



Diocesan Protection and Safety Council

QUARTERLY REPORT

JULY – SEPTEMBER 2022

Diocesan Protection and Safety Council Meetings

During the third quarter of 2022, the Diocesan Protection and Safety Council ('Council') met on the 23rd of August. The meeting lasted three hours and was conducted face to face, with all members in attendance.

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

This quarter we had two Standing Committee members resign due to changing responsibilities. We are looking for another two to three members, in particular a Psychologist and Survivor. Meeting dates were changed so that they would flow better with the Diocesan Protection and Safety Council.

The first original Equine Assisted Therapy group completed their second course in October 2022. The second group started mid-October.

A Women's Group morning tea was held at Zimmerman Services - Healing and Support (ZSH&S) at the end of August. We have added a 'reflection' prior to the morning tea to add a spiritual, mindful component.

ZSH&S met with Rev Rod Pattenden about the Loud Sky Project and exhibitions expressing the survivor experience through the healing power of art. We will encourage our clients to get involved. The Manager attended an Art and Spirituality workshop by Rose McAllister and is in discussions on how to incorporate more art related activities in our service provision.

Relationship building efforts continue with interagency and support groups, especially CAN. The CAN Coordinator position has been filled and is going well with good interagency communication as well as implementing activities such as bushwalking and cooking classes to complement the monthly CAN meetings and strengthen connections and support.

ZSH&S reconnected with Taree and Newcastle Sexual Assault Services, and SAMSN.

Diocesan Administrator, Fr Greg Barker, met with the Lord Mayors office and Anglican Bishop re community memorial. Meetings are ongoing and early indications are promising. Further community consultation is expected.

The Town Hall and Cathedral lights were lit up during the Perpetual Day of Remembrance (PDoR).

An article about the importance of the PDoR and what it means to survivors was published in the Aurora written by the Manager.

Fr Greg Barker received positive feedback about his homily. Disappointingly, the PDoR seems to have had a mixed bag of responses within parishes throughout the Diocese. This is an area that we hope will continue to build in importance and momentum in the years ahead.

Caseworker Leanne Beckhouse commenced in early August. She brings with her 35 years of Social Work experience, skills and knowledge. The team continues to present a part of Safeguarding training Course 3, with the OoSG. We are working on a client database and better way of obtaining service stats. In 2023 we will also focus on updating and creating policy and procedures. Caseloads remain steady throughout the July - September quarter, with a 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

Between the first week of July till mid-August 2022 the Convenor of the Standing Committee (Director of Safeguarding) took five weeks annual leave. The Executive Coordinator Safeguarding was given responsibility for the Claims portfolio and National Redress Scheme during this time.

The Standing Committee for Assisting in Resolving Claims met three times during the third quarter. There were two mediations held, where one claim was settled on the day. Regrettably the second mediation failed to settle, however the claimant

intended to make further submissions, which may then lead to the Diocese reviewing its current position.

The Diocese submitted seven RFI (request for information), related to six individual applicants, to the National Redress Scheme during the third quarter.

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

During the quarter ended 30 September 2022, the Standing Committee met on 11 August 2022. Notwithstanding a number of vacancies due to death, resignation and retirement, the Committee (and therefore the Diocese) is fortunate to have the skill and expertise of a variety of professional people whose objective is the realisation of the Mandate established to oversight the Office of Safeguarding (OoSG).

In the period under review, the OoSG was under the effective management of Ms Lisa Wollschlager (given the absence of the Director, Mr Sean Tynan on annual leave). She (and OoSG Executive and Investigation Teams) discharged their duties in a highly competent and efficient manner and her report to the Standing Committee indicated an ongoing focus on professional standards, governance and compliance across the Diocese.

The Director and his staff have been working assiduously with St Nicholas Out of School Care Centres and its newly appointed Director to rectify a range of reporting, compliance and training issues which arose out of oversight and complaint matters. These issues are being addressed by enhanced

induction and in-service training. Notably, the Governance Team (Shared Services) are working with St Nicholas OoSH to drive cultural change with an emphasis on systems, processes, compliance and agreed outcomes. The Committee will continue to monitor this body of work.

Compliance remains a high priority for the OoSG and work continues to have the whole of the Diocese accredited to the NSW Child Safe Standards in conjunction with the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards. The realisation of this objective will see the Maitland-Newcastle Diocese as the first significant and religious entity to establish compliance with the NSW Child Safe Standards.

The status of investigations, in particular, those over 90 days remained at high rates for this quarter – some seven (7) in all. These delays (from initiation to completion) can be for a range of reasons which, on occasions, are outside the control of the OoSG. Measures to address the timely resolution of complaints are the subject of the Director’s attention and every attempt is made to advise the complainant of the status of the investigation. The Committee noted that complaints are not regarded as closed until matters have concluded before the Courts (conviction or acquittal). Of equal note, the Oversight Committee sought advice on the status and finalisation of complaint matters from the perspective of the respondent. This is an area of related importance which is underpinned by the principles of procedural fairness. This issue is to be the subject of further deliberations and report to the Committee.

In accordance with the Director’s responsibilities, a report is provided to the Standing Committee and,

in turn, the Council. The content of this report was discussed and it was agreed that an emphasis on enhanced reportable conduct data, including sustained data, should be provided. Such data is to include trends over time (current and historic), pattern analysis, and other relevant data upon which the Standing Committee could draw informed conclusions and advice to the Diocesan Protection and Safety Council. This requirement includes wider financial reporting which ensures budget integrity in the financial management of the OoSG.