

Safeguarding Children and Young People

The YMCA's National Child Protection Policy

May 2014

Foreword – Message from the President

It is within the very fabric and identity of the YMCA Movement to provide programs and services for children, young people and their families.

So at this time, as the Australian nation addresses the manner in which institutions care and protect children and young people, it is important for us to reiterate our commitment to and continually address the way we view child protection within the YMCA. A child-safe organisation acknowledges that safety does not just happen. It not only requires conscious action to protect children from harm, but action to build resilience in children and young people and to create a positive nurturing environment, which ensures children are safe.

Here are the words of Justice McClellan speaking of the recent past: *“The work of the Royal Commission is bringing an understanding that many children under the supervision of adults within an institutional context ... have suffered both sexual assault and gross physical abuse... The work the Royal Commission is doing should lead all institutions where abuse has occurred to acknowledge their past, accept the obligation they owe to survivors and resolve to do whatever may be necessary to ensure that, so far as possible, it never happens again”.*

It is timely to remind ourselves that the YMCA strives for an inclusive society where everyone has the opportunity to reach his or her potential. The YMCA is a Movement of people committed to provide opportunities for all people to grow in body, mind and spirit. Caring about the welfare of children is our first consideration and with that responsibility comes the concept of guardianship.

The YMCA wholeheartedly commits to the concept that guardianship extends to everyone. By this we mean that everyone who is bound by our policies is expected to do all they can to ensure every child or young person in the care of the organisation is safe from harm. It is the responsibility of all at the YMCA, from board directors to staff and volunteers, to understand the important role they personally have to play to ensure the resilience and safety of the children and young people in their care is at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make.

How Will We Do It?

The YMCA, through the *Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy* and the accompanying licensing standards will require all its member associations to reframe the way we protect children within our Movement to ensure that abuse does not happen again within or because of a YMCA.

The Policy identifies four key commitments that will operate in all our locations, by all who take on the YMCA name.

To continuously improve how we do our work, we acknowledge we cannot do it alone and therefore have joined with a specialist partner, the Australian Childhood Foundation, to help us on our journey.

The Next Steps

There is a transition period leading up to the National Annual General Meeting in November 2014.

Currently

Each Member Association and affiliate must:

- comply with the Education and Care Services National Law applicable to each State and Territory
- comply with applicable child protection legislation
- comply with applicable legislation and industry standards in regards to all areas of service provision
- meet the current YMCA licensing standards and
- have a clear strategy of external audit compliance within a timeframe acceptable to the National Board.

In May 2014

The National Board are expected to review the new draft licensing standards as they apply to child protection (Refer Part B). All Member Associations will have the chance to comment on the draft standards between June and August 2014. The National board will then consider their endorsement of the standards. This process requires Associations to be compliant with the standards six months after their endorsement by the National Board.

With child safety as the priority the National Board will also consider the requirements of a partnership agreement 2014-2017 with a suitably qualified and experienced vendor of choice to strengthen child safety across the YMCA's in Australia. The current proposal being reviewed is from the Australian Childhood Foundation.

In June 2014

The draft policy and supporting standards will be circulated for comment to the Movement.

In August 2014

The draft partnership agreement with the Australian Childhood Foundation 2014-2017 will be circulated to the Movement. The current agreement is due to expire on the 30th September 2014.

In November 2014

It is anticipated the draft policy will be approved by the Movement at the 2014 November AGM. Each Member Association who wishes to maintain the right to hold a YMCA License in Australia will then be required to have a *Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy which fulfils the nationally endorsed policy requirements*. All Member Associations will need to adhere to the Policy from the date of endorsement.

We strongly encourage your Associations input and engagement in this process.

YMCA Australia is continuing to develop resources to assist members in meeting their obligations to the Movement with a key strategy of support being the 2014-2017 partnership agreement.

Budgeting and business models must ensure adherence to these proposed changes taking into account the compliance requirements of the attached licensing standards and the partnership agreement.

At this time in the history of the Movement and of all institutions in Australia, we have a wonderful opportunity to learn from the experiences of the past and turn them into something very positive. The children and young people YMCA's are with, now and in the future, can be assured they are safer, more resilient and listened to as a result of the changes we decide to make now. However, we cannot afford to delay and your participation in this process of change over the next six to twelve months is essential.

Graham Kent
President
YMCA AUSTRALIA

CONSULTATION DRAFT

The Four Key Commitments

The *Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy* supports the YMCA's goal to protect and empower children and young people so that they may thrive, learn and grow according to their potential.

The *Policy* will operate through four key commitments:

1. To protect the rights of all children and young people consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
2. To build resilience in children and young people by supporting the development of their skills and qualities to cope with difficulties in a positive way.
3. To create opportunities for children, young people and families to meaningfully participate in the development of YMCA policy and practice that has a direct impact on them.
4. To ensure that robust YMCA licensing standards deliver adherence to this policy across the organisation and its members.

Commitment 1

To protect the rights of all children and young people consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The YMCA will:

- Adhere to and proactively support The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (ratified in Australia in 1990)
- Ensure that the rights of the child are upheld by all adults who are part of a YMCA program or service or come into contact with children as part of their role within the YMCA
- Base all its operational decisions on upholding the rights of the child or young person as a first priority
- Demonstrate through its practices how protecting the rights of all children is being accomplished within the organisation

Context

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 is the most internationally recognised treaty. It defines that children are to be and to feel valued. Children and young people should neither benefit nor suffer because of their race, colour, gender, language, religion, nationality, societal or ethnic origin, political or other opinion, caste, property, birth status or disability.

It is the role of the YMCA Movement within the Australian community to stand up and strongly reinforce our position that child abuse and neglect is unacceptable. This position is to inform all who make decisions within our organisation.

The YMCA is committed to safeguarding children and young people from abuse so that they can grow and develop into adults without threat to their safety, security or wellbeing. We can only reach our vision to *"make a positive difference, by providing each and every person with the opportunity to be healthy, happy and connected"* if we firstly ensure children are safe when they are in our care.

The YMCA is a large, national, community organisation and major employer of young people and deliverer of programs for children and young people. The YMCA has an important role in promoting community awareness of Australia's national child abuse and neglect issues. We must do everything we can to be a role model organisation by supporting the rights of children and young people and by continually developing our child protective practice and sharing our learning with the community.

As stated in the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020, endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments in April 2009, "Protecting children is everyone's business." The YMCA commits to protecting children and we intend to take on this role as our first priority.

Commitment 2

To build resilience in children and young people by supporting the development of their skills and qualities to cope with difficulties in a positive way

The YMCA will:

- Acknowledge that children by the nature of their psychosocial and physiological development, are vulnerable and therefore it is up to the organisation to ensure they are appropriately cared for and supported
- Develop ways within all its programs and service to build resilience in children
- Ensure continued learning and understanding of resilience in children
- Demonstrate how building resilience in children is occurring.

Context

Developing resilience in children and young people is vital not only to their future, but to the wellbeing of their families and to all of us as a community.

However there are still many children and young people in Australia who are not safe and who face adversity on a day-to-day basis or at some time in their lives.

The YMCA, driven by its mission, vision and values, is committed to help children and young people to develop the characteristics, that research informs us, will help them to succeed in spite of hardships and adversity.

Resilience is the human capacity to face, overcome and be strengthened by or even transformed by the adversities of life. Resilience is a universal capacity that allows a person, group or community to prevent, minimize or overcome the damaging effects of adversity.

In caring for and working with children and young people it is the responsibility of all YMCA people to look for the strengths that exist in children and young people and to help build on these strengths.

The YMCA will recognise and respond to children and young people with special needs, including a disability, and for those from diverse cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds.

It is important to play a role in developing children and young people to meet the challenges of life and for them to succeed. All YMCA programs and services shall play an important role in developing opportunities for all children and young people participating in its programs and services to build resilient behaviours that will empower them to reach their potential.

This approach also supports children and young people to play an integral role in their own safety. The YMCA wants to provide ways for the voice of children and young people, who are suffering harm or feel at risk of harm, to be heard loudly and clearly.

Commitment 3

To create opportunities for children, young people and families to meaningfully participate in the development of YMCA policy and practice that has direct impact on them

The YMCA will:

- Recognise that safeguarding children and young people from harm is the shared responsibility of all and therefore will commit to the concept that guardianship extends to all YMCA personnel
- Commit to a child and young person participatory approach via implementation of the following philosophies
 - To be family and culturally sensitive
 - To be child and young person inclusive
 - To focus on a strength based approach (based on capabilities not deficits)
 - To be collaborative
- Ensure that all YMCA personnel understand how to create safe opportunities and environments
- Ensure all children, young people and families understand the role they play in creating safe opportunities and environments
- Ensure the voice of YMCA personnel, children, young people and families has meaningful representation within YMCA programs and services.

Context

Sexual abuse, physical abuse, psychological or emotional abuse, physical neglect and witnessing family violence are events and experiences many Australian children and young people face in their lives.

Often facing the realities of this is difficult. We daily face the complexities of our own lives when we focus on our personal, work, business, community or global issues. So we may not observe and prioritise the needs of children and young people. It is imperative children and young people are heard and that we all act as guardians of their safety and wellbeing.

Research findings are clear that children and young people are vulnerable due to their age. The younger the child the greater the risk of maltreatment and gender is not a significant predictor.

Sexual abuse is often assumed to be the most damaging form of abuse for children and young people however all abuses have been shown to have the potential to be equally as harmful.

Although the majority of abuse is known to happen in familial settings, the Royal Commission has exposed that sexual abuse alone, is likely to have occurred in over 1,950 institutions Australia wide.

To be a guardian of children it is imperative that organisations ensure all directors, staff and volunteers understand abuse, understand the indicators of abuse, understand how people may become perpetrators, understand the environmental factors that reduce the risk of abuse and have robust systems in place to ensure that all staff and volunteers are personally vigilant and dedicated to listening to children and young people.

To be a guardian of children it is important that policy development includes an imperative to educate children and young people about their rights and to help them to understand their responsibilities.

Commitment 4

To ensure that robust YMCA licensing standards deliver adherence to this policy across the organisation and its members

The YMCA will:

- Continually strengthen and improve its licensing standards to ensure children are safe at the YMCA
- Ensure all licenced Members and affiliates provide YMCA Australia with an annual assessment against the policy via a self-reporting process
- Ensure adherence to the current YMCA licensing standards by the organisation and members
- Undertake an audit and/or accreditation process by a recognised external child protection expert organisation with credentialed skill in child protective practice. For the period 2014-2017 this will be the Australian Childhood Foundation (ACF)
- Proactively share resources and experience in the development of child safe initiatives.

Context

A child-safe organisation acknowledges that safety does not just happen. Conscious action needs to occur to protect children from harm and this must be understood and accepted at all levels of the organisation.

The YMCA must ensure it has an organisational culture and strategies in place that provide for the shaping of safe environments for children. Focussing on safe environments is a broader approach than simply trying to identify and address potential offenders.

The YMCA recognises the role that environmental conditions play in facilitating or mitigating the potential for child abuse. There are people who deliberately try to infiltrate organisations in order to sexually abuse children. There are people with poor boundaries who will take advantage of opportunities to abuse children where they arise. There are environments that facilitate abuse of children.

The YMCA is an employer of many young people and engages many young people as volunteers as well as serving as a provider of many programs for children and young people. It needs to be particularly vigilant because, while there is no stereotypical perpetrator, child abuse is often committed by other young people.

Research findings tell us that:

- Institutional child abuse can be minimised through appropriate organisational management
- Supporting a child safe culture, one in which openness is encouraged for personnel and children and young people to raise concerns, will help prevent child abuse
- An accreditation system will encourage and guide adoption of child safe strategies. External validation of quality control processes including standards and processes will help prevent abuse.

These are issues we should discuss regularly at all levels of our organisation within a culture of openness to continually improve ideas and accountability.

Through the continual development of YMCA Licensing standards, our commitment to children and young people will be demonstrated in a practical way.

References

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