

בס"ד



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Response of the Rabbinical Council of Victoria (RCV) to the Royal Commission regarding actions taken by the RCV after the public hearing, to enhance the safety of children within their care, to improve the effectiveness of their responses to reports of child sexual abuse and to alleviate the impact of past and future child sexual abuse within its institution.

1.1 Action the Rabbinical Council of Victoria has taken as a result of Case Study 22

The Rabbinical Council of Victoria is the pre-eminent Orthodox religious leadership body of Victoria's Jewish community. The RCV's primary role is representing Victoria's congregational Rabbis. It aims to foster positive relations with leaders of other faith communities and to enhance religious engagement with members of the Jewish community.

The main work of the RCV includes:

- Providing professional development to Rabbis and Rebbetzins.
- Promoting the Torah halachic perspective on social and moral issues to the community.
- Encouraging observance of Torah and Mitzvot within the community.
- Cultivating multifaith engagement.

The RCV does not generally organise functions for the community, nor interact directly with children. However, in its role as representing the community's orthodox leaders it has actively taken a strong stance on protecting the rights of children and victims of child sexual abuse since around 2010 when the issues of child sexual abuse first became public. Such stances included publishing media statements to the community, making resolutions that members voted to uphold and the provision of professional development to the rabbis and their wives regarding the issues of child sexual abuse and the importance of encouraging victims to disclose abuse to the authorities.

The RCV continues to offer training to rabbis and rebbetzins (rabbis' wives) in areas of child protection and disclosure by victims of child sexual abuse.

1.2 Organisational structure, governance and culture

The RCV operations are bound by a constitution which outlines the organisational structure and guidelines for governance. Following Case study 22 the National Rabbinic Association body, formerly known as Organisations of Rabbis of Australasia re-established itself and will now be known as the Rabbinical Council of Australia and New Zealand. In re-establishing this new organisation the national body recognised the requirement to create a professional organisation and to create a mechanism to review and to consider the conduct of any member who might arguably have acted in a manner unbecoming a religious representative of Australasian Jewry in the most transparent and fair manner. The national council's constitution is in the final draft stages. It is the intention of the RCV to adopt the code of conduct outlined in the national council's constitution to ensure consistent standards of governance across Australia.

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The RCV continues to offer professional development to its members in order to further promote cultural change both amongst the rabbinate and throughout the community.

1.3 training and supervision of staff;

The RCV continues to offer a comprehensive professional development program recognising the importance of providing our spiritual leaders with access to the latest information, best practices, and learning opportunities that are available. Training is conducted by world-renowned scholars and expert educators in the relevant fields. This program also better equips our community's rabbis to help their congregants grow in Jewish commitment, strengthen their communal connection and overcome personal challenges.

The RCV is proud to be a pioneer in the offerings of training provided to rebbetzins (rabbis' wives), recognising the profound and critical role they play as unsung leaders of the Jewish community.

As the RCV is a professional membership body, its only staff comprises of the Executive Director which is primarily an administrative position. The President and committee supervise the work of the ED in relation to RCV communication.

Since case study 22 the RCV has offered the following training to further educate the rabbinate and support them to educate the community on the issues of child sexual abuse, family violence and victim disclosure statements:

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

In June 2014 the RCV organised a presentation from four panellists comprising:

Lana Block, Young Achievers Coordinator, Jewish Care

Myra White and Anthony Abate, Priority Communities Division, Victoria Police

Nomi Kaltman, Student Representative Council

Jen Brooker, Youth Work Coordinator at RMIT University

The presenters each gave a brief introduction of themselves and in turn spoke about the different models and youth programs they are involved in together with suggestions to further constructive youth engagement both in the Jewish community and the wider Victorian community.

RELATIONSHIP AUSTRALIA COUPLES COUNSELLING

A course on Couples Counselling was organised comprising three sessions between June 11 and 25, 2014. The course was run by Peter Roberts who is the Senior Manager (Training) of Relationships Australia – Victoria. The focus of the program was on the importance of knowing how and when to refer, recognising warning signs including abuse and different kinds of addiction, how to structure sessions and helping couples manage expectations from parents and the community.

REBBETZINS NETWORK

Throughout 2014, the rebbetzins attended a series of Monash University professional development workshops under the banner of 'Women in Leadership'. These included sessions such as the following:

Mindfulness

Facilitated by Dr Craig Hassed, a General Practitioner and Senior Lecturer and mindfulness consultant at Monash University, the interactive presentation, explored the science, practice and philosophy of mindfulness for personal and professional life.

Networking and Building Sustainable Relationships

Kelly Mitchell, an Associate Director Client Relations from 'Directioneering', ran the interactive presentation, which explored areas including how to build sustainable relationships, how to manage stakeholders, tips for personal and professional networking and creating goals for the long-term.

Lessons Learnt and Future Opportunities

Associate Professor Amanda Pyman led this session comprising areas such as; assertive behaviour time management, public speaking and project management.

Defining Roles

This session was unique in that the rabbis were invited to attend and together with the rebbetzins were encouraged to explore areas such as negotiating one's role within the community; communication; enhancing working relationships and collaboration and compromise. This session was facilitated by Professor Vivek Chaudhri, an academic in the Department of Management at Monash University, who noted the importance of perspective and perceptions in enabling a more nuanced and empathetic approach to negotiations in the community context.

AGUNAH

In partnership with The Jewish Taskforce Against Family Violence Inc. (JTAFV) the rabbis attended a seminar addressing the sensitive issue of Aguna, entitled "Separating with Dignity". The seminar, held in August 2014, focused on exploring the Gett (Jewish divorce) process and challenges involved in assisting men and women whose spouses refuse to participate in the Gett process.

The dynamic and positive session was facilitated by KWS Legal and was attended by members of the Melbourne Beth Din, RCV and the JTAFV. The interactive discussion highlighted the benefits of a structured and systematic process for all couples applying for a Gett (a Jewish divorce) and explored adapting Halachically acceptable prenuptials.

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

In line with October being Mental Health Month, a session was led by Cassandra Barrett, Mental Health Promotion Manager at Jewish Care who focused on Mental Health Awareness, Stigma prevention and how religious leaders can have an impact in their community, including practical ideas, and suggestions for resources and training.

MENTORING

Regular member sessions are held throughout the year to offer expertise in specific areas relating to Jewish law and social issues in the community, to provide mentoring opportunities and to facilitate in the sharing of ideas and programs amongst the members.

The RCV also works closely with Jewish organisations to facilitate social action programs and agendas such as endorsing the Jewish Taskforce Against Family Violence submission to the Royal Commission on Family Violence and a further submission in conjunction with National Council of Jewish Women of Australia (Vic), Jewish Community Council of Victoria and Executive Council of Australian Jewry on Jewish Divorce – the Gett.

LEADERSHIP

A leadership training seminar with Ernie Schwartz of Red Sky Group was held in April 2015. The PD comprised four sessions of three hours covering:

- the fundamentals of influence
- relationship building
- building the persuasive message
- getting the best out of colleagues and staff

COUNSELLING

In June 2015, Dr Nicky Jacobs a Senior Lecturer, Clinical & Counselling Psychologist, Course Leader Master in Counselling, Faculty of Education Monash University will run a course on advanced issues in mental health including ethical implications. The course will be run over 4 sessions and will cover areas such as counselling perspectives, stress and anxiety, depression and sadness, trauma and referrals to name but a few areas.

FAMILY VIOLENCE

In October and November, under the guidance of Jewish Taskforce and Family Violence the Rabbis and Rebbetzins attended courses on Responding to Family Violence. The courses were facilitated by Susan Geraghty and Danny Blay and provided opportunities for the participants to learn contemporary aspects of the prevalence, impact and responses to family violence. Some of the areas explored included:

- the ways in which women and children experience family violence and its effects
- the beliefs about women that support and excuse family violence
- the impact of family violence on individuals and within society, and in particular the Jewish community
- the prevalence of family violence in the community
- the myths and excuses about family violence, and in particular those relating to women experiencing family violence
- the legal responses to family violence in Victoria including Intervention Orders and the impacts of stalking
- the basic principles of responding to women and children who have experienced family violence
- the local family violence service system and referral options for women and children
- quality responses to women and children who have experienced family violence
- definitions, impacts and responses to other forms of family violence such as elder abuse, cyber abuse and adolescent violence towards parents/carers
- the potential personal impact of engaging in family violence prevention work, their own self-care and other strategies to ensure personal safety

LIFE CRISIS

In March 2016 the RCV attended a training run by an American organisation, Chai Lifeline regarding pastoral care for those experiencing grief and loss and the needs of individuals who grieve or who have sustained other life crisis.

PUBLIC SPEAKING

In May David Smorgon OAM presented a seminar on public speaking to the RCV rabbis and rebbetzins. David is one of Australia's most in-demand conference speakers and one of the most compelling.

GRIEF, BEREAVEMENT AND TRAUMA

In July 2016 the RCV participated in an advanced professional development training course focussing on Grief and Bereavement Support, with Keren Ludski. Keren is a qualified and experienced professional educator, specialist grief and loss counsellor, counselling supervisor, VET assessor and trainer, facilitator and speaker and has vast experience in bereavement counselling and facilitating bereavement support groups. Keren facilitated training to the RCV in 2013 and was asked to come back and provide an advanced course after the success of the initial course.

FAMILY VIOLENCE

The Jewish Taskforce ran a session in June 2016 with Judge Hyman to discuss the perpetrator of violence and the impact of their behaviour on society.

In September 2016 the RCV attended another of the JTAFV run sessions with Alon Marglit, who focuses on the perpetrator of violence's perspective in a one man play. This session led to a frank and important discussion including recognising abuse, supporting victims of abuse and the community's role in cultural change toward the victims of abuse.

1.4 Child protection policy and procedures

In 2015 the RCV launched its Child Protection Policy Program in shules (synagogues) in partnership with Australian Childhood Foundation. This vital project will prioritise the rights of children to protection from abuse by employees and volunteers in member shules across the state. Working closely with the Australian Childhood Foundation, each participating shule will formulate an effective child protection policy and system to cover all of its programs and activities. This program includes multiple child protection training opportunities for the members and their congregations.

Monthly Child Protection Training Sessions were held with facilitators of the ACF including Monique Blom and David Ross up to December 2015 and in February and March in 2016. Nineteen shules attended this training and are currently working with the ACF template policies to ensure that their organisations are compliant with the new child safe regulations that will come into place in January 2017. Sixteen of these shules are working toward achieving child safe accreditation with ACF.

The RCV continuously offers child protection training, support and the provision of child safety information bulletins to all members for the use of their shules.

A number of shules are working with other child safe organisations to ensure their child safety policies and procedures are up to Victorian Child safe Legislation. The RCV continues to send its members training opportunities and bulletins on child protection produced by other organisations such as JCCV, Tzedek and Jewish Care.

1.5 redress for survivors of child sexual abuse;

There were no direct claims against the RCV from survivors of child sexual abuse.

The RCV continues to educate the rabbinate on how to offer support to victims of child sexual abuse.

1.6 measures to encourage reporting of child sexual abuse to secular authorities;

The RCV issued the following statement as a media release and posted it on its website in February 2015.

RCV Statement following the Royal Commission's Case Study 22

This statement is issued on behalf of the Executive Committee of the Rabbinical Council of Victoria (RCV).

During the course of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse conducted this month we have been greatly disturbed at what could be perceived as a misrepresentation and/or misinterpretation of the attitude of the Victorian Rabbinate in general towards the issue of reporting and dealing with child sexual abuse.

We wish to state quite unequivocally for the record:

1. The RCV has, since 2010, publicly reiterated, on numerous occasions and through numerous forums, the Jewish Halachic position that any prohibition of mesira (reporting to the civil authorities) and arkaot (adjudication in civil courts) does not apply in cases of child sexual abuse and that there is an actual obligation to report any allegations of child abuse directly to the police and relevant authorities.
2. The RCV is completely committed to such ruling and will continue to publicise such advice to the community as often as deemed necessary to ensure the message reaches and is heeded by all members of the Jewish Community.
3. The RCV understands that members of the rabbinate may have been inadequately prepared to deal with the area of child sexual abuse. In this regard the RCV has instigated and continues to conduct training and professional development courses and programmes for its members, in conjunction with appropriate communal services and organisations, to ensure that members of the rabbinate are amply and professionally equipped to properly and responsibly respond to and deal with reports of child abuse and to offer effective, compassionate and empathetic counselling and support to victims.
4. The RCV states unequivocally that the above mentioned measures and issues are now supported across the entire range of its membership and are not just confined to younger and more progressive members - as may have been incorrectly implied during the course of the Commission's hearings.

5. The RCV apologises unreservedly for any part any of its members, past or present, may have played in the angst, frustration or hurt that may have resulted for victims in their attempts to report and seek justice for the actions perpetrated against them and roundly condemns any form of harassment experienced by anyone as a result of presenting evidence of child sexual abuse to police or relevant authorities.

6. The RCV trusts that the Commission's findings will initiate recommendations aimed at addressing the shortcomings of the past in institutional reactions to allegations of abuse, assist and encourage victims of abuse to come forward without apprehension or trepidation and will aid in bringing perpetrators to justice.

The RCV pledges to continue to co-operate and work towards these goals to the very best of its ability.

Royal Commission Debrief Session

In March of 2015 the RCV members attended a debrief session following the Royal Commission Case Study 22 facilitated by Nicky Jacobs and Vicky Gordon from the Australian Jewish Psychologists.

1.7 The promotion of the key elements of a child-safe organisation' as identified in the Royal Commission publication Creating Child Safe Institutions

The RCV launched its Child Protection Policy Program in shules (synagogues) in partnership with Australian Childhood Foundation in March 2015. This vital project prioritises the rights of children to protection from abuse by employees and volunteers in member shules across the state. Working closely with the Australian Childhood Foundation, each participating shule will formulate an effective child protection policy and system to cover all of its programs and activities. This program includes multiple child protection training opportunities for the members and their congregations.

The member shules participated in the Foundation's Safeguarding Children Accreditation Program, which systematically builds the capacity of organisations to keep children and young people through;

- enhancing and maintaining a collective culture that promotes the safety of children and young people;
- reviewing, designing and executing specific policies and procedures to protect children and young people;
- providing relevant training to management, staff and volunteers;
- engaging the involvement of children, young people and their parents/carers in safeguarding practices;
- implementing a consistent set of endorsed operational standards at every level; and,
- responding effectively to situations in which a child is abused or exploited by an individual involved in the management or delivery of a service or activity.

Throughout 2015 and into 2016, the participating shules attended monthly Safeguarding Children Workshops in order to develop their policies and procedures in line with the seven standards outlined below.

SEVEN STRATEGIES TO KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE

The Safeguarding Children Program has developed a set of seven unique strategies to build the capacity of organisations to keep children and young people safe from abuse and exploitation by staff, volunteers or other relevant related individuals.

Each strategy is evidence based and supported by a range of organisational documents that make it easy to implement. These strategies also form the basis for the standards used in achieving organisational accreditation in the Safeguarding Children scheme.

1. A commitment to safeguarding children

Documenting a clear commitment to safeguarding children and young people from abuse and neglect.

2. Personnel roles and conduct

Each person involved in delivery of services to children and young people understands their role, and the behaviour expected in safeguarding children and young people from abuse and neglect.

3. Recruitment and screening practices

Appropriate measures to minimise the likelihood of recruiting a person who is unsuitable to work with children or young people.

4. Personnel induction and training

Induction, education and training programs which are a vital part to safeguarding children and young people from abuse and neglect.

5. Involving children and parents

Developing a safe, inclusive and supportive environment and communicating with children, young people and their parents.

6. Child abuse reports and allegations

Measures to ensure that all our people who work with children and young people understand their responsibility to report possible abuse or neglect and an understanding of reporting procedures.

7. Supporting a child-safe culture

Ensuring that all people who work with children and young people understand their responsibility to report possible abuse or neglect and understand the reporting procedures.

Producing and implementing an accredited child protection policy is a significant task to undertake. It is the hope of the Rabbinical Council of Victoria that by undertaking this project together, the shules can streamline the process in order to ensure that every shule prioritises the rights of children to protection from abuse by shule employees and volunteers.

CHILD PROTECTION TRAINING

Throughout the year the shules were required to attend one of the two sessions offered on each of the seven standards. These intense sessions were run over a 2.5 hour period (in the Chabad Youth Building) and thoroughly provoked intense discussion on all areas of the relevant standard and its application in the shule environment.

The program's setting, being available only to the shules, encouraged an environment of trust, reflection and honest discussion about the unique workings of the shules and the change in procedures necessary to comply to child safety standards.

Although the ACF program does promote policy implementation, staff training and an audit process, these sessions were run with an aim of promoting cultural change throughout the shule's services, programs, membership, staff and volunteers. The Rabbi of each shule, a board member and a key manager able to implement policies were all required to attend the sessions and participate in the workshops.

In the last quarter of the year, each shule was provided with access codes for all of its staff, board members and volunteers, to complete online training, further educating personnel on child safety standards.

Throughout the process the ACF provided the shules with all the necessary policies, guidelines and support documentation in line with the standards. In order to maintain a high standard of child protection, the shules and ACF decided to endeavour to keep the policies as uniform as possible across all of the shules. Therefore, after both sessions on each standard were complete, the shules were provided with a summary of the issues and suggested changes to the policies, as per session discussions.

Over December and January the shules were tasked with reviewing and implementing all of the policy documentation. The ACF has provided the shules with an extensive checklist ensuring that the process does not become overwhelming. This intense process is expected to take considerable time, effort and resources.

In February and March four further session dates were allocated to the shules to have one on one meetings with ACF staff to discuss the shule's progress in implementing its policies and procedures. This was an opportunity for the ACF and RCV to gauge where the shules are up to in the process and offer any guidance or support in directing the shules in their aim to achieve accreditation.

The RCV Executive Director continuously meets with the ACF Project Manager to discuss the learnings of the project and plan the most appropriate way forward to support the shules in further sessions.

It is important to note that although every shule aims to achieve accreditation, this may not be possible for some of the smaller shules given their lack of resources. In addition, there are a couple of shules participating in the program that have very limited contact with children at this time, yet have made an important decision to be educated in the best practise of child protection in planning for the future of their shule.

Together with further training and support regarding the policy implementation, 2016 and 2017 will include further professional development sessions in the areas relating to the standards. It is also intended that the RCV will support the shules by organising marketing material, that can be personalised by each shule, educating the shule community regarding the new policies. These initiatives will be paramount to promoting cultural change amongst the community.

2.0 Consultations held and materials considered, in the formulation of the action taken and changes made by the Rabbinical Council of Victoria.

Please see the above explanations for details.

3.0 Impediments the Rabbinical Council of Victoria and its members face in implementing the action taken and changes made and any other reforms, and proposed measures to overcome these impediments.

The RCV and its members are committed to working together to ensure that children are protected from abuse. The RCV members are also committed to the statement it issued in February 2015.