



Contact:

Dave Holscher
KCOMM
949-295-5515
dave@kcomm.com

Ken Muche
Verizon Wireless
949-286-8193
ken.muche@verizonwireless.com

EMBARGO: March 23, 2009, 2:30PM PST

One million children could be safer thanks to new education program

Web Wise Kids, WILL Interactive, Verizon and the ESA Foundation launch game for schools, law enforcement and community organizations to educate teens about “sexting,” cyberbullying, academic cheating and related issues

NORTH HILLS, Calif., March 23, 2009 – More than one million school children in California and across the U.S. will learn how to use cell phones and the Internet responsibly thanks to a new online education game. The game, titled “It’s Your Call,” launched today in the Los Angeles Unified School District at Sepulveda Middle School in North Hills, Calif. Web Wise Kids, WILL Interactive, Verizon and the ESA Foundation collaborated to develop the cutting-edge curriculum.

“It’s Your Call” is an interactive game that allows users to play out difficult situations in the safety of cyberspace before they live them out in real life. The game offers teens guidance about responsible cell phone behaviors and how to use the devices to enhance their personal safety. Players become a live action character in an interactive movie and are presented with a series of difficult decisions in a slice-of-life context. The teens must make tough decisions and view the consequences of their actions in the video. Regardless of the outcome in the game, users learn important lessons about cell phone safety.

Katie Canton, lured at age 15 by a 22-year-old man in 2002, is the type of person who will be helped with this new program. Now a Web Wise Kids youth ambassador, Canton told her story about being contacted online by a stranger and later becoming convinced that they were in love. The situation also involved cell phone contacts. After playing a Web Wise Kids game, Canton realized that she was being taken in by an online predator and participated in the individual’s apprehension.

“It’s Your Call” will be available through the Web Wise Kids and WILL Interactive web sites. It also will be incorporated into Web Wide Kids training programs offered through local schools, law enforcement agencies and community organizations.

“As we all increasingly rely on mobile technology in our lives, it is critical that young people understand how to use cell phones responsibly with their peers and with adults,” said Los Angeles Unified School Board President Mónica García. “I applaud Web Wise Kids, WILL Interactive, Verizon and the ESA Foundation for taking this step to educate young people on how to be safe and enjoy the many benefits of mobile communications.”

“By partnering with Verizon, the ESA Foundation and WILL Interactive, we are equipping today’s youth with the knowledge to make wise choices with their cell phones,” said Judi Westberg Warren, president of Web Wise Kids. “Our goal is to help create a safe, friendly cell phone and online experience for millions of young people. The result of this partnership will be to provide important answers to the questions that young people have about the new frontiers in modern communications.”

Web Wise Kids, a national non-profit organization, is the leading provider of computer-based, interactive simulation games based on real-life situations for educating young people and their parents on safe Internet practices. “It’s Your Call” was produced by WILL Interactive using its patented Virtual Experience Immersive learning Simulation (VEILS®) technology. Development of the mobile phone safety game was funded by grants from Verizon and the ESA Foundation in addition to a financial contribution from WILL Interactive. The grants also will help fund distribution of the game to Web Wise Kids partners around the country.

Information about Web Wise Kids can be found at www.webwisekids.org.

Expert Statements

“As we all increasingly rely on mobile technology in our lives, it is critical that young people understand how to use cell phones to interact responsibly with others, whether that is with their peers or adults. I applaud Web Wise Kids, WILL Interactive, Verizon, and ESA Foundation for taking this step to educate young people on how to safely utilize the many benefits of mobile communications.”

Mónica García
Board President, Los Angeles Unified School District

“By partnering with Verizon, the ESA Foundation and WILL Interactive, we are equipping today’s youth with the knowledge to make wise choices with their cell phones. Our goal is to help create a safe, friendly cell phone and online experience for millions of young people. The result of this partnership will be to provide important answers to the questions that young people have about the new frontiers in modern communications.”

Judi Westberg Warren
President, Web Wise Kids

“Verizon’s goal is to build America’s best wireless and fiber-optic networks while ensuring that our customers have the best possible experience using those networks. This initiative furthers that commitment by creating a dynamic and engaging educational game to teach young people how to protect themselves and enjoy all the positive aspects of the technological revolution.”

Elva Lima
Vice-President, Verizon Strategic Programs

“Approximately 17 million teens have mobile phones. This new generation communicates with and plays on wireless devices in unprecedented numbers. With this increased use comes the need for education and tools that help teens use this technology safely. We are proud to be a leader in this area.”

Michael Gallagher
President, Entertainment Software Association Foundation

“Keeping our children safe is at the forefront of every parent’s mind. By educating our teenagers and giving them the skills to know how to behave responsibly, we will increase the safety and security of our children.”

Sharon Sloane
President/CEO WILL Interactive

“Issues like ‘sexting’ and ‘cyberbullying’ are epidemic among teens today. Educational programs are critical to teaching teens responsible technology use.”

Detective Micah Smith
Linn County, Oregon, Sheriff’s Office
Member, Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force. U.S. Dept. of Justice
“It’s Your Call” Game Creative Advisor

###

About Web Wise Kids

Web Wise Kids is a national non-profit organization dedicated to empowering today's youth to make wise choices online through easy-to-use, school-approved Internet safety education programs for young people. Today's e-generation is taught valuable lessons using unique computer games with fun, interactive simulations based on real-life criminal cases. Web Wise Kids programs have reached more than five million children and thousands of parents nationwide in conjunction with school systems, law enforcement, and community-based youth organizations.

www.webwisekids.org

About WILL Interactive Inc.

Founded in 1994, WILL Interactive pioneered and patented the advanced form of digital game-based learning called Virtual Experience Immersive Learning Simulations® (VEILS®). WILL works with America's leading organizations to help address their most critical education and training challenges, including issues of national concern. VEILS® uniquely enable users to role-play lead characters in live action, research-based movies and experience real-life decisions and consequences in the safety of cyberspace. WILL's products are used by millions of military and law enforcement personnel, and are also part of the curriculum in thousands of middle schools, high schools and colleges. WILL's unique blend of art and science allows it to create immersive learning simulations that have been shown in independent pilot evaluations to improve individuals' decision-making under real-life stresses.

www.willinteractive.com

About the Verizon Foundation

The Verizon Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Verizon Communications, supports the advancement of literacy and K-12 education through its free educational Web site, Thinkfinity.org, and fosters awareness and prevention of domestic violence. In 2008, the Verizon Foundation awarded more than \$68 million in grants to nonprofit agencies in the U.S. and abroad. It also matched the charitable donations of Verizon employees and retirees, resulting in an additional \$26 million in combined contributions to nonprofits. Through Verizon Volunteers, one of the nation's largest employee volunteer programs, Verizon employees and retirees have volunteered more than 3 million hours of community service since 2000. For more information on the foundation, visit www.verizonfoundation.org.

About the ESA Foundation

The ESA Foundation was created by the American interactive entertainment software industry to support and provide opportunities that can make a difference in the lives of America's youth. The Foundation is fully supported by proceeds from its limited edition charity game pack's sales and its annual fundraiser, “A Nite to Unite – for Kids,” which together have raised more than \$11 million in the last 10 years.

www.theesa.com/foundation