

Summary notes from A National Conversation on Safeguarding Children and Young People

Webinar, Friday 15 July 2016

YMCA Australia was delighted to host the YMCA National Conversation on Child Safe Organisations with speakers including Joe Tucci, CEO of the Australian Childhood Foundation (ACF), and Susan Halliday, a Life Governor of the Foundation and formerly the Chair of the regulator the Victorian Institute of Teaching and a past Australian Sex Discrimination and Disability Discrimination Commissioner. Other speakers include our National President, Andrew Smith, and the CEO of Launceston YMCA, Jodie Johnson.

Some of the key themes that emerged from the conversation were:

- We are no longer on a “journey” towards becoming a child safe organisation – it’s who we are, in everything we do, at all levels across the organisation.
- The priorities and interests of children and young people must come first – ahead of an organisation’s business interests. It shouldn’t be an “add on”.
- Proactive and pre-emptive mindsets are required so a child safe culture is actively created. We can’t afford to stagnate.
- We don’t need to reinvent the wheel – networks and partnerships and learnings from the Royal Commission are there for us to draw upon.
- Our partnership with the Australian Childhood Foundation has provided the opportunity for mutual learning between both organisations.

More detailed notes are below.

Andrew Smith, President YMCA Australia

We can no longer say we on a journey towards becoming a child safe organisation....it’s who we are now. Safeguarding children and young people is part of our everyday life.

Culture is the story you tell about yourself, and to others, the story we consistently tell to ourselves and others is of our child safety and child protection culture.

The priority of child safety and child protection is evident right across our organisation, at all levels, across the Movement.

It’s even been embedded into our recruitment process for our new National CEO.

What was my proudest moment at the YMCA, came recently when talking to the parents of a young person employed in a casual part-time basis with the YMCA, and those parents told me what they had learned through their son about child safety. They were very impressed with what he’d learned, and had taught them, too.

Our culture is now such that we no longer walk past behaviours we might have walked past in the past, not understanding what we were seeing.

While we are no longer on a journey, and we have much we can be proud of, we also still have work to do, and we can’t ever afford to get complacent.

Joe Tucci – CEO Australian Childhood Foundation

We have been walking alongside the YMCA on its journey for years. And I agree that the metaphor or journey is no longer relevant. *The YMCA is a child safe organisation* – it's soaked in your culture, into the layers of the organisation. It's gone beyond posters - although you have them too! - and it's now in your people, and your people are carrying forward the message.

I've always said the organisations are a microcosm of the communities they live in, and the importance of child protection has increased over time. The story you tell via your culture is a story about a meaningful understanding of the issue.

When organisations start to make decisions in the interests of children, rather than the interests of the organisation, that's when you know you have a child safety culture.

You now do what you say in relation to child safety and child protection – you are a congruent organisation. But you can't stagnate.

You have an important role to play in helping educate community about the very real issue of child abuse. It continually rates as a very low community issue – until people understand the life-long impacts, then it quickly becomes a high priority. People need to be reminded of the extent of child abuse, and it's confronting for people to talk about this, because adults are the abusers.

In the YMCA I see an organisation that has stepped away from saying "there is a problem that needs to be fixed", to doing something about it.

The Royal Commission has shown us that it wasn't organisations that failed children – it was people.

The best organisations protect their children, their users, their staff *and* themselves.

You are the first organisation in the country with your reach and your size to come out with one national child protection policy, that you have written, and that your members have agreed to at an Annual General Meeting. I don't think you really realise how innovative and progressive this is. You do stand out, and that commitment is really clear.

This (child protection) is such a new field of practice and we have definitely learned from the YMCA, who was the first organisation of its size to work with us. We have learned together. How you apply it in the workplace and in all the settings in which the YMCA works – you've taught us, too.

Susan Halliday, Life Governor ACF, and member of Accreditation Panel

I see YMCAs at "the pointy end", as part of the accreditation process, and on the panel.

It's a privilege to run the community organisations you do, and it's also a privilege to have a Child Safe Organisation Accreditation on your website. It's not achieved lightly or easily.

Our role is to support and help YMCAs build their capacity to be child safe organisations. It is a mutual and shared partnership. It's not a field you can stay stagnant in. We all need to constantly learn from each other, and YMCAs can learn from each other, too. It's not a journey you have to travel on your own.

When we see an organisation that has really "got it", we see an organisation in which children and young people come first, not the business.

When the ACF audits an organisation, it looks for evidence of:

- Constant and consistent communications about child protection across the organisation and into the community

- Pre-emptive and proactive mindsets that are always on the lookout for ways to improve the culture further
- A culture where everyone feels able to 'speak up' and
- Children's voices being heard and taken into account
- Using the Royal Commission learnings to further educate your people and develop your policies and practices.

I think the YMCA has a very important leadership role to play in the community. As a community organisation with your Mission, the community assumes you will do the right thing. The right thing is for you to now share your knowledge and leadership with the wider community.

Children are special and we need to protect them.

We need people and organisations in which everyone if they see something will say something and do something – go to the extremes to make sure children are safe.

Jodie Johnson is an example of such a person – she's a "poster person" for safeguarding children and young people. Once you've 'got it', you've 'got it', and as you can see, she lives and breathes it.

In working with Jodie as she was leading a renovation at her YMCA, we were able to provide input into things like having glass walls so children can be seen at all times, and when Jodie was talking about wanting to bring more young people in to the centre, we were able to work with her to look at issues like cyber-bullying, and help develop social media policies relevant to young people. The cyber-bullying mightn't happen at the centre, but the young people might meet there, and the bullying can happen outside of the facility.

Jodie Johnson

As 'a little YMCA' with a lot on, including renovations, we were a bit worried about being ready for our audit with the Australian Childhood Foundation for Accreditation as a Child Safe Organisation.

It was quite a headache for us at first, to be honest.

But the support and training we got from the ACF – we even had a visit from Joe Tucci - and the support from YMCA Australia was tremendous.

The ACF quickly put us at ease, and on the right track. Child safety is top of mind for everyone here. It's on every meeting agenda, and I overhear our staff talking about it constantly.

We're really proud of our accreditation as a Child Safe Organisation. In a small place like Launceston, everyone knows everyone really well, and that's really great, but it's also a risk too.

Re. safeguarding children and young people with disabilities

Joe Tucci and Susan Halliday -

The ACF is paying closer attention to this matter now, as we look at ways to make safeguarding children and young people more culturally relevant, and as the NDIS rolls out, and YMCAs have the opportunity to provide one-on-one care for children and young people with disabilities in a market-driven environment. Further guidance will be available over the next six months.

We need to acknowledge that all children with disabilities are especially vulnerable, and any trauma increases their vulnerability. However, there are already pockets of practice you can draw upon. For example, teachers' aides in schools who work one-on-one with children with disabilities are an invaluable resource. At the ACF we already do one-on-one trauma-informed counselling with children, and therapeutic practice can inform how we work in this space, too.