

Towards a national approach for suitability checks

A reproduction of a poster presented at the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect World Congress in Brisbane (19-22 September)

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Thousands of organisations across Australia take on responsibility for children and young people on a regular basis. Numerous activities and supports are provided by a vast range of agencies including: community groups, welfare services, sporting bodies, youth clubs, church associations and special interest groups. All of these organisations have one thing in common. By offering services to children and young people they are trusted to provide a safe environment. In particular, the community assumes that this environment will be free of child abuse.

Sadly, this is not always the case. As media reports have highlighted, child abusers have been able to infiltrate well meaning and reputable community organisations gaining access to vulnerable children. For example, police data compiled in Victoria between 1988-1996 showed that more than 20 per cent of recorded child sex offenders (in cases involving two or more victims) used community based organisations such as welfare, youth, church and sporting groups, to gain access to their victims.

What can you do to make your organisation safer?

Unfortunately there is no one simple step that will totally protect your organisation. However, there is good news! There are many things that your organisation can do to make it less desirable to someone who is seeking to abuse children and young people. For a start there are basics such as getting a police check on all paid and volunteer staff. Although only about five per cent of recorded sex offenders have police records, carrying out these checks will at least deter some people from accessing your organisation. Secondly, and most importantly, organisations can make sure that they develop a Child Protection Policy. This

National Child Protection Clearinghouse activities

In the past three months, the National Child Protection Clearinghouse has responded to numerous requests for information. Below is a brief summary of presentations NCPC staff members have made during this time. The National Child Protection Clearinghouse can provide researchers with current information on a particular topic at forums and events or for staff professional development. This service is offered on a cost-recovery basis for travel expenditure. The resources which we prepare for these speaker invitations are available free of charge upon request. If you would like access to these resources please contact the National Child Protection Clearinghouse on (03) 9214 7888 or email ncpc@aifs.gov.au

Safety House AGM Guest Speaker: "Child abuse: Addressing the problem at home" (23 October 2004)

Child maltreatment is a very serious social problem. In 2002-3, approximately 198,355 reports of child abuse and neglect were made nationally. Dr Daryl Higgins, Manager of the National Child Protection Clearinghouse at the Australian Institute of Family Studies provided an overview of the types of child maltreatment, and the extent of the problem. Information was provided about best-practice guidelines for preventing the problem, talking with children, and dealing appropriately with disclosures. Dr Higgins focused not only on sexual abuse, but other forms of family violence, bullying and victimisation.

2004 National Foster Care Conference – Canberra: "Snapshot: Resources for Foster Carers and Policy Makers"

The Manager of the Clearinghouse, Dr Daryl Higgins, gave a "snapshot" of the research publications and other resources that are relevant to the needs of foster carers, and other workers and policy-makers in the field of out-of-home care. In particular, the publications dealing with child welfare in Indigenous communities, and describing the effects of child maltreatment – which foster carers and workers are confronted with each day – were outlined. Carers and workers were encouraged to join the Clearinghouse mail list to receive the newsletter and issues papers, and workers were encouraged to join the e-discussion list *childprotect*.

should cover areas such as recruitment and selection of staff, and stipulate how your organisation operates on a daily basis with clear guidelines about how staff should act and the policy and procedures which will operate within the organisation.

How can your organisation develop a comprehensive child protection policy?

The even better news is that help is at hand! The Australian Council for Children and Youth Organisations (ACCYO) has developed the first phase of an accreditation process for organisations providing services to children and young people which involves the conduct of suitability (police) checks for staff and volunteers and the development of a comprehensive child protection policy followed up by an external audit.

Even if your organisation already has police checks and a child protection policy in place, it is good to know that you can formalise these processes and have them recognised at a national level. Thanks to Commonwealth Government and philanthropic foundation funding, this training and accreditation process will be made available to participating organisations across Australia over the next 12 months. This first stage accreditation process includes:

- an orientation and initial training session to provide information and assistance to organisations to develop or reassess their child protection policy according to the “Choose With Care” model developed by Child Wise;
- a follow-up process to check progress with implementation and share the learning;
- self-assessment phase;
- external audit and accreditation phase to verify that policies and procedures are in practice;
- ongoing support from ACCYO; and
- recognition of your efforts through a formal certificate from ACCYO after successful completion of an independent audit carried out by La Trobe University.



The current situation in caring for young people and children. More than 20 per cent of recorded child sex offenders, used community based organisations such as welfare, youth, church and sporting groups to gain access to their victims.

The Australian Council for Children and Youth Organisations

The Australian Council for Children and Youth Organisations is an initiative of some of Australia’s leading philanthropic trusts and foundations in partnership with community services organisations, the police, magistrates and the judiciary.

To find out more about ACCYO Training and Accreditation contact:

ACCYO, 196 Williams Road, Toorak 3142

Website: www.accyo.org.au Telephone: 03 9804 8521

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NSW Health: “Gaps in child protection research: Evaluating child abuse prevention programs” (2 November 2004)

NCPC participated in the NSW Health *Child Protection Research and Evaluation Practice Forum* presented by the Child Protection and Violence Prevention Unit. The aim of the forum was to provide senior managers within NSW Health with the opportunity to learn about research gaps in the field of child protection and strategies for practice-based research and evaluation. NCPC presented some results based on an extensive audit and literature review of Australian and overseas child abuse prevention programs and services, and identified priority areas for research and evaluation. Gaps within the current knowledge base and opportunities for linking evidence-based practice with practice-based evaluation were presented.

Victorian Department of Human Services – Gippsland Innovations Projects: “Social Marketing and Child Maltreatment” (23 November 2004)

Social marketing uses commercial marketing techniques to advance a social cause, idea or behaviour. Social marketing has been used in various ways to help prevent child maltreatment. In this presentation, social marketing is defined. Several international campaigns that have been evaluated and published are briefly described to demonstrate the applicability of social marketing to preventing child maltreatment. A Victorian child abuse prevention campaign was profiled in detail. In addition, strategies for conducting social marketing campaigns were discussed.

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