

Coroner highlights need for targeted education in report on teenager Rohan Cosgriff's suicide after sextortion scam

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ABC Ballarat

Mental Health

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Teenagers using Snapchat have become a target for sextortion scams. (Adobe Stock)

In short:

17-year-old Rohan Cosgriff suicided in July 2022 after being blackmailed on Snapchat over the distribution of an intimate image.

Police could not identify the person responsible, but found the account used originated in Nigeria.

What's next?

A Victorian coroner has recommended Rohan's death be considered during an ongoing statutory review of the Online Safety Act 2021.

A Victorian coroner says young people who fall victim to online sextortion scams need to know they are going to be OK, after investigating the case of a teenager who took his own life within an hour of being blackmailed over the distribution of a nude image.

Seventeen-year-old Rohan Cosgriff was found dead with a note in his pocket reading, "I made a huge mistake, I'm sorry," at his home in the Ballarat suburb of Miners Rest in July 2022.

Investigators later found he had been coerced to provide an intimate image to a person on Snapchat purporting to be "Christine", who threatened distribution of the image unless he paid an amount in exchange.

Police could not identify the person responsible, but found the Snapchat account originated in Nigeria.



17-year-old Rohan Cosgriff died by suicide in 2022 after falling victim to a sextortion scam. *(Supplied)*

In a report released this week, Coroner Audrey Jamieson highlighted the need for cyber safety education to focus on breaking down feelings of shame and guilt that prevented victims from disclosing what had happened to them.

"If a young person finds themselves in a situation like Rohan did, the most important thing is that they know they have not done anything wrong," she wrote in the report.

"They are a victim, there is help and resources available to them and that the situation will not define the rest of their lives."

Devastating impact

Rohan's Snapchat conversation with "Christine" began just over 24 hours before his death, with the threat of distribution of the intimate image sent less than an hour before he decided to take his own life.

Rohan was described as a compassionate, patient and bright young man who was "on top of the world" in the days leading up to his death.

His football team was almost certainly going to play finals, he had just been awarded best-on-ground and one of his family horses had won at Warracknabeal "which he was very happy about".

If you or anyone you know needs help:

- [Suicide Call Back Service](#) on 1300 659 467
- [Lifeline](#) on 13 11 14
- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander crisis support line [13YARN](#) on 13 92 76
- [Kids Helpline](#) on 1800 551 800
- [Beyond Blue](#) on 1300 224 636
- [Headspace](#) on 1800 650 890
- [ReachOut](#) at au.reachout.com
- [MensLine Australia](#) on 1300 789 978

Rohan was engaged in his studies at St Patrick's College in Ballarat and aspired to be a teacher.

- [QLife 1800 184 527](https://www.qlife.org.au/1800-184-527)

He volunteered at a mentor camp for children who had experienced trauma, was a talented sportsman and worked as a stablehand at his father's racing stables after school.



Police traced messages sent to Rohan Cosgriff on Snapchat back to an account in Nigeria. (ABC News)

The coroner's report said he had no known mental health issues.

"It would be remiss of me not to mention that had [Rohan] felt able to disclose the incident to his family, a trusted friend or police his death may have been prevented," Coroner Jamieson said in the report.

Education in focus

An assessment found considerable education material was available through Rohan's school, more broadly online and in the Victorian education system about cyber safety and the dangers of sharing intimate images online.

But Coroner Jamieson said more education was needed to empower young people to speak up and seek assistance when they found themselves a victim of these crimes.

"The fact remains that with all the education in the world, and no matter how many times the message 'don't send intimate images' is repeated, young people will continue to do these things," she said.

"The conversation must turn to 'should you find yourself in this situation, it is going to be OK'."

Cyber safety expert and former Victoria Police officer Susan McLean said education should be holistic and delivered by experts, not trained facilitators, and include parents.

"We know it is not going to fix everything but we need to work on this," she said.

"Education around sextortion, what it is, how it happens, what it looks like must be embedded in the curriculum across all schools."

Ms McLean will be in Ballarat to deliver an education session to parents and carers next week.



Susan McLean is a cyber safety expert and former Victoria Police officer. (Supplied)

"To parents, if you become aware this has happened to your child, mental health support must be the first 10 steps, don't worry about anything else," she said.

"Report the abuse to the platform, block the offender and then support your child."

Coroner's recommendation

In her report, Coroner Jamieson recommended the circumstances of Rohan's death be considered during an ongoing statutory review of the Online Safety Act 2021.

The act introduced a regulatory framework to improve and promote online safety and provided broad powers to the eSafety Commissioner when it came into effect in January 2022.



The federal government is considering extending the powers of the eSafety Commissioner to address growing forms of online harm.

The review is examining the effectiveness of the act and whether additional protections are needed for harmful online material.

Coroner Jamieson also said the legal response to sextortion and image-based abuse, particularly in situations such as Rohan's involving an international element, needed to be bolstered.

A search of the Victorian Suicide Register identified one other Victorian suicide since 2014, which occurred in similar circumstances to Rohan's death, with the blackmailers traced to a West African country.

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