



**Submission to the Royal Commission into  
Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse:  
Responding to complaints of child sexual abuse in institutions.**

**Submitted by the Jewish Community Council of Victoria (JCCV)**

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**The JCCV**

The Jewish Community Council of Victoria (JCCV) is the peak body for Victorian Jewry, representing over 52,000 Jews living in Victoria. Victoria boasts the largest Jewish community in Australia. The JCCV is comprised of 54 Jewish community organisations, including educational, welfare, religious, social, youth, sporting and communal organisations. It has acted as the voice of Victorian Jewry for 78 years, and is particularly active in the areas of social justice, community welfare, social inclusion and social cohesion.

JCCV affiliates vary in size from Jewish Care with about 600 staff and 400 volunteers, through Jewish schools with hundreds to over a thousand students, to small community organisations run by volunteers and without any employed staff.

**JCCV actions to improve institutional responses**

In July 2011, the JCCV issued a strong and unequivocal statement about its stance on child abuse, asking that all those with knowledge of alleged abuses to contact the police and offered assistance. This was followed by a joint statement from the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, the Jewish Community Council of Victoria, the Organisation of Rabbis of Australia and the Rabbinical Council of Victoria.

In June 2012, the JCCV issued a statement to the media and our Affiliate members which was published in the Australian Jewish News, which reiterated the position of the JCCV and included:

“Child abuse in any form whatsoever and wheresoever it happens, is horrific and beyond understanding. When child abuse occurs either within a home, or within an institution, where a child expects safety and guidance and understanding, the hurt

and the bewilderment are exacerbated. The ramifications, on the victims, on their families and indeed on our entire community, are life-long and cause untold damage.”

The JCCV developed a Child Protection Policy, which was ratified by the JCCV Plenum of Affiliate members in November 2012, and entered into the JCCV Policy Platform.

In March 2013, the JCCV made a submission to the Victorian Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and other Non-Government Organisations. The JCCV President at the time Nina Bassat AM and the JCCV Executive Director David Marlow gave evidence at the Victorian Inquiry in April 2013.

Also in April 2013, there was a presentation to and open discussion with the JCCV Council of Presidents, which is the forum of the presidents of the Affiliate organisations of the JCCV, where the issues surrounding child sexual abuse were raised, and the importance of clear and effective policies and procedures was highlighted.

A Child Protection Directory was developed by the JCCV, including contacts for child protection reporting of incidents, counselling services and training which was distributed to community organisations, and is available on the front page of the JCCV website at <http://www.jccv.org.au/child-protection-directory.html>.

In mid 2013, the JCCV held a forum on Child Protection in Jewish community organisations with Dr Joe Tucci, CEO of the Australian Childhood Foundation as keynote speaker. There were over 50 participants from a wide variety of Jewish schools, Synagogues, welfare organisations, youth groups and other communal bodies.

The JCCV then commenced design and rollout of a comprehensive five session x half day training program for Jewish community organisations to understand the risks, to help identify red flags, and to help in developing policies and procedures to protect children from sexual abuse. The delivery of the training to organisations commenced in March 2014, with two additional rounds of training delivered in 2015. Additional workshops were provided to assist schools and Synagogues formulate and document policies and procedures.

We have seen significant cultural change across many community organisations with over 100 community organisation leaders and Rabbis participating in the JCCV training, representing over 40 organisations, including all the Jewish day schools, the United Jewish Education Board, over a dozen of the major Synagogues, youth groups, sporting, welfare organisations, Tzedek, the Jewish Taskforce Against Family Violence, Australian Jewish Psychologists, Hatzolah and Jewish Care Victoria.

Over a dozen Rabbis from Ultra-Orthodox, Orthodox, Conservative and Progressive streams of Judaism have actively participated in the training. We are also aware that a significant group of congregational Rabbis have undergone training organised by the Rabbinical Council of Victoria and delivered by the Australian Childhood Foundation.

The JCCV training was designed and delivered by Katherine Levi, a highly qualified professional with over 20 years of experience working with youth at risk. Katherine was CEO of the Australian Council for Children and Youth Organisations (ACCYO) for 4 years and CEO of Big Brothers – Big Sisters for 6 years. Katherine also developed the Safeguarding Children Program.

The training program included:

- A clear understanding of child sexual abuse, grooming behaviours and indicators/red flags
- The risks to children and young people within organisations
- The skills required to minimise risks within an organisational setting
- The ability to incorporate prevention strategies into organisational culture, policies and procedures including recruitment, screening, induction and physical safety
- A child protection code of conduct
- Skills to deal effectively with a suspected, witnessed or alleged incident of abuse.

In February 2015, the attached media release was issued by JCCV to media and the community discussing the Royal Commission, the importance of supporting victims and the activities of the JCCV in helping to build a safe community for our children.

In early 2015, Martin West, a representative of the Department of Justice presented to JCCV's Plenum of Affiliates on the new law on the Working With Children Checks for religious leaders. We have continued to communicate to our Affiliates and other Jewish community organisations about the recommendations and new legislative requirements flowing from the Victorian Inquiry.

Current plans include:

- Training for Jewish community organisations in the new Child Protection standards and reporting requirements legislated in Victoria.
- Actively encouraging Jewish community organisations to seek accreditation with the Australian Childhood Foundation to help ensure that policies and procedures, and a culture of Child Protection are embedded into our community organisations.

## **Best practice principles**

### *General*

Relating to section 1.2 Terminology, we believe that 'the accused' should also include any person who is alleged to have participated in grooming a child.

Working with Children Checks and Police Checks should at all times be performed on a national basis to avoid perpetrators escaping detection by moving jurisdictions. Although we recognise that these checks are not the be-all and end-all of child protection, they are important steps in the process.

Thought should be given by the Royal Commission to people with intellectual or communication disabilities being covered by the same protections as children, as they can be susceptible to the same risks, if not greater.

### *Complaint handling*

The JCCV fully supports the best practice principles for effective complaint response outlined in the Consultation Paper.

Internal organisation complaint processes can be tricky, and sometimes, as case studies have shown, ineffective if the perpetrator or suspected perpetrator is a senior official of an organisation. There needs to be an independent, well communicated central point outside the organisation where whistle-blowers or complainants can report incidents and allegations, especially for in the cases where offenders may be senior in an organisation or there is danger of recrimination for reporting.

Protecting children should formally be given precedence by legislation over privacy or defamation law, to remove a barrier to reporting.

In the case of historical complaints, an important part of the complaint handling process should include reaching out to the community and possible victims of the past, such as through letters to past students/congregants, newsletters or advertisements in newspapers. This should be done to seek other victims to come forward and to offer counselling and other support.

### *Complaint handling oversight*

Oversight of responses to complaints of child sexual abuse in institutions should be nationalised to ensure a standard process across the country and to help ensure that perpetrators cannot easily escape across jurisdictions.

A national body should be appointed to replace the roles currently undertaken by the NSW Ombudsman with respect to reportable allegations and the Victorian Commission for Children and Young People under the Victorian reportable conduct scheme. This would allow a national body to have one database of incidents and offenders across the country, rather than one per state.

The role of the national body should include:

- Provision of education and provision of advice to organisations to assist in implementation of appropriate policies, procedures and complaints handling processes
- receiving of reports of allegations and incidents
- ensuring that police and/or DHS are appropriately advised
- development and implementation of audit processes to ensure compliance, that organisations have implemented policies, staff are aware of policies, complaints registers are in place, and that organisations actually do report appropriately

- appropriate information sharing across agencies to help ensure effective investigations

We would encourage that the scope of the national oversight mechanism be the same as under the Victorian reportable conduct scheme, but recognise that the category 2 organisations under the Victorian scheme will need significant hand holding to reach full compliance due to limited expertise and resources in most of those organisations. Category 1 organisations will have substantially more experience and typically more resources to comply with reporting and compliance regimes.

#### *Advice and support for institutions*

The JCCV, as the peak body for the Jewish community, is well placed to act as a reference and directory point for organisations seeking advice and support, but has very limited resources to provide advise and support with only 3.5 staff. The JCCV could certainly assist in the process by providing training on standards, development of policies, processes and procedures, and the essential steps for compliance with complaint handling requirements.

#### *Perpetrators in the community*

Consideration must also be given to how communities and organisations should handle situations where perpetrators, whether returning to their local community from prison or from elsewhere such as overseas, are residing close to schools, community buildings, places of worship and otherwise close to children. Prison sentences can be short, overseas offenders may have no restrictions upon them and some may for whatever reason be free in the community, such as on bail or parole. What can communities and organisations do in these circumstances to ensure the safety of children.

We commend the Royal Commission for their work, which has brought difficult issues to the forefront to be addressed, and encouraged open discussion on child abuse so that victims can be properly treated, incidents effectively reported and perpetrators appropriately dealt with, and most importantly our children protected. Please direct any queries to our Executive Director, David Marlow, on 03 9272 5642 or [david@jccv.org.au](mailto:david@jccv.org.au)



Jennifer Huppert  
JCCV President

**Jewish community supports the victims**

4 February 2015

As the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse hears testimony from members of the Jewish community, the Jewish Community Council of Victoria (JCCV) reiterates its support for victims of child sexual abuse and their families, and welcomes the opportunity provided by the Royal Commission for them to tell their stories.

We are following the proceedings of the Royal Commission closely by livestream and we are all devastated by any and every case of child sexual abuse. The JCCV strongly supports reporting to police and other appropriate secular authorities, as well as full cooperation with the authorities during investigations. Our children must be protected from future abuse.

All victims should be treated with respect, decency and compassion, and we recommend directing victims to appropriate counselling and support services such as provided by organisations listed in the online JCCV Child Protection Directory.

Contacts for child protection reporting of incidents, counselling and training are available in the Child Protection Directory of the JCCV website at <http://www.jccv.org.au/child-protection-directory.html>.

We strongly advise all community organisations to implement effective child protection policies and practices, and to ensure that these are communicated to all stakeholders, including parents and staff.

To this end, over 60 leaders and staff from 20 Jewish community organisations participating in an extensive program of JCCV child protection policy and procedures training in 2014, including a diverse range schools, synagogues and community groups.

The remaining Jewish day schools have signed up with some other organisations for the training in 2015, so that all Jewish schools will have participated in the JCCV training by mid-2015.

The training has been designed by and is being delivered by Katherine Levi, a highly qualified professional with 20 years of experience working with youth at risk. She was CEO of the Australian Council for Children and Youth Organisations (ACCYO) for 4 years and CEO of Big Brothers – Big Sisters for 6 years. Katherine also developed the Safeguarding Children Program.

We strongly urge community organisations to implement what they have learned, and for the community to insist that the organisations they are connected with can demonstrate to them that they have a policy in place and abide by it.

Jennifer Huppert, JCCV President said, “Having all the schools and a wide range of community organisations involved is a great achievement for the community. We should note that this is the start of an ongoing process of protecting children, not the end of it.”

On Monday, the JCCV had Martin West, a representative of the Department of Justice present to its affiliates on the new law on the Working With Children Checks for religious leaders.

Media contacts

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