



Key messages from Safeguarding Children – a National YMCA Conversation Webinar, hosted on Friday 26th June, 2015

Panellists

- Andrew Smith (President, YMCA Australia)
- Jacki Whitwell (Executive Manager Social Policy, YMCA Australia)
- Janise Mitchell (Deputy CEO, Australian Childhood Foundation)

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- Dianne McDonald (Executive Manager Communications – YMCA Australia)

Andrew Smith key messages

- The adoption of a national policy on protecting children and young people in the YMCA in November last year was a very important step for the YMCA and for the protection of children and young people in the YMCA.
- It is the National Board's expectation that all YMCAs will be compliant with this policy, acknowledging that this will be a process of continuous improvement.
- By the end of the year two thirds of all YMCA Associations were expected to be ACF Accredited, with ALL expected to be accredited by early 2016.

Critical steps to Protecting Children and Young People at the Y

1. It starts with LEADERSHIP - from the National Board, and from local Boards – leadership has to come from the top and flow throughout the entire organisation.
2. Critical Champions for the importance of the issue are an important component of leadership.
3. We need to be CONSISTENT in our approach, and PERSISTENT and RESILIENT as we work to create safe environments for all children in our care.

Jacki Whitwell key messages

- 60% of all participants in the YMCA are children or young people.
- The YMCA's national child safety journey in child protection commenced in 2006, as one of the early adopters of the Australian Childhood Foundation's first accreditation processes.
- As Ron Mell (National YMCA CEO) and Jacki have travelled around the country visiting Boards and Senior Staff team, they have observed a pleasing shift towards the responsibility for protecting children and young people 'starting at the top' with the subject a standard item on most Board agendas.

The 7 key learnings that support and drive our child protection policy and practice

1. Recognising the right of every child and young person to be safe from harm and using a rights-based framework.
2. Child abuse in any form is intolerable and must never be ignored – we need to understand how abuse occurs and understand the potential impacts.
3. Child abuse is a reality of our society and all children are vulnerable.
4. Protecting children and young people is everyone's business – from Board Directors to frontline staff.
5. Effective controls need to be in place regarding policy and practice.
6. Our governance structures must embed a child safe culture.
7. Protecting children and young people is a process of continuous improvement.



Janise Mitchell – key messages

- Protecting children and young people from harm is not an easy task –it is a complex and challenging area
- ACF research shows that there are very low levels of community awareness and understanding about child abuse. This is reflected in organisations as well.
- Organisational policies, procedures and practices aimed at child safety increase the ability of organisations to ensure that they have all that is possible to ensure the safety and well-being of children involved in its programs and services. The YMCA safeguarding children and young policy provides a framework for supporting this – it provides a “perimeter of safety” around your organisation.
- It can be challenging for organisations and individuals to accept that there are people who harm children. It can sometimes seem easier to “turn away” from what’s going on.
- If you haven’t got a strong and transparent culture around children’s rights, including the ability to have conversations around protecting children and young people at all levels, then children and young people remain at risk.
- Your organisational CODE OF CONDUCT is the vehicle for how you enact your culture and your Vision. At its centre should be a commitment to the rights and needs of children.
- Low-level breaches of your code of conduct start to erode your organisational culture, and provide an opening for perpetrators to children and young people.

4 key reasons why organisations fail to protect children and young people

1. A lack of awareness of the rights of children and young people.
2. A lack of knowledge and understanding among staff and volunteers within organisations about how to enact policy.
3. A lack of process and systems to support a child protective culture.
4. A lack of confidence in addressing potential issues of child abuse, or low level breaches of organisational culture.

A particular challenge for organisations:

- Including children as stakeholders is the standard in the ACF Protecting Children and Young People Accreditation that organisations find most challenging.
- Find meaningful ways to hear the voices of children in all your services, just not regarding child protection– and be prepared to ACT on what you hear.

“The YMCA and the work you are doing is leading practice in organisations that work with children and young people in Australia – I really do believe the Y has an opportunity to lead a national conversation that engages the broader community,” Janise Mitchell, Deputy CEO the Australian Childhood Foundation.