



Supervisor of and Access to Children and Young People by Catholic Church Personnel – *The Safeguarding Project*

The Perth Catholic Archdiocese launched the Office of the Safeguarding Project in November 2014. The overall aim of the Safeguarding Project was to develop safe and secure environments for all its church members, leaders, vulnerable adults and in particular its children and young people.

The Project recognises that the best way to protect children is to prevent child abuse and neglect from occurring in the first place. To do this, we identified the need to build capacity within the Archdiocese of Perth and strengthen our Catholic families and communities, across the Archdiocese.

This The Safeguarding Project is child-focused and informed by a fundamental belief that children have the right to physical and psychological safety at all times and we, the Catholic Archdiocese of Perth, must play our part in protecting children and vulnerable individuals within the confines of the Perth Catholic Archdiocese. To this end the duties of the Safeguarding Office have been centered on putting the needs of children and young people first. This is also reflective in the Archdiocesan Plan 2016 -2021.

The rights of children to be safe has been identified as being paramount and as such this drives the operations of the Safeguarding Office and has underpinned the establishment of robust policies, procedures and frameworks that relate to child protection.

The Project acknowledges that providing safe environments for children and young people also requires a range of proactive and preventative strategies in addition to reactive processes, that aim to protect children and the vulnerable from abuse and harm occurring and or re occurring.

Recognising that there is no fool-proof system for the complete prevention of all forms of abuse, the Project Scope also incorporates elements of public health interventions to prevent the abuse of children, minimise the risk of abuse by heightening the likelihood that abuse will be detected, and to reduce the long term impacts of abuse on children. Furthermore the scope is designed to enhance the effectiveness of child protection processes including the development of policies and procedures and the responses to claims, complaints or concerns of child sexual abuse.

In order to develop the Archdiocese into a Child Safe Organisation the Project Scope included the following 12 standards:

1. *The development of an open & aware culture within the Perth Catholic Archdiocese*



2. *Ensuring all staff paid and unpaid have a workable understanding of child abuse and neglect*
3. *The development of strategies and processes to manage risk in order to minimize abuse occurring*
4. *The creation of Child Protection Policies & Procedures for parishes*
5. *The development of clear boundaries for both children and adults*
6. *The development of effective recruitment & selection processes*
7. *The enhancement of current screening process for staff paid and unpaid*
8. *Ensuring appropriate support & supervision is provided*
9. *The development of a robust Prevention Education program designed to empowering children, young people and parents.*
10. *Enhancement of staff training & education with particular relevance to child protection*
11. *Development of streamlined processes to manage complaints & disclosures*
12. *Complete adherence to all legal and statutory requirements and responsibilities.*

These standards create a framework for building an open, transparent and accountable Archdiocese. Furthermore they work towards combating those barriers to establishing a child safe organisation such as fear, denial, and a lack of resources, complacency, lack of education and skills and an entrenched culture. These standards aim to prevent and minimise, child abuse in an organisational and institutional context. They employ situational crime prevention tools to create environments that are 'child safe' – this does not seek to have a direct effect on the behaviour of offenders, but aims to eliminate or reduce their inappropriate behaviour within organisations. It is about creating safer environments, the goal of a child safe environment is to create a culture where abuse is unable to take place or the opportunity to do so is greatly reduced.

The Safeguarding Project included the establishment of a central Safeguarding Office that is run by a Project Coordinator, Compliance Officer and Administration Officer. This office oversees the 189 volunteer Safeguarding Officers attached to parishes throughout the Perth Catholic Archdiocese. To date 94% of parishes have Safeguarding Officers. These Safeguarding Officers attend comprehensive Child Protection and Safeguarding Children Training prior to taking up their roles as Safeguarding Officers. This training provides them with all the necessary training, education and tools required for executing their duties in safeguarding children and vulnerable adults in their parishes. Their primary role is to implement local policy and procedures for the protection of children and vulnerable adults and to respond to concerns or complaints of child abuse in the parish. Furthermore they assist with the implementation of the 12 Safeguarding Standards in their parish. They serve as a support for the Parish Priest in all matters relating to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults and as such are responsible to the Parish Priest however they report to the Safeguarding Project Coordinator.

In addition and following on from the mandatory Safeguarding training the following training is also provided:



- Protective Behaviours training
- Trauma informed training
- Protective Behaviours for Parents – Train the Trainer Workshop
- Sex education training – in line with the catholic faith
- Professional Standards training .

Further primary functions of the Parish Safeguarding Officers include;

- be a source of support, advice and information on all matters of safeguarding children and vulnerable adults in the parish
- be the first point of contact for children, vulnerable adults and other members of the parish community regarding suspicions of abuse and other safeguarding concerns
- respond to all safeguarding concerns in line with the Archdiocese's Safeguarding Policy and Procedures handbook, reporting these concerns to the Safeguarding Project Coordinator and/or other authorities, as needed
- keep the Parish Priest informed of all concerns, responses and activities relating to safeguarding children and other members of the parish community when necessary (it won't always be necessary to inform the Parish Priest)
- raise the profile of safeguarding in the parish, ensuring that it remains a high priority, and report on any issues or concerns with the implementation of the Safeguarding Policy and Procedures
- assist with proactive measures within parishes to safeguard children
- ensure that all statutory requirements are met within parishes in respect to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults.

In addition to their duties Parish Safeguarding Officer's are

- to report to the Safeguarding Project Coordinator and the Archbishop, Perth Archdiocese.
- expected to undergo the required training in relation to the position and the responsibilities of the position.
- expected to demonstrate best practice in the prevention of Child Abuse and in responding to it within their parish.
- expected to promote and orchestrate the effective operation of preventative policies and practices within their parish that will minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur and encourage disclosure if it does occur.
- to inform and advise the Safeguarding Project Coordinator in all matters relating to child abuse allegations or concerns within a parish.
- To adhere to all statutory and legislative requirements at all times.

In addition to the above it has been identified that agency staff and volunteers attached to the Perth Catholic Archdiocese also required training and an update to policy and procedures and as such child protection training has been and will continue to be provided to agency staff.



Both Seminaries have been provided with child protection and safeguarding training and this process is ongoing.

The development of the Project Scope and Standards were considered necessary due to the early findings and recommendation's of the Royal Commission Into Institutionalised Child Sexual Abuse and prior reports to the WA Professional Standards Office in respect to complaints of child sexual abuse within the Perth Archdiocese and the previous Redress WA data.

Prior to the establishment of the Perth Catholic Archdiocese Safeguarding Project there were no formal coordinated policies or processes for the response to and the management of child sexual abuse or any other form of child abuse within the institution or for that matter outside the institution.

Clergy staff and volunteers were lacking information and training on child abuse and neglect. In order to develop an open and aware culture in respect to child protection Clergy, staff and volunteers must be well informed and they were not.

There was a need to provide ongoing support and guidance to clergy, staff and volunteers in matters relating to child protection and the disclosure of abuse by members of the church or outside of the church.

There were no formal mechanisms for the management of child sex offenders that wished to attend mass outside of the Working With Children Legislation and the Reportable Offenders legislation. Staff, volunteers and some Clergy considered themselves out of their depth or area of expertise if required to manage child sex offenders on a local level or parish level.

There were no formalised preventative proactive programs in place designed to empower children and young people nor were there programs for parents and families.

Churches have in the past and will continue to provide access to children.

Past Ignorance of the problem and the failure to listen and believe children.

The fact that child sex offender consider those who attend church are easier to fool.

The ability to exploitation Christian beliefs and turn them into weaknesses.

Within the church workers both paid and unpaid are less inclined to be sceptical and are more trusting. This opens up the ability to be groomed by the sex offender and compromises church workers and parishioner's ability to discern likeability from trustworthiness.



Abuse of Authority / religious cover/ distortion and attitudes of invincibility or grandiosity are also reasons for the need to implement the reforms.

Some additional factors include community expectations, Truth, Justice & Healing Council reforms – Safeguarding Standards, Reputational risk and cost.

These reforms have assisted all church workers and volunteers including clergy to do better in preventing the circumstances in which child abuse and neglect are often found; and heightens the wellbeing of Catholic children and young people within the Archdiocese.

The 12 Standards implemented in the policies and procedures clarify the Perth Catholic Archdiocese role and provide practical working documents outlining concrete responsibilities and actions to be undertaken by the church, clergy, its workers paid and unpaid and other government stakeholders.

In light of the unacceptable and increasing numbers of reported and substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect within the Catholic Church, the Perth Catholic Archdiocese is committed to the protection of children and young people and the standards and framework allows us to fulfil our obligation to do just that.

Child abuse and neglect cannot be easily disentangled from issues such as poverty, homelessness, drug and alcohol addiction, domestic violence, mental health issues, previous victimisation and social isolation. Understanding the ways these factors inter-relate and developing strong connected solutions require comprehensive and coordinated church policies and procedures. As such the 12 standards are implemented through the various policy and procedure contained in the handbook.

The standards encased in the policies and procedures acknowledge the policing and statutory role of Western Australian State Government in responding to allegations of child abuse and neglect. However it highlights the potential for all church workers to do better in preventing the circumstances in which child abuse and neglect are often found; and in increasing the safety and wellbeing of all Catholic children.

The reforms enhance the effectiveness of child protection policies and responses to claims, complaints or concerns of child sexual abuse by providing ;

- A stronger focus on prevention
- A stronger focus on the responsibility we all share within the church to keep children safe
- Streamlined clear processes for the identification and response to child abuse and neglect
- Better use of early intervention strategies
- Providing capacity in parents to better empower and equip their children with preventative strategies that aim to prevent and or detect abuse and neglect



- Defined support mechanisms for Clergy, children, young people, workers, families and individuals in the parish in respect to any child concern that may arise
- Increased collaboration between external agencies and the Archdiocese including statutory agencies
- A common and coordinated approach to protecting children and young people in the Church
- Supports compliance with Legislation and the reporting to statutory authorities
- Improves Data collection and knowledge sharing (as appropriate)
- Assist with attracting and retaining appropriate persons to work with children in parishes