

**Panel 9.2 Case Study 50**  
**Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse**  
**Points from Claire Pirola – Manager,**  
**Office for Safeguarding & Professional Standards, Catholic Diocese of Parramatta.**

**1. *What engagement does the Diocese of Parramatta have with children?***  
***For example, what services does it operate for or provide to children, including at a parish level.***

The Diocese of Parramatta delivers ministry to children in the following areas:

- ***Parish activities***  
This includes youth group activities, sacramental programs, children’s liturgy.
- ***Education services***  
The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine delivers Religious Education in government schools in western Sydney.  
  
Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta (CEDP) provides education services through 79 schools and four early learning centres.
- ***Social welfare services***  
Catholic Care provides social welfare services through approximately 140 programs which include child, youth and family services.
- ***Youth services***  
Catholic Youth Parramatta organises events, gatherings, retreats and pilgrimages for youth in the Diocese and supports parish based youth initiatives.
- ***Family support services***  
The Life Marriage and Family Office co-ordinates events and circulates resources to support to support family life within the context

These activities operate with the approval and under the governance of the Bishop.

- The Bishop has appointed senior personnel to lead these ministries and co-ordinate the delivery of these services.
- Within the context of parish communities a broad range of parish-based activities are offered to children and young people. Such activities may operate under the leadership of the Parish Priest (or his delegate) and / or through a Diocesan agency such as Catholic Youth Parramatta or the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.

Examples include:

“Kids Church” may run on a Sunday during Sunday mass in a parish;

A Lent program specifically catering for youth may be offered in a parish;

A parish, local area or cultural group within the Catholic community may organise an outreach initiative for youth to engage in;

A school retreat or overseas immersion experience may be offered and this is co-ordinated by the Principal of the school and senior personnel at our Catholic Education Office.

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- 2. In relation to that engagement with children, within the Diocese of Parramatta, what bodies and which personnel are responsible for supervising the implementation of child safety, complaint handling and risk management policies?*

**2.1 The Office for Safeguarding and Professional Standards**

*The Office for Safeguarding and Professional Standards* was established in July 2014 to ensure accountability and support of all Diocesan agencies in regard to safety of children and other vulnerable people, and response to complaints. This office operates independently and reports directly to the Bishop.

*The Office for Safeguarding and Professional Standards* has 7 core functions:

- **Prevention**  
This includes education, including the delivery of Professional Development to all agency leaders and clergy by way of a 7 hours of mandatory professional learning required each year.  
  
The delivery of advisory services to build capacity in local contexts, especially in the areas of risk management and policy development.
- **Investigation**  
The management of investigations and inquiries to all professional standards allegations
- **Outreach**  
The delivery of a range of support services designed to empower people who have been harmed by the Church to engage in processes that may deliver some experience of acknowledgement and justice. This includes a Healing & Support service and Reparation process.
- **Partnership/Engagement**  
To work in partnership and collaboration with other Dioceses, relevant professionals and external bodies to share knowledge and resources, explore practice innovation and build capacity.
- **Legal**  
Adherence to model litigant principles and ensure legal compliance, including reporting to relevant authorities, in areas related to child safety or abuse. Management of responses to legal requests for exchange of information in area of Safeguarding.
- **Compliance**  
Manage internal and external reports and compliance for Safeguarding and Professional Standards. Including audits, reports to NSW Ombudsman, advice to Diocesan agencies on compliance matters.
- **Research**  
To engage in research to explore local and international initiatives to inform our understanding of contemporary best practice.

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## **2.2 Agency Leadership**

### *Child-Safe Policy Implementation*

All senior leaders in the Diocese are responsible for supervising the implementation of policy and processes for child safety, complaint handling and risk management for their area.

### *Audit Processes*

An audit process has been initiated to monitor compliance with child safety standards and compliance with child protection legislation. Resources within the Office for Safeguarding and Professional Standards are dedicated to designing and implementing audits of Diocesan agencies and ministries. These processes are designed to monitor compliance and increase knowledge and skills in the area of child-safety.

### *Mandatory Annual Professional Learning*

Since 2014 all agency and ministry leaders of the Diocese of Parramatta (including all clergy engaged in public ministry) have been required to undertake 7 hours of mandatory training in the area of Safeguarding and Professional Standards each year.

## **2.3 Advice sought from external bodies or professionals**

Over the last five years the Diocese of Parramatta has engaged in extensive consultation to develop revised practices and to enhance accountability.

### *Professional Standards Consultative Committee*

This committee consists of external professionals who advise the Bishop on matters related to risk and strategy in respect of the more complex child safety issues facing the Diocese. Professional expertise on this committee includes representation from medical, legal, social work, psychology and education disciplines.

### *Reparations Review Panel*

This panel considers the claims of survivors of abuse and advises the Bishop on appropriate financial reparations in accordance with an established set of criteria. The panel consists of a lawyer, psychologist and parent of a deceased victim of child sexual abuse.

### *Consultation with Government Agencies*

The Diocese consults regularly with the following government agencies:

- Office of Children’s Guardian
- NSW Ombudsman
- NSW Police
- Community Services

### *Collaboration with the Australian Church*

The Diocese of Parramatta engages regularly with professional standards personnel from other Diocese and Religious Orders within NSW and across the nation. The nature of this engagement consists of informal meetings and regular structured consultation meetings.

### *Consultation with survivor support groups*

The Diocese has consulted extensively with Survivors and Mates Support Network (SAMSN). The insights provided by this agency have informed the review and development of our outreach services.

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*Consultation with tertiary institutions*

The Diocese has been invited to work in collaboration with several universities to contribute to the development of courses that include the study of child safety principles.

*Engagement of External Expertise*

The Diocese regularly engages consultants local and international with specialist knowledge in the areas of child protection and professional standards, survivor support services, international research and trends.

**3. *How does the Diocese of Parramatta manage any risks to children associated with the engagement that the Diocese of Parramatta has with them?***

*The Diocese of Parramatta manages the risks associated with these forms of engagement by giving priority to:*

- A primary focus on behaviour rather than intention in the identification and response to high risk behaviour
- Early intervention to high risk identified behaviour
- The child's interests over other competing priorities - this approach continues to create tensions and can have adverse implications for employers.
- The implementation of the 10 principles for a safe organisation within each agency
- The development of practical safeguarding resources to support child-safe practices
- Improved access to information through Diocesan website and social media
- The recent appointment of full time Director of Risk Management for the Diocese
- Ongoing commitment to review – The Office was subject of a review in December 2015.

*a. How is the Diocese of Parramatta engagement with children supervised and / or overseen at a parish level?*

- All leaders have been directed to undertake a risk assessment for all service activities (including those involving children).
- The risk assessment will give emphasis to the identification of personnel responsible for supervising children, as well as other responsibilities
- Through mandatory training, reinforcing the role of the Parish Priest in assuming responsibility for monitoring effective risk management of parish activities.

*b. What external child protection and safety regulations apply to your agency? For example, the 'reportable conduct scheme' of the Ombudsman Act 1974 (NSW).*

- In terms of reporting complaints or identified high risk adult behaviour – we have various reporting responsibilities to - NSW Ombudsman, FACS, NSW Office of Children Guardian and NSW Police.
- In terms of preventative systems we are monitored or audited by NSW Ombudsman and NSW Office of Children Guardian within their scope.

We would like to see the scope of what is caught by the NSW Ombudsman broadened as it has been an effective tool for changing culture and increasing accountability and awareness within the industries caught

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*c. How does Diocese of Parramatta respond to any complaints of child sexual abuse?*

- Every agency has a process in place for receipt of complaints of child sexual abuse (or any abuse of a child)
- All allegations are to be reported internally to the Office for safeguarding and Professional Standards. (Note: an agency receiving the initial complaint will also make an immediate police or FACS report as required)
- It is the role of the Office for safeguarding and Professional Standards to:
  - a) Offer immediate support through the Healing & Support services to the alleged victim or others affected, and
  - b) Triage the allegation/complaint to determine appropriate reporting obligations and suitable internal processes available;
  - c) Inform the victim/complainant of what is available
  - d) Engage with any other agencies that are involved in the matter.
- Engage the Diocese’s Reparation Review Panel to advise the Bishop on appropriate reparation

**4. Planning for a Better Future: Matters that Require Further Attention**

**4.1 Some challenges requiring attention:**

- The risk of not identifying risks or gaps in child safety until a complaint arises, an audit process identifies an issue, or a third party proactively recognises it and reports a concern.
- Managing the range in capacity and level of understanding of the agency leader
- Reducing priority given to risk management due to competing priorities, limited resources, workloads and costs.

**4.2 Other critical elements**

- a. Legislative change and attitudinal change that addresses the often competing interests and rights in employment law against child protection principles.
- b. The development of a more sophisticated understanding of proactive risk management principles in child related workplaces, especially at the leadership level.
- c. Naming and responding firmly to high risk adult behaviour rather than examining the intention of the person – there can be no tolerance for crossing boundaries, evasion of professional development, inadequate management of complaints for those engaging with children.
- d. Intelligence informed processes and initiatives through the gathering of accurate data to generate reports that may inform professional learning, planning and prevention. This includes robust records management processes, consistent procedures for the intake of

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preliminary notifications, and the tracking of complaints. This can only occur with adequate resourcing.

- e. Allocating adequate resources to achieve cultural change that is proactive, committed to ongoing education and makes child safety and prevention the first priority.
- f. Review and development of systems of accountability and supports for clergy with firm consequences for those who opt to not engage in child safe practices to align the expectations of clergy to that of other professionals and volunteers in ministry with children.
- g. Legislative review and development to facilitate efficient national information exchange with priority being given to the rights and interests of the safety and well-being of children over rights of privacy, data security, professional privilege and other existing impediments.
- h. A revised understanding of how to measure success by evaluating the successful response to complaints, the effective implementation of child –safety systems, evidence of an enhanced understanding of child protection principles by volunteers, and increased accountability for those who exercise power and authority over children especially agency leaders and clergy.
- i. Enhanced human resource management processes that give priority at every stage of the employment cycle to child-safety and prevention.
- j. The review and development of protocols to ensure that the voice of the child and external input informs strategies to further develop child-safety and prevention.
- k. Education of external groups that have impact on agencies capacity to create child safe environments in particular, the judiciary, legal profession, unions and families.