

Save the Children's response to Issues Paper 3: Child Safe Institutions

About Save the Children

Save the Children is the world's leading independent international organisation for children. The organisation works in more than 120 countries towards a world in which every child attains the right to survival, protection, development and participation. Australian programming commenced in 1951, primarily focussing on health and education for Australia's indigenous children.

Save the Children has offices, branches and supporters in every Australian state and territory and operates programs at more than 100 sites around the country. Australian programs focus on: school attendance; early childhood care and development; refugees and asylum seekers; youth engagement; parenting support; reconciliation; and multicultural early learning. The organisation also maintains one of Australia's largest NGO emergency teams, and has been at the forefront of coordinating an integrated emergency response to recent natural disasters that have confronted children and families both here and abroad.

Save the Children is committed to protecting children, regardless of gender, race, country of origin or religious belief. The organisation's work is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that children should be protected from all forms of physical and mental violence, injury, abuse, neglect, maltreatment and exploitation, including sexual abuse.

Save the Children's commitment to child protection is based on the following principles:

- Promoting and protecting the best interests of children at all times.
- Zero tolerance of child abuse (mandatory reporting of confirmed or suspected

child abuse).

- Child protection as a shared responsibility between the organisation, its partners and the communities in which it works.
- The views of children and young people used to inform child protection policy and program development.

Child Safe Institutions

Question 1: Essential Elements of Child Safe Organisations to prevent Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in an institutional context.

Child Safeguarding is a key priority and responsibility for all staff, volunteers and associates of Save the Children Australia (SCA) and Save the Children International (SCI). In order to maintain a child safe and child aware organisational culture committed to the prevention of all forms of abuse and exploitation of children (including CSA), a Child Protection (CP) Policy and Code of Conduct was developed. The key elements of child safeguarding at SCA are implemented and monitored in the following ways:

- A clear mandate from the organisation's leadership that the organisation is committed to providing a child safe organisation and there is a zero tolerance approach to child abuse. The leadership creates an open and aware culture where all those associated with the organisation, including children, feel confident to raise any concerns they have about the safety or wellbeing of a child and know this will be handled in a professional and expedient manner.
- Mandatory Sign off on the SCA CP Policy and Code of Conduct and SCI Child Safeguarding Policy by all employees, volunteers and associates at commencement of employment to ensure standards are adhered to, everyone is aware of appropriate behavioural guidelines when interacting or working with children and fair and transparent processes are followed if a complaint is made.
- Rigorous child safe recruitment, selection and screening processes are followed; targeted reference checks, police checks and working with children checks are conducted. Behavioural based interview questions on child protection matters are

asked in interviews and reference checks. Strict guidelines are followed when recruiting for positions working directly with children and child safe commitment statements are made in all recruitment notices. Human Resources (HR) staff are trained to identify factors that may indicate a person is not safe to work with children. This training includes education on the dynamics of sex offending and ensuring the recruitment process explores an applicant's motivations, values and attitudes in regards to children and child safe policies.

- Risk management/mitigation is undertaken in all new program designs, activities and funding proposals and partner organisation capacity assessments.
- Training and capacity building is delivered to all staff and is mandatory to ensure familiarity with the CP Policy and responsibilities
- The provision of a clear Reporting Process for all staff, volunteers and stakeholders of the organisation to use when they have a concern or report about the safety or wellbeing of a child. This Reporting Process states it is mandatory for all personnel to raise any concerns they may have by following the proper process. The organisation's Child Protection Reporting Process should include dedicated roles and responsibilities that are clearly stated and reflected in training, position descriptions and management responsibilities. SCA also provides a Help Desk which is available for CP support and advice.
- Annual Audit processes within Save the Children International (SCI), AusAID Audits and Accreditation, SCA Audits.
- Child Protection Technical Unit (CPTU) established – Highly Experienced CP Technical Team employed to build organisational CP capacity, promote and maintain high levels of awareness and CP Policy compliance monitoring.
- Child Protection Focal Points (CPFP's) have been appointed in every site , have clear position descriptions and receive regular training and technical support from the CPTU.
- Child Protection and Safeguarding being a regular item discussed at team meetings and Board meetings, and the strategies used to establish a child safe organisation are promoted widely throughout the organisation and externally, including on websites and other promotional material.

- Accountability and transparency processes in place to communicate with Donors and key stakeholders.
- Service users, children, parents/guardians and partners all made aware of SCA commitment to CP and are empowered to speak up about any concerns. Child friendly complaints processes and feedback mechanisms have been established.
- All personnel working with children are trained in positive discipline to ensure the use of physical or humiliating punishment is not used. This is important as there is a recognised link between physical abuse and sexual offending.

These are some of the critical and essential elements to create and maintain child safe organisations based on several years' experience in this field and global best practice as implemented by SCA.

We recommend the following core strategies be present to protect children from sexual abuse in an institutional context:

- Child Safe/Protection Policy and Code of Conduct signed by all personnel.
- Rigorous child safe recruitment, selection and screening processes for all personnel in contact with children.
- Training for all personnel on the policies and procedures and their role in establishing a child safe organisation.
- Child safety and protection included in the organisation's risk management processes.
- Clear Reporting Process and mandatory obligations to report any concern for the safety or wellbeing of a child.
- Designated staff to be the child safety focal points for the organisation (1 or more depending on size of the organisation- like the OHS representatives).
- Child friendly complaints and feedback processes.

Question 2: Evidence Base for Child Safe Strategies – Physical Environment

SCA is not aware of any specific evidence base for specific “child safe” strategies. In our experience the majority of child safe strategies pertain to psychological safety. Physical environmental mechanisms do help to address some issues such as line of sight supervision, staff ratios, not working alone unsupervised, and avoiding remote locations and physically dangerous surroundings.

There is very little evidence available to validate the strategies SCA or other organisations use to make their organisation’s child safe. SCA conducted an organisational wide survey in 2012 to assess the effectiveness of the implementation of our Child Protection Policy, which provided insight into understanding and adoption of the strategies by our staff, volunteers and associates. The survey indicated a shift in behavioural change towards children and a greater sense of responsibility in responding to concerns for a child’s safety both within the organisational setting and the wider community since the introduction of the current Child protection Policy in 2010.

The UK based Keeping Children Safe Coalition (KCS) has begun a piece of research which will involve field work to look at the effectiveness of their approach. KCS also works internationally.

In David Pilgrim’s article “Child Abuse in Irish Catholic Setting: A Non-Reductionist Account” , he demonstrated that a non-reductionist account of child abuse in Irish Catholic settings can be created by the use of a systemic framework. Pilgrim showed that due to the punitive institutional routines that existed and regular use of physical chastisement “emotional, physical and sexual abuse co-existed in these setting”. By applying a systemic framework to these settings Pilgrim found reductionist accounts of abuse could be avoided.¹

Pilgrim’s findings speak to the need for organisations and institutions to be mindful of other forms of abuse which accompany sexual abuse and to ensure clear behavioural boundaries and codes of conduct are in place. Prevention strategies such as the introduction of Positive Discipline training for Save the Children staff and community members have contributed to higher levels of child developmental awareness and clarity on what is optimal child rearing practice is to ensure children grow up in violence free environments. Protective behaviour training for children and service users can empower and enable

¹ Pilgrim, D, Child Abuse Review Vol 21: 405-413 (2012)

children to speak up when they feel unsafe and encourage adults to and take action to protect children.

Question 3: Effectiveness testing for “child safe” strategies

The effectiveness of child safe strategies can be tested in a number of ways:

- Self-Audit (annual) to assess the level of implementation of the strategies and what changes have been made in the delivery of programs and activities to test whether the strategies have worked internally. (It is acknowledged this is reliant on self-report and objectivity may be questionable).
- External audit to test the effectiveness of the child safe strategies which includes evaluations with the beneficiary groups.
- Survey of staff and volunteers and/or children and service users on their awareness and understanding of the organisation’s child safe strategies.
- Annual case management review can be used to see whether the reporting of cases has risen – showing that the strategies are working – and then starting to drop off because the rate of incidents is reducing. This however would need to be considered carefully so that a fall in cases wasn't attributed to good strategies when it was due to under-reporting.
- Child safe risk assessments conducted by staff and volunteers that can identify risks and put in place strategies to mitigate those risks.

Question 4: How “child safe” policies and procedures work in practice

In practice, child safe policies and procedures create a child safe culture within an organisation. When implemented effectively through open discussion, training of all personnel and promotion, the standards and measures become everyday practice. They guide interactions with children, provide safe boundaries for working with children and provide personnel with support and guidance in their work. The policies and procedures also provide the practical ways personnel, children and others can raise concerns, who they should contact and what will happen when they do raise a concern.

The policies and procedures become the educational and capacity building tools in the area of child safety and organisational child safeguarding for all personnel.

The policies and procedures can be used to promote the organisation's commitment to establishing a child safe organisation by placing them on the website, sending them to all job applicants to deter those who may pose a risk to children and attract those applicants who share the same values. HR must comply with the policies in the recruitment, selection and screening of staff and volunteers. The Code of Conduct can be used to provide a framework for performance management or disciplinary action taken for unsafe behaviour by personnel with children. As personnel have signed on to the policies and procedures, this type of action is professionally and fairly handled, accountable and expected.

The policies and procedures can also be sent to and shared with partners and donors. In some situations partners can sign on to the policies or abide by them as part of a Memorandum of Understanding or partner agreement. Parents and guardians can also be made aware of the policies and procedures and the organisation's commitment to provide their children with a safe environment.

Question 5: Universal framework or tailor made strategies?

SCA recommends a universal framework for child safe organisations be developed. In this way the minimum standards or core strategies for a child safe organisation are implemented consistently by all organisations having contact with children. The standards can become well understood, implemented and more effectively monitored and tested. From this, an evidence base can be developed and best practice principles agreed upon and promoted. It is anticipated that this could also act as a deterrent to "undesirable" or "unsuitable" people applying to work in organisations operating within these standards.

However it is important that organisations do not simply adopt a one size fits all approach. Each organisation must implement the universally agreed upon minimum framework and then identify their own child safe strengths and risk and include these in their own policies and procedures. In this way organisations have greater ownership and therefore compliance to their child safe strategies as they deliver specific programs and operation of the organisation.

Further, by going through the process of developing their own policies and procedures (using the universal framework), organisations open up the discussion internally on what a child safe organisation is, how they implement these strategies and how they will best achieve and maintain this standard. By undergoing a process of analysis, risk assessment and strategy development, the organisation develops greater understanding and commitment to establishing and maintaining a child safe organisation.

Question 6: Role of staff performance management systems and disciplinary processes

SCA recommends that implementation of and compliance with organisational child safe policies and procedures be adopted as an integral part of staff performance management systems, particularly for those working directly with children. For those staff working directly with children, child safety and protection can be articulated and formalised as part of their key performance indicators.

In regard to disciplinary processes, child safe policies and in particular the Code of Conduct are essential to guide staff and volunteers on safe and appropriate behaviour with children, how to avoid misunderstandings, and what constitutes behaviour that would require disciplinary or performance management intervention. The policies and Code can then be used as the basis for taking disciplinary action and provide organisations with legitimate grounds for taking this action.

Question 7: Role and characteristics of governance and management leadership in creation and maintenance of “child safe” organisational culture

In addition to the core strategy referred to in Question 1 regarding the mandate by leadership, the role of governance and management leadership in creating a child safe organisational culture is vital. There must be congruence in leadership behaviour and commitment to achieving this. Board and Executive staff are powerful role models and their actions and behaviour can send strong messages about organisational culture which can motivate staff. Their advocacy and support for child safe organisational culture is critical.

Examples of such support can include:

- Communication and endorsement to all personnel on the importance of child safe policies and procedures from Board, Executive, Management and Leadership staff.
- Appointment of a child safe champion on the Board or within the Management Leadership team who is visible in imparting these messages across the organisation as well as externally to other stakeholders.
- A written mandate and adequate resourcing provided for child safety focal points or equivalent role to carry out their jobs effectively.
- A requirement to report critical incidents to the Board or Management Leadership team and clear accountability mechanisms established for management and investigation of the incident.
- Provision of a budget line for policy development, regular staff/volunteer/associates training and to allow adequate allocation of time for child safety focal points to maintain the level of technical inputs required.

Question 8: Should there be any additional enforceable requirements for institutions or particular institutions to maintain a “child safe” environment?

It is recommended that the registration and continued operation of organisations be dependent on compliance with the minimum universal framework for child safe organisations. Funding for organisations delivering child and youth programs should be contingent upon them demonstrating their commitment to and evidence of operating as a child safe organisation and having in place the minimum standards by the appropriate bodies.

Contact: Fiona Williams

Child Protection Advisor

Save the Children

fiona.williams@savethechildren.org.au

