

Royal Commission National Task Group Survey

Findings Report

Introduction

In late October 2016, the Assembly National Task Group (NTG) distributed a survey to UnitingCare agencies (including service providers, schools and congregations), seeking feedback on measures that have been undertaken to ensure child safety. Feedback was particularly sought on measures introduced during, and in response to, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (the Royal Commission).

Responses were sought across a range of elements which are drawn from the Royal Commission's Creating Child Safe Institutions framework:

1. Child safety is embedded in institutional leadership
2. Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously
3. Families and communities are informed and involved
4. Equity is promoted and diversity respected
5. People working with children are suitable and supported
6. Processes to respond to complaints of child sexual abuse are child focussed
7. Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training
8. Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur
9. Implementation of child safe standards is continuously reviewed and improved, and
10. Policies and procedures document how the institution is child safe.

Feedback and examples from agencies corresponding with each of these elements is detailed in this report. Where appropriate, recommendations are included as suggested strategies to further enhance child safety and/or overcome any gaps that are apparent at present in relation to child-safe organisational policies, procedures and practices.

Overall, this report finds that agencies have undertaken a variety of measures, particularly during the tenure of the Royal Commission, to comprehensively improve child safety in their organisations in accordance with each of the elements. Measures have included, for example, the introduction of specific policies, procedures and frameworks regarding child safety incident identification and reporting that have improved transparency around practice. Several agencies have also introduced mechanisms to oversee and ensure their organisation's adherence to, and improvement of, child safe policies and procedures – such as, for instance, the development of consultative committees and working groups, some of which involving children as participants.

The report also finds that gaps and opportunities for progress remain, specifically in relation to the development and publication of resources, particularly for external audiences, which explicitly state and explain agencies' commitment to child safety. Further consideration also regarding the way in which children and their families are engaged in the continual improvement of services that are well-tailored and child-focussed, particularly through use of feedback and complaint mechanisms, is also an area for further focus.

General Comments on Survey Respondents

Agencies that provided survey responses include:

- Connections UnitingCare (VIC)
- Kinross Wolaroi School (NSW)
- Newington College (NSW)
- UnitingCare Wesley Country SA
- Uniting Communities (SA)
- Uniting (NSW)
- UnitingCare QLD
- UnitingCare Tasmania
- Vic.Tas Synod – Schools, Agencies and Congregations
- Wesley Mission Queensland
- Wesley Mission (NSW)
- Wesley Mission Victoria
- Margaret Jurd College (NSW)
- Knox Grammar (NSW)
- Pymble Ladies College (NSW)
- UnitingCare Wesley Port Adelaide (SA)
- Somerville (NT)
- UnitingCare West (WA)

Agencies that responded to the survey deliver a broad array of services across the UnitingCare Network and congregations, ranging from adoption programs, permanent care, out-of-home-care and therapeutic services, to childcare and education services. Feedback indicates that the delivery of these services predominantly occurs in metropolitan locations, as well as some regional locations.

Less than half of the agencies who responded to the survey (42%) indicated that they had previously received notices to produce from the Royal Commission. All, however, reported the introduction of various measures to enhance child safety in their organisations during the tenure of the Royal Commission.

Of those agencies required to produce evidence to the Royal Commission, the majority of this was in relation to data for Case Study 24, on preventing and responding to allegations of child sexual abuse occurring in out-of-home-care (OOHC). Agencies have subsequently looked extensively to implement changes in response to learnings from the Royal Commission on child safety concerning OOHC.

Respondents also noted changes implemented in their agencies following the Royal Commission's examination of Case Study 41, investigating the experiences of children with disability and disability service providers.

Feedback in response to the NTG survey was received from UnitingCare/Church agencies located in all states and territories.

Responses to elements

Responses from agencies regarding the ten 'elements' identified by the Royal Commission are detailed below, along with recommendations for additional measures that could be implemented to further enhance child safety.

1. Child safety is embedded in institutional leadership

a) *The institution publicly commits to child safety and leaders champion a child safe culture*

Half of the agencies that responded to the survey indicated that public statements or commitments to child safety were externally available via their websites, as well as through other means of publication (brochures, job advertisements, etc.).

A number of agencies also referenced links to Child Protection Policies published on their websites – some in addition to their own organisational statements/commitments to child safety, and some in lieu of these.

All agencies indicated that they had in place internal policies and processes regarding child safety broadly. These included:

- Performance management targets (where relevant) for group executives (UnitingCare Queensland)
- Extension of child-safe organisational accreditation across all services - including aged care (Uniting NSW)
- Child safety awareness training sessions (Vic.Tas Synod)
- Workplace Equality and Respect project – 'Our Watch' – to drive cultural change to mitigate violence against women and children (Connections UnitingCare)
- Child-safe training for all staff, volunteers and foster carers, which is also promoted to the wider community (UCWSA, UnitingCare Tasmania)
- 'Keeping Children Safe' policy with communication strategy (Vic.Tas Synod – congregations)
- Robust internal audit procedures to ensure safe practice consistently across services (Wesley Mission Queensland)
- Client Information Booklet, detailing commitment to child safety (Wesley Mission Victoria)
- Commitment to child safety addressed in CEO updates to all staff (Wesley Mission Victoria)

Two agencies (Connections UnitingCare and Uniting communities) have also introduced Child Safety Champions, who will aim to lead and further embed a child safe culture across their organisations.

Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agencies to develop a <i>public</i> commitment to/statement on child safety, to be published on agency websites and through other appropriate means.

b) Child safety is a shared responsibility at all levels of the institution

All agencies indicated that policies and procedures were in place in their organisations to ensure that child safety was a shared responsibility at all levels.

A number of agencies (42%) made explicit mention of induction policies and procedures for all new staff that had a child safety focus. These agencies also indicated recurrent training to 'refresh' staff on the importance of child safety and related expectations of employees. Three agencies specifically noted that child safety induction also extended to volunteers working for their agencies.

Other measures to encourage a child safe culture across agencies were also noted:

- Child safety handbook (Connections UnitingCare), which employees must sign to confirm they have read and understood child safety practices in the organisation.
- Internal audit processes across all programs to ensure that child safe practice is consistently applied (Wesley Mission Queensland)
- 'Team Talk Kits' distributed to managers of all programs to facilitate discussion regarding child safety with staff, including a quiz for staff designed to test their knowledge of child safety policies and procedures (Wesley Mission Victoria).

Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agencies to develop a staff and volunteer induction program that incorporates a focus on child safety and wellbeing.

c) Governance arrangements facilitate the implementation of the child safe elements and accountabilities are set by institutional leaders, at all levels of the institution's governance structures

The majority of survey respondents (92%) indicated that governance arrangements are in place in their organisations to ensure accountability in relation to child safety. One organisation (Kinross Wolaroi School) indicated the need for further development of governance mechanisms to support this.

One organisation (Wesley Mission Queensland) noted that the Royal Commission's recommendations will continue to influence the governance of programs as they continue to grow and change.

Specific governance arrangements noted by agencies included:

- Development and implementation of strategic and business plans that include a focus on child safety (Wesley Mission Queensland).
- Appointment of the CEO as a Child Safety Charter Champion (Uniting Communities).
- Appointment of Child Safety Officers throughout the organisation (Victorian Synod – Schools)
- Creation of a Child Safety Committee to drive and monitor child safety initiatives and compliance with child safety standards (Wesley Mission Victoria).

- Staff in child related work receive regular supervision and attend regular team meetings where safety is a standing agenda item (UnitingCare West).

d) Risk management strategies focus on preventing, identifying and mitigating risks to children

Over a third (35%) of agencies explicitly identified having pre-employment screening procedures in place as part of their risk mitigation and management strategies, including Working with Children Checks, Police Checks and the requirement to have a staff clearance.

Adherence to accreditation requirements was also noted by about half of the survey respondents, with these requirements being incorporated into risk management frameworks. Regular audits to check adherence are also undertaken.

One agency (Vic.Tas Synod) noted that changes to government policy (both state and Commonwealth) have required agencies to undertake more sophisticated analysis and monitoring of incidents. The need to demonstrate how change had been made to improve processes is now essential.

All agencies noted a focus on prevention strategies to mitigate risks such as, for example, undertaking quality staff training around child safety standards.

A number of agencies also have established committees to monitor and respond to risks—for example, a Risk and Clinical Care and Governance Sub Committee (Uniting, NSW), and a Quality Governance Committee (Wesley Mission Victoria).

Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agencies to develop and employ recruitment strategies that incorporate a focus on child safety – for example, testing applicants’ understanding of child safety and how to ensure this through their conduct as prospective employees. • All organisations should have risk identification and mitigation frameworks in place that clearly articulate roles and responsibilities regarding child safety.

e) Staff and volunteers comply with code of conduct that sets clear behavioural standards towards children

All but one agency reported having organisational Codes of Conduct that overarching, but incorporate child safe elements. Employees are required to read and sign the Code of Conduct in a number of agencies. The majority of agencies have specific codes of conduct for child safety, however, Uniting (NSW) and Victorian Synod (Agencies) indicated that they had general codes of conduct only, but these included a focus on child safety

A number of agencies detailed disciplinary consequences that would apply to staff who breached their Codes of Conduct.

One agency (Connections UnitingCare) noted that their code of conduct is reviewed at least on an annual basis.

Recommendations

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agencies should ensure 100% sign off from staff on acceptance of the Code of Conduct • Organisational codes of conduct should be reviewed at least on an annual basis. |
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f) *Staff and volunteers understand their obligations concerning information sharing and record keeping*

Over half of the survey respondents (64%) indicated that privacy policies were in place in their organisations to ensure that staff and volunteers maintain privacy and confidentiality in the collection and use of client information. Staff and volunteers are typically provided with training to ensure their understanding of relevant policies and procedures.

Several agencies noted that their policies were regularly revised and refreshed, as appropriate.

One agency (Vic.Tas Synod) noted the need for continued focus on improving practice regarding staff understanding of obligations, support and education options in relation to record keeping and information sharing.

Recommendations

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All agencies to introduce specific information sharing and record keeping policies that make reference to child safety • Policies to be revised/updated annually, at a minimum, or as required. |
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2. Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously

a) *Children are able to express their views and opportunities are provided to participate in decisions that affect their lives*

A number of policies and frameworks promoting children's participation in decision making processes are currently used by agencies, for example:

- Charter of Rights for Children and Young People in Care (developed by the South Australian Guardian for Children and Young People, used by UCWCSA)
- Competencies and Behavioural Indicators Framework for Service Provision – Child Focused, Child Inclusive (Uniting Communities, SA)
- Entry to Care procedure (Wesley Mission Victoria), which describes the steps necessary to inform a child or young person on the decision-making methods they can participate in.
- A child and youth friendly complaints process developed in consultation with children and young people (UnitingCare West).
- Case Workers undertake the My Star outcomes measurement tool with children, providing them with an opportunity to identify and plan how they will achieve their goals. The tool is used to review and measure progress toward achieving goals (UnitingCare West).

One agency (UnitingCare Tasmania) identified training that is undertaken with staff specifically to ensure their understanding of the need for children's participation in decision making.

Another organisation (Connections UnitingCare) observed that they were in the process of forming a Children's Consultative Committee to enable children and young people to share their views and have input into decision making processes. The agency has also developed a Child's Survey for children aged 5-12 who have used their services, to obtain direct feedback on the level of service satisfaction and opportunities for improvement.

Another agency, (Uniting, NSW) has appointed a Children's Advocate to ensure that the rights of children and young people are respected and their views heard.

Another organisation (Knox Grammar) reported the development of school-based Student Mentoring and Positive Education programs, focussed on developing and empowering students and ensuring they are informed and involved in decision-making.

A number of agencies (Wesley Mission Victoria, Uniting (NSW) and Wesley Mission Queensland) identified the need for continued focus on promoting greater participation of children and young people in decision making.

Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agencies to consider establishing reference groups consisting of children and young people, or involving children and young people in existing committees and reference groups, to ensure their voices are respected and heard.

b) The importance of friendship is recognised, and support from peers is encouraged in helping children feel safe and less isolated

Survey responses indicate opportunities for further development of mechanisms to encourage friendship and peer support—only a small number of agencies indicated strategies, policies or specific activities presently in place to facilitate this.

For example, one agency (Connections UnitingCare) indicated that it develops tailored 'goal plans' for children and families using services that may incorporate social connectedness.

Another noted its mentor program (Newington College) which operates to establish friendship groups and positive relationships with teachers.

One agency (Wesley Mission Queensland) also indicated that specific programs are in place to support friendship circles and skills.

Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further focus from agencies on strategies and mechanisms to encourage friendship and peer support is required. Examples could include friendship circles, mentoring programs, and peer support groups.

c) *Children can access sexual abuse prevention programs and information*

A limited number of agencies (including Newington College, UnitingCare Tasmania, Victorian Synod (Schools) and Knox Grammar) indicated having programs available for children to access regarding sexual abuse prevention.

One agency (UnitingCare Tasmania) indicated having a specific program to provide information on professional support for children at risk, also offered a referral service to counselling services and supports.

Another agency (Wesley Mission Queensland) noted a number of prevention programs in place, aimed at providing information to children and young people between 0-18 years regarding their concerns and needs.

One organisation (Wesley Mission Victoria) also noted its *Sexual Health and Protective Behaviours in Residential Care Procedure*, which requires program managers and senior managers to implement strategies to prevent the occurrence of problem sexual behaviour and sexually abusive behaviours in out of home care.

UnitingCare West noted that staff are trained in the delivery of the Protective Behaviours Program and utilise the strategies identifies in this program in all of their work.

Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further focus from agencies required on facilitating children's access to sexual abuse programs and information.

d) *Staff and volunteers are attuned to signs of harm and facilitate child friendly ways for children to communicate and raise their concerns*

All agencies indicated training program in place to enable staff and volunteers to recognise child safety issues and handle disclosures.

Two agencies (Victorian Synod (Congregations) and Wesley Mission Queensland) acknowledged their efforts to continue enhancing their conduct in this area, particularly through taking on-board recommendations from the Royal Commission.

Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agencies could consider using external trainers to obtain further insight and expertise on strategies to facilitate child safety and wellbeing.

3. Families and communities are informed and involved

a) *Families have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of their child and participate in decisions affecting their child*

A number of agencies (Connections UnitingCare, UnitingCare Queensland, UnitingCare Tasmania, Victorian Synod (Agencies) and Wesley Mission Victoria) indicated that they explicitly advise families of the importance of them taking part in decision making concerning the services they are accessing and setting goals.

One agency (Connections UnitingCare) indicated that active engagement approaches are outlined within the organisation's Program Practice Manuals.

Supports including mentors and counsellors are also available in some agencies (Newington College and Margaret Jurd College) to further facilitate this family involvement in decision making.

One agency (Margaret Jurd College) reported that a School Counsellor provides family therapy services, and also runs parenting groups.

Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategies to facilitate family involvement in decision-making could be included in Program Practice Manuals.

b) The institution engages in open, two-way communication with families and communities about its child safety approach and relevant information is accessible

Several agencies (Connections UnitingCare, Uniting (NSW), UnitingCare Queensland, Wesley Mission Victoria and Knox Grammar) indicated that they used information resources (for example, brochures, factsheets, annual reports and website information) to advertise their organisation's commitment to child safety and encourage communication around child safety issues with clients.

One agency (Vic.Tas Synod – Schools) noted that it holds parent information sessions to provide and receive information directly with children and their families.

Broadly, whilst it was noted by all agencies that information is provided to children and their families that come into contact with services, two organisations (Uniting (NSW) and Newington College) acknowledged the need to better develop their two-way (active) communication processes, to ensure that information from clients is also heard and responded to appropriately.

Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easily-accessible feedback mechanisms should be developed to enable children and their families to communicate more effectively with agencies and receive information in return. Opportunities for direct consultation/conversation with children and their families who receive services should be prioritised, to enable information to be received from children and their families and ensure appropriate responses.

c) Families and communities have a say in the institution's policies and practices

Several agencies (Kinross Wolaroi School, Uniting (NSW), Victorian Synod (Congregations), Wesley Mission Queensland and Wesley Mission Victoria) acknowledged that working collaboratively with, and listening to, children, parents and family members to revise and enhance policies and procedures regarding service delivery was an area requiring more attention.

One agency (Connections UnitingCare), however, noted that it was in the process of forming a Children's Consultative Committee through which to engage with children and young people and enable them to express their views regarding the organisational policies and procedures impacting on them.

Another organisation (Wesley Mission – Sydney) noted that “while [the agency] welcomes any feedback from families in the wider community, its policies and procedures are determined in accordance with our core purpose and values with a focus on industry best practice”.

Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop client satisfaction surveys (for both children and their families using services) that ask questions regarding organisational policies and practices, and particularly, opportunities for improvement to ensure child safety and wellbeing.

d) Families and communities are informed about their institution's operations and governance

A number of tools are currently used by agencies to inform families and communities about organisational operations and governance, including newsletters, annual reports, policies and frameworks that are published, and through information available on agency website.

No indication was provided, however, of any formal information sharing protocols in place in agencies concerning the timely communication of information to clients, methods of distribution and following up with clients to ensure receipt and understanding of information.

Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop information sharing protocols to clearly articulate the process that will be followed by the agency in sharing information with service users, and what mechanisms exist to follow-up on queries from clients and their understanding of the information communicated.

4. Equity is promoted and diversity respected

a) The institution actively anticipated children's diverse circumstances and responds effectively to those with additional vulnerabilities

Agencies identified the following mechanisms that are currently employed to anticipate diverse needs of children and their families:

- Cultural responsiveness training (Connections UnitingCare)
- Association with specialist agencies (for example, settlement services and Indigenous community organisations) to ensure delivery of tailored services (Connections UnitingCare)
- Implementation of a *Socially Inclusive Organisation and Employment Policy* (UnitingCare Wesley Country SA)
- Translating services available for communication with culturally and linguistically diverse clients (UnitingCare Tasmania)
- Staff training/professional learning, for example, in cultural competency (Connections UnitingCare, Kinross Wolaroi School, Victorian Synod (Schools), Wesley Mission Victoria and Newington College).

Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop diversity and inclusiveness policies that highlight the need to tailor services to appropriate accommodation the needs of children and their families with diverse backgrounds and needs.

b) All children have access to information, support and complaints processes

A number of agencies (with the exception of Uniting Communities, Victorian Synod (Schools, Agencies and Congregations), Wesley Mission Queensland, Wesley Mission (Sydney) and Pymble Ladies' College) noted that child safety frameworks and resources were publicly accessible and therefore available to children.

One agency (Connections UnitingCare) further noted, however, that it was currently developing a children's version of its organisational 'Welcome Pack', to be used by employees during their initial visit with the child and family receiving services.

Another agency (Vic.Tas Synod – Congregations) indicated that it was in the process of developing a child-focussed complaints system.

Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agencies to ensure that information, support and complaints mechanisms are accessible to children and 'child friendly' (can be read and understood by children).

c) Particular attention is paid to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with disability and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

Survey responses indicated a range of organisational views on accommodating the diverse needs of children and young people.

Some agencies indicated that cultural competency training is compulsory for all staff and volunteers to undertake (Connections UnitingCare, UnitingCare Tasmania, Wesley Mission

Victoria and Margaret Jurd College), while other agencies (UnitingCare Queensland) only encourage such training.

Two agencies (UnitingCare Wesley Country South Australia and Wesley Mission Queensland) also indicated that they have diversity Action Plans (Indigenous, culturally and linguistically diverse, LGBTI, etc.) in place and evaluate the extent to which these are effectively implemented.

One agency (Uniting Communities – SA) indicated that actively seeks input from Indigenous organisations and services to facilitate community control in service design and delivery.

Another agency (Connections UnitingCare) noted that its Program Practice Manuals included specific information on how to effectively support children from Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Guidelines on supporting children with disability will also be incorporated into future iterations of the Manuals.

Recommendation

- Consider development of organisational Action Plans in conjunction with expert organisations to ensure adherence to best practice service delivery for Indigenous, culturally and linguistically diverse and LGBTI children and young people, as well as those with disability.

5. People working with children are suitable and supported

a) Recruitment, including advertising and screening, emphasises child safety

All agencies indicated that they undertake pre-employment and placement checks for incoming staff and volunteers regarding child safety – including police checks, working with children checks, etc.

One agency (Connections UnitingCare) noted that its *Commitment to Child Safety* is published in job advertisements to assist in discouraging inappropriate applicants. Furthermore, candidates in job interviews are also asked questions regarding their understanding of child safety and how this should be practically demonstrated in their work.

It was observed by one agency (Vic.Tas Synod – Agencies) that there has possibly been an over-reliance on working with children checks and police checks to screen and recruit workers, largely due to the fact that most perpetrators are not identified via these processes or there is often a long delay in disclosure. Recruitment processes therefore need to avoid reliance on these checks as the sole mechanism to ensure a child-safe workforce.

One agency (UnitingCare West) noted that there was room for improvement in articulating and including child safety messages in their advertising.

Recommendation

- Ensure that strategies further to reliance on police and working with children checks are used to screen appropriate candidates for employment (for example, focus more on behavioural attributes testing) to ensure a cultural of child safety and wellbeing is understood and practiced.

b) Relevant staff and volunteers have working with children checks

All agencies indicated that staff and volunteers are required to have positive working with children checks in order to work in their agencies.

One organisation (Wesley Mission Victoria) noted that, since June 2016, all staff in the organisation are required to have a working with children check, irrespective of whether or not they work directly with children.

c) All staff and volunteers receive an appropriate induction and are aware of their child safety responsibilities, including reporting obligations

All but one agency (Vic.Tas Synod - Congregations) indicated that they have induction processes in place that highlight responsibilities regarding child safety and wellbeing. Vic.Tas Synod – Congregations) noted that these processes were currently being developed.

UnitingCare West observed that their staff and volunteers working in a residential setting are required to undergo a lengthy (four day) program-specific induction before they are able to work in the service area.

Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following induction, all staff should sign a statement to acknowledge understanding of, and commitment to, child safety.

d) Supervision and people management has a child safety focus

Several agencies (Connections UnitingCare, Newington College, Uniting Communities, UnitingCare Queensland, UnitingCare Tasmania, Victorian Synod (Congregations) and Wesley Mission Victoria) noted that they had clear policies in place on supervision of children, as well as procedures on safety checks.

One organisation (Wesley Mission Queensland) noted that its professional supervision and employee management strategies have been strongly influenced by the Royal Commission's outcomes.

6. Processes to respond to complaints of child sexual abuse are child focusses**a) The institution has a child focussed complaint handling policy which clearly outlines roles and responsibilities and approaches to dealing with different types of complaints**

Agencies identified the following mechanisms that are currently employed to ensure the appropriate handling of complaints:

- Trained child safety officers in place to listen and respond to complaints (Vic.Tas Synod - Schools)

- Training for all service provision staff on mandatory reporting (UnitingCare Tasmania)
- Various child safety policies and frameworks, for example:
 - Critical Incident Reporting Procedures (Connections UnitingCare)
 - Reporting Child Abuse Policy and Procedures (UnitingCare Wesley Country South Australia)
 - Safe Organisation for Children and Young People Policy (Uniting Communities)
 - Youth Services Rights and Responsibilities Charter for Young People (Uniting, NSW)
 - Child Safe, Child Friendly Risk Management Framework (UnitingCare Queensland)
 - Child-Centeredness Framework (Knox Grammar)

One agency (Wesley Mission Victoria) specifically identified the need for further improvement in this area to address requirements of children.

Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agencies could explore innovative tools to facilitate feedback and complaints processes, such as using technology, apps etc. that would be accessible to children and young people.

b) Effective complain handling processes are understood by children, staff, families and volunteers

Mechanisms to ensure clients' understanding and access to complaints mechanisms that were specifically identified by agencies include:

- Complaints Procedures brochure (Connections UnitingCare)
- Client Rights and Responsibilities resource (UnitingCare Wesley Country SA)
- During orientation to services undertaken with all clients, information presented to clients regarding how their concerns can be shared/raised, and how they will be progressed and responded to (Wesley Mission Queensland).

One agency (UnitingCare Queensland) observed that contact details and the process for making a complaint were made available on the organisation's website. Another agency (Wesley Mission Queensland) reported that information on how concerns and complaints can be raised by clients is made available during all orientation to service and information sessions.

One agency (UnitingCare Tasmania) noted that contact details for the Child Protection Office (or equivalent) in the relevant state or territory were also made available to clients.

Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear explanation (visual, if possible) of complaints and feedback processes to be provided to all clients upon commencement of service delivery.

c) *Complaints are taken seriously, responded to promptly and thoroughly and reporting, privacy and employment law obligations are met.*

All agencies indicated having effective processes in place to identify and respond to complaints in accordance with reporting, privacy and employment law obligations.

Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure transparency and clarity around process, agencies should, if possible, indicate their commitment to investigating and resolving formal client complaints within a finite time period (for example, 10 business days)

7. Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training

a) *Relevant staff and volunteers receive training on the nature and indicators of child maltreatment, particularly institutional child sexual abuse*

All agencies reported that training is undertaken by all staff regarding children at risk, as well as mandatory and safe practices for working with children (broadly, annually or biannually).

One agency noted that it presents a quarterly report the Executive Leadership Team that includes information about training provided and under development (UnitingCare Queensland).

Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All training materials to be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure their effectiveness and quality.

b) *Staff and volunteers receive training on the institution's child safe practices and child protection*

All agencies reported that training to staff and volunteers on their organisation's child safe practices is currently provided.

One agency (Vic.Tas Synod – congregations) noted that it was developing an online training program to increase accessibility of training.

c) *Relevant staff and volunteers are supported to develop practical skills in protecting children and responding to disclosures*

Agencies broadly indicated that employees, staff and volunteers appeared to feel encouraged and supported to ensure child safe practice through their conduct and respond to disclosures. Mechanisms to determine and monitor this included staff surveys (Connections UnitingCare), professional development and mentoring (UnitingCare Tasmania) and feedback through staff training and development (Wesley Mission Victoria,

Wesley Mission (Sydney), Wesley Mission Queensland, Victorian Synod (Schools) and UnitingCare Queensland).

One agency (Connections UnitingCare) reported that it runs a survey with employees that asks a specific questions regarding whether or not staff feel comfortable in raising a child safety concern. 98% of respondents indicated that they felt supported.

Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make use of resources such as employee surveys to determine whether or not staff feel supported and capable to protect and respond to child safety concerns that are raised.

8. Physical and online environments minimise

a) Risks in the online and physical environment are identified and mitigated without compromising a child's right to privacy and healthy child development

Agencies identified a number of processes in place to facilitate online and physical safety, however, observed that safety in the online environment was an area requiring further focus. Mechanisms currently in place were identified as follows:

- Monitoring filters for IT services provided (Newington College, UnitingCare Wesley Country South Australia, Uniting (NSW), UnitingCare Tasmania, Wesley Mission Queensland, Wesley Mission Victoria, and Knox Grammar)
- Privacy and confidentiality policies (UnitingCare Wesley Country South Australia, Uniting (NSW), UnitingCare Tasmania, Wesley Mission Queensland, Wesley Mission Victoria, Knox Grammar, Victorian Synod (Agencies).
- Training for staff, particularly in ensuring a safe physical environment for clients and identifying risks in an online environment, such as cyber bullying (UnitingCare Wesley Country South Australia).
- All electronic devices that children have access to have standard filters and children and staff are educated about the safe use (and potential dangers) of engaging in social media and other internet-based technologies (UnitingCare West).

One agency (Connections UnitingCare) noted that its “staff attend regular home visits in the pre-legalisation (period prior to placement) phase” and provide children with the opportunity to speak to the worker one on one, which provides an outlet for the child to raise any concerns.

Another agency (Wesley Mission – Sydney) advised that, for its out of home care services, foster carers receive training with respect to the physical environment of which they are in control of, as well as training to assist them in monitoring a child's exposure to online and physical environmental risks.

It was observed by one agency (Vic.Tas Synod – Agencies) that whilst it had some relevant policies in place, further consideration of relevant policies/processes to ensure online safety, in particular, was required.

b) The online environment is used in accordance with the institution's code of conduct and relevant policies

Broadly, survey respondents reported aligning their organisational codes of conduct with policies related to online safety, although some acknowledged this as an area requiring further consideration and attention (Victorian Synod – Agencies and Congregations).

One organisation (Connections UnitingCare) observed that it was in the process of developing a Child Safety Handbook that will include considerations relating to the online environment.

Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In addition to measures (required or undertaken proactively by agencies) to ensure physical safety in the environments that children receive services and supports, policies, procedures and organisational guides to facilitate online safety and wellbeing should be prioritised.

9. Implementation of child safe standards is continuously reviewed and improved

a) The institution regularly reviews and improved child safe practices

Four agencies (Connections UnitingCare, Newington College, UnitingCare Queensland and UnitingCare Tasmania) indicated that child safety policies and practices are reviewed, at least, on an annual basis or as required.

One organisation (UnitingCare Wesley Country SA) observed that, per their organisation's Cyclic Policy Review Scheduler, policies and procedures are required to be reviewed every three years, or more frequently when an improvement is identified through feedback or legislative changes.

Another organisation (Uniting Communities, SA) noted that quarterly reports are prepared for the organisation's Executive Management Team regarding complaints.

It was noted by one agency (Wesley Mission Queensland) that a number of representatives across the organisation's Executive Leadership Team, as well as service managers, employees and external practice experts are engaged to inform 'best practice' in the organisation and review its policies to ensure they are relevant and responsive.

Another agency (Wesley Mission Victoria) also reported that it had established a Child Safety Committee to monitor the implementation of actions in response to Child Safe Standards.

UnitingCare West also indicated that it has established a Child Safe Working Group that meets to look at existing and additional policies that can be developed and implemented to improve the safety of the children accessing their services.

Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If possible, agencies should aim to schedule (at least) an annual review of their child safe practices. • Where possible, expertise from within and outside the organisation should be drawn on to support the development of best practice in child safety policies, procedures and activities.

b) Complaints and concerns are analysed to identify causes and systemic failures to inform continuous improvement

Survey respondents identified a number of tools used to facilitate their complaints processes, for example:

- Grievance Resolution Flowchart, to inform clients and assist staff in complaints resolution (UnitingCare Wesley Country SA)
- Online incident management systems – for example, the ‘Riskman’ system (Vic. Tas Synod – Congregations)
- Quality, Risk and Compliance framework, incorporating a dedicated compliments and complaints program (Wesley Mission – Sydney)

Half of the survey respondents explicitly identified that their Executive Leadership teams have involvement in the resolution and analysis of complaints.

10. Policies and procedures document how the institution is child safe

a) Policies and procedures address all child safe organisation elements

All but one agency indicated having in place policies and procedures that address all child safe organisation elements (The latter agency, Kinross Wolaroi School, reported that it was currently in the process of updating its policies.)

One agency (Somerville) reported that it implements the Safeguarding Children Accreditation Program, aimed at systematically building the capacity of organisations to keep children and young people safe from abuse and exploitation by staff, volunteers or other individuals.

Another agency (UnitingCare West) indicated that it was exploring the potential of undertaking accreditation as a Child Safe Organisation.

b) Policies and procedures are accessible and easy to understand

Several agencies indicated that their organisational policies and procedures are produced in plain English to facilitate ease of understanding (Uniting (NSW), Connections UnitingCare, UnitingCare Queensland and Wesley Mission Victoria).

One agency (Vic.Tas Synod – Congregations) noted that, in addition to electronic resources, hard copy resources are also made available to staff and volunteers who may not have the ability to access or use technology.

Another agency (UnitingCare West) observed that any new or updated policies and procedures are placed on the organisation's internal learning portal, and all staff are required to read and answer questions to demonstrate that they have understood information provided. Staff compliance with, and completion of, the online learning modules is monitored by both Line Managers and the organisation's People Services Department.

For use of appropriate resources by those outside the organisation, it was suggested by one agency that more consideration be given to accessibility for people with disability and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Recommendations

- All agencies should ensure that policies and procedures are written in easy-to-understand language, to facilitate ease of understanding by staff and volunteers.
- Consideration should be given to how resources can be made most accessible for people with disability and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- As possible and appropriate, electronic resources should also be replicated as hard-copy publications to facilitate access by those who have limited IT access or skills.

c) Stakeholder consultation informs the development of policies and procedures

Two agencies noted specific tools and platforms established to inform the development of policies and procedures:

- Children's Consultative Committee (Connections UnitingCare)
- Stakeholder Consultation Policy, which requires regular surveys seeking feedback from clients, staff and other organisations worked with (UnitingCare Wesley Country SA) can we say what, if anything, the others do?

Other agencies (Kinross Wolaroi School, Uniting Communities, UnitingCare Queensland, UnitingCare Tasmania, Wesley Mission Queensland, Wesley Mission Victoria, Knox Grammar) referred broadly to 'engagement processes' and policies being in place to engage with stakeholders and take on board feedback.

One agency (Wesley Mission Queensland) acknowledged that recommendations from the Royal Commission will continue to influence their processes in relation to engaging with, and acting on, feedback from stakeholders.

Recommendations

- All agencies to develop stakeholder (internal and external) consultation platforms and processes to inform the development and enhancement of policies and procedures.
- If possible, agencies should aim to schedule (at least) an annual review of their child safe practices.
- Where possible, expertise from within and outside the organisation should be drawn on to support the development of best practice in child safety policies, procedures and activities.

d) Leaders champion and model compliance with policies and procedures

The following specific examples were provided by survey respondents to demonstrate how leaders champion and model compliance with policies and procedures:

- Child Safety Champions appointed, who are trained in, and deliver, specialised child safety training programs across the agency (Connections UnitingCare).
- Group Executives in the organisation address child safe culture elements in annual performance meetings, where applicable (UnitingCare Queensland).
- Policies and procedures promoted through CEO updates to staff (Wesley Mission Victoria)
- Draft policies, as appropriate, circulated to staff and parents for input, prior to review by senior management (UnitingCare Tasmania)

Another agency (UnitingCare Wesley Country South Australia) noted that staff and volunteers are made aware of relevant policies and procedures at induction.

e) Staff and volunteers understand and implement the policies and procedures

Several agencies (UnitingCare Tasmania, Victorian Synod (Congregations), Wesley Mission Queensland, Wesley Mission Victoria, and Knox Grammar) indicated that training is undertaken with staff prior to new policies and procedures being implemented, as well as with new employees, as part of organisational induction processes.

One agency (Wesley Mission Victoria) reported that it uses 'Team Talk Kits', which include a quiz to test staff knowledge on child safety procedures and reporting obligations.