

Cyberbully fright

SHEPPARTON TEEN DELETES BLOG AFTER RECEIVING ABUSIVE MESSAGES

By Estelle Griepink

Shepparton teenager Sarah never thought creating a blog about her favourite bands would leave her open to the scathing attacks of cyberbullies.

Last week, the 19-year-old was forced to delete her website, hosted on Tumblr, after several comments left her feeling worthless.

"The messages came within about five minutes of each other," Sarah said.

"They said I should kill myself, that I was going to grow old alone because nobody could ever put up with me, and that I was an embarrassment to the people I hang out with.

"It made me question everything."

Sarah said she was well aware of cyberbullying, but being on its receiving end had come as a sobering "wake-up call."

"It made me think, 'Wow,'" she said.

"Firstly, there's some really frightening people out there and, secondly, I know it really can happen to anybody."

After receiving the messages, Sarah decided to delete her blog.

She said that had been an extra blow, because she had



Telling her story: Cyberbullying victim Sarah. Picture: Simon Bingham

As difficult as it was, Sarah recommended taking a screenshot of derogatory comments on messages before deleting them. She said any evidence would help police track the perpetrators.

Sarah urged cyberbullies to think about the real-life consequences of their actions online.

"If you get someone in a fragile state of mind, anything can push them over the edge," she said.

"I'm sure someone wouldn't like to have someone hurting themselves on their hands.

"That would be a worse punishment than any charge."

Shepparton police Sergeant Matt Hunt urged anyone who experienced cyberbullying to speak up and tell someone.

"Some people may be apprehensive or embarrassed about coming forward, but I would encourage anybody who is the victim of cyberbullying to report it to police and, if required, we will investigate the matter further," he said.

"If not we can certainly advise on processes for getting help and ways to prevent it from happening again."

● **The News has agreed not to publish Sarah's real name.**

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

- **Question:** How can we stop cyberbullying?
- Visit facebook.com/sheppartonnews and give us your thoughts on this topic.

enjoyed posting on her blog for more than a year and had met people with mutual interests through it.

"There's pretty much no way anyone can anonymously contact me now," she said.

Sarah wanted to tell her story in the hope it would help even

one other person struggling with cyberbullying.

"What I'd say is you don't deserve it, it's just not fair to anybody," she said.

"Too many lives have been taken and too many people have been hurt by this — it's ridiculous."



Driving message home: Shepparton police Leading Senior Constable Richard Ivory and Transport Accident Commission's Melissa Kahraman with the "Wipe off 5" message at Riverside Plaza yesterday. Picture: Julie Mercer

Safer driving method spelt out

By Riahn Smith

Victoria's latest road safety campaign came to Shepparton yesterday to encourage all drivers to "Wipe off 5".

Giant, 3D letters at Kialla's Riverside Plaza brought the message to life, with people urged to sign their names on the slogan to show their commitment to road safety.

The "Wipe off 5" roadshow is touring regional Victoria to spread the Transport Accident Commission's message about low-level speeding.

Shepparton police Highway

FIVE KILOMETRES PER HOUR COULD BE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.

— SHEPPARTON POLICE'S RICHARD IVORY

Patrol Leading Senior Constable Richard Ivory said the "Wipe off 5" message was targeted at all road users.

"The main point of the campaign is to reduce the number of accidents and the severity of the collisions," he said.

"Five kilometres per hour

could be the difference between life and death."

Commission spokeswoman Sarah Henderson said the roadshow team was pleased with Shepparton's contribution to the thousands of names scrawled on the letters.

"We had a lot of people come past and sign the letters

and we even had school groups come in by bus to show their support," she said.

"The local businesses from the shopping plaza also came over and got involved."

The commission is also running a community competition to find the most creative way to articulate the road safety message.

Entrants are being asked to show how they will "Wipe off 5" in their daily lives by sharing their ideas on social media.

● **For more information, visit www.wipeoff5.com.au**

IN BRIEF

Fined for spitting on ex-girlfriend

A Shepparton man has been fined \$400 for spitting on his ex-girlfriend.

Jesse Beckhurst, 19, of Numurkah Rd, pleaded guilty at Shepparton Magistrates' Court yesterday to unlawful assault.

Police prosecutor Kim Talbot said the victim was walking on Shepparton's Maude St at 3 pm on January 29 when the pair had a chance meeting.

Sen Const Talbot said Beckhurst spat in the

face of the victim. Then, 15 minutes later outside Target, he spat in a cup of soft drink and threw it over the victim, saying, "How do you like that?"

Lawyer Ian Michaelson said Beckhurst was playing senior football at Rumbalara and was remorseful.

"It is a fine, not jail," Magistrate Paul Smith said.

"It is just fairly anti-social behaviour and he shouldn't do it."

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