



# Diocesan Protection and Safety Council

QUARTERLY REPORT

APRIL – JUNE 2022

## Diocesan Protection and Safety Council Meetings

During the second quarter of 2022, the Diocesan Protection and Safety Council ('Council') met on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May. The meeting lasted three hours and fifteen minutes and was conducted face to face with all members in attendance.

Sr Patricia Egan formerly resigned from the Council and Standing Committee for Assisting in Resolving Claims at the meeting. Sr Patricia had been a founding member of the Council in 2016 and prior to that had served on the Diocese's *Towards Healing Panel* for many years.

## Report from the Convenor of the Standing Committee for the Support and Guidance of Healing and Support Issues

The first original Equine Assisted Therapy group started in late May. Therapist, Brenda Tanner, spoke at the monthly CAN meeting in April regarding Equine Assisted Therapy. Expressions of interest were emailed to CAN members.

A Women's Group morning tea was held at ZSH&S in mid-May.

Relationship building efforts with interagency and support groups, especially CAN are ongoing. In April meetings with CAN commenced on the Community Memorial, clarifying survivor expectations and a meeting was held with CAN leadership group around the Coordinator (CAN) position and how it would be overseen and managed.

The Coordinator (CAN) position was filled by Chanel Hughes who started in early May. This is an independent Coordinator position not affiliated with any religious order. There has been a restructure. This used to be the Marist Brothers Co-ordinator role and is now separate and not affiliated with a religious organisation. It is funded by the Marist Brothers and the Diocese (grant for three years), auspice and managed by CAN.

Manager Zimmerman Services, Healing and Support, Magda Mycak, attended the Child Protection and Perpetual Day of Remembrance (PDoR) working party meetings. Representatives came from other Diocesan agencies/services. It was decided that there won't be a survivor lead event this year. The Town Hall and Cathedral lights will be lit up again. An article about the importance of the PDoR and what it means to survivors will be written by Magda for the Aurora.

A Survivor of the Diocese and a CAN Member approached Magda to commission a piece of music to commemorate the PDoR. This music could be used by schools, the church and for future PDoR events. The conductor recommended is Mr David Banney.

In May there was a data breach within CTARS record keeping system. CatholicCare and numerous other agencies who use this system were affected. Fortunately, ZSH&S had not transferred to CTARS for record keeping. We are pleased to confirm that none of ZSH&S clients records were breached.

Recruitment for the ZSH&S caseworker position was unsuccessful for two rounds of advertising. Applicants were not qualified or did not have enough experience. The third round of advertising was most successful and closed in early July. Altogether there were six applications. Magda changed working days to Tuesdays to Fridays so that the service is covered on all days. Caseloads remain steady. Approximate numbers throughout the April-June quarter:

- ZSH&S Caseworker – 20
- Vacant - Unallocated – ZSH&S Caseworker - 18
- ZSH&S Manager – 8

Total of 46 active matters with various degrees of complexity and contact.

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

The second quarter of 2022 saw a significant increase in the numbers of personal injury claims brought against the Diocese. The practice of '*Claims farming*' – firms

going into prisons and producing multiple personal injury claims by inmates, contributed to the increase. There were two Standing Committee meetings during the second quarter, on 7 April and 26 May.

Two mediations were held during the quarter, both in May and both were settled on the day.

It was a relatively quiet period for National Redress Scheme, with only four RFI (Request for Information) submitted during the quarter. All four RFI were submitted within the statutory timeframes.

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

Consistent with its Charter, in this period the Standing Committee met on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 2022. As previously reported action has been taken to fill a number of vacancies on the Committee and on this occasion, we welcomed Ms Courtney Newman as the appointed representative of St Nicholas Early Education Centres. It is hoped that other vacancies will be filled in the coming quarter.

At this meeting, the members of the Committee took time to consider its performance against the key requirements of the Constitution of the Diocesan Protection and Safety Council, and as important, the Committee's Mandate. The primary objective of this exercise was to ensure that the Standing Committee was providing advice to the Diocesan Council on its oversight of the operations and strategic direction of the Office of Safeguarding (OoSG), and any identifiable risks to OoSG fulfilling its mandate.

Notwithstanding the vacancies on the Standing Committee (including the challenges of meeting by technical means versus face-to-face) we are of the view that the Committee's focus and direction are consistent with its role, functions and responsibilities. The Director, OoSG has provided full and frank advice on the operations of the Office and he, in turn, has sought the advice and guidance of the Committee on a wide range of issues.

The Strategic Plan of the OoSG has been the subject of comment at the Committee's meetings. To this end the Committee's role is not to micromanage issues, rather, to advise and assess the functionality and overall performance of both the Director and the Office. The Committee seeks to undertake its role by discussion and analysis of current and historic data, the contemporary nature of OoSG policies and procedures and financial reporting (including budget integrity). The key to this approach is by ensuring governance and compliance with agreed operating systems and protocols.

Turning to more specific issues, the Committee noted that personnel attached to the OoSG have attended a number of Police and Principal's Forums conducted by the Newcastle and Raymond Terrace Police Area Commands. This is important cross-agency building and the benefits to the OoSG and law enforcement is an important one.

Training in the form of Courses or Bespoke training has continued with staff across Diocesan schools and colleges, as well as St Nicholas Early Education Centres, CatholicCare, Parishes and Diocesan Curia.

During this period, the OoSG commenced collaboration with the Diocesan Governance and Human Resources teams to align policy in the

Safeguarding Framework where there may be multiagency interest.

Of particular note were the complimentary remarks of the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian regarding the Diocese's handling of a complex investigation into allegations of historic abuse arising interstate. This work reflects the competence and diversity of the skill of investigators attached to or undertaking work on behalf of the OoSG.

The Committee noted the Director's advice on seven (7) outstanding investigations that have run for 90 days plus (as of 30 June 2022). The Director's advice on the status of these matters was noted, notably, issues impacting on the finalisation of these investigations. In these and all complaint matters the importance of advice as to the status of the investigation to both the complainant and the respondent was emphasised.

Finally, issues impacting on the human resource and financial management of the Office were discussed with the Director and the Committee noted action taken or proposed.

During this quarter, the Committee took time to meet with the staff of OoSG to hear of their work and compliment them on their achievements on behalf of the Diocese. The development, implementation and monitoring of professional standards, including the realisation and monitoring of investigation outcomes, is a challenging task. The Committee noted the work of the OoSG with thanks and appreciation.