Safe Environments For All Framework

Safe Environments For All: A Church where God's children can flourish, where all are welcomed, valued and respected

Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide
Living Catholic

Archdiocesan Child Protection Unit

Theological Context

At the heart of Christian faith is the recognition that every child is born in the love of God and that, throughout their lives, God moves toward each of them in love at every moment. The inherent dignity of these lives could not find more striking expression than in Jesus' encounters with children as they are related to us in the gospels. In one passage of Mark's gospel, in which Jesus is conversing with his disciples, the disciples seek to move some children out of the way because they see the children as intruding. But Jesus places the children into the midst of the disciples, insisting that the Kingdom of God belongs to them. He then explains: "whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it" (Mk 10:15). For Jesus, children are models of lives lived in openness to God.

Safe Environments for All focuses on the structures and life of the Archdiocese of Adelaide, aiming to ensure that our communities always provide a context in which children can flourish. This is not simply a matter of articulating policy, as important as that is, but of continually transforming the life of the Archdiocese. We aim to foster a community that is "child-friendly," in which every child knows they are welcome, supported, and precious to God. Our communal life must foster the emerging identity of every one of our children, so that they can discover anew the depth of God's love for them.

Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray.

The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said.

'Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.'

Matthew 9:13-14

A Safe Environment for All is one which provides children, families and individuals with a welcoming, nurturing, child-friendly environment which is free from risk of harm and abuse. It ensures the active presence of children and meeting of children's rights: children's views are respected and listened to and they are engaged about issues that affect them. An organisation which embraces a S*afe Environment for All* approach has clear policies and procedures for the protection of children and young people, including protocols for reporting and responding to abuse and neglect.

Policies and protocols are transparent, adhered to, implemented and evaluated and reviewed. Safe governance and commitment to children's rights, and those with vulnerabilities, underpins all practices. These values and practices are modelled across all levels of leadership and in recruitment and personnel supervision. A S*afe Environment for All* is evident in an organisational culture which prioritises the protection of children and young people and where there is open communication.

A safe organisation ensures the ongoing provision of education, training, professional development and culturally and linguistically appropriate resources which provide a foundation for building continuous leading practice. Risks are managed: capacity is built.

Background

The South Australian Child Protection Council was first established in 2004 and supported by a Child Protection office. This governing body was instrumental in guiding child safe initiatives and founded the South Australian Catholic Child Protection Council Charter which directed the Council to work towards child safe environments. Child Protection Policy was developed in 2006 and later reviewed in 2009 and 2017. This policy determines the Catholic Church's commitment and responsibilities towards promoting a child safe environment where children have the right to be heard, protected and nurtured to reach their full potential. Implementation Procedures were created in 2009 to assist the Catholic Church Community and Archdiocesan clergy, religious, employees and volunteers to understand their mandatory responsibilities and obligations to implement the policy. These procedures underpin four key elements to promote and oversee the safety and well-being of children and young people as follows; Faith and Culture, Governance, Human Resources practices and Training.

Integrity in Ministry and Integrity in the Service of the Church, resource documents developed by the National Committee for Professional Standards provide guidance, principles and behavioural standards for clergy, religious, employees and volunteers.

Introduction

The Safe Environments for All framework provides a consistent, measurable approach to safeguarding practice within the Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide through the implementation of five key strategic goals and organisational requirements which support leading practices in child abuse prevention and intervention. This framework has been developed by drawing on the existing policies and procedures and from consideration of key national and international literature with the aim to address gaps in practice, enhance existing initiatives, and monitor compliance through identifying and managing risk and strengthening a culture which prioritises child safety.

This framework creates a program which focuses on listening, engaging, and empowering children and young people to express their gifts through enabling their participation and presence in all areas of faith. Its purpose is to further embed child safe practices through raising awareness of organisational requirements and to increase the effective implementation of policies, procedures and safeguarding initiatives that contribute to and promote safe environments for all.

The Safe Environments for All framework also draws on the rights of children outlined in the 'UN Convention on the Rights of the Child' and reflects the wider commitment of the Archdiocese of Adelaide to ensuring the rights of children are realised and respected.

The Truth Justice and Healing Council, in the 'Child Safe Institutions Submission' to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, articulates the Australian Catholic Church's commitment t*o "endeavour to repair the wrongs of the past, to listen to and hear victims, to put their needs first, and to do everything we can to ensure a safer future for children"* (October, 2013*).* The Submission affirms that the Australian Catholic Church is wholly committed to "strategies that promote child safe organisational environments" (2013, p.6). The Council describe nine elements that support attainment of a child safe organisation: "a protective child centred organisational culture, 'child aware' leadership, continuous risk management strategies, implementation of a child protection policy, effective human resource practices, effective investigation processes, accreditation, children's empowerment and victim support'' (2013, p.37).

The framework is underpinned by both risk management and community capacity building models to foster opportunities for continuous improvement. In this context these models are defined as follows:

Risk Management – to identify, analyse, evaluate and treat risk. Risk management is integral to the decision making processes of the organisation to support attainment of objectives. It creates value, monitors and reviews and is a means for reflection and action. It aims for grassroots solutions to problems.

Community Capacity Building – to *s*trengthen the skills, competencies and abilities of people and communities to achieve measurable and sustainable results. To promote empowerment and participation, to engage the hearts and minds within the organisation to develop and create cultural change.

The Safe Environments for All framework has five key strategic goals that together form an integrated approach to providing safety for children, young people and those with vulnerabilities.

Within each Goal is a set of essential organisational requirements;

Goal 1: Empowerment of Children and Young People: Across the Archdiocese all Church bodies are working to ensure effective mechanisms and practices that support the active and respectful participation of children and young people.

Goal 2: Organisational Structures: Across the Archdiocese the organisational structures and culture maximise safe environments for all through;

- built environments,
- leadership and governance,
- human resource practices

Goal 3: Responding to Child Protection Allegations: Across the Archdiocese all clergy, religious, employees and volunteers know, understand and act on their responsibilities with respect to child protection, investigation and support processes.

Goal 4: Information and Communication: Across the Archdiocese exists a system of culturally relevant and appropriate knowledge transfer that communicates commitment to the values and attainment of Safe Environments for All and provides relevant information in a timely way.

Goal 5: Education and Training: Across the Archdiocese training and development delivers a standardised approach to transference of knowledge. This ensures the competency of individuals to perform their ethical and legal responsibility to recognise indicators of abuse and neglect and implement reporting guidelines.

Goal 1: Empowerment of Children and Young People

Across the Archdiocese all Church bodies are working to ensure effective mechanisms and practices that support the active and respectful participation of children and young people.

The empowerment of children and young people is the first goal in the *Safe Environments for All* framework. This positioning reflects its importance.

Empowerment of children and young people is a crucial element in child safe organisations. Organisations that work to support and protect children need to be places where children are welcome and able to voice their views, concerns and feel safe. Their opinions are heard, listened to and taken into account in organisational practices and matters that affect them (Government of South Australia, 2012: 18). This requires an open organisational culture and environment where there is active leadership to both advocate the empowerment of children and young people, and address the organisational structures which work against enabling practices.

Requirements:

- Leaders at all levels within the Archdiocese act from an awareness of power differentials and respect the physical and emotional boundaries between adults, children and young people;
- There is a sound awareness and visibility of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and this is promoted as the foundation for child protection;
- Within the Church body there is a culture which welcomes children, young people and families and mechanisms are in place for their active participation in decisions that affect them, where they feel heard and valued;
- Throughout the Archdiocese there are effective practices for the engagement of children and young people in the design and evaluation of policies, initiatives and environments which are safe and child friendly;
- The Church body implements processes where children are informed of their rights and have access to pathways for voicing concerns or providing feedback ;
- The Church body establishes active partnerships with organisations which work to empower, encourage and support the development of children and young people.

Goal 2: Organisational Structures

Across the Archdiocese the organisational structures maximise safe environments for all through A) built environments, B) governance and leadership; C) human resource practices and policy and delivery systems reflect this commitment.

A. Built Environment

Preventative strategies to increase safety for all should place attention on how buildings, rooms, corridors and walkways, amenities, roads and grounds are constructed and accessed, and how transparency and visibility of spaces can be maximised. Sexual abuse of children is known to occur, as Professor Smallbone writes, in "places where risk of detection is low" (2013, p.6[1]). Children need to be safe and feel safe from violence and abuse in the physical environments across the Archdiocese and this requires a protective built environment.

Requirements:

- Policy within the Archdiocese recognise the design of the built environment as a factor in creating child safe environments and this is reflected in systems and safeguarding initiatives;
- Audit processes and risk assessments are implemented to analyse the built environment and determine strategies for managing the safety and wellbeing of children and young people;
- Children and young people are consulted on the design and safety of built environments and this feedback is reflected in Archdiocesan practices.
- Within the built environment there is a culture and visible signs that welcome children and young people.

B. Governance and Leadership

Safe organisational environments for children, young people and vulnerable others require governance structures and processes in place that operate from the principles of children's rights and commitment to prioritising the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, to ensure the operational protective policies and practices. The Truth Justice and Healing Council write: "Those responsible for leadership and governance of 'child-safe' organisations lead by example in ensuring that protecting children is a priority of the organisation' (Submission: Child Safe Institutions, 2013, p. 14).

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[1] Smallbone, S. (2013) Report of Professor Stephen Smallbone to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, YMCA Case.

<u>Requirements:</u>

- Child Protection Policy is implemented and outlines the principles, guidelines and action for responding to child abuse and neglect demonstrating the Archdiocese's commitment to the safety of children.
- Organisational culture and leadership is attentive and committed to child safety, vulnerable others and seeks to strengthen safeguarding initiatives;
- There is a delegation structure which identifies leadership responsibilities within the organisation for safe environments for all
- Governance processes demonstrates an open and aware culture where there is ongoing discussion within the organisation which prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children and young people;
- Leadership engages in risk assessments about child safety and develops related risk management plans
- Systems are in place which monitor compliance with child protection measures;
- Leadership exercises quality assurance and improvement practices using information about performance in creating safe environments for all;

C. Human Resources

Human Resource practices are a critical element in the delivery and maintenance of a *safe environment for all* and requires an organisational focus on people and culture

Human Resources purpose is to manage the processes and conditions by which people are recruited and engaged, inducted into the culture and values of the organisation, supervised and supported in the work they do, through personnel development, review and workforce planning.

<u>Requirements:</u>

- Mandatory screening processes, child related checks and assessments are implemented;
- All decisions made when assessing the suitability of Archdiocesan clergy, religious, employees and volunteers are based on the principle of safe environments for all;
- Policies and systems are in place which manage safe recruitment and initiate a program of induction for all new Archdiocesan clergy, religious, employees and volunteers inclusive of reference checks, signing of code of conducts, work, health and safety and role descriptions;
- All Archdiocesan clergy, religious, employees and volunteers are informed of best practice guidelines for interacting with children and young people and expectations for implementing protective practices
- Processes are in place to provide support and supervision for Archdiocesan clergy, religious, employees and volunteers, to maintain good child safe practices.

Goal 3: Responding to Child Protection Allegations

Across the Archdiocese all clergy, religious, employees and volunteers understand and act on their responsibilities with respect to child protection investigation and support processes.

Safe Environments for All has transparent procedures that make clear the process for identifying, responding and reporting child abuse and neglect in order to minimize the risk of harm to children and young people, and the means to take a preventative, proactive and participatory stance on child protection. This includes the provision of appropriate support processes.

Requirements:

- All Archdiocesan clergy, religious, employees and volunteers fulfil mandatory notification responsibilities as required under State Government legislation to notify the Department for Child Protection if there is suspicion on reasonable grounds that a child or young person has been or is at risk of being abused or neglected;
- Procedures are in place which provide a step by step guidance on what action to take and how to respond if there are concerns about a child or young person's safety;
- There is a nominated Child Safe Contact Person or group responsible for the safety and wellbeing of children and young people within Church bodies and this person has a clear set of responsibilities which they understand and are supported to fulfil;
- There is an established process for listening to children and young people and responding to concerns or complaints about behaviour towards a child;
- There are clear record systems in place and Archdiocesan clergy, religious, employees and volunteers are familiar with best practice principles for sharing and documenting information;
- There are mechanisms for support to those impacted by child abuse and there are clear guidelines for how they will be accessed, communicated and implemented.

Goal 4: Information and Communication

Across the Archdiocese exists a system of culturally relevant and appropriate knowledge transfer that communicates commitment to the attainment of Safe Environments for All.

Effective organisational programs to build safe environments for all need open communication systems that convey the underpinning values and commitment, and inform multiple parties about the organisation's policies and practices.

Requirements:

- The policy for protecting children and young people is current and regularly reviewed;
- The principles and practices of *Safe Environments for All are broadly communicated;*
- A statement which demonstrates the Archdiocese commitment to safeguarding children and young people is visible and embedded into the culture of the organisation;
- Communication practices are open and transparent especially in environments where Archdiocesan clergy, religious, employees and volunteers are working directly with children and young people;
- The Safe Environments for All framework is actively promoted during National Child Protection Week, forums and discussions within the Archdiocesan setting about child protection.
- The Child Protection Unit leads the development of culturally appropriate and contextually relevant material about child safe environments, and this is accessible to Leadership and relevant organisations within the Archdiocese;
- Resources which support and protect children and young people are made available and promoted

Goal 5: Education and Training

Across the Archdiocese training and development delivers a standardised approach to transference of knowledge which ensures the competency of individuals to perform their ethical and legal responsibility to recognise indicators of abuse and neglect and implement reporting guidelines.

Education and accredited training provides Archdiocesan clergy, religious, employees and volunteers with the opportunity to learn, acquire knowledge, skills and expertise in relation to child safe environments, raising the individual's awareness and responsibility to care and protect children, young people and others in the community. The Child Protection Unit is the key facilitator of the provision of Child Safe Environments Training and development of child safe initiatives, education and resources materials.

Requirements:

- An Archdiocesan training framework which incorporates different levels of culturally appropriate training to develop knowledge and expertise in child protection and child safe environments, and the relevant Church policies on safeguarding children and young people;
- Ongoing training and development is provided to support Archdiocesan clergy, religious, employees and volunteers responsibilities in maintaining appropriate professional boundaries and codes of conduct;
- Leadership develops positive culture which engages child safe initiatives and builds the capacity of Archdiocesan clergy, religious, employees and volunteers to be competent in protecting children through professional development and supervision;
- Education is available for children and young people about protective practices and the values of the organisation;
- There is an open organisational culture which is aware of child abuse and resources initiatives which seek to strengthen child safe environments.