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Guns trolls target charity

Members distraught

WENDY TUOHY

CHILDREN's charity the Alannah & Madeline Foundation has had to offer counselling support for staff distressed by "aggressive" trolling from the firearms lobby.

Chief executive Lesley Podesta said gun-lobby bullies have tried to "intimidate, shout down and abuse" the foundation, established to support child victims of violence after the shooting deaths of 32 people at Port Arthur in 1996.

Some foundation staff have been in tears over online abuse since the foundation ran a petition last year demanding that

powerful, rapid-fire guns remain restricted. This included the controversial, seven-shell Adler A110 shotgun.

"It's a tactic the (US gun lobby group) NRA does all the time: 'Don't let these pussies be heard, shut them up, they've got no balls, who are these bitches?'" Ms Podesta said.

"Every time someone on our social pages talks positively about what we do, the gun lobby piles on to them and abuses them."

She decided to speak out about the bullying to let foundation supporters know what

was happening.

Ms Podesta said the gun industry worked to increase demand by telling disenfranchised men they were being victimised if their right to own better weapons was denied.

"It's all about the psychology of young guys — I'm

not unsympathetic to those guys," said Ms Podesta, a former Fred Hollows Foundation executive.

"In many cases their lives are tough, they don't have a lot, they're victims of globalisation in some cases, their lives have been affected by job losses.

"But the answer is not 'give you a gun to give you back your masculinity, power and status in the community'.

"This is what the gun lobby tells them, that if they had these guns they wouldn't feel disempowered any more."

Ms Podesta said staff felt intimidated by the trolls but she decided as an anti-bullying organisation Alannah & Madeline needed to be the "brave voice" defending the Australian Firearms Agreement.

The foundation also wants the establishment of a Community Safety Council com-



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prising first-responders, public health bodies, the firearms industry and recreational shooters, to enable civil and mature discussion of weapons issues.

Ms Podesta said many of the 60,000 people who signed the foundation's Keep Australia Safe From Gun Violence petition were gun owners who agreed they did not need higher-powered weapons.

The federal government's three-month gun amnesty starts on July 1.

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