



Diocesan Protection and Safety Council

QUARTERLY REPORT

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2020

Diocesan Protection and Safety Council Meetings

During this 4th quarter, the Diocesan Protection and Safety Council ['Council'] met once, on 18 November 2020. The meeting lasted three hours and fifteen minutes, conducted via electronic medium rather than face-to-face.

There was the provision of information from the various standing committees, the details of which are provided later in this quarterly report.

The Council continued to debate the challenging question of public listings of former priests appointed to a parish, which may be displayed in the parish church, near the principal entrance to the nave. These lists can include the names of known child sex abusers which can cause distress to survivors and their families when they attend the church.

The Council again discussed the ongoing adverse impacts of the ABC documentary *Revelation* and the release of the unredacted reports from the Royal Commission, Case Study 43.

Report from the Convenor of the Standing Committee for Healing & Support

The Standing Committee for Healing & Support met once during 4th quarter and received an application, from a survivor, for funds from the *Bishop's Healing*

Fund which was approved by the Standing Committee.

This application was for an Equine Therapy Group which will offer the opportunity to participate in a highly unique healing program for those who have been affected by child sexual abuse, within Maitland-Newcastle Diocese. In a peaceful, rural setting participants will join a small group of other survivors, on an Equine Assisted Therapy program which supports healing, mental wellbeing, as well as re-building trust and connection. In summary it will assist people to:

- Better manage anxiety
- Increase resilience
- Support holistic healing
- Learn to stay in the present moment
- Cope better within day-to-day life
- Allow joy back in.

The Standing Committee continued to raise the issue of the names of priests being publicly displayed in churches and the negative impact this could have on those who have been abused by those priests. The Standing Committee has been advocating for survivors in this regard.

During this time, the Healing & Support [Zimmerman Service] team also presented two training sessions online, as a part of the Introduction to Safeguarding Course for new employees of the Diocese.

Healing & Support [Zimmerman Service] saw the resignation of one of their experienced Caseworkers due to a relocation to Brisbane. This has been a huge loss to the service. Recruitment for a new caseworker commenced in December.

Report from the Convenor of the Standing Committee for Assisting in Resolving Claims

The Standing Committee met once during 4th quarter. Advice was given to the Bishop in relation to two matters.

There were two mediations held, both using electronic means instead of face-to-face.

The Diocese completed and submitted nine *Request for Information* submissions to the National Redress Scheme, related to seven individual applicants.

Report from the Convenor of the Standing Committee for the Oversight of the Office of Safeguarding

On 22 December 2020 an introductory and explanatory meeting was held for persons who had been invited to join the *Standing Committee for the Oversight of the Office of Safeguarding*, which commenced its work in 2021.

The role of the Standing Committee will be to provide advice to the Vicar-General on the operations and strategic direction of the Office of Safeguarding (OoSG) and identifiable risks to the OoSG fulfilling its mandate.

Operations of the Office of Safeguarding

The 4th quarter of 2020 was a period of great activity that was only achievable thanks to the dedication and commitment of OoSG personnel.

During this quarter, there was a marked increase in work tempo, particularly in comparison to the previous two quarters. The 'rebound' in the volume of work was particularly significant in the area of

'Intake'. The intake process is gathering information, recording, analysing and classifying the information and then assuring that the appropriate follow-up actions occur, including the reporting of the information to the relevant statutory authorities and triggering appropriate processes within the Diocese. Intake is an opportunity to promote safeguarding practices with diocesan personnel, contributing to improving the overall safety, welfare and wellbeing for all children in the Diocese. The Prevention and Response Service (PaRS) who were carrying a vacancy (an Investigator) undertake the majority of Intake on behalf of the OoSG.

ADR (Alternative Dispute Resolution), which had only been launched in January 2020, had a very challenging year navigating COVID-19 restrictions whilst establishing itself. An unexpected demand for ADR services to work with complaints related to authorised (foster) carers and involvement in the development of a 'whole of Diocese' complaints management system, prompted the beginning of a redesign, effective 2021. There was a recognition that additional resourcing was required in the ADR space, with approval for the establishment of a 'practitioner' role in ADR, reporting to the ADR Coordinator.

The OoSG has an annual cycle of safeguarding training, the core of which are four distinct packages which involve full or half day face-to-face training:

Course (1) Introduction to Safeguarding for employees in child-related work which is mandatory for all diocesan employees in child related work, other than parishes.

Course (2) Safeguarding in parishes which is mandatory for all parish workers (paid and unpaid).

Courses (3) and Course (4) are advanced safeguarding training for, respectively, educational or social services, which are mandatory for the relevant diocesan employees every six years.

There is also an annual brief refresher package required to be completed by all diocesan employees.

Due to COVID-19 implications, face-to-face training was subsequently suspended indefinitely. As a result, the OoSG re-engineered the training courses and information packages so they were suitable for online delivery.

The period between September and December, with October being the busiest month, the OoSG's training cycle was delivered via ZOOM or similar audio-visual platforms as a 'live online' method.

During the 4th quarter, PaRS staff and the ADR Coordinator conducted an entire year's worth of compliance audits in diocesan schools, which form part of the CSO's Continuum of School Improvement (CoSI) programme. School entry and access issues proved challenging, with the need to observe COVID safe practices.

The Director's Office experienced a challenging 4th quarter because of its lynchpin roles in transitioning training packages for online delivery, responding to some personal injury claims that had been delayed as a consequence of COVID-19, responding to an influx of NRS (National Redress Scheme) applications that were received in late September, the maternity leave of an Office Administrator and implementation of the Diocese's NCSS (National Catholic Safeguarding Standards) compliance strategy.

On 25 November 2020 the OoSG undertook a strategic planning day facilitated by Rozyta Englert, Manager Strategic Change. A presentation by the Vicar-General on the 'Mission of the Diocese and the National Plenary Council' placed OoSG in its wider Church context and the Director presented the rationale for and evolution of the Office of Safeguarding. The OoSG staff then undertook a detailed discussion on current and future state including a form of SWOT analysis.

In December an opportunity arose for PaRS and the Director's Office (which are co-located at 50 Crebert St) to relocate within the office building to a larger space, including more offices and a meeting/training room. In December the Diocese agreed to the

relocation, which would be funded wholly by an operating surplus in the OoSG's budget. The preparatory works (minor renovations to the space) are planned for mid to late 1st quarter 2021.

The OoSG Leadership Group includes the managers of Healing & Support and PaRS, the ADR Coordinator, Executive Coordinator Safeguarding and Director. In December the Leadership Group began working with an external consultant to develop 'mindful leadership' within the group.