



**A Good Beginning
for Every Child**

Discussion Paper

Issues Paper 3: Child Safe Institutions

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse

Good Beginnings Australia Response

October 2013



Context

Good Beginnings is a national small/medium size charity that provides early intervention and parenting support programs across every State and Territory in Australia. This response to *Issues Paper 3 Child Safe Institutions* draws on service delivery experience and extensive knowledge of the communities in which Good Beginnings works. Good Beginnings programs across Australia range from universal services to targeted intensive family support programs. Good Beginnings acknowledges that it does not provide services to children and young people living in out of home care or other institutional environments; however its experience encompasses the support provided to families in order to prevent this outcome and for families in the process of reunification.

Good Beginnings can provide a unique view due to its national positioning and understanding of the challenges in each State and Territory.

Good Beginnings is of a strong view that any planning for children and young people should be done within the context of a national overarching outcomes framework. In the absence of such a framework, other frameworks (such a child safe organizations and the current National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children) can become disconnected and potentially contradictory. Good Beginnings proposes that any action taken to develop a child safe framework be done within a broader, overarching context.

Good Beginnings commends the work of *The Nest*, an initiative of the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) as providing the overarching context through promoting five outcomes that can be used to frame actions for children – loved and safe, healthy, learning, participation and have material basics.

General Feedback

Before implementing any framework it is essential to start with clear positive outcomes for children. In the absence of a national framework for child and youth wellbeing there is limited guidance on the key indicators of wellbeing for all children.

Good Beginnings is an organisation that is committed to and working actively towards creating the conditions that promote the safety, protection and participation of children. Good Beginnings has not currently sought certification as a child safe organisation. However, as an organisation Good Beginnings seeks to live its values, including one of being child-focused.

Within its own operations Good Beginnings has in place a number of structures and processes that are aimed at ensuring that the work done preserves the safety and protection of children. These includes

Recruitment, professional development and supervision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• National police and working with children screening undertaken for all new staff prior to employment. Police checks updated every two years.• Consideration of child focus at interview.• Incorporation of values into performance appraisal and supervision processes.
Policies and procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Child Protection policies and procedures in place.• Consulting with Children project to ensure the views of young children are sought, heard, advocated for and reflected in program delivery.
Organisational Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organisational values that clearly state Good Beginnings as a child focused organisation – we work to achieve what is in the best interest of the child.• Staff are encouraged and supported to speak up for children.

It is Good Beginnings' aim to review and improve these practices within a 'child safe organisation' framework and policy.

Response to the submission questions

1. The essential elements of establishing a 'child safe organisation' that protects children from sexual abuse in an institutional context. In particular, are there core strategies that should be present and others that are less critical?
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Good Beginnings is supportive of the National framework for Creating Safe Environments for Children¹ and believes that the elements outlined in schedule one (below) should be implemented in concert to ensure child safety practices are embedded into organisational settings. It is optimal that any framework is embedded into any operational practices and is not treated as a standalone mechanism. In implementation this is likely to mean aligning child safe practices with other practices such as quality or risk management frameworks.

1. Systems to ensure adaption, innovation and continuous improvement

2. Governance and culture

- a. A child safe policy
- b. Risk management
- c. A code of conduct
- d. Privacy and data collection

3. Participation and empowerment of children

- a. Enabling and promoting the participation of children
- b. Inclusive and empowering language
- c. Strategies to reduce the potential for undiscovered or ongoing harm

4. Human resources management

- a. Recruitment and selection practices acknowledge the importance of child safety
- b. Job descriptions and duty statements
- c. Staff support, supervision and performance management
- d. Complaints management and disciplinary proceedings

5. Education and training

- a. Awareness and understanding of child abuse and organisational responsibilities
- b. Support for organisations in building, maintaining and strengthening child safe capacity

2. The evidence base for the range of strategies associated with making an organisation 'child safe'. Does this evidence base extend to the physical environment?
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Given its service focus Good Beginnings is not aware of substantial evidence on strategies that could be adopted for the physical environment, but agrees this should be considered. Research on issues such as playground design, classroom design and design of public spaces would strongly contribute to recommended strategies.

3. How should the effectiveness of 'child safe' strategies be tested?

Good Beginnings has adopted an Outcome Based Accountability planning framework across all facets of its operation. Essentially this means that all strategies and activities focus on the outcome it is seeking to achieve.

Good Beginning advocates for measuring effectiveness of child safe strategies by determining and measuring the impact of strategies against broad outcomes for children and young people, rather than measuring the strategies themselves. Key principles that should be considered in these outcomes include:

- An organisation that is welcoming to children
- An organisation that recognises children are unique
- An organisation that adapts itself to respond to the needs of children with disabilities, are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- An organisation that seeks to promote child wellbeing and participation in all aspects of its operation

Developing child safe organisations and environments is a dynamic and ongoing process of learning, monitoring and reviewing and that organisational policies and processes need to reflect this.

4. How 'child safe' policies and procedures work in practice.

Implementing policies and procedures need to be aligned to the principles of child safe organizations.

State based standards (e.g. Working with Children Checks (NSW), Blue Card (Qld), Ochre Card (NT) and others) can add an administrative burden to organisations that can detract from development of positive practices.

Good Beginnings would advocate for a national standard for such checks, that have cross state validity (similar to principles applied for National Road Transport).

5. Should there be a universal framework for a 'child safe organisation' or should strategies be specifically tailored to particular types of institutional settings?

Good Beginnings supports a universal framework for 'child safe organisations', provided such a framework is aligned with an overarching outcomes framework for children and young people and incorporates the elements listed in question One.

Good Beginnings advocates for a principles-based approach. By adopting a principles-based framework organisations are availed the flexibility to adapt frameworks to the particular needs of organisation and community(ies) in which it is operating.

Codes of Practice can provide guidance on the implementation of principles, and a regulatory framework that requires organisations to implement either the Code of Practice OR to demonstrate why an alternate view is more effective in the particular instance, is one way of addressing society expectations. This may be more effective than adopting mandatory requirements for particular types of institutional settings.

6. The role of staff performance management systems and disciplinary processes in a 'child safe organisation'.

A child safe framework needs to incorporate a principle that the interest of the child exceeds other interests. For example, if an issue relating to staff behaviour is raised, any action taken by the organisation needs to seek to protect the child first and the staff member second.

7. The role and characteristics of governance and management leadership in creating and maintaining a 'child safe' organisational culture.

The role of governance and management leadership is critical in any aspect of organisational culture, both positive and negative.

Any child safe organisational standard needs to incorporate principles of child focus at all levels of the organisation, and may include concepts such as KPI's for management, senior leadership and board.

8. Should there be any additional enforceable requirements for institutions or particular institutions to maintain a 'child safe' environment?

In preparing this submission Good Beginnings reflected that, as a child focused charity, it is not required to be or assess itself as a 'child safe organisation', despite working with children and families on a daily basis.

Good Beginning is supportive of mechanisms that hold organisations to account in relation to principles for ensuring child safety. Established expected community principles will assist in the implementation of appropriate child safe policies and processes across relevant organisations.

Good Beginnings is supportive of the National framework for Creating Safe Environments for Childrenⁱ and would endorse the following approaches to ensure the safety and protection of children is maintained in institutions and organisations:

1. Introduction of *minimum standards* for demonstrating child safety in organisations and volunteer community groups working with children along with the requirement to meet these standards, particularly those targeting services directly to children and those in receipt of funding for the purpose of working with or supporting children.
2. Inclusion of 'child safety' standards within existing Quality and Accreditation processes for human services fields.

ⁱ http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/5636/NCSF_Schedule1.pdf