



Safeguarding Children in Sport

Summarising the results of the research phase of a project seeking to build the capacity of sport to protect children and young people from abuse, harm and exploitation

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Introduction

Organised sport is an integral part of the fabric of childhood in Australia. According to the most recent ABS data, in the 12 months prior to April 2012, 1.7 million (60%) of the 2.8 million children aged 5 to 14 years in Australia participated in at least one organised sport outside of school hours. On average, they spent 5 hours a fortnight playing, training or participating in organised sport.

The protection of children in sport from abuse, exploitation and the resultant harm such experiences cause has emerged as a critical area of focus. At state and national levels, a number of initiatives have focused on educating sporting codes and their constituents to understand and implement strategies which build the capacity to create and maintain child safe cultures.

However, like many other institutions with a duty of care to children and young people, sporting organisations have not been immune to the failures of policy, procedures and systems to protect children from abuse and exploitation by coaches, administrators and other participants. The current Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has highlighted the scope of horror that has traumatised the lives of so many children in schools, child care, sporting activities, churches as a result of sexual abuse by adults in positions of trust and authority.

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) contracted the Australian Childhood Foundation (ACF) to undertake a project in response to what it acknowledged is

“...a steadily changing environment and the need to be innovative, up-to-date and practical in the Australian sport sector’s approach to the issue of child safe sporting environments....”

In its brief, the ASC identified that

“...the outcomes of the project will not only help to reinforce existing child protection policies, but perhaps more importantly, will increase the confidence and awareness of those who participate in and deliver Australian sport...”

The origins of this project began in April 2012, when the ASC conducted two forums for National Sporting Organisations (NSOs) and the Play by the Rules (PBTR) National Reference Group. The top priority identified by the PBTR Reference Group and the second top priority from the NSOs was child protection in sport.

The key objectives of the project are to:

- provide the ASC with an insight as to the strategies it could implement in order to deliver increased confidence, awareness and implementation of child protection policies across ASC funded and recognised NSOs;
- provide NSOs and associated groups with the capacity to implement appropriate actions that reflect a very clear understanding of their responsibilities towards the protection of children in sport; and,
- develop education and capability-building strategies that extend the previous work undertaken in this area, in particular the capacity of the sport sector to prevent, and deal confidently with child abuse in sport.

In establishing the project, the ASC recognised

“...that there are a range of agencies across the sector including some NSOs that have made significant progress in creating child safe environments....A major part of this review will provide the ASC with more information on what is actually happening at the grass roots level with regards to child safe environments; where gaps have emerged in sport and how they compare to other sectors; and finally what kind of assistance clubs, associations, state and national bodies may require to continuously improve their child safe environments...”

The project collected and analysed the following three sources of data:

- a scan of the international and national literature that specifically pertain to the protection of children in sport;
- a stocktake of the initiatives which have been undertaken in sport at a national and state level in Australia; and,
- feedback from NSOs, State Government Sporting Authorities and other important stakeholders collected through stakeholder forums and interviews;

The aim of this summary report is to present the preliminary findings from the project. Specifically, it defines the scope of issues which a child protection in sport strategy should address in its development and implementation. It provides the outcomes of the literature review and the final key messages from the project.

The summary report will be used as the basis for a further round of discussion with key stakeholders seeking feedback about the nature of the final recommendations that should be made to the Australian Sport Commission.

Please note: For ease of reading, the term “child” or children” means any young person aged up to 18 years.

Scanning the literature

Brackenridge (2015) has pointed out that

“...while safeguarding and child protection are both relative newcomers to the research and policy agenda in sport...there is an emerging international alliance of interests developing evidence based policy to improve safety for athletes...”

Given the infancy of this field, the risks facing children when they are participating in organised sport are not clearly understood. In a recent review of the literature, Vicsport (2014) found that

“...there is only limited research available on the subject and appropriate structures and policies for preventing, reporting and responding appropriately to child protection issues in sport are often lacking...”

Community awareness and concern about the safety of children whilst they are participating in activities or programs run by a range of organisations (including sport) has increased recently as a result of two major inquiries in Australia – the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations in 2013 (Family and Community Development Committee, 2013) and the current Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2014).

In this section, the available literature on safeguarding children in organisations and in particular sport is reviewed with a view to drawing out the most pertinent themes to support the development of a framework for understanding how the culture that exists in and around sport can be strengthened in order to first prevent, then identify and finally respond to the abuse, exploitation and harm of children.

There is a lack of definitional clarity.

Child abuse is often considered an “umbrella” term, which encompasses a range of different forms with differing consequences for children (Goddard, 1996). Due to the breadth of its possible interpretation, its utility has been questioned. Similarly, the term child protection has meanings that range from a broad community based activity that organises the actions of whole populations to very narrow definitions associated only with forensic procedures necessary to uncover evidence in the decision making of statutory authorities in order to place children in out of home care.

In the literature related to the practices of safeguarding children within organisations, there is a high degree of slippage between terms which are often used interchangeably leading to confusion and an ongoing sense of knowing but not really understanding what is being talked about (Tucci and Mitchell, 2015).

Tucci and Mitchell (2015) have argued that the key conceptual and practice dilemmas about child protection in organisations are reflected in the complexity of the questions summarised below.

- Should definitions only be related to abuse or to forms of misconduct?
- Should definitions include forms of harassment and/or exploitation?
- Should definitions include peer to peer, or child to child, problematic or abusive behaviour?
- What is the difference between prevention and protection?
- What does safeguarding children mean?
- What is a child safe culture?
- Who is responsible for doing what in protecting children? What is the role of the employee/volunteer? What is the role of the organisation?
- Is it within the scope of definitions to include abuse which is perpetrated by an employee or volunteer but not whilst he/she is at work?

- What is the difference in response to child abuse that perpetrated by an employee or volunteer of an organisation compared to child abuse which occurs in a child's family or community and is identified by an employee or volunteer of an organisation?

For sport, the definitional boundaries of key constructs are becoming even more increasingly blurred. Lang and Hartill (2015a) have argued that there are a number of emerging issues related to safeguarding and child protection in sport which

“...receive less media coverage, generate less public concern, remain under researched and ...have been marginalised...”

These include

- exposing children to too much training, pressuring children to take part in inappropriate training regimes and allowing coaches to employ inappropriate training practices (Oliver and Lloyd, 2015);
- supporting beliefs that lead to children being willing to play in pain, return from injury before they are fully recovered and vilify other athletes who do not conform to such expectations (Pike and Scott, 2015); and,
- exposure to repeated emotional abuse, including being belittled individually or as a team, criticism and mockery of the child's performance and overly authoritarian approaches to coaching (Stirling and Kerr, 2015).

There is limited understanding of children's experiences of sport.

It is almost universally recognised that there is very little research which has explored children's experiences of harm during or as a result of their participation in sport. This data is critical in being able to identify the scope of the problem and then develop targeted approaches designed to protect children from these risks.

In the most significant study of its kind, Alexander, Stafford and Lewis (2011) sought and reviewed feedback from 6124 young people aged between 18-22 years through an online survey which examined their experiences and retrospective views of participating in organised sport when they were children up to the age of 16 years.

The outcomes of the study were revealing. On the whole, sport was viewed positively by the majority of young people. However, they also expressed concerns about some of their experiences. For example,

- 75% of all respondents had experienced at least one occasion where they had been criticised for their performance, had been shouted at or sworn at or been embarrassed or humiliated by a coach, parent, peer or sport administrator;
- a minority of young people reported problems with body image arising from or being given greater expression as a result of some of the requirements of their sport, for example, losing weight to not look fat in swimwear, feeling embarrassed about their body shape - 10% of respondents said they had a special diet plan to reach their perfect weight and 11% had a special exercise plan;
- 10% of respondents reported self harming arising from their experiences of elements of their sport; and,
- 29% of respondents reported experiencing sexual harassment, mainly from peers.

Even more concerning is the reality that these experiences of harm are often accompanied by enforced interpretations that pressure children to explain away, minimise or even ignore the harmful consequences of disrespectful and abusive behaviour.

The authors concluded that the main message arising from the research was

“...a simple one of respecting children and young people and listening carefully to what they say. There is a pressing need to encourage the development of a sporting ethos that is more open; where coaches and other sporting adults are aware of children's sporting and emotional needs as they grow and develop; where young people feel able and are encouraged to share concerns about sport and other issues...at all levels of sport, children's welfare needs should take precedence over the sporting priorities of training and competition...”

Vicsport (2014) highlighted the need to understand children's experiences of harm in sport as a benchmarking exercise for evaluating any initiatives which aim to improve their emotional and physical safety.

There is a lack of evidence about what is effective in protecting children from abuse, exploitation and harm in sport.

Vicsport noted in its recent report that there is recognition from stakeholders that

"...the lack of information about children's experiences in sport, along with an understanding that disclosures of child abuse are often made many years after the abuse occurred, means the sector cannot confirm there is not an issue..."

Hartill and O' Gorman (2014) have argued that

"...there is little evidence that sports organisations or umbrella agencies have attempted to evaluate the efficacy of the policy interventions they have introduced..."

Relating back to the early stage of development of this area of policy, the lack of rigorous and external review of initiatives have led to missed opportunities to

- know what works and why;
- whether any of the actions taken are actually improving the safety of children in sport; and,
- disseminate such knowledge to a wider audience as the basis for continual improvement.

Children with disabilities in sport require a different level of consideration.

Research has demonstrated that children with disabilities are at heightened risk of being abused. Over 15 years ago, in a population based study published in 2000 and still cited today, Sullivan and Knuston estimated that children with disabilities are 3.4 times more likely to be abused than non-disabled peers.

More recently, a global meta-analysis of 16 studies of prevalence and 11 studies of risk, Jones et al (2012) found

- prevalence estimates of 26.7% for violence in the lives of children with disability; and,
- children with disabilities were at 3.68 greater risk of experiencing a form of violence than their non-disabled peers.

The following characteristics are some of the factors which contribute to the heightened risk of abuse for children with disabilities:

- they are very dependent on carers and others around them for many acts of daily living;
- they experience communications difficulties which can impede them reporting or describing abuse experiences;
- they are often more socially isolated and have less opportunity to receive informal support;
- they may have less capacity to perceive the inappropriateness of behaviour by a perpetrator of abuse; and,
- their evidence can be perceived as less credible due to their cognitive impairments/delays.

Most of the literature suggests quite strongly that the abuse of children with disabilities is under-reported (Robinson 2012; Smith, 2015).

If the research about the abuse of children in sport is minimal, then the research about the abuse of children with disabilities in sport is non-existent. Children with disabilities have special needs in relation to their own safety that should be taken into account when developing any safeguarding initiative.

Child safe standards are becoming more homogenous.

Following a summit in London in 2012 entitled Beyond Sport, a partnership of sport related organisations (including the NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit, UK Sport, Swiss Academy for Development, Caribbean Sport and Development Agency, Unicef UK and Right to Play Thailand, Manchester City FC, Coaches Across Continents, Slum Soccer, Soccer without Borders, Special Olympics, USA Swimming, US Olympic Committee) summarized the experiences of children in sport with the following commentary.

“...Over the past 15 years or so, victims of all forms of violence in sport have started to be able to have their voices heard and responded to. Previously, there has been little questioning of the perception that sport is only a force for good for young people. Until the late 1990s/early 2000s very few sports organisations had put in place systems and structures to respond to complaints about the behaviour of adults or other young people.

We now know enough from research and evidence to be clear that sport does not always take place with a focus on children’s rights at its centre, or sometimes fails to fully consider the risks to children, leading to organizational cultures that don’t allow for the discussion of harm and abuse (Brackenridge, Kay and Rind, 2012).

There are also some risks to children and young people which are unique to sport such as the increased risk of all forms of abuse to elite young athletes. Many sport for development programs are provided to extremely vulnerable children who may be affected by violence and abuse in their daily lives and for whom sport should be a safe haven. We should all seek to ensure that sports provision to these young people takes place in safe environments.....(International Safeguarding Children in Sport Working Group, 2014)”.

As a resource to support sport, the Working Group then published a set of guiding principles (called Safeguards) which ambitiously aimed to

“...lay the foundations for a holistic approach to ensuring children’s safety and protection in all sport contexts internationally...(International Safeguarding Children in Sport Working Group, 2014)”.

These eight safeguards are comprised of the following initiatives and/or systems.

Developing a child safeguarding policy – The safeguarding policy creates a safe and positive environment for children and demonstrates that the organisation is serious about its duty of care. It includes a statement of commitment from the organisation as well as required endorsement by the highest level structure of the organisation.

Developing a system to respond to safeguarding concerns – These set of procedures describe the steps for individuals within an organisation to take in different circumstances when there is a concern, complaint or allegation made in relation the safety of a child or young person.

Advice and support – These arrangements provide essential information and support to individuals within organisations, especially those with specified roles for safeguarding children. It should resource responses for children with additional vulnerabilities (for example, disabilities).

Minimising risks to children – A broad sets of procedures for undertaking risk assessments to children and implementing strategies to address those risks in a proactive way.

Guidelines on behaviour – All organisations should have a Code of Conduct that describes clearly and in an understandable form what is an acceptable standard of behaviour for all those adults and other young people who are involved in the sporting activity.

Recruiting, training and communicating – A system for the effective screening, induction and training of adults with a role in administering, supporting or coaching junior sport. It also includes the involvement of young people and families as stakeholders to these processes.

Working with partners – This safeguard is a strategy for promoting collaborative systems for ensuring the protection of children whilst engaged in sport. It includes the promotion and communication of policies and other resources to the community in which the sport takes place.

Monitoring and evaluation – The enactment of an embedded organisational commitment to monitoring of the degree of compliance achieved and the effectiveness of the approach undertaken by the sport to achieve a safeguarding children culture.

The *International Safeguards for Children in Sport* reflect a growing trend towards a greater degree of homogenisation of what are commonly referred to as “standards” as defined within typical regulatory frameworks that govern the safety of organisation their delivery of activities or services.

In Australia, there are three clear examples of standards related to child protection with organisations.

In Queensland, under the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000, organisations and self-employed persons who fall within the scope of the Blue Card system are legislatively required to develop, implement and maintain child and youth focused risk management strategies. In the guide to resource organisations to meet their obligations (Queensland Public Safety Business Agency, 2014), a child and youth risk management strategy is defined as

“...the combination of an organisation’s aims, values, protocols, policies and procedures to foster a safe and supportive service environment for children and young people. The purpose of a child and youth risk management strategy is to help to identify potential risks of harm to children and young people and to implement strategies to minimise this risk...”

In order to comply with the legislative framework, a child and youth risk management strategy must include the following eight minimum requirements:

- A statement of commitment to the principles of safe and supportive service environments;
- A code of conduct;
- Recruitment, selection, training and management strategies that encourage best practice and enhance the safety and well-being of children and young people;
- Policies and procedures for handling disclosures and suspicions of harm;
- Policies and procedures for the occasions where there might be a breach of the organisation’s child and youth risk management strategy;
- A planning process for high risk activities and special events;
- Policies and procedures for compliance with legislation; and,
- Strategies for communication and support for all stakeholders including children and young people.

Under the South Australian Children’s Protection Act 1993, all organisations which provide health, welfare, education, sporting or recreational, religious or spiritual, child-care or residential services to children are required to lodge an annual compliance statement outlining their child safe environment policies and procedures with the Department for Education and Child Development. The annual statement includes agreement from an organisation that they meet the following criteria.

- My organisation has a documented risk management plan that identifies, assesses and takes steps to minimise and prevent risk of harm to children because of the action of an employee, volunteer or another child.
- My organisation has a documented child safe environment policy that outlines our commitment to children’s well-being and safety.
- My organisation’s child safe environment policy is supported by guidelines and procedures that are relevant to our specific business and activities.
- My organisation communicates our child safe policy and procedures to all relevant persons (such as staff, volunteers, members, families and children).
- My organisation has a code (or codes) of conduct for adults and children.

- My organisation knows its obligation to conduct criminal history assessments on staff and volunteers who are working with children in prescribed positions, as required by the Children's Protection Act 1993.
- My organisation has a policy and/or procedures for assessing and dealing with criminal history information where this information is required by law.
- My organisation has systems for actively supporting and supervising staff and volunteers.
- My organisation provides training and development opportunities for staff and volunteers to maintain their knowledge of child protection and child safe environments.
- My organisation actively encourages the participation and involvement of children and young people (where appropriate).
- My organisation educates its staff and volunteers about their role and responsibilities to report and respond appropriately to suspected abuse and neglect.

In April 2012, the Victorian Government initiated a landmark inquiry into the handling of child abuse allegations within religious and other non-government organisations. The inquiry's final report, *Betrayal of Trust* was tabled in Parliament on 13 November 2013 and contained 15 recommendations. The Victorian Government and the Opposition at the time have committed to support all of the recommendations.

The Victorian Government has introduced three new criminal offences to further protect children from abuse. The three new offences are:

- a grooming offence which targets communication, including online communication, with a child or their parents with the intent of committing child sexual abuse;
- a failure to disclose offence that requires adults to report to police a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed against a child (unless they have a reasonable excuse for not doing so); and,
- a failure to protect offence that applies to people within organisations who knew of a risk of child sexual abuse by someone in the organisation and had the authority to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently failed to do so.

It has also funded a strategy to improve the capacity of organisations to prevent and respond to child abuse, including:

- introducing minimum child safe standards for organisations engaged in child-related work, and providing support for organisations to meet the new standards (to be overseen by the Commission for Children and Young People);
- requiring all Victorian government and non-government schools to have consistent policies in place for responding to child abuse allegations; and,
- establishing a 'reportable conduct' scheme requiring certain organisations with a very high degree of responsibility for children to report allegations of abuse to the Commission for Children and Young People.

Recently, the Commission for Children and Young People released for consultation a draft set of child safe standards (October, 2014). To be compliant, an organisation will need to have in place the following minimum requirements:

- a child safe policy or statement of commitment to child safety;
- a code of conduct that establishes clear expectations for behaviour;
- human resources practices that reduce the risk of harm to children by new and existing personnel;
- processes for responding to and reporting harm to children;
- a risk management approach;

- mechanisms to promote the participation and empowerment of children; and,
- strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety.

All three of these examples and the preceding international analysis demonstrate that child safe standards are becoming more and more similar.

In summary, best practice is considered to include the development and implementation of a clear and meaningful child protection policy with reference to a code of conduct for its personnel and systems for safe recruitment, training and induction of personnel, child abuse reporting and response procedures, the involvement of children and families in decision making and an ongoing quality improvement cycle involving regular monitoring and review.

Enduring structures in sport help to build capacity over time.

In what has been now called the child safe movement (Budiselik, 2010), Tucci and Mitchell (2015) have identified that a critical element to achieving the up-take of child safe frameworks by organisations is the creation of enduring structures of expertise that support capacity building in sectors over time. They pointed to a number of examples of which the NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit is the most relevant.

Lang and Hartill (2014) track the development of safeguarding children initiatives in sport in England to the conviction of British Olympic swimming coach Paul Hickson in 1995 of the rape and sexual assault of young athletes under his care. In their commentary, they reported that at the time

“...the Amateur Swimming Association, like most other English sports organisations, had no strategy for safeguarding and protecting athletes from abuse... The Hickson case was a wake up call for sport. The case cost the Amateur Swimming Association around 1 million pounds in lost sponsorship and prompted a moral panic around child sexual abuse in sport that drove national governing bodies and external sport agencies to act. There was considerable resistance from inside sport, however, with NGBs initially denying abuse in sport was a significant issue...”

In 2000, Sport England (the equivalent of the Australian Sports Commission) partnered with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) to convene a Child Protection in Sport Task Force which created a national action plan and the establishment of the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU). The CPSU has introduced a set of standards for child protection that has been made part of the conditions of funding between Sport England and the National Governing Bodies. It has also continued to provide ongoing training and other resources for sport to use in relation to risk assessment protocols and other child protection practices (Boocock, 2012a; Lang and Hartrill, 2014).

Lang and Hartill (2015a) reported that according to the CPSU, 85 of 95 publicly funded sport agencies have achieved the Advanced Level of the Standards.

Tucci and Mitchell (2015) have argued that these results are in stark contrast to the lack of tangible achievements in safeguarding children in sport made in most of the other developed countries, including Australia. In over a decade of activity, the work of the NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit has been an instrumental driver of reform and change.

Safeguarding children needs to be interwoven into the culture of sport.

In the recent Vicsport report (2014), it was identified that approaches to protecting children should not be seen as less significant element of its operations than running the sport. In the view of its membership,

“...a standalone approach across each member protection issue would also likely result in a more pronounced compliance based approach, drawing attention away from a proactive and participatory approach...”

It should be core to its commitment to run sport in such a way that it is safe, fair and inclusive of everyone.

This is a point echoed by Tucci et al (in press) when they make the following observation:

“...An organisational child protection policy should speak in the language of the organisation and reflect its values. The wording of the policy plays an important role in generating commitment to its implementation. It is a mirror to the organisation’s mission and identity. It will be real when it is experienced as a genuine feature of the organisation’s character instead of an “add on” to it...”

The Vicsport report however sounds a note of caution against a totally integrated orientation. It concluded that

“...Victorian sport stakeholders do need to be cognizant that interlinking safeguarding and child protection with broader member protection issues has led to a predominantly uniform and reactive approach...{such that} general member protection and complaints based responses may not be wholly fit for purpose to safeguard and protect children...”

In essence, safeguarding children initiatives should be experienced as an everyday part of being involved in junior sport without fading altogether from view.

External evaluation and rigour is essential.

A number of authors have argued that achieving change in this area of organisational behaviour will not be achieved without meaningful compliance (Irenyi, Bromfield, Beyer and Higgins, 2007; Budiselik, 2010; Tucci et al, In Press).

In the early implementation stages, external review can ensure that an organisation’s child protection policy is as clear and comprehensive as it can be. After its implementation, the organisation must ensure that a child protection policy is kept alive and constantly improving to adjust to the needs and changing context in which it is applied.

Tucci et al (In Press) have recommended that the Board of the organisation will review its policy annually (or earlier as required). The responsibility for evaluating the organisation’s compliance with this policy should be delegated formally to the CEO. The CEO is then responsible for undertaking to collect, analyse and report on relevant data from the organisation that provides an assessment of

- the degree of compliance;
- new or additional risks identified for children and young people and how those risks were addressed;
- critical incidents that have resulted in children and young people experiencing harm, abuse or exploitation arising from their involvement with the organisation; and,
- areas for improvement.

The Board should produce as part of its annual reporting a summary of the outcomes of the information collected in relation to its Child Protection Policy and make it available to parents, staff and volunteers of the organisation and the broader community it serves.

On a regular basis, at least every three years, it is critical that the effectiveness of the child protection system be reviewed by an external authority with expertise in the area of child protection. It is a significant risk for any organisation to believe that it is being effective but be doing so only because the right questions have not been asked or answered.

The Vicsport report (2014) highlighted that at a state and regional level, sporting organisations do not have any mechanism to check the compliance of child protection initiatives. Without such monitoring of the rigour of its systems, sport is vulnerable to a degree of over confidence and as such heightened risk to children.

Australian sport has more to do to safeguard children in comparison to other developed countries.

In Table 1, a comparison is made between eight developed countries in relation to a number of benchmarks that support the development of effective child protection practice in sport (Duncan, 2012; Raakman, 2012; de Lench, 2012; Zubrack and Kirby, 2012; Boocock, 2012a, 2012b; Simms, 2012; Kirby, 2012; Stirling and Kerr, 2012; Fasting, K.; Leahy, 2012; Toftegaard-Stoeckel, 2012; Lang and Hartill, 2015b; Toftegaard-Stockel, 2015; Vertommen, et al, 2015; Lopiano and Zotos, 2015; Parent, 2015; Martin, 2015; Russell, 2015). England is clearly most advanced having begun to implement a range of initiatives in 2001. It is testament to the fact that change in the field of child protection in sport takes a long time, requiring steady progress and needs to be resourced by leadership at a national level that co-ordinates activities centrally. It is also facilitated by enduring structures that provide an ongoing impetus for change and advancement. It also needs to be informed by research that can help build a contemporary knowledge base and a relevant public policy climate.

In comparison to other countries, Australia has partially achieved a number of benchmarks. However, it is clearly well behind the achievements currently being made by England.

Table 1. Comparison of eight developed countries in relation to child protection in sport

Key Benchmarks of Development	GBR	USA	DEN	BEL	CAN	ESP	JPN	AUS
Long term approach	✓ ✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
A coherent and articulated framework	✓ ✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
Co-ordinated strategy	✓ ✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
Safeguarding children standards	✓ ✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Funding of sport is contingent on compliance to standards	✓ ✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓
Enduring structures	✓ ✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Collaborations are embedded	✓ ✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓
Capacity building initiatives	✓ ✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ ✓
Working with Children Checks	✓ ✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓ ✓
Research is undertaken	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗

Legend: ✗ No evidence of meeting the benchmark
 ✓ Some evidence of meeting the benchmark
 ✓ ✓ Ample evidence of meeting the benchmark

Project Findings

This section is divided into two sections. In the first, a series of key themes are presented which summarise the findings of the research phase of the project. In the second section, there is an examination of the critical issues which need to be addressed in order to design a strategy that will build on the established outcomes achieved by Australian sport already and strengthen its capacity to more effectively prevent and respond to the abuse and exploitation of children as a result of their participation in sport.

Summarising the key findings

The safety of children from any form of abuse or harm in sport is considered paramount by all stakeholders.

There was no disagreement across all stakeholders that the protection of children from any form of harm arising from abuse and exploitation is an absolute priority. It is at the core of the value base and mission of Australian sport. It is also perceived to be vital in continuing to grow participation rates at a time when there are other types of activities competing to reduce sport's share of the audience of children and young people.

The national and state leadership of Australian Sport is committed to creating child safe sports.

The national and state leadership of Australian Sport who took part in this project described a strong commitment to implementing strategies that would continue to make their sports safe for children and young people. There was a significant recognition that the current Royal Commission into the Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse had forever changed the landscape of the broader Australian community. They understood and accepted their responsibility to provide children with experiences of sport that were safe, fair and inclusive.

The capacity to implement effective child protection strategies is not uniform within a jurisdiction and even less so across jurisdictions.

The capacity building oriented strategies provided to and for sport has achieved a degree of effectiveness in creating child safe environments. However, it is very clear that there are variations in that capacity between sports within individual states and territories and even more variation between sports and systems between individual jurisdictions. Compliance with legislative requirements associated with the introduction of Working with Children Checks in state systems has, in the main part, been the driver for the provision of education, resources and other obligations (such as annual organizational child safe organisation compliance declaration in South Australia). Such inconsistency of capacity was identified as major threat to the safety of sport for children and young people.

The influence of NSO child protection policies decrease as they are rolled out down organisational structures to the club level.

It is clear that Member Protection Policies have been developed and produced by all NSOs which receive public funding. As highlighted in an earlier section, compliant Member Protection Policies cover off on child protection.

Yet, there is doubt as to how influential such national policies are at the grass roots level where junior sport is played and administered. Many of the stakeholders raised concerns about how effective these policy templates are in resetting the culture of sport at a club level. In addition, a significant proportion of MPIOs were not clear whether their club had a member Protection Policy or how adequately it had been rolled out. For example, 29% of MPIOs believed that their child protection policy at a club level is inadequately implemented and 27% of MPIOs say that code of conduct is inadequately implemented.

This is an issue that Tucci et al (In Press) have cautioned organisations about, especially those with federated structures.

“...there are inherent dangers for organisations to develop child protection policies that use a “cookie-cutter” template. Too often, these versions of policies dilute their intent as they are cloned further and further away from the original source...”

In a follow up article, Tucci and Mitchell (2015) have argued that the further into the operational level an organisational child protection policy reaches, the more there needs to be an understanding as to the rationale for each element, what the objective of the policy element is and why it is important for it be adhered to.

“...the support structures around the policy – training, written guides, supervision, operational procedures – are inherently critical in explaining the need for it and generating a commitment to it. Without a meaningful understanding of the assumptions behind the policy and what it is trying to achieve, all you have is people following the rules as they are written, not embodying them...”

There is still confusion about how to engage in effective decision making.

A major theme arising from the consultations and forums was the lack of confidence of many individuals about how to make decisions that were in keeping with a sporting code’s commitment to prioritising the safety of children. Firstly, it was consistently expressed that child protection was an area of expertise that was not part of the background of many people involved in sport. This has left a major knowledge gap in those charged with the responsibility to action it at all levels of sport administration, coaching and resourcing.

Secondly, individuals, if they felt equipped with the knowledge and skills, had either the capacity to understand organisational risk and how to address it **or** the knowledge about how to understand and assess the risk that other individuals pose to children through their behaviour and act on their concern. There were very limited examples of individuals who could do both within Sport.

Thirdly, it became obvious through the feedback from respondents that there is inadequate distinction, at a policy and operational level, made between abuse that is perpetrated by employees and volunteers involved in sport and abuse that occurs by others in the community and is identified by employees and volunteers involved in sport.

As Tucci et al have noted (In press),

“...many organisations have child protection policies that conflate the issue of child abuse perpetrated within organisations by staff or volunteers with the suspected abuse of a child or young person by his/her parents or someone else in the community....”

It is important to recognise that there are very different decisions which flow from the abuse or exploitation of a child or young person by the staff and volunteers involved in sport (organisational child abuse) and the abuse or exploitation perpetrated against children by parents or others in the community (community child abuse) and may be identified by staff or volunteers involved in sport.

In the context of organisational child abuse, the sport itself is a focus of the investigation. It must proceed with transparency and a commitment to ensuring that its staff or volunteers who are alleged to be, or are responsible for the abuse or exploitation are held accountable for their behaviour. The organisation’s management must act lawfully and ethically at all times. It must co-operate with any external investigation of the incident and should undertake an internal review of the circumstances that led to the situation occurring. It must also provide resources for supporting children, young people and their families who are in any way affected by the abuse or exploitation. The focus of the efforts of the Sport is on achieving justice, protection and support for the children and young people affected by the abuse and exploitation. Sport also has a responsibility to other staff or volunteers who may be adversely impacted by the allegations about, or incidence of abuse or exploitation of a child or young person by a colleague.

In the context of community child abuse, the Sport is not an implicated party in the abuse or exploitation of the child or young person. If staff or volunteers become concerned that a child or young person participating in the sport has been or is a risk of abuse or exploitation by a family or community member, the role of the Sport is to act to ensure that relevant information about the risks to the child or young person is reported to the appropriate authorities in a timely way. Its staff and volunteers need to be supported through any difficulties in managing the reporting process, as well as involvement in subsequent actions that may be taken by relevant child protection authorities or police. The primary responsibility of the Sport is to be an active member of the protective network around the child or young person.

Fourthly, whilst individuals felt confident to know how to report child abuse if there was a disclosure or very clear indicators of it, they felt far less confident about how to respond to breaches of policy, in particular if they

appeared to be trivial or insignificant. The early response to breaches in Child Protection or associated policies and/or Code of Conduct is consistently identified within the literature as the key to building what Tucci and Mitchell (2015) call a “safeguarding perimeter” or what Smallbone, Marshall and Wortley (2014) define as “extended guardianship”. A framework that supports effective decision making in these circumstances which is more frequently the reality and more frequently the cause of much angst for individuals at the operational level in sport is missing.

Finally, the communication protocols within a Club and/or State Sporting Organisation and between the varying sporting structures and authorities is complicated and the source of tension for individuals within Sport. There are numerous questions that an individual must find answers to in this process. If and when do I contact the police, child protection authorities, Children’s Rights Agencies? At what point are parents involved? What do I communicate to the child? When do I inform the Club Committee and/or any other part of my sporting organisation? How do I manage the scenario with the alleged perpetrator? Is this a significant enough breach of policy that it warrants action and communication to the right people? What will happen if I make a mistake? All of this can be stressful even for seasoned child protection practitioners in the field. It can be overwhelming for individuals who only have to deal with these issues and systems on an occasional basis and in scenarios where the outcomes can be the driver of whether a child is or is not effectively protected.

These issues or barriers in the protection of children mirror those experienced by the general community with regard to taking action in regard to child abuse. Community attitude tracking research in Australia (Tucci et al, 2010) and England (Penn, 2008, NSPCC, 2009) found the following that uncertainty, disbelief, shock and distress, and a lack of confidence can lead to inaction or delayed action in the protection of children..

Education is the key to building capacity, but not the only answer.

The educational resources offered by Play by the Rules and state based agencies have to date focused largely on awareness raising about the issue of child abuse within the community and within organisations. Substantial numbers of individuals associated with the administration of sport have undertaken this training. Whilst important and extremely positively received, it is not comprehensive enough to build the skills and confidence of those who need to make decisions about children.

The majority of training offered to date has lacked a model for learning transfer, i.e. a conceptualisation of how a trainee integrates what they learn and then applies it in the context of their role. Broad (2000) noted that transfer of learning is maximised when the following elements are in place:

- there is a supportive management culture that values training;
- the training program is mandatory;
- there is preparation of the trainee by their manager;
- any barriers to work performance in their role are eliminated;
- pre and post discussions about the content of the training and its application occur between the trainee and supervisor;
- the provision of training-related work assignments and frequent practice opportunities by the supervisor;
- ongoing coaching and support of the trainee by a trainer is available to apply new learning;
- the provision of refresher and problem solving sessions by the trainer; and,
- trainers formally evaluate the transfer of learning to the workplace.

Others have argued that the transfer of learning is most effective when it is supported by an organisational culture in which

- the training is connected and relevant to the organisation’s philosophy, policy and practice;
- there is opportunity for rehearsal of and high-quality feedback on new skills or strategies learned;
- there is ongoing processes through which reflection occurs between the learner and the organisation (Morrison, 1997; Collins et al, 2007; Mitchell and Tucci, 2012).

Mitchell and Tucci (2012) recently concluded in their review of child protection training in the Northern Territory that there were six key elements that should form the core of the design and content of any child protection curriculum.

- Child protection training must move away from a 'one size fits all' approach to a differentiated framework that can more effectively meet the diversity of needs, skills, knowledge, and roles of learners.
- A comprehensive child protection training framework includes a tiered approach including pre-service, in-service and advanced or continuing education.
- Training will be most effective when it is based around a central theme that forms a through-line that connects principles, skills, values and behaviour.
- The effectiveness of training will be maximised within a broader organizational learning culture.
- Training must be soundly embedded in adult learning principles.
- Technology-based training is most effective in the delivery of content in the 'effective' domain such as foundational skills, policies, procedures and processes but cannot adequately address content in the 'affective' domain that has a strong behavioural component such as collaboration and engagement.

Finally, training is not the magic bullet of organisational capacity building and organisational change management. It plays an important role. However, it is only one of a number of strategies that need to be integrated together by management as part of change management process. These include: the availability of operational manual/guides to aid decision-making, clear and effective policies that have been and continue to be communicated across an organisation, access to expert content knowledge when it is required, external validation and review of the quality of the systems that are in place to protect children and young people, and risk assessment approaches (Irenyi, Bromfield, Beyer and Higgins, 2007; Budiselik, 2010; Erooga, Allnock and Telfor, 2011; Tucci et al, In Press).

Consumers of sport have very limited awareness of any child protection initiative that has been implemented and how it applies to them.

All the data highlights that children, young people and the adults who care for them have little awareness of the

- possible risks of abuse and exploitation of children that arise as a result of their participation in sport;
- expectations about their own behaviour towards and with children and young people with whom they interact as part of their involvement in sport;
- obligations they have to take action if they become aware of any allegations of abuse and/or exploitation;
- procedures to follow if an adult or other young person breaches a policy or the Code of Conduct of the Sport; and,
- the ways they can participate in making their Club and their Sport safer for children and young people.

According to Tucci and Mitchell (2015), parents and families are an early warning system for protecting children in organisations like sporting codes. They are the eyes and ears of children's environments. They need to be supported to understand how they can help in a realistic way and be supported when they come across information that may be of concern or even unusual in nature. It is often by piecing such intelligence together that a true and accurate assessment of risk of an individual can be completed and resultant action be taken.

What needs to be addressed to make Australian sport safer for children and young people?

The language of child protection in sport needs to be defined and settled.

In the feedback from the consultations and surveys, a variety of words with relevance to child protection were treated as if they were interchangeable. For example, the following terms have been used synonymously: child protection, safeguarding children, child safe organisations, child safe culture in organisations. Similarly, the terms: child abuse, exploitation and harm have been used to describe both actions and outcomes. As noted earlier, a distinct lack of definitional rigour is part of the problem that faces Sport and indeed many other organisations which run an activity, service or program for children, young people and/or their families.

It is critical then that the conceptual landscape surrounding child protection be defined as the starting point for unifying the collective commitment of Australian Sport to implementing policies, systems and practices that will prevent and respond to the abuse and exploitation of children as a result of their participation in sport.

A coherent framework in Australian sport needs to be developed that has a central organising narrative.

There is currently no robust national strategy to support child protection in sport. To date, each of the jurisdictions have been left to develop their own approaches based on the prominent political and community context in each state and territory. Much has been made of education as the basis for building the capacity of Sport in this area. Yet, there is wide variability in the understanding, confidence and behaviour of those involved in sport to create and ensure child safe environments at a local level where the sport is actually played and administered.

The Australian Sports Commission has used its authority as a funder and regulator of sport to implement a Member Protection Policy which has served to embed a movement towards child safety into the fabric of the way junior sport is run and experienced. Clearly, this compliance oriented strategy has achieved results with all publicly funded sports having in place at a national level some form of child protection policies through the broader Member Protection Policy framework. However, there is little evidence as to how influential and well known these policies are. The exception is the wholesale uptake of the Working with Children Checks as required through legislation in almost all jurisdictions as of 2014 with Tasmania being the last state to introduce mandatory background screening as a prerequisite for working with children and vulnerable people.

A strategic framework for protecting children is needed that is nationally defined and locally embedded with due reference to state and territory legislation and regulations. The national framework requires a cohesive narrative that can be communicated clearly to a range of audience groups ranging from the leadership of NSOs all the way to the participants of junior sport itself.

The framework should direct effort into outcomes and away from a reliance on activity as the basis for evaluating the impact of all initiatives to create and maintain child safe environments at a local level.

The framework needs to be understood as shaping the attitudes, values and behaviour of Australian Sport.

The national strategic framework represents an organizational change management action plan. This has been missing from the approach adopted by Australian Sport so far. It has had no clear and identifiable goals. It has lacked a deliberate plan that will support organisations to change. It has lacked an evaluation framework. There have been no timelines.

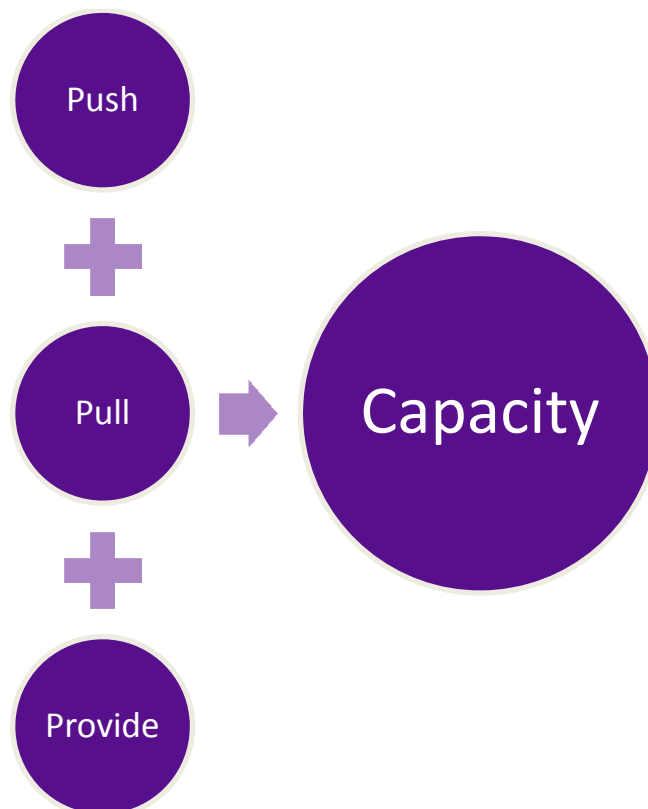
Change management applies a systematic approach to transitioning organisations from where they are to where they need to be in order to more effectively addressing an issue or problem or meet a need. It resources individuals within organisations to operate according to the desired changed parameters. An effective management strategy builds commitment, minimises resistance and helps individuals/teams to develop the required knowledge and ability to implement the change.

As a change management plan, the national framework must be sustainable over time and be anchored to structures and processes that are independent of the people who are the decision makers over today. It cannot be person contingent. It will set the direction for change to occur over 10 year time frame and deliver annual outcomes integrated to the long term vision.

The framework should integrate education, compliance and consumer oriented initiatives as the basis for building the capacity of Australian Sport to be child safe.

To date, the capacity of Australian Sport to effectively prevent and respond to the abuse and exploitation of children involved in its activities has evolved through two main groups of initiatives that have focused on

- the provision of child protection training to a range of individuals who are involved in running and administering junior sport; and,
- regulatory compliance based on obligations in funding agreements between government bodies and sporting organisations and requirements imposed through legislation in a minority of jurisdictions.
- There has been very little offered to children or parents through any of these activities.
- Building on the work undertaken to date and addressing the gaps that have been identified, the framework will be most effective if it is based on the three key elements illustrated below.



Push strategies are regulatory in nature and shape change by setting standards and gradually encouraging compliance over time. In this way, benchmarks can be evaluated and monitored. Push strategies are driven by funding bodies, legislation and the sport themselves. They offer external review mechanisms that are independent of the sport/club itself to ensure that improvements are real and sustainable.

Provide strategies are educational and aim to build capacity in organisations through enhancing the knowledge, skills and confidence of individuals who are responsible for preventing and responding to the abuse and exploitation of children as a result of their participation in sport.

Pull strategies aim to empower consumers (children, parents and supporters) to understand the need for child protection initiatives in their club/sport, become actively involved in them and finally begin to request that their club/sport introduces them. **Pull** strategies represent a groundswell of support for an initiative that aims to overcome any resistance/concerns in the club/sport. Pull strategies are effective when they create a movement for change that moves the motivation to achieve improvement and change from external to internal drivers that are more salient and meaningful to everyone involved in the club/sport. These initiatives typically involve direct information provision and “campaign” champions endorsing the need and direction for change.

These three different strategic elements, in combination, build and integrate what is working now at state and national levels but extend it further offering the basis for a coherent framework that clarifies the need for collaborative effort to achieve meaningful and sustained enhancements of a safeguarding children in sport culture in Australia.

The framework requires a sound implementation plan and resourcing to maximise its effectiveness.

Whilst there is unanimous agreement that the issue of child protection in sport is important, there are varying levels of engagement within individual sports with regard to the extent to which it is a critical issue of concern for their particular sport. Existing resourcing strategies have relied heavily on training and template development with varied results. The implementation of a national framework across sport will benefit significantly from:

- using a change management paradigm to ensure that a multi-level strategy is developed that addresses overarching cultural and leadership issues as well as building the capacity of staff and volunteers at the operational level;
- building on the best of what is available in every jurisdiction and integrate the educational resources so that children are not made vulnerable because of where they live. These resources need to evolve so that they convey a deeper understanding of the underlying principles of child safe organisations as the basis for generating commitment to them from all those involved in the running and support of junior sport, including the participants and their families; and,
- the provision of access to expertise to support and resource sporting bodies to develop the confidence and competence to operationalise the knowledge they acquire through training initiatives.

The national framework and the outcomes need to be externally validated and evaluated.

All of the current approaches to building capacity in sport to enact child safe practices have not been validated or evaluated. The recent Vicsport project and this current ASC project are the only two projects of their kind to have been undertaken in sport in Australia over the past decade.

They are both overdue.

External validation, in particular by an agency with content knowledge, is required because there is no way to know whether the initiatives implemented by Australian sport are in line with best practice or are evidence based.

Equally, the lack of evaluation or research represents another systemic risk factor.

There is a need to establish enduring structures to anchor the national framework.

It has been already demonstrated in the case example of sport in England that the creation of the NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit has been a major driver of policy reform and educational resources. In the comparison of child safe benchmarks, England is clearly the international leader in the field of child protection in sport mainly because of a long term commitment to this Unit.

The success of the national framework will depend heavily on a similar structure being created and supported to serve as a focal point for Australian Sport. It should be part of the organising narrative and also form the central point for advice and advocacy for sport. It should be established as a partnership between the ASC and agency or agencies with child safe expertise.

There is a need to test an initiative that integrates education and compliance into outcomes.

The national framework needs to integrate more formally and deliberately a capacity building approach through education with a more sophisticated compliance based strategy. Both strategies working in parallel have been found to be the most effective in other sectors who have attempted to strengthen organisational capacity to safeguard children and young people (Irenyi, Bromfield, Beyer and Higgins, 2007; Budiselik, 2010; Tucci and Mitchell, 2013; Tucci and Mitchell 2015). It should be piloted and evaluated in order to ensure that the implementation at full scale are understood and considered prior to a more comprehensive roll out.

Conclusion

Australian Sport stands at a cross road in relation to preventing and protecting child participants from abuse and exploitation. It has certainly achieved outcomes that put it ahead of many other countries. However, there are major inconsistencies within and across jurisdictions and sporting codes. In the main, initiatives have been judged to be successful on the basis of activities which have been undertaken rather than on any evaluations about the effectiveness of these activities in producing safer cultures and organisational systems for children as a result of their involvement in sport.

The basic foundations for a revitalised, nationally co-ordinated, coherent and validated approach exist.

There are emerging groups of informed stakeholders who can champion safeguarding initiatives, including a national network of MPIOs. There is an effective dissemination platform for training and information in Play by the Rules. Many of the State Department of Sport and Recreation have established positive educational and regulatory strategies.

Above all, there is a clear and strong commitment from the leadership level of National Sporting Organisations, the Australian Sports Commission and the individual State Departments of Sport and Recreation. It is a tangible motivation driven by an inherent belief in the value of “fair, safe and inclusive” sport to children and the broader community.

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