

Response to Issues Paper 3 “Child Safe Institutions”

from

Child & Family Services Ballarat

4/10/13

Child and Family Services Ballarat, formerly Ballarat Children’s Homes & Family Services, and Ballarat Orphanage, is highly mindful of the abuse suffered by some children in care at various times of its history. To this end, we made a formal apology some years ago to those who suffered abuse, have a long-established “Heritage Centre” to provide information and support to ex-residents, and have had a genuine commitment to ensuring the mistakes of the past never re-occur.

We believed that cafs had become a rigorous and child-safe organisation with appropriate checks and balances, but what we learned after a particular incident of child abuse in our Foster Care program some three years ago, was that it is not sufficient to generally have reasonable safety practices in place; these need to be constantly checked for compliance by a dedicated team, and a culture of child safety needs to be overt and visible.

1) The core strategies at cafs are not unique, but are as follows;

- Up to date police checks for all staff, Board members, students, carers, volunteers and children of carers turning 18. We have elected to use an internal police checking system that raises alerts to pending criminal matters, as well previous court appearances, not just convictions.
- Up to date Working with Children Checks for all staff, Board Members, students, carers, children of carers turning 18 and contractors. Consider standing staff down who allow their WWCCs to lapse. Staff who allow their WWCC to lapse are given a formal first warning, and removed from all contact with children. A second transgression in this area results in staff being stood down.
- Verification checks on qualifications, referees, identity. This includes verifying the bona fides of referees.
- Have well-advertised and easily accessible “child and youth safety officers” within the organisation who are available at any time to discuss any concerns a staff member may have about any child.
- All staff trained in Child Wise “Choose with Care” program. This includes education on risk management and a clear message to staff to act on or report any concerns they have about a staff member or volunteer and that person’s interaction with children. The message is clear that we would prefer you alert us to a concern that you may not feel is fully validated yet rather than wait and potentially allow a child to be abused.
- We now have incidents of complaints from adults (clients and staff) who have felt uncomfortable when our staff have asked the next question in checking out suspect behaviour. In each incident, while we apologise for the discomfort to the adult, it is validation that staff are following our procedure.
- All staff, students and carers provided with regular supervision per internal policy and DHS standards.



ABN 83 786 843 940

CAFS Ballarat
Ludbrook House
115 Lydiard Street North
Ballarat 3350
t. (03) 5337 3333
f. (03) 5332 1724
e. info@cafs.org.au

CAFS Ararat
4 Banfield Street
Ararat 3377
t. (03) 5352 2910
f. (03) 5352 5115
e. cfs@cafs.org.au

CAFS Hepburn
13 Hospital Street
Daylesford 3460
t. (03) 5348 8200
f. (03) 5348 1324
e. dfs@cafs.org.au

CAFS Moorabool
52 Grant Street
Bacchus Marsh 3340
t. (03) 5367 9900
f. (03) 5367 4315
e. bm@cafs.org.au

Early Childhood
Parenting Centre
515 Chisholm Street
Ballarat 3350
t. (03) 5327 1100
f. (03) 5333 5715
e. chisholm@cafs.org.au

Wozzles Wearhouse
Operations Centre
1011 Howitt Street
Wendouree 3355
t. (03) 5339 9166

1231a Howitt Street
Wendouree 3355

11 Grenville Street South
Ballarat 3350

www.cafs.org.au

- Clear complaints procedure with monitoring of follow up and timelines.
 - Culture of reporting all incidents involving children via “Riskman” risk management system, whether required by funding bodies or not, that ensures a manager sees and acts on information.
 - Ensure all minimum departmental standards are met in relation to monitoring of placements, including compliance with the Victorian Carers’ register.
- 2) The evidence base for the range of strategies comes from the Child Wise organisation, Office of the Child Safety Commissioner, and the Victorian Department of Human Services, as well as what we have learned from our own history. It extends to the physical environment in so far as it is vital to create a child friendly environment (color, toys, posters, child-accessible information, comfort, child-sized amenities, sense of safety) so that children feel that within the environment they are safe to express themselves, and that adults genuinely want to hear what they have to say.
- 3) The effectiveness of “child safe” strategies could be tested by assertively and flexibly seeking individual feedback from children and young people at regular points throughout their time in care, and post-care. This could be undertaken by somebody external to the particular [out of home care and Child Protection] programs, such as a designated child advocate. Data from incident reporting and other risk management systems should be collated and analysed at regular intervals.
- 4) Child Safe policies and procedures work in practice with dedicated resources to ensure compliancy. Somebody needs to check every week that all checks are up to date, and provide this feedback “up the line”. Accountability needs to end at the highest possible point, for example, via a regular report to a Board of Management.
- 5) There can be a universal framework for a “child safe organisation” to a certain point, that is, there are basic safety procedures applicable to all organisations, including police checks, referee checks, working with children checks and so on. However, it is difficult to see how one could impose a “one size fits all” to all organisations dealing with children, which will cover the spectrum of scouts, kindergartens, church groups, schools, sporting clubs, hospitals and large organisations dealing exclusively with children. The burden of compliance on very small organisations working with children may be impossible to achieve, and one runs the risk of “throwing out the baby with the bathwater”.



ABN 83 786 843 940

CAFS Ballarat
Ludbrook House
115 Lydiard Street North
Ballarat 3350
t. (03) 5337 3333
f. (03) 5332 1724
e. info@cafs.org.au

CAFS Ararat
4 Banfield Street
Ararat 3377
t. (03) 5352 2910
f. (03) 5352 5115
e. als@cafs.org.au

CAFS Hepburn
13 Hospital Street
Daylesford 3460
t. (03) 5348 8200
f. (03) 5348 1324
e. cfs@cafs.org.au

CAFS Moorabool
52 Grant Street
Bacchus Marsh 3340
t. (03) 5367 9900
f. (03) 5367 4315
e. bm@cafs.org.au

Early Childhood
Parenting Centre
515 Chisholm Street
Ballarat 3350
t. (03) 5327 1100
f. (03) 5333 5715
e. chisholm@cafs.org.au

Wozzles Wearhouse
Operations Centre
1011 Howitt Street
Wendouree 3355
t. (03) 5339 9166

1231a Howitt Street
Wendouree 3355

11 Grenville Street South
Ballarat 3350

www.cafs.org.au

- 6) Staff performance management systems and disciplinary processes in a child safe organisation are essential. There needs to be a zero tolerance approach to any breach of policy or guidelines. This means, for example, that if a staff member lets a working with children check lapse by a few days due to an oversight, then standing them down should be seriously considered. Organisations need to demonstrate that they are utterly serious about child safety.
- 7) The role and characteristics of governance and management leadership in creating and maintaining a “child safe” organisational culture are;
- Genuine and frequent consultation with children who are using the service
 - Child friendly environment
 - Zero tolerance of breaches of policy, compliance or code of conduct
 - Strong lines of accountability back ultimately to the Board of Management
 - Dedicated and visible child safety officer/s
 - Consider an independent child advocate working with the organisation
 - Strong child friendly culture
 - Child safety policies in place
 - High compliance with employment and supervision processes
 - High compliance with mandatory police checks and WWCC
- 8) Any additional enforceable requirements; no further comment



ABN 83 786 843 940

CAFS Ballarat
Ludbrook House
115 Lydiard Street North
Ballarat 3350

t. (03) 5337 3333
f. (03) 5332 1724
e. info@cals.org.au

CAFS Ararat
4 Banfield Street
Ararat 3377

t. (03) 5352 2910
f. (03) 5352 5115
e. afs@cals.org.au

CAFS Hepburn
13 Hospital Street
Daylesford 3460

t. (03) 5348 8200
f. (03) 5348 1324
e. dfs@cals.org.au

CAFS Moorabool
52 Grant Street
Bacchus Marsh 3340

t. (03) 5367 9900
f. (03) 5367 4315
e. bmt@cals.org.au

Early Childhood
Parenting Centre
515 Chisholm Street
Ballarat 3350

t. (03) 5327 1100
f. (03) 5333 5715
e. chisholm@cals.org.au

Wozzles Warehouse

Operations Centre
1011 Howitt Street
Wendouree 3355

t. (03) 5339 9166

1231a Howitt Street
Wendouree 3355

11 Grenville Street South
Ballarat 3350

www.cafs.org.au