

Key constraints to implementing child protection in the YMCA of Sydney

Predominant concern is for the 'closed' nature of how business is done at the Y and the apparent caution operational staff show around senior management. This is a 'red flag' for any organisation with a prominent role with children - if staff feel unable to raise and respond to issues, it is unlikely they can adequately identify and respond to concerns for children in their work setting.

Other 'red flags' are that staff are told what they are to do, not asked, 'no questions allowed'; it is unclear how staff can raise concerns; or what they might do when they don't get an answer. There appears significant levels of bullying and concomitant levels of personal distress; the level of acceptance that "this is the way it is", and that to raise concerns, is to risk your job.

The level of pressure on operational staff appears unsustainable, the majority of managers simply do not have time to learn about and respond to concerns for children. Levels of staff working outside hours to meet basic operational requirements appears significant. This is exacerbated by unrealistic requirements placed on staff eg for all out of school care coordinators and managers to attend functions/days/retreats with little support to maintain operations.

Key policies are in place (Safe Child and Young Person Policy, Responding to Allegations Against Staff, Code of Conduct, Conflict of Interest, Induction Process) but appear little used and require updating to meet accreditation standards.

Business plans do not reflect strategies to support child protection responses.

Roles and responsibilities of many positions are unclear making it difficult to identify who is accountable for implementing policy. Staff talk of examples how existing staff were moved into positions for which they are not qualified.

Reporting lines are similarly unclear with Liam and Phil regularly approaching centre level staff without reference to their manager and making operational decisions without informing or involving managers. Confusion about how decisions are made is widespread.

Problems with basic administration are evident – it is difficult to implement basic procedures such as ordering, querying pay, getting leave approved, eg HR's attempts to check that all Y staff have a valid WWCC since October 2011 appear continuing.

Statistics appear inconsistently reported and do not add up – it is unclear how the Y understands the figures they report externally.

Accidents and incidents appear to be logged on the Y intranet inconsistently; some centres are hardly reflected, the level of information varies, subcategories are confusing; and reports often do not indicate the Y's response

Incidents involving children can only be identified from opening and reading each individual incident. This makes it hard to monitor and report on incidents involving children, and there is no report function to facilitate accessing information.

There appears little 'in house' knowledge of ordinarily accepted legal requirements for reporting child protection concerns, staff (both frontline and managers) indicate fear of losing their job if they were to contact a government department.

Problems with identifying and implementing child protection appears to arise at senior management level as centre staff consistently indicate (to CP&C Mgr) interest and will to implement child protection in their operations (evidenced by questions, incidents, seeking information).