Uniting Church in Australia

Annual Report to the

National Office for Child Safety

30 November 2020

Contents

Acknowledgement

We pay our respects to the First Nations people of the country in which we live and work and acknowledge Elders past, present and emerging.

The Uniting Church in Australia continues to acknowledge that children and young people entrusted to the care of the Church did not always receive the care they deserved and we acknowledge the ongoing impact and trauma of the separation of children and young people from families and communities. This is part of our story that we continue to acknowledge so that we never forget and never become complacent.

The Uniting Church in Australia marks the 22 October anniversary of the National Apology to Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse annually. Each year the Church delivers a Liturgy for the Anniversary and laments its role in causing harm to children and renews its commitment to be a safe place for all people.

The Uniting Church has pledged publicly to continue to implement the lessons of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, to grow our culture of safety and sustain our action to be a safe Church for all people. We remain open to the insights of survivors and professionals, we regularly renew our policies and practices in all parts of our Church, and we work to ensure that they reflect best practice for care, service and support of children.

Introduction

> The Uniting Church in Australia believes that a safe Church is integral to who we are called to be. Ensuring a safe Church is the way we are able to physically, emotionally and spiritually care for each other.

Although the Church's commitment to safety is not new, its commitment to take a nationally consistent approach to safety is new and the National Safe Church Unit (NSCU) was created in 2019 to lead this work.

Across 2019, the necessary structures were put in place to enable the NSCU to become a fully functional national resource. This included establishing the structure of the Unit, agreeing parameters for the work of the Unit, recruiting staff, agreeing delegations, confirming the operating budget and addressing operational issues such as securing physical office space, and the provision of back of house support services.

A new Governance Committee was created to oversee the work of the Unit and a Consultation Advisory Group, comprising representatives from each of the UCA Synods, was established to help inform that work.

New policy frameworks and principles were created to provide national direction and guidance to inform the work of all entities and individuals who engage in child related services and activities. This includes, but is not limited to: Congregations, Presbyteries, Synods, the Assembly, agencies, ministries, childcare services, out-of-home care services, family and community services, disability services, health services, camps and schools.

The Church's **National Child Safe Policy Framework** continues to be the foundational policy to guide action across the life of the Church, including in our Synods, schools, agencies and congregations, to keep children safe. It was reviewed In November 2019 and amended to reflect the development and implementation of the Principles of a Child Safe Uniting Church in Australia (UCA).

The **Principles of a Child Safe UCA** were created to support a nationally consistent approach to child safety issues. They communicate the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations within the context of the Church, and outline organisational expectations and specific actions required in UCA settings. The Principles are also used as a measurement framework to identify our annual progress in implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

The Church continues to develop and implement an expanding suite of child safety resources which are used across the life of the Church. Each of these aligns with the National Child Safe Policy Framework and upholds the Principles of a Child Safe UCA.

Principles of a Child Safe Uniting Church in Australia

Fig.1 Principles of a Child Safe Uniting Church in Australia

About this report

The Uniting Church in Australia has previously reported to the National Office for Child Safety in 2018 and 2019 about the progress made to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. This report builds on previous reports and specifically outlines action and progress in the current reporting period 1 September 2019 – 1 September 2020.

The format of this report differs from previous years to better reflect the structures that the Church has put in place to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission and align with the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.

For this report, each UCA Synod, agency and school was invited to report against the Principles of a Child Safe UCA to inform this report. Each of the Principles is presented with case studies that illustrate action taken across the different entities of the Church to align with the Principles and drive a nationally consistent approach to child safety.

The case studies provided in this report illustrate the practices, process and resources that are being put in place across the life of the Church to implement the Principles of a Child Safe UCA.

SECTION 1: Identifying the Institution – the Uniting Church in Australia

On 22 June 1977, the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA/the Church) was inaugurated by a union of the Congregational Union of Australia, the Methodist Church of Australasia and the Presbyterian Church of Australia (the three churches). The UCA is the first church to be created in and for Australia.

Uniting Church structure
The Basis of Union is a foundational document of the Church. The Church's structure is defined in that document as inter-related councils as follows:

- The Assembly (the national council)
- The Synods (the regional councils)
- The Presbyteries (the district councils)
- The Congregations (congregational councils) and The Elders' or Leaders' Meeting (the councils within a congregation or group of congregations)

Children and young people in contact with the Uniting Church
The Church, through its schools, agencies and congregations provides a wide range of services directly to children and young people, including:

- Worship and pastoral care
- Youth/children's ministry activities within Church settings (Sunday school, youth groups, playgroups, etc)
- Local, regional and national camps and gatherings

- Childcare
- Out-of-home care
- Boarding and day schools
- Hospitals and health services
- Mental health services
- Disability services
- Child and family services such as telephone and face to face counselling, family violence support programs and refuges, family intervention services, community recovery
- Homelessness services
- International aid programs

SECTION 2: General reporting against recommendations relevant to all institutions

Like other large and complex organisations, the Church has a number of different policies, procedures and codes of conduct in place for staff, members and volunteers across its entities which were developed in response to local context and need; and to meet State regulatory compliance.

The Church is working to achieve a nationally consistent approach to child safety, as was recommended by the Royal Commission, and has delivered, progressed and established a number of key pieces of work to realise this approach during the reporting period.

The Church has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by moving to remote ways of working and connecting with people. In 2020, particular work was undertaken to uphold our commitment to child safety in the new online spaces created for worship, ministry, service delivery and engagement.

As a whole Church we have taken the following actions in the reporting period:

Governance
- Refreshed the Principles of a Child Safe UCA (p.4)
- Created National Principles for Education and Training (p.18)
- Developed a UCA National Child Safe Curriculum to provide for a consistent approach to child safety training for people across the Church
- Created new resources to support people in governance positions to understand their specific responsibilities with regards to vulnerable people, including children and young people
- Delivered new National Policy Frameworks:
  - Child safe screening: Pre-employment and pre-appointment screening for staff and volunteers
  - Person of Concern: Additional measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

- Delivered a series of events and activities to further support a child safe culture and practices across the Church including:
    - Engagement with the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments to support legislative and system reform
    - Engagement with ecumenical partners about safe church issues
    - Theological reflection to inform the development of resources which grow our safe church culture
    - Regular reporting on progress to national and Synod (state and territory) governance bodies

Child Safe Organisation

- Created new resources to support people across the life of the Church to locally implement the Principles of a Child Safe UCA
- Undertaken regular engagement with networks and stakeholder groups across the Church to support the development and implementation of National Policy Frameworks
- Used evidence and child safe best practice to inform the development of the National Principles Education and Training
- Engaged a child safety expert to inform the development of the UCA National Child Safe Curriculum
- Developed specific guidance about how to deal with 'known offenders' in online congregational settings (as the Church rapidly moved to provide worship and ministry online in response to the COVID-19 pandemic)
- Developed specific guidance about child safety issues related to online Church activities
- Developed specific guidance for Church Leaders to help children, young people and their families be safe online
- Created and begun the delivery of a Church wide ongoing communications strategy to ensure child safety is always on the agenda
- Begun consultation across the Church to inform action to further amplify the voices of children and young people to inform decision making
- Begun Church wide engagement to ensure that our work and actions to keep children safe are culturally competent and accessible
- Begun the development of resources for Ministry Agents to provide for a nationally consistent approach in the interpretation and adherence to the UCA Code of Ethics for Ministry Practice and to support reflection on their ministry practice, including child safe practice

Compliance

- Established the Principles of a Child Safe UCA as our annual reporting framework
- Implemented a new whole-of-Church annual reporting template to identify progress against the Principles of a Child Safe UCA

Redress

In its second year of operation, [UCA Redress Ltd](#) continues to support the UCA to respond to survivors of abuse, including facilitating the Church's participation in the National Redress Scheme for Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse.

In this reporting period, UCA Redress Ltd has focused on streamlining systems and process for engaging in the National Redress Scheme, understanding decisions made under the Scheme, engaging with internal and external stakeholders and continuing to develop and embed governance requirements.

As at 30 June 2020, UCA Redress Ltd had received a total of 354 requests for information, had 85 offers of redress accepted and 43 offers of redress pending, and had made 47 offers of direct personal response.

SECTION 3: Reporting against the Principles of a Child Safe Uniting Church in Australia

Each of the 10 Principles of a Child Safe UCA includes guidance for people across the life of the Church to take action to grow and sustain our safe church culture.

In this report each principle is provided in full and includes case studies to illustrate the activities that different UCA entities have undertaken across this reporting period to implement and live the principles.

Principle 1: Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture

The Uniting Church commits wholeheartedly and publicly to being a child safe organisation. This commitment will influence our decision-making and guide our practice. Children's voices will be listened to, and every adult who is working with children will be supported to act in the interests of children.

We commit to the following principles and actions:

1.1 In policy, practice and making decisions which affect the safety of children, the Uniting Church in Australia will ensure child safety is its paramount consideration.

1.2 Our leaders and our people will publicly commit to child safety, will model and champion child safe policies and practices and will make decisions that will support a child safe culture across our Church.

1.3 Our governance arrangements will facilitate the implementation of child safe policies and practices and will set clear accountabilities.

1.4 We will document the standards of behavior we expect from leaders, staff and volunteers and ensure our people accept individual and shared responsibility for the safety of children in contact with the Church.

1.5 We will work to understand our risk areas and develop strategies which aim to prevent and mitigate risks to children and young people.

1.6 We will support our people to understand their obligations for information sharing and record keeping.

Principle 1 case studies

Queensland Synod

Across the Queensland Synod there are currently 94 Safe Ministry with Children (SMC) Training Facilitators, and most congregations have a designated SMC Coordinator. These volunteer roles are

located in each presbytery, and champion child safe policies and practices across the Synod. The Safe Church Assurance and Support Officer is a full-time resource provided by the Synod, to support these volunteers within their congregations and presbyteries.

Ministry Agents were offered a training amnesty in February 2020 which allowed all Ministry Agents, regardless of previous training undertaken, to access safe ministry with children refresher training to ensure their training was current. Almost all Ministry Agents undertook the training.

Northern Synod NT

Congregations in the Northern Synod are encouraged to have Safe Church Champions who will support their congregations and promote child safety. Champions are provided with resources to enable them to leverage events such as Children's Sunday, Child Protection Week and National Children's Week.

The Uniting Church has a covenant with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. The Northern Regional Council of Congress (NRCC), which is a regional council of the Uniting Aboriginal & Islander Christian Congress (UAICC), is part of the Northern Synod. The Synod Safe Church Officer is working with the NRCC to deliver the safe church story in accessible language and content.

Uniting Victoria and Tasmania

Uniting provides a wide range of community services in Victoria and Tasmania. A new Child Safe Advisory Committee was established in May 2020, comprising members from most of the regions in which Uniting operates and most services types (aged care, early learning, child, youth and family) along with representation from the People and Culture, Risk, Consumer Partnerships and Quality areas of the organisation. The Committee provides advice and support to the Executive Leadership Team about child safety issues with regard to practice, service, governance and operations.

Good Sammy Enterprises WA

Good Sammy Enterprises provide meaningful employment opportunities for Western Australians living with disability.

Although Good Sammy does not deliver services to children it has taken action to be a child safe organisation and recognises that it has particular responsibilities for the small number of high school students, aged 16 to 18 years old, who participate in work experience in its retail stores.

Any person who works in a one-on-one client relationship, irrespective of the age of the client, must complete a working with children check. All other employees who work in team settings must complete a satisfactory police clearance.

Principle 2: Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously

The Uniting Church acknowledges children's rights and wants to ensure children know that they have a right to be and feel safe, and what to do about it if they don't. We know this means providing

information to children and young people and their families in a way that is easily understood and accessible, taking into account their age, culture and the context of our contact with them.

We commit to the following principles and actions:

2.1 All Uniting Church entities will work to inform children, young people and their families with information about their rights, including to safety, information and participation.

2.2 In our interactions with and decision-making impacting on children and young people, we will recognise the importance of friendships and encourage support from peers in helping children feel safe and connected.

2.3 Where relevant to the setting or context, we will consider the need to ensure children have access to sexual abuse prevention information that is appropriate to the age and context.

2.4 We will ensure our staff and volunteers are familiar with the signs of abuse and grooming and are skilled to facilitate child-friendly ways for children to express their views and raise concerns.

Principle 2 case studies

Parramatta Mission NSW

Parramatta Mission is a church based community delivering a range of services from over 80 sites across Western Sydney to the Central Coast, Sydney's Northern Suburbs, the Blue Mountains, Liverpool, Hunter, and New England.

Over the past year, Parramatta Mission has delivered the [Love Bites](#) program to young people engaged in its Youth Services crisis accommodation. The program provides a safe space and activities to help young people talk about domestic and family violence and sexual assault prevention. Participants from Parramatta Mission learnt about the prevalence and forms of domestic and family violence and sexual assault, explored models of respectful relationships and considered how they could support each other and their friends.

UnitingSA

UnitingSA provides a diverse range of programs across aged care, community, disability, mental health, child development and employment across South Australia.

Young people in UnitingSA's youth programs are provided with a suite of factsheets that explain the organisation's person centred care principles and commitment to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people who access their services.

UnitingCare QLD

UnitingCare delivers a mix of community, aged care, disability and health care services across Queensland and the Northern Territory.

UnitingCare partners with centres of academic excellence to conduct research into understanding and better responding to the voices of children. Pivotal to this is the Empowering Children's Voices Project

which entered phase 2 in 2020. This project has enabled the creation of a UnitingCare Youth Parliament comprising children and young people who are engaged in the organisation's out of home care services. The Youth Parliament acts as an advisory group to inform decision making about services and programs that affect them.

UnitingCare provides welcome packs to children and young people entering placement and foster care which provide information about their rights, outline how to access a confidential 24 hour reporting line and explains how they can provide feedback about the service they participate in.

Principle 3: Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing

The Uniting Church acknowledges that families have the primary responsibility for the upbringing of their children and that strong family, community and cultural connections create protective factors which can impact on a child's vulnerability to abuse. We will include families in our ways of working and make space for all people to voice concerns in relation to the safety of children.

We commit to the following principles and actions:

3.1 We will support the participation of families in decisions that affect their children, and recognise the need to facilitate culturally safe spaces and ways of working.

3.2 We will communicate openly with children and families about our child safe approach and make sure that information about it is accessible and available.

3.3 We will seek out input and feedback from children, families and communities as we develop and review our child safety policies and practices.

3.4 We will keep families and communities informed about our child safety approach, operations and governance.

Principle 3 case studies

Congregations of NSW

Each year, parents/guardians of children involved in **New Lambton Uniting Church's** children's and youth ministries are required to complete a registration form. The form includes questions that allow families to make decisions regarding their child's safety such as whether their photograph can be taken and/or used on the church's social media sites and whether children are allowed to travel with adult volunteers. Families are supported to update their permissions at any time.

At the beginning of each year, children and leaders work together to decide a list of rules that ensure the safety of all participants. These rules address both physical safety (e.g. always stay where leaders

can see you, keep our bodies to ourselves) and emotional safety (e.g. listen respectfully when someone is talking, inform a trusted adult if you feel uncomfortable).

All families are made aware, through in-person announcements, and email communications, of New Lambton's adherence to the Principles of a Child Safe UCA.

Ebenezer-Pitt Town Church was established in 1809 and is Australia's oldest Church. It has a small congregation. Despite its small size, the Church Council is committed to upholding the Principles of a Child Safe UCA and has oversight of the Sunday school which is the main activity involving children.

The Sunday school teacher is a registered teacher who has undertaken all of the NSW screening requirements in order to maintain teacher registration and work with children. Direct communication works best for this small congregation. The teacher meets the parents/carers of each child in the Sunday school and outlines the activities their children will be involved in and any associated risks. Parent/carers are encouraged to visit/see their children in the Sunday school environment at any time.

Principle 4: Diversity is respected and equity is promoted

The Uniting Church wants to be a child safe organisation, but also a child friendly organisation, where we embrace and value diversity and provide safety for all people to realise their full potential, noting this is different for everyone. We commit to equitable treatment of all people regardless of age, abilities, gender or social, economic or cultural background.

We commit to the following principles and actions:

4.1 The Uniting Church will promote inclusion of all children, considering the diversity of their circumstances.

4.2 We will ensure that children and young people have access to information, supports and complaints processes that are accessible, easy to understand and appropriate to age and culture of the child.

4.3 We will pay attention to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and children from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, children with a disability, children who have experienced trauma and other vulnerable children.

Principle 4 case studies

Wesley Mission QLD

Wesley Mission Queensland (WMQ) is an integral part of the Uniting Church in Queensland and operates as a mission activity of the Albert Street Uniting Church. It provides a suite of community, aged care, childcare, disability, NDIS and mental health services.

WMQ's recruitment of educators for children and young people includes specific questions to determine the applicant educator's capacity to identify and respond to indicators of child safety concerns, neglect

and/or abuse. Educators are trained annually in child protection, which includes training to identify and interpret child safety risks.

Educators use a mix of evidence based resources to talk to children about safety, including the 5 hand 5 finger exercise – children draw a hand and on each finger they write the name of a person they can talk to if they don't feel safe. This activity also supports educators to talk about feelings that children may have if they don't feel safe.

Congregations of NSW

There are a number of culturally and linguistically diverse congregations throughout the Synod of NSW and ACT, including those that cater to the Korean, Rotuman, Fijian and Tongan communities. A number of our churches in the Synod offer prayers in other languages. For example, Burwood Uniting Church in Sydney offers readings in their newsletter in Sri Lankan, Chinese and Korean. Eastwood Uniting Church projects slides for sermons, readings and prayers in Korean, Chinese and English. Some churches offer pictorial slides as part of their worship to assist those whose language background is not English. Many offer English classes to assist those who need language support. The Uniting Church celebrates the diversity of cultures and languages which are part of the Church nationally.

Synod of Victoria and Tasmania

The Synod of Victoria and Tasmania's Intergenerational Team promotes and resources an intergenerational approach to ministry that is inclusive of children, along with a contextual, relational understanding of ministry with young people (allowing for diverse values).

The Synod's Disability Action Plan (2019-2022) includes in its matrix of actions the objective to ensure people with disabilities are able to fully participate in worship, social activities and leadership. This includes a theological rationale and statement about disability inclusion, with reference to camping, cultural diversity, young people and children.

The Synod actively seeks to work with local leaders who have a lived experience of diversity to inform cultural considerations about child safety.

Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress

In 1995 the Uniting Church entered into a relationship with the first peoples of Australia through formalising a covenant with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. The UCA commits itself to the ongoing journey of reconciliation and justice. This is expressed differently across the Church according to local relationships and initiatives. However, it remains an important priority in the Church's life.

Principle 5: Our people are suitable for work with children and committed to values of child safety and wellbeing

Recruitment and screening of all people who work with children is a vital part of keeping children safe. We will be intentional with our people, exploring values, understanding motivations for working with children and ensuring ongoing training and supervision to maintain awareness and vigilance amongst our communities.

We commit to the following principles and actions:

5.1 We will ensure that recruitment, referee checking and screening processes for all our people include an emphasis on child safety and wellbeing.

5.2 All persons who need a working with children check will have a current check, including international criminal history checks where required.

5.3 Those working with children will receive an induction which emphasises child safe culture and sets out behavioural expectations in working with children, along with record keeping, information sharing and reporting obligations.

5.4 Ongoing staff support, supervision and people management will include a focus on child safety and wellbeing.

Principle 5 case studies

National

The National Safe Church Unit has developed a National Policy Framework for Child Safe Screening: pre-appointment screening for staff and volunteers for implementation across the Church. It provides policy direction to Synods about the screening processes that must be undertaken before people are appointed to paid and volunteer positions to ensure they are suitable for work with children and are committed to values of child safety and wellbeing. The framework includes guidance on creating position descriptions, writing advertising positions and forming interview questions in addition to the formal screening processes managed by state and territory governments. It also outlines the Church's expectation that the "no card, no start' approach provision applied by some state and territory governments is adopted as best practice across all Synods regardless of legislative requirements.

A Church wide policy requires that an appointed person must be immediately withdrawn from for all expressions of ministry and/or leadership if their positive notice working with children check expires or is revoked.

The framework recognises that pre-appointment screening and working with children checks do not, in and of themselves, keep children safe. It highlights the continuous need for everyone across the life of the Church to take sustained action to uphold the Principles of a Child Safe UCA and take responsibility for the safety of children and young people.

Congregation of NSW

Every volunteer with **Blacktown Uniting Church** who will engage with children is required to secure a positive working with children check. Child safety training is mandatory for people seeking to become Brigade Officers, including training to supervise any additional helpers. People are counselled on Safe Church issues to raise their awareness and understanding. Leaders of children's groups regularly review the safety of children and young people which contributes to Blacktown's safe church culture.

South Australian Synod

The Synod has introduced a mandatory requirement for all appointed leaders to have a valid working with children check before they are appointed.

The Synod instigates the initial request for most working with children screening checks. This enables the Synod to hold a central record of all screening requests and results. The Synod can check the validity of every working with children check in the central record and receives live notifications from the relevant authorities about any changes to eligibility.

Employment contracts provided by the Synod include a requirement in every role for a working with children check and for role holders to undertake Mandatory Reporting training.

Principle 6: Child focused complaints processes

We acknowledge that to be effective, processes to raise concerns and complaints about the safety of children need to be known, simple and taken seriously. Uniting Church processes will prioritise the safety and wellbeing of children in the way we manage and respond to complaints and concerns.

We commit to the following principles and actions:

6.1 Each Uniting Church entity will have an accessible, child focused complaint handling policy which clearly outlines the roles and responsibility of leadership, staff and volunteers, approaches to dealing with different types of complaints, breaches of relevant policies (including codes of conduct) and obligations to protect and report.

6.2 Our complaint handling processes will be culturally appropriate, clear and easily understood by children and young people, and all our people.

6.3 Complaints will be taken seriously and responded to promptly and thoroughly. Where a complaint of abuse of a child becomes known it will be immediately reported to the authorities, including police and other statutory authorities, and we will immediately take the appropriate steps to assess and minimise any further risk or harm.

6.4 The Uniting Church mandates any person who is aware of, or suspects child abuse or harm to make a report to the authorities, including police and other statutory authorities, and we will support relevant authorities' investigations into any concerns about children and/or allegations of abuse or harm towards children. While investigations are being conducted, we will ensure child protection measures continue to be in place. In consultation with police and other authorities, and subject to

their approval, we will conduct our own inquiries in order to identify opportunities for child safe practice improvements.

6.5 We will meet reporting, privacy and employment law obligations.

Principle 6 case studies

Congregation of NSW

Bathurst Uniting Church has implemented a child focused complaint handling system that is understood by children, volunteers and families. The Church has an information procedure that outline roles and responsibilities of people who deal with different types of complaints and it outlines the obligations of everyone to act and report child safety concerns. The procedure also identifies how complaints are taken seriously, timeframes for responding, reporting mechanisms, and explains how privacy obligations are met.

Queensland Synod

As [reported in 2019](#), the Queensland Synod uses the B.C.A.L.M reporting process for lay workers and the R.E.S.P.O.N.D reporting process for Ministry Agents who become aware of or receive a report about child safety.

In January 2020, the Synod's Reporting and Referral Guide was updated to include referrals and resources that reflect the inclusion of children and vulnerable adults. The guide is part of a suite of resources provided to Ministry Agents to support Mandatory Reporting and it is included in safe ministry with children training delivered by the Synod.

The Synod also updated a number of tools for Ministry Agents to reflect the terminology changes in Queensland legislation relating to child abuse and neglect. The updated tools have been used in training sessions for Ministry Agents across 2020.

UnitingSA

UnitingSA has ensured that it meets reporting, privacy and employment laws through the development and introduction of a suite of organisational policies which are regularly reviewed and updated in response to changing compliance and/or legislative requirements. The suite includes Recruitment and Selection Policy and Procedure, Child Safe Policy and Procedure, Mandatory Notification Procedure (reporting child abuse and neglect), Privacy Policy, Screening and Police Check Policy and Procedure.

Principle 7: Our people are provided with ongoing education and training on child safety

The Uniting Church commits to keeping child safety high on our agenda and will provide initial and ongoing education and training on child safety to those who work with children. We know that this is critical to ongoing maintenance of a child safe church and to our people maintaining contemporary

knowledge which supports them to make good decisions, to maintain vigilance in recognizing the signs of abuse and to support children who have concerns.

We commit to the following principles and actions:

7.1 Our people will be trained and supported to effectively implement our child safety and wellbeing policies.

7.2 Our people will be given information to recognise indicators of child harm.

7.3 Our people will have information on how to respond effectively to disclosures or concerns of abuse by a child or another person.

7.4 Our people will be given information about how to build safe environments for children and young people, including environments which are safe for people of different cultures.

Principle 7 case studies

National

In 2020, the National Safe Church Unit worked collaboratively with Safe Church leads from each of the Synods and engaged an external child safety expert to develop the UCA National Child Safe Curriculum. The Curriculum provides for a consistent approach to child safety training for people across the Church. It combines contemporary best practice and expert knowledge with the theological underpinnings, policy and operational frameworks of the Church and it aligns with the UCA National Principles for Education and Training
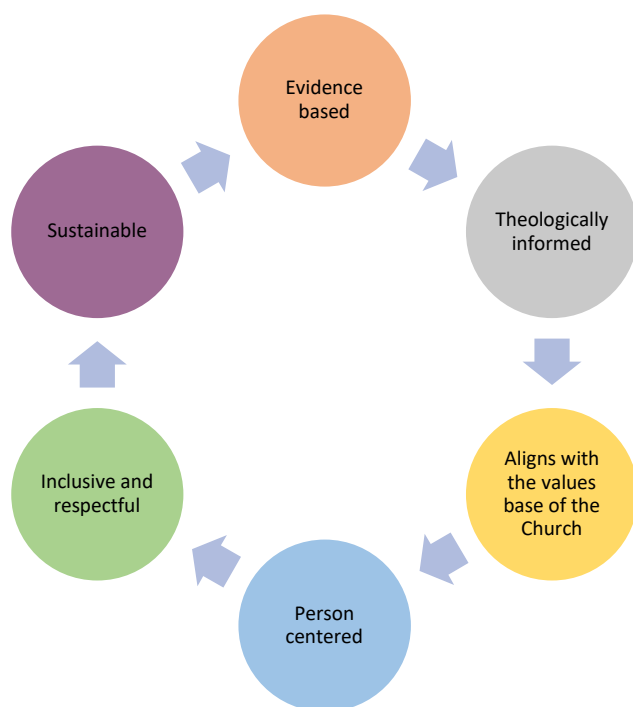

Fig.2 UCA National Principles for Education and Training

Curriculum modules cover the Church's child safe frameworks and foundations, recognising indicators of harm, early intervention, responding to child safety concerns, reporting child safety matters, creating and maintaining child safe environments, managing people and records, engaging with persons of concern and legal, moral and organisational responsibilities.

The Curriculum content is on target for delivery in December 2020 and training will be rolled out across the Church in 2021.

UnitingCare QLD

In 2020, UnitingCare implemented organisational-wide child safety e-learning for all staff and volunteers across the organisation, including Board members and Executive Leaders. Compliance will be monitored and reported annually as a requirement of the Executive to ensure the organisation is meeting this internal compliance feature.

The Child Safety e-learning comprises three comprehensive learning modules:

Level 1: awareness and Code of Conduct sign-off (compulsory for everyone)
Level 2: abuse and harm types, including grooming behaviours and environmental risk awareness (compulsory for all staff working directly with children, irrespective of service stream)
Level 3: reporting and accountability responsibilities incorporating how to support staff to raise issues of concern (compulsory for all managers, irrespective of service stream and highly recommended for any staff who may conduct higher duties)

Additionally, other resources to facilitate the 'culture conversation' to support keeping children safe in all of UnitingCare's services include a new Leaders Conversation Pack and an additional call-to-action messaging – *not knowing is not an excuse* - in all of UnitingCare's child safety collateral.

Synod of NSW and ACT

The Synod established a new Synod Safe Church Unit in 2020. The Unit is responsible for ensuring appropriate safe church training is available to congregations, presbyteries and Special Religious Education (SRE) teachers. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, training was delivered in person in a variety of locations throughout NSW and the ACT. Attendees were provided with a certificate and their participation updated within the Synod records.

In 2020, the Unit developed an online training option via zoom, and also provided details of online training options offered by other denominations who are part of the Safe Church Training Agreement.

Training materials were updated in 2020 to reflect changes to the Mandatory Reporting and Reportable Conduct legislation.

The Synod also provides Ethical Ministry Training to all ministers twice a year and training throughout the ministry formation process.

Principle 8: Physical and online environments promote safety

The Uniting Church acknowledges that physical environments and online behavior can impact on the safety of children. We will be intentional in our assessment of risks and take steps to mitigate risk as much as possible by considering physical environments, evaluating high risk activities and making online behavioural expectations of our people very clear.

We commit to the following principles and actions:

8.1 Our people will identify and mitigate risks in our online and physical environments while facilitating a child's right to privacy, access to information, social connections and learning opportunities.

8.2 Our people will understand their obligations in using our online environments.

8.3 Where activities involve children, we will assess risk from the type of activity, the physical environment and the organisational setting.

8.4 If outside parties are engaged to provide services to us (including temporary/agency staff, procurement), we will consider the child safety requirements in engaging outside parties.

Principle 8 case studies

UnitingSA

UnitingSA has implemented a Child Safe Code of Conduct that is discussed annually with all employees and volunteers, and with students on placement. They are required to understand, sign and uphold the Code of Conduct as part of their role responsibilities.

Individuals who sign the Code of Conduct are committing to:

- Follow organisational policies and procedures as outlined in UnitingSA's Child Safe Policy and Procedure
- Use computers, mobile phones, video and digital cameras appropriately
- Raise any concerns, issues or problems relating to the welfare of a child or young person with a Manager as soon as possible and not let allegations go unacknowledged or not acted upon
- Treat all children and young people with dignity and respect
- Adhere to the UnitingSA Social Media Procedure and guidelines which includes the following:
  - UnitingSA will seek to make any social media content accessible to a diversity of users
  - UnitingSA will not post, access or engage with inappropriate content on social media, in alignment with the Email and Internet Policy. This includes controversial or potentially inflammatory subjects, including politics, sex, and religion, or content featuring nudity, violence, drugs, sex and gambling
  - UnitingSA will not post, access or engage in any social media activity that may violate local, state or commonwealth laws or regulations

Uniting NSW and ACT

Uniting NSW and ACT has a suite of policies which have been developed to ensure physical and online environments promote safety for children and young people. These policies are reviewed regularly, and updates are informed by external and internal changes, learning and best practice.

Examples of policies which support safe environments for children and young people are:

- The Uniting Risk Management Policy and Framework provides a common platform for all risk management activities undertaken, including activities undertaken by children and young people. It outlines roles, responsibilities as well as use of risk matrix, risk severities and risk register
- The Uniting Safety and Wellbeing Policy outlines risk identification and mitigation steps taken to ensure for staff and client safety in Uniting environments. Safety and wellbeing performance indicators are reviewed quarterly, and resources are in place to allow the safety and wellbeing system to be implemented at every level
- The Uniting Media and Social Media Policy updated in February 2020 outlines that children in out of home care must not be identified as being in care and any participation of children in Uniting promotions gives consideration to safety risks, the best interest of the child and ensuring history or current status is not published

Congregation of VIC

Manningham Uniting Church has ensured that their Safe Church Contact person has access to every zoom activity/meeting that includes children and/or young people (worship, play groups, messy church, etc.)
The Safe Church contact 'drops' into meetings/activities to provide a 'safe' presence and support as well as oversight to ensure that any issues or concerns are addressed quickly.

Uniting Church School NSW

Pymble Ladies College introduced a Cyber Safety Program which is designed for students K-12. It provides students with an age appropriate practical hands-on educational journey to raise awareness of online risks and strategies to keep safe when online.

Principle 9: Policies and procedures document child safety

The Uniting Church acknowledges that it is not enough to have in principle commitment to child safety but that these commitments must be documented in policy and procedure so that there is clarity, accountability and shared understanding.

We commit to the following principles and actions:

9.1 Our policies and procedures will address all the Principles of a Child Safe UCA

9.2 Our policies and procedures will be documented and easy to understand

9.3 Development of policies and procedures will include stakeholder consultations

9.4 Church leaders will champion and model compliance with policies and procedures

9.5 Our people will be supported to understand and implement, and consistently apply policies and procedures.

Principle 9 case studies

Congregation of NSW

Charlestown & Garden Suburb Uniting Church is a multi-centre congregation in the Lake Macquarie area. It has a dedicated Safe Church Contact Person who leads child safety work across the congregation.

The Church Council has responsibility for the sign-off and updating of local policy and work has been undertaken to ensure policies address the Principles of a Child Safe UCA. All staff and volunteers are given the Church's Safe Place Policy and must sign-off to acknowledge that they understand the policy and the procedures that flow from it.

Queensland Synod

Each year, the Synod General Secretary asks Presbyteries to gather information from all congregations to demonstrate compliance with their obligations to provide a safe environment for the children they are ministering to. Obligations are set out in the Safe Ministry with Children Policy (the Policy) and processes which align with the state requirements of the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000 (the Act) and the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Regulation 2011 (the Regulation) and include:

- all church councils formally adopt and enact the Policy annually to meet the requirement of the Act and Regulation for a 'Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy'
- a council resolution be made if the congregation determines not to conduct child related activities
- all people working with children are screened, trained, sign a statement of personal commitment to child safety and are approved by the church council before commencing. This screening includes interviews, referee checks and linking of blue cards.

The Synod has provided resources in the form of a full-time permanent Safe Church Assurance and Support Officer, to support these undertakings.

Principle 10: Review and continuous improvement of policy, procedure and practice

The Uniting Church is committed to continuous improvement and will be intentional in its review of policy, procedure and practice. We will examine incidents and reports to identify systemic issues and take lessons from what we learn.

We commit to the following principles and actions:

10.1   We will monitor the implementation of our child safe policies and procedures and conduct regular reviews of our child safe practices

10.2   We will critically review all incidents and reports to identify causes and trends, manage risks, identify systemic issues and improve our child safe policies and practices

10.3   We will communicate with our people and communities on the findings of relevant reviews

Principle 10 case studies

National

Synods and the National Safe Church Unit are working collaboratively to ensure that reviews of Synod/local policies, procedures and practices include consideration of alignment against the Principles of a Child Safe UCA and the UCA National Child Safe Policy Framework. This is strengthening a consistent best practice approach to child safety and embedding a common understanding and language across the life of the Church.

Uniting Victoria and Tasmania

Uniting uses incident and complaints data relating to children and young people to identify key trends and improvements. These are reported monthly to an Executive leadership team sub-committee to monitor their implementation and effectiveness, and bimonthly to the Uniting Board.

Queensland Synod

An annual audit survey occurs across the Synod, to capture information about implementation of the Safe Ministry with Children policies and procedures, as a way to measure compliance against legislative requirements and child safe principles.

All Ministry Agents sign a statement of commitment to child safety annually. All lay workers and volunteers sign a statement of commitment annually which outlines their commitment to the behavioural standards. In signing this personal commitment, all lay staff and volunteers agree to ensure that children are made aware of their rights and of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and its consequences, in line with legislative requirements for all children to know their rights. The Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice for Ministry Agents addresses physical, emotional, behavioural and spiritual boundaries.

The annual audit survey is utilised to identify gaps or areas for further support and growth. A number of strategies, procedures and resources were developed and implemented during 2020, in response to the audit survey outcomes from 2018 and 2019, which included:

- Refresher Training
- Recognition of Prior Learning
- Release of an online training platform
- Review of policies and procedures to include children AND vulnerable adults
- Additional Training Modules – Practicing Shared Guardianship; Providing Safe Online Ministry
- Church management software to assist with recordkeeping
- Additional Training sessions – Audit Readiness; Register of Workers

SECTION 4: Prospective work post 2020

> The Church's commitment to be a safe place for all people is an enduring commitment that spans ministry and mission contexts, including congregations, agencies, hospitals and schools.
>
> A safe church is who we are called to be.

The Church will continue to expand the suite of national resources and tools available to Synods and their congregations, agencies and schools. This work will continue to be led by the National Safe Church Unit in partnership with the Synods. Resources and tools will continue to reflect best practice and external expertise will be engaged where required.

Key national deliverables for 2021 include:

- Roll out of the UCA National Child Safe Curriculum
- Delivery of new national policy frameworks regarding the rights of children and vulnerable people, recruitment of volunteers, interrupting behaviours of concern
- Quality Assurance work to refine the evaluation of national policy frameworks
- Provision of information about child safety in languages other than English and accessible formats
- Delivery of communications and information to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people is a standing agenda item for all decision makers across the life of the Church

Synods will continue to ensure that their congregations, agencies and schools are supported to meet legislative and organisational requirements.

**National
Safe Church Unit**

safechurch.uca.org.au