



Diocesan Protection and Safety Council

QUARTERLY REPORT

October - December 2022

Diocesan Protection and Safety Council Meetings

During the fourth quarter of 2022, the Diocesan Protection and Safety Council ('Council') met on the 29th of November. The meeting lasted two hours and fifty minutes 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

The original Equine Assisted Therapy group completed their second course in October 2022. The second group started mid-October and are halfway through, allowing for breaks for Christmas, sickness and family tragedy. The team had an afternoon tea with Brenda Tanner, Equine Assisted therapist running the groups, before Christmas to discuss how the groups are going and future possibilities.

A Women's Group Christmas lunch was at Teale in East Maitland in November. The group is going strong with shared experiences and understanding, shared reflections and wisdom, and the women involved are very supportive of one another.

Ongoing relationship building efforts with interagency and support groups. Kelly Pavan (Executive Manager Therapeutic Services, CatholicCare) and Magda Mycak (ZSHS Manager) met with CAN President, Mr Bob

O'Toole and another member of the CAN Leadership Team in late November. The ZSHS Manager and the CAN Leadership Team have been working collaboratively on matters around ZSHS clients and CAN members.

Magda wrote about ZSHS in the Diocesan Administrator's newsletter to Parish Priests informing them she is happy to visit parishes in 2023 to introduce herself and discuss the service.

ZSHS Team attended an Exhibition Opening - The Healing Power of Art – as part of the Loud Sky Project in November. Team members also attended a discussion re the artwork in December. More collaboration on an installation at the Catholic and Anglican Cathedrals is planned for 2023.

Magda and Brenda Moloney (Office Administrator) attended the Mental Health Month breakfast in October. The ZSHS Team attended Liturgy and morning tea for All Saints Day at the Diocese. Magda and Leanne attended the Staff Mass and morning tea in December.

Commissioning music for the Perpetual Day of Remembrance was approved by the Standing Committee following an application to the Bishops Healing Fund. It will be composed by David Banney and a collaboration between ZSHS and a Survivor and a member of the CAN Leadership Team. A meeting has

been scheduled in January to hear the first draft and discuss the name of the piece.

Magda and Michelle (Caseworker) celebrated employment anniversaries in October. First year for Magda and three years for Michelle.

Magda, Brenda and Leanne (Caseworker) attended their first two-day CatholicCare conference in November. It was an occasion for deep learning and a great opportunity for ZSHS staff to be fully introduced to all the CatholicCare team, to meet new people, and reflect on, and see in practice the mission, vision, and values of CatholicCare.

The team is working very well, and team bonds, dynamics and moral are positive and strong. The Team has been busy supporting clients through court processes, claims and criminal justice, accessing information such as childhood records, getting clients on the Disability Support Pension and in homes after years of homelessness. As they are all part-time and a small team they have worked together on matters and demonstrated great teamwork for the best outcomes of clients.

Caseloads remain steady. There has been 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

The Standing Committee for Assisting in Resolving Claims met on two occasions during the fourth quarter of 2022, on 25 October and 30 November.

Traditionally the last quarter of the year tends to be busy, this was very much the case in 2022. There were six mediations and one informal settlement conference held during this quarter. The preponderance of mediated settlements (rather than informal settlement conferences) is an indicator of the

increasing challenges faced by all parties, attempting to achieve resolution of these personal injury claims.

Whilst the Diocese was able to resolve six of the seven claims, regrettably one remained unresolved.

However, agreement was reached for the claimant to submit further evidence and a further mediation will be worked towards in 2023.

The Diocese was equally busy responding to the National Redress Scheme. The Diocese submitted eleven RFI (requests for information) relating to eight individual applicants, two applicants generating multiple RFI.

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

In the period ended 31 December 2022, the Committee met on 15 November 2022.

As last reported, the Committee had experienced a number of vacancies due to the death of Fr Paul O'Neill, and the resignation or retirement of other members. Consequently, a number of suitable applicants were identified, and they will take up their positions on the Oversight Committee on 23 February 2023. The new Committee members are Fr Peter Street, Foster Tuncurry and Ms Patricia Hales, Principal, St Joseph's College, Lochinvar. Two further appointments are pending, namely, that of a community member and a representative of the Diocesan Safety and Protection Council.

The Committee was pleased to appoint one of its Committee members to the position of Deputy Chair. Ms Julianna Demetrius has been a member of the Oversight Committee since its establishment. She is a Solicitor of the Supreme Court of NSW, and the former Assistant Ombudsman (Strategic Projects) and acting Deputy Ombudsman in NSW. Julianna brings a wealth of practical experience in the field of child protection,

governance and compliance policy to the Committee and her appointment as Deputy Chair has been warmly welcomed.

During this quarter the Office of Safeguarding (OoSG) contributed to the review by Mr Mark Tedeschi KC of the *Children's Guardian Act (NSW) 2019*. His report to the NSW Government is due in the first quarter of 2023.

As important, drawing on its Strategic Plan 2022-2023, the OoSG has finalised its Strategic Plan 2024-2025 and work is underway to operationalise the latter Plan. These Plans, and the realisation of their stated goals, serve as a barometer to both the Committee and the Diocesan Council on the performance of the OoSG. As important, these Plans and the outcomes reached will be assessed by Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd (ACSL) when they conduct an independent audit of the OoSG in the latter part of this year. The primary objective of these audits is one of continuous improvement.

Training of new personnel and current staff across the Diocese remains a priority. Staff are required to attend training on child protection procedures and policies, legislation and policy requirements of Government, and directions which are set by ACSL or the Diocesan Protection and Safety Council. Training is delivered either in a face-to-face situation or via the Diocese's eLearning platform.

The management of investigations is and remains a critical issue for the Committee's attention. This quarter has seen a modest reduction in the number of investigations which have been in situ for over 90 days. Presently, this numbers five complaints.

As previously advised, investigations are not regarded as finalised until (and where relevant) the complaint has been resolved by Court action. Understandably, delays in the legal system are beyond the control of the OoSG and every endeavour is made to bring about a timely resolution of complaints.

A critical aspect of complaint management is the need to provide advice to the complainant and or his/her representatives on the status of their matters. Every endeavour is made to ensure that this is done. So, too, there is a need to advise respondents in complaint matters of the status of complaints which have been made against them. In both situations, the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness apply.

Finally, the Committee engaged in a self-initiated review of the first 12 months of its operation. The purpose of this review was to:

- Determine if the Committee was meeting its mandated objectives.
- Review the functionality of the Committee (skills mix, diversity), and
- Consider if there were issues from a governance and compliance perspective, which ought to be the subject of closer attention by the Committee going forward.

The Committee's measurement is the mandate set by the late Bishop William Wright and we are satisfied that this objective is being met when having regard to the operational, administrative and financial performance of the OoSG. The Committee's role is not to operate the OoSG, rather, it is one of oversight and the provision of advice to the Director thereby ensuring that the systems, policies and procedures within the OoSG are operating at their optimum.