

# CYBER BULLYING

## DID YOU KNOW:

- \* 1 in 5 online Canadian teens (ages 12-17) has witnessed someone they know being bullied through a social networking site  
*Ipsos Canadian Inter@ctive Reid Report*
- \* Bullying was a major factor in school shootings such as Columbine  
*"Faceless Bullies: Legislative and Judicial Responses to Cyberbullying" (2009) 33 Seton Hall Legislative Journal 651*
- \* Bill C-273 proposes to amend Canada's Criminal Code to clarify that cyber bullying is an offence  
*Parliament of Canada website - Bill C-273*

### Case

#### Comment

In 2006, thirteen year old Megan Meier committed suicide by hanging herself in her closet after falling victim to cyber bullying.

Megan was a middle school student who lived in Dardenne Prairie, Missouri. She had a history of depression and was on medication, but was looking forward to her upcoming 14<sup>th</sup> birthday and having her braces removed. Megan created a MySpace profile and, with her parents' consent, began an amicable relationship with a teenage boy named Josh. Over the course of just over a month, Megan and Josh developed an online friendship.

In October 2006, Megan and Josh's online communications took a drastic change when one day Josh began sending cruel messages and calling Megan names. Other students who were linked to Josh's MySpace webpage also started sending Megan profanity-laden messages, which resulted in an online fight between Megan, Josh and another female student. Josh's final message to Megan was that "the world would be a better place without her in it." The online bullying was devastating to Megan who was already struggling with depression. Within an hour after the online fight, Megan's mother found Megan hanging from a belt in her closet. Megan died in the hospital the next day.

After Megan's death, a shocking story unraveled when it was discovered that "Josh" never existed. "Josh" was in fact a fictitious online profile created by Lori Drew, the forty-seven year old mother of one of Megan's long term girlfriends. Drew, along with her daughter and part-time employee, were behind the cruel online messages sent to Megan that ultimately pushed Megan to the tragic act of suicide.

### What Can Be Done?

There is a wealth of resources, tools, and guidance available online for School Boards, teachers, and parents on the following Government of Alberta websites that can be used to promote awareness and enhance bullying prevention measures:

[www.child.alberta.ca/home/586.cfm](http://www.child.alberta.ca/home/586.cfm)

[www.education.alberta.ca/teachers/safeschools.aspx](http://www.education.alberta.ca/teachers/safeschools.aspx)

### Cyber Bullying Defined

The use of information and communication technologies such as e-mail, cell phone and pager text messages, instant messaging (IM), defamatory personal Web sites, and defamatory online personal polling Web sites, to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behaviour by an individual or group, that is intended to harm others.

*\*Coined by Canadian Bill Belsey*

### Legislative Framework

#### Bill 2 (Education Act)

Prior to the provincial general election, the Legislature was proposing the *School Act* be repealed and replaced with new legislation known as the *Education Act*. Although the Bill has since died, the proposed changes are still live issues that may come back in the future.

Bill 2 specifically addressed bullying by 1) placing responsibility on each student to refrain from and report bullying, whether the bullying occurs in the school building, during the school day, or by electronic means; and 2) mandating that school boards implement a policy regarding the board's obligation to provide a safe environment, which includes establishing a code of conduct for students that addresses bullying behaviour. It also sets the third week of November as Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week.