



# The **Salvation** Army

## Australia

### The Salvation Army Australia

*Response to the*

**Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse**

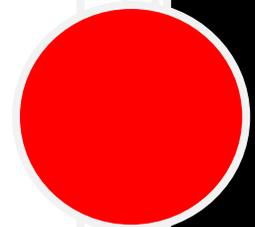
### **Issues Paper 3 – Child Safe Institutions**

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**The Salvation Army Australia**  
***Response to the***  
**Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse**  
**Issues Paper 3 – Child Safe Institutions**

**INTRODUCTION**

The Salvation Army Australia welcomes the opportunity to respond to the third issue paper on Child Safe Institutions released by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

The Salvation Army Australia has a significant history in the provision of child and youth related services and activities for children and youth at risk and with high level and multiple complex needs. In addition, The Salvation Army provides a range of support, recreational, music and family supports through its network of social support services, community centres and churches across the country.

As a national organisation providing services and programs to children and youth at risk, The Salvation Army Australia is committed to the provision of child safe practices and has adopted specific child safe programs to guide the development of processes, structures and work with its client group in both its church and social program based activities.

In making this response, The Salvation Army advocates a nationally endorsed set of principles, guiding standards and accreditation processes for the development and ongoing review of child safe institutions. The Salvation Army recognises that such a system must sit within a broader national framework that proactively supports organisations to align with and produce child safe policy, procedure and best practice principles. Such a framework is articulated in the *Creating Safe Environments for Children* guidelines developed by the Community and Disability Services Minister’s Advisory Council in 2005 and endorsed by COAG. The Salvation Army recognises that, on the basis of this work, most states and state based departments working with children have already articulated guidelines and processes for the establishment of child safe institutions but these frameworks lack the continuity, consistency and a mandate for compliance that could be achieved within a national framework. Indeed, this Issues Paper references a number of key state government frameworks that reflect similar governing principles and operational strategies to achieve child safe environments.

**About The Salvation Army**

The Salvation Army is one of the largest national providers of welfare services. Operating for over 130 years in Australia, The Salvation Army has a significant history of working with and advocating for the rights and needs of disadvantaged people in our community. Consistent with our values of human dignity, justice, hope, compassion and community, The Salvation Army is committed to the promotion of social justice and protection of the rights of disadvantaged and vulnerable people, including children and youth at risk.

The Salvation Army Australia, with an annual operating budget of approximately \$600 million, provides over 1,000 social programs and activities through a network of social support services, community centres and churches across the country.

Key services provided by The Salvation Army Australia network include:

- Children and youth at risk programs

- Out of home care services, including foster care and residential care
- Material aid and emergency relief
- Financial counselling and assistance
- Personal counselling and support
- Drug and alcohol support and treatment services
- Family and domestic violence support and accommodation services
- Accommodation and homelessness services
- Disability services
- Education, training and employment support services.

The Salvation Army Australia currently mandates specific child and church safe programs and practice guidelines for all of its church and ministry based activities involving children and youth. Both systems, *ChildSafe* and *Safe Church (Safe Salvos)* provide standards, guidelines and training consistent with providing safe organisational environments for individuals engaged in child, youth and family based activities and events. In addition, as an organisation committed to the accreditation process, The Salvation Army must comply with a range of standards that, whilst not specifically child safe in focus, address the risk management, staff recruitment and training processes, safe environments and program monitoring, evaluation and review processes articulated under the National Framework as essential to building the capacity of organisations to become child safe.

## RESPONSE TO ISSUES PAPER 3 – Child Safe Institutions

### **Question 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?**

The Salvation Army Australia strongly supports the development of nationally agreed core guiding principles for the establishment and maintenance of child safe environments, with two key caveats: firstly that these principles are non-negotiable, and secondly that no individual principle is less critical or essential within the framework.

In many ways the issues raised in this Issues paper reflect those highlighted in Issues Paper 1: on Working with Children Checks, in that there is significant intent and considerable work, but there are many players, similar ideas but little consolidation and coordination across sectors and states to bring it all together.

Significant key work has already been established for setting the parameters of the ‘child safe organisation’ and many states already have standards to guide community service organisations in the development of child safe practices with varying mechanisms for applications, compliance requirements and legislative mandates. These processes lack continuity and consistency across states, and this is especially significant for national organisations providing activities and services across the country.

Of note, in relation to a national framework is the *Creating Safe Environments for Children National Framework* established in 2005 by the Community and Disability Service Ministers’ Conference and endorsed by endorsed by COAG. This framework emphasises that whilst child safety is the responsibility of a broad range of stakeholders, including families, governments and the wider community,

“organisations have a moral and legal responsibility to ensure that children in their care are safe and that community service organisations have additional obligations because of the vulnerability of many children in their care or utilising their services.<sup>1</sup>”

The principles defined in this national approach to creating child safe organisations are:

- Centrality of the rights, interest and safety of children, that is the rights, interests and safety of children are the focus of the framework
- Respect for variation between jurisdictions
- Focus on capacity building
- Respect for natural justice and procedural fairness
- Appreciation of the complexity and cultural diversity of community services.

It must be noted however that the application of these underlying principles at the organisational level in policy, procedure and processes requires both a strategic approach and intent on behalf of organisations. However, unless such an approach is mandated through funding and/or legislative requirements, despite the good intent and best practice initiatives, organisations will be unlikely to adopt such changes.

Implementing effective child safe policies and practices is the best way for an organisation to protect the children they are involved with. There are many different systems and structures, training programs and policy dictates that describe how an organisation can become a child safe

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<sup>1</sup> The Community and Disability Service Ministers’ Conference (2005) *Creating Safe Environments for Children National Framework*

organisations. In essence, based on these myriad sources, a Child Safe Organisation should have the following core strategies:

- Child Safe policies, including policies and procedures for handling disclosures and suspicions of harm and that communication and training processes are available to all staff and volunteers
- Child Safe code of conduct, which stipulates an organisation's commitment to the principles of safe and supportive service environments is clear and shared by all
- Effective staff selection, recruitment, training and management strategies that define and encourage best practice and that enhance the safety and well-being of children and young people
- References to privacy considerations
- Clear and transparent policy and procedure for managing and reporting risk that are advertised, implemented and followed
- Encourages children and young people to participate and have an active voice in the development and review of programs and activities within the organisation
- Processes that deal effectively and in a timely manner with concerns or complaints about behaviours towards a child or young person
- Promotion and support of all staff to attend accredited child safe training
- Clear, transparent and mandated strategies for communication and support for all stakeholders including children and young people.

***Question 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?***

In terms of evidence base, The Salvation Army highlights the role of the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) as a key repository for evidence based information for developing policy and practice in relation to children's well-being and the impact of sexual abuse. A key focus area for the AIFS is to support research to enhance the evidence base for the COAG National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009 – 2020.

The Salvation Army provides a diverse range of services across the nation. These services are administratively organised from two distinct operational centres. The child safe aspects of The Salvation Army have been shaped by two distinct research based programs: *Child Safe* in our Southern Territory and *Safe Church* in the Eastern Territory. These programs have been developed specifically for church based institutions providing child and youth based services and activities. Both programs have common evidence based frameworks and reflect the principles outlined above.

Both programs include standards and processes for review of the physical environment in the provision of services and activities for children and youth.

The physical environment is indeed an essential element in the range of overall strategies associated with making an organisation 'child safe'. Situational risks and a safe physical environment are interrelated factors when it comes to a child safe organisation. The Salvation Army supports a balance between safe individuals and safe environments including a safe physical, emotional and spiritual environment for children in its programs and services.

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

A child safe strategy should be considered a 'whole of organisation' approach supported by mandated and continuous monitoring and review to ensure it remains effective and relevant to

the needs of the individuals it provides services to, employees, the organisation and to the sector.

While some of the facets of a child safe strategy may be difficult to measure specifically (e.g. respectful relationships between children to workers, workers to workers and children to children; organisational culture which is child friendly), it is possible to set indicators to measure progress towards establishing or maintaining specific strategies and compliance with specific activities. It is suggested that indicators be set against each of the National Standards that require evidence of compliance or progress towards compliance.

For example, to test the effectiveness of an organisation's child safe strategies a range of feedback measures reflecting the essential elements could be identified on a checklist and used for internal governance auditing as well as external audits. This checklist could include, but not be limited to, the following elements:

- Describe and provide evidence of how child safe policies and procedures have been implemented across the organisation
- Explain and provide evidence of the organisation's process for auditing staff to assess their knowledge and daily practice application of the organisational policies and procedures
- Describe and provide evidence of specific child safe practices within the organisation and how they are proving to be successful, where gaps may exist and how the organisation seeks to rectify issues or minimise risk
- Provide statistical and documentary evidence of reflective practice and critical analysis in the failure of child safety, identifying areas of development, analysis of why policy wasn't implemented, access of offenders to the organisation, and any other relevant information
- Post incident critical review of policy and procedural management to analyse any failure of child safety practices, with action plans to minimise recurrence.

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

An organisation's child safe policies and procedures should be integrated into its service delivery and embedded in the overall safety culture of the organisation. The child safe policies and procedures should be reviewed, measured, assessed and audited on a regular basis to ensure they remain relevant and up to date.

Policy and procedure should be clearly articulated and transparent to all staff and volunteers and mandated at the highest level of the organisation.

All staff, at all levels of the organisation, and volunteers should be trained in all aspects of child safe policy and procedures, and that this training is mandated as part of the orientation process for all new staff, with regular refresher training for all existing staff.

Records of staff training should form part of the monitoring and evaluation of an organisation's compliance with child safe practices

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

As identified earlier, The Salvation Army endorses a national framework for child safe organisations that comprises core non-negotiable standards in order to provide consistency of practice and process across the country. A national framework would ensure a comprehensive and standardised response to raising the standard of child safety across every agency and sector across the country.

A national framework must reflect best practice across the states and territories.

The Salvation Army recommends that a national accreditation process be identified in relation to working with children that applies to both government and non-government child related organisations.

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

Similar to many organisations within the not-for-profit sector, The Salvation Army has a significant workforce of both paid employees and volunteers working in child related roles. As such The Salvation Army recommends a staff performance system and disciplinary process that has the same standards for paid and unpaid workers. There should be absolute staff compliance with child safety practices across all organisations.

For religious based organisations, The Salvation Army supports the requirement that any individual holding and undertaking ministry or spiritual leadership roles, whether paid or unpaid, should adhere to organisational mandated staff management, disciplinary and other governance systems.

With reference to the National Framework for Creating Safe Environments for Children (Schedule: Guidelines for building the Capacity of Child Safe Organisations), human resource management (including staff support, supervision, performance and complaints management and disciplinary proceedings) is identified as a core foundation element in the provision of a child safe environment.

Position descriptions and orientation practices should detail the requirements of staff and volunteers to adhere to child safe practices and processes, and the accountability mechanisms to ensure compliance. All levels of organisational management should mirror and support compliance with child safety practices.

The recruitment, selection and management of the training of staff and volunteers should be structured and systematic.

Enabling organisations to become child safe requires committed resourcing. Most states, through their Commissions for Child and Youth (or equivalent) have on-line guides to support organisations to become child safe, providing toolkits, checklists, policy proformas, sample flowcharts for example.

A number of these organisations also provide free training to assist organisations in creating child safe policies and procedures, improving risk management strategies and tips and tools to make your organisation child safe and child friendly.

Whilst most of the information contained in the guides and training is similar, within the context of a national approach all resources should be reviewed to reflect nationally consistent language, guiding principles and the nationally described strategies to avoid confusion, omission and/or error. Availability of regular locally based and nationally consistent generic child safe training, supporting informational guides, will ensure and enhance a consistent and evidence based approach to the development to child safe institutions across the country.

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

Further to the above, governance and culture are similarly identified in the National Framework as core foundation elements in a child safe institution.

The Salvation Army strongly supports a number of key governance strategies to guide the development and maintenance of a child safe organisation:

- Organisational leadership actively supports and promotes an organisation as a child safe institution, responding proactively to the training and support needs of staff and volunteers, child safe policy and procedure development and risk management issues
- Policy and procedure is transparent, well understood and embedded in practice
- Risk management processes are transparent, well understood, take into account the different risk profiles associated with the range of factors specific to organisations
- Clear and transparent lines of accountability and reporting responsibilities at all levels of the organisation, with mechanisms to support staff and volunteers to voice concerns about child safety or where compliance with the framework is lacking
- Senior organisational executives are responsible for the review and management of child safety issues with specialist input from professionals employed within the organisation
- Clear guidelines to ensure children have a voice and are heard are embedded in practice and regularly reviewed. Similarly for staff and volunteers who may believe that child safety matters are not being handled in a transparent manner.

Governance and management strategies need to sit within an organisational culture that supports and facilitates disclosure of abuse and/or actual or potential risk, responds appropriately to disclosure and provides a supportive and therapeutic context for victims/survivors.

The Salvation Army strongly supports the formalisation of national accountability measures that require:

- Ongoing, open and transparent support and protection for staff and volunteers to disclose breaches of policy and to speak to external parties in circumstances where evidence supports that a child safety matter is not being addressed by management
- Senior executives to act on and manage issues of child safety within their organisation, with possible legal consequences for failure to comply with these responsibilities
- Organisational requirement to submit quarterly reports on compliance or non-compliance and issues related to compliance/non-compliance with child safety practices to an external body (i.e. equivalent to a state based Commission for Children and Young People).

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

If a national child safe organisation framework with core guiding principles is established, it is recommended that a national accreditation system be established to mandate organisational structures and processes and set requirements for compliance and ongoing review.

It is suggested that such an accreditation system need not be, necessarily, separate to the current service accreditation requirements that currently exist through a number of quality improvement organisations. Indeed, issues related to governance structures, management (including human resources) risk management and the safety and security of physical spaces are already core standards in most formal accreditation processes.

The Salvation Army would support the inclusion of specific standards related to provision of a child safe environment in current accreditation systems and that compliance with standards should be linked to full service accreditation and specific funding. In addition, The Salvation Army would support independent review of organisations providing direct services to children and youth rather than self assessment against standards.

In addition to the accreditation process, The Salvation Army supports the introduction of the following compliance mechanisms as measures to mandate and maintain child safe environments within organisations:

- Legislated accountabilities for ensuring child safety practices remain a priority of all organisations
- Organisational accountability to meeting mandatory standards with penalties for failure to comply (i.e. financial, loss of accreditation status)
- Greater follow through on organisational failure to comply with mandatory reporting requirements or other such systems
- Individual/personal accountability for senior executives who attempt to cover allegations or matters that are clearly child safety matters.
- There should be significant organisational fines and/or restrictions for any organisation not complying with the national framework for child safety practices.