most importantly how to reach out for help from adults and services like Kids Helpline when they need it. We believe that early intervention and prevention is key. This program aims to normalise help-seeking behaviour and assist children to feel comfortable about seeking support," said Ms Adams.

Tracy Adams commented, "The internet can be an amazing resource. Used wisely, it can open up a world of information and learning, but as any parent knows, with these benefits come serious and real dangers such as exposure to inappropriate content, cyberbullying, and the anxiety that can arise from constantly being connected."

"Our counsellor-led Optus Digital Thumbprint with Kids Helpline workshops consider big issues for children such as cyberbullying, sharing images, and consent online, in an age-appropriate way. The workshops also promote help-seeking behaviours should things go wrong," Ms Adams stated.

Helen Maisano, Director of Group Sustainability for Optus said she is thrilled Optus was able to provide ongoing support for Safer Internet Day by bringing the Digital Thumbprint with Kids Helpline program to primary school aged students.

"As a leading provider of internet technology, Optus is passionate about what Safer Internet Day stands for. Our Digital Thumbprint program is aligned to what this day is all about, and has been designed to incorporate an interactive and original approach to educating students on key issues such as how to protect their identity and information online as well as how to build positive and respectful relationships."

"It's no secret that we live in an ever-increasing digital world, meaning parents, caregivers and teachers all play a vital role in supporting young people to be safe, responsible and positive online. There are many free tools and resources available, including those part of the Optus Digital Thumbprint with Kids Helpline, which teaches students that they don't have to be an expert at navigating the internet to practice safe habits," said Ms Maisano.

Since its launch in 2013, Optus Digital Thumbprint with Kids Helpline has reached more than 45,000 students, with Kids Helpline counsellors connecting to primary school classes across Australia delivering sessions via video-conferencing technology. The sessions have been designed to teach students about cyber safety topics including:

1. Apps, Games and Social Media
2. Cyberbullying
3. Balancing life and technology
4. Positive use of technology
5. Respectful relationships online
6. Staying safe online
7. Your digital footprint

Children and young people can contact Kids Helpline, a service of **yourtown**, any time and for any reason, via the phone or WebChat.

Kids Helpline also works closely with the Office of the eSafety Commissioner to support children and young people who are experiencing online safety issues. Young people can report cyberbullying at www.esafety.gov.au

Go to https://kidshelpline.com.au/teens/issues/cyberbullying for more about how parents, carers and others can help.

To find out more see http://kidshelpline.com.au/schools/sessions/cyberbullying

yourtown Corporate Communications & Media Advisor:

Maree Reason-Cain Phone 0423 843 786 OR mreason-cain@yourtown.com.au