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About the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare is the peak body for child and family welfare in Victoria, providing independent analysis, dialogue and cross-sectoral engagement to break down multi-causal factors that perpetuate disadvantage and vulnerability. Working alongside our 90 member organisations, the role of the Centre is to build capacity through research, evidence and innovation to influence change. The Centre and its member organisations collectively represent a range of early childhood, child and family support services, youth and out-of-home care services, including kinship care, foster care and residential care.

A shared social responsibility approach

The Centre's approach to ensuring the health, wellbeing and safety of children and young people in institutional contexts as in all communities, is one of shared social responsibility. It recognises that community service organisations, government and all citizens have a role in creating environments of safety and well-being for children. As such, the promotion of safety and prevention of criminal abuse against children and young people can only be achieved with a whole-of-community approach. Previous submissions to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, parliamentary inquiries, issues papers and Centre publications have taken this approach. Central to any successful strategy promoting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people is a whole-of-community awareness, an appreciation of the centrality of children in our community, supportive and protective community attitudes towards children, and inclusive engagement with children and young people in the decision making processes that affect their lives (CFEFCW, 2011; CFEFCW, 2012)

The observations and recommendations in this submission are made in consideration of the programs and services offered by our organisational membership, and will therefore focus on creating safe environments for children and young people specifically in the contexts of community service organisations. For this reason, we acknowledge that some of the recommendations made will not be applicable to certain organisational contexts. However the Centre seeks to provide a framework for open community discussion of the way in which effective and inclusive child safe strategies can be implemented both in organisational contexts and the wider community.

Understanding the contribution of a social responsibility approach

Community service organisations, in serving the best interests of the children, young people and families in their communities, should have the capacity to facilitate an important culture shift away from the protection of vulnerable and 'at-risk' children and young people being the sole responsibility

of organisations and governments, and towards a whole-of-community responsibility to child safety utilising local protective factors.

A community which is more informed of the developmental needs of a child, including the capacity to openly participate in society, express opinions about issues that concern them and share freedom to explore shared community spaces (i.e. parks, public transport, community recreation centres, learning centres and shopping centres etc.), has more capacity to influence safe practices within their micro (family) and macro (organisation) systems through age and stage-appropriate activities and practices. Community service organisations hold valuable academic and practical knowledge about the interplay of community networks (i.e. individuals, families, peers and the broader community) and its impact on a child's safety, health, development, education and wellbeing (Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005). This may often be unknown to the general public and, as a result, citizens may often overlook the importance of assisting children to establish healthy two-way relationships with their community networks. It is therefore the social responsibility of community service organisations to publicly share this knowledge through their engagement with local service providers (i.e. public awareness campaigns), empowering children, young people and adults in the community to identify and act on unsafe or harmful practices.

The combined knowledge base of community service organisations and local citizens forms the foundation for creating specific child safe strategies which seek to promote overall community cohesion and unity which recognises that 'society as a whole shares responsibility for promoting the wellbeing and safety of children' (Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005).

What is a whole-of-community culture of child safety?

The provision of community services has historically been very individual-focused (Daro and Cohn-Donnelly, 2002), assessing and responding to instances of abuse or harm to a child or young person and not the cumulative impact of exposure to harmful environments (Schrapel, 2013) for both the individual *and* the communities in which they engage. This approach is problematic as it does not effectively acknowledge the constant, 'reciprocal interplay' between children and young people and their communities' networks (Daro and Dodge, 2009), and therefore is restricted in providing the foundation for more holistic approaches to service provision (Jack and Gill, 2010). The concept of a whole-of-community approach to ensuring the wellbeing and safety of children and young people from abuse and exploitation has been explored and endorsed in national policy and practice frameworks such as the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 (COAG, 2009), the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry (Cummins, Scott and Scales, 2012) and the Best Interests Case Practice Model (DHS, 2012). Each of these policy and practice frameworks emphasise the core principles of community development approaches, including social capital and mutual benefit, community values and knowledge, and social responsibility.

Social capital and mutual benefit

A fundamental element of recent community development theory is the concept of 'social capital'. This is built when communities are actively engaged in facilitating coordination and cooperation, and establishing social norms, trust and networks for the mutual benefit of their citizens (Daro and Dodge, 2009; Wright, 2004). Cooperative efforts are necessary to identify and act on local issues and needs, such as the wellbeing and safety of children and young people from abuse in the community. This can be facilitated through inclusive processes of participation and empowerment in obtaining meaningful feedback from citizens (Wright, 2004). Ensuring citizen participation in establishing the safety of children in their own communities empowers the definition of local concerns and influences the generation of realistic solutions at a local level with local resources (Nair, 2012). This strengths-based process represents a 'bottom-up' approach, encouraging community service organisations to tailor services to meet community needs, rather than applying a generic response (Wright, 2004; Muir et al., 2010).

Community values and knowledge

Conflicts may arise when there is a lack of respect for the competing values and knowledge within a community. A common example of this is evident in child protection service delivery, where organisations may act on perceived social issues and needs of a community whose citizens may not share the same concerns. Organisations therefore have a responsibility to connect with the needs of the community, and to generate an effective response to the feedback received from citizens. In acting on concerns raised for the wellbeing and safety of children and young people in the community, it is essential that children and young people are given the opportunity to participate in this process, as they can often 'provide a layer of additional and alternative knowledge about community life' (Goodwin and Young, 2013: 344).

Organisations hold invaluable collective knowledge about the lives, experiences and needs of the local communities with which they engage, and this knowledge should be shared with the community to raise awareness of the issues being faced in their local area. This information should also be shared with similar organisations, local council and government so they can work in partnership to tailor services to meet the collective needs of their communities effectively (Cummins, Scott and Scales, 2012). The facilitation of youth advisory committees by community service organisations is an example of how knowledge of local issues and needs can be communicated and integrated in preventative approaches.

Rethinking risk in community service organisations

The community sector has witnessed an increasing emphasis on risk management as the underlying foundation and most influential motivation for organisational policy and service development and delivery (Sawyer, Green and Moran, 2007). While it is paramount that we acknowledge the wide array of real risks associated with service delivery, especially those posed to vulnerable groups such as children and young people, preoccupation with risk management by organisations is costly and can often hinder true best practice (Sawyer, Green and Moran, 2007).

Where risk aversion becomes entrenched in the management of an organisation, practice may become 'reactive and mechanistic,' rather than reflective and creative (Beddoe, 2010: 1284), reducing flexibility in the development and delivery of new, innovative and preventative services and strategies which may prove more successful in minimising cumulative exposure to harmful situations (Child Wise, 2004). A risk aversion lens may reinforce existing inequalities and power imbalances within the system through the prioritisation of service delivery to 'high risk' service users over those considered to be 'low risk' (Foster, 2005). Assessment and management of 'risk' may impede open communication and negotiation between organisations and affected stakeholders, including workers, children, young people and families. Reinforcing these inequalities can pave the way for service disengagement and the perpetuation of further vulnerabilities and disadvantage. This, we would argue, is contradictory to the central nature and purpose of our work in the community services sector.

The Centre proposes that policy makers and community service organisations and employees consider moderation of the defensive model of risk aversion now commonly entrenched in the child safe policies and practices of the community service sector. Instead we propose working towards a model of engagement which embraces a community culture of child safety, both internal and external to the community service organisation. This can only be achieved if governments and organisations adopt a whole-of-community approach. In such an approach all citizens are considered as sharing a social responsibility to safeguard the health, wellbeing and safety of *all* children and young people, 'irrespective of their family circumstances and background' (Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005), and are actively engaged in the collaborative development of safe communities which put children and young people at the centre of all decision making.

The essential components of a whole-of-community response to child safety in organisations

There is widespread evidence and support for the adoption of the essential elements required in organisations to establish a 'child safe' environment and these should be part of the development of child safety strategies in organisations. However, it is both important and responsible for organisations, policy makers and the Australian public to acknowledge that, although well-intentioned and carefully considered policies and procedures might be developed and mandated by governments and organisations, there is no absolute way of guaranteeing the safety of a child or young person from

abuse or exploitation in any institutional context. On the other hand, there are measures which can significantly enhance the safety and wellbeing of children in organisations. Some of these measures include:

- An comprehensive organisational Child Safety Policy
- Selection and recruitment of employees and volunteers
- Support and supervision of employees and volunteers: and
- Education and training of employees and volunteers.

These measures are considered below.

A Child Safety Policy

Organisations should have a Child Safety Policy. The Child Safety Policy should be underpinned by a Child Safety Policy Statement which sets out accepted definitions of child abuse and exploitation, legal and moral responsibilities, abuse prevention strategies and processes for reporting abuse when it may have occurred. The document should be transparent, easy-to-understand and accessible to everyone within the organisation, including children. Organisations may thus need to produce their Child Safety Policy in more than one format to facilitate understanding and to meet the language, cultural, communication and developmental needs of adult and child service users (DHS, 2011).

In order to capture the local needs and perceptions of the community, the Child Safety Policy document should be developed by the organisation in partnership with their local community, inclusive of the children, young people and families engaging in the service (Nair, 2012).

The Policy should clearly state:

- The organisation's **commitment to child safety** in all practices within the organisation;
- The accepted **definitions of child abuse and exploitation** in all its forms, to be in line with current legislative definitions (Child Safety Commissioner 2006);
- Overarching community strategies to develop **open and aware cultures** within the organisation which fosters the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.
- The **roles and responsibilities** of each level of employment within the organisation, and to whom those responsibilities apply. This will include specific statements of appropriate and inappropriate conduct, i.e. Managers will/will not..., Employees will/will not..., Volunteers will/will not... (Child Safety Commissioner, 2006);
- A **Code of Conduct** to guide all engagements between employees, volunteers and service users of the organisation. An effective code seeks to promote positive work practices and outlines expectations of the organisation in relation to the attitudes, responsibilities and relationships that are conducted. The Code will provide explicit boundaries concerning what is and is not acceptable behaviour toward children and young people in contact with the service, specifically in reference to physical contact, cultural sensitivity, confidentiality and

appropriate language, as well as the formal disciplinary processes that will be followed if the Code is not observed (Child Safety Commissioner, 2006; Child Wise, 2004);

- Any identifiable risks to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people from within the organisation, and implement strategies to **address and manage situational risks** to the best of the organisation's ability. This includes consideration of the physical environment where services take place and how perpetrators can manipulate environments to conceal abuse (Beyer, Higgins and Bromfield, 2005);
- Clear procedures on **how to report** concerns, disclosures and allegations of abuse and exploitation of children and young people (Beyer, Higgins and Bromfield, 2005; Irenyi, Bromfield, Beyer and Higgins, 2006);
- Strategies and procedures to ensure the appropriate **support** for all people implicated by disclosures and allegations of abuse or exploitation of a child or young person. This includes support to
 - the **child or young person** who has experienced or made allegations of abuse or exploitation;
 - the **parents/carers, families and friends** of children and young people who have experienced or made allegations of abuse or exploitation;
 - **employees or volunteers** who have had allegations of abuse or exploitation of a child made against them;
 - other **staff and volunteers** who are direct/indirectly affected by allegations of abuse or exploitation against colleagues;
 - **other stakeholders** affected by the disclosure or allegations of abuse or exploitation of a child within the organisation (Child Wise, 2004).

An important, although often overlooked, feature of any Child Safety Policy is a signed declaration of commitment to child safety in all practices within the organisation. Incorporating this feature into an organisation's Child Safety Policy will reinforce all employees and volunteers' commitment to the policies and procedures of the organisation to ensure child safety (Child Safety Commissioner, 2006).

Periodic reviews of the Child Safety Policy

Article 25 of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states that reviews of the services provided to children should be undertaken periodically to address their relevance to children's changing circumstances, and to ensure that the services that children are receiving are meeting their needs. Periodic assessment of strategies, service relevance and impacts on outcomes for a child or young person in their local community should also be undertaken at an organisational level, to confirm that the range of services available and the strategies in place to ensure child safety reflect the fluidity of modern social, cultural and political environments. This is

particularly relevant to children, youth and family organisations whose legislative frameworks, policy settings and funding arrangements are subject to ongoing change.

Child Safety Policies in community service organisations, as an essential component of any commitment to ensuring child safety, should therefore be regarded as 'live documents' (Child Wise, 2004; DHS, 2011; Child Safety Commissioner, 2006), subject to periodic evaluations in order to maintain relevance with the changing needs of the community (UN General Assembly 1989).

Selection and recruitment of employees and volunteers

The Centre believes that organisational approaches to promoting the safety and wellbeing of children in community service organisations should encompass both paid staff and volunteers. Volunteers are a valuable resource for any community service organisation and their contributions, despite being driven by altruism and generosity, should also be supervised and part of the overall protective processes of the organisation.

Compliance with Working with Children and National Police Checks is not the sole threshold for determining whether applicants to paid or volunteer positions are suitable for working safely with children and young people. Reference checking is crucial to ensuring that the qualifications and experience of potential employees and volunteers fits with the duties and responsibilities required of them.

However, while maintaining natural justice and procedural fairness in selection and recruitment, organisations should also ensure that staff and volunteers bring qualities which foster the best interests of the children and young people engaging in the organisation's services. For this reason, the specific roles and responsibilities of each position or role (inclusive of duty of care responsibilities) should be made available in the application process, with further clarification in the interview stages of recruitment (COAG, 2009; Child Safety Commissioner, 2006). It is also important to make the public aware how any newly advertised role fits into the overall structure of the organisation to assist the applicant in understanding how his/her role fits in with that of other employees in the organisation, and the potential interplay between roles.

In the child and family services sector, tertiary institutions have a critical role in equipping future workers with both entry level and advanced knowledge and skills. Tertiary institutions are responsible for ensuring that their graduates are emotionally and professionally competent in managing complex and challenging situations, particularly those involving vulnerable children and young people (Zufferey and Gibson, 2013). The preparedness, confidence and skill sets of new graduates to work with vulnerable and at-risk children and young people (Zufferey and Gibson, 2013) are essential: the capacity of new employees to practice and promote child safety within their communities should be part of the selection processes of organisations. Ongoing feedback and collaboration between organisations and tertiary institutions is critical.

Orientation and Induction

Upon appointment, all new employees and volunteers must be assured a thorough orientation and induction to the organisation. Induction should involve exposure to existing employees and volunteers in order to provide new staff and volunteers with practical examples of the Child Safety Policy in practice, to assist in facilitating team unity and cohesion during the transition period of introducing a new staff member or volunteer, and to improve self-confidence in being accepted as a new member of the team. Involving representatives from all levels of the organisation will provide the opportunity for employees and volunteers to revisit the organisations' commitment to the Child Safety Policy and Code of Conduct, and will work to keep the safety of children and young people from abuse and exploitation in their organisation at the forefront of their mind. Some organisations provide a "buddy" arrangement to monitor and support the induction of new employees and volunteers.

Provision of support and supervision

In the organisation

The provision of supportive programs for carers and guardians of children and young people, as well as competent, critically reflective supervision for all practitioners and volunteers with the care of a child or young person, is mandated by the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989), and is mutually beneficial for all stakeholders. Supervision is an essential part of this support. 'At its best [supervision] serves and benefits the professional who is being supervised, their clients, the organisation in which they work (and work for) and the development of the profession,' by assisting practitioners and volunteers to connect the theory they are introduced to in tertiary studies with what they learn and do in practice (Hawkins and Shoet, 2012). Supervision is therefore essential to the best practice in any organisation.

Traditionally, formal supervision in community service organisations has been provided to employees of the organisation as a core component of quality management and accountability in service delivery (AASW, 2013). However, organisations committed to the safety and protection of children and young people in their care should also provide supervision to all volunteers. This will ensure that their practices are meeting the standards and best interests principles outlined in their Child Safety Policy and Code of Conduct (Child Safety Commissioner, 2006).

Best practice ensures that formal supervision is not solely task-driven. Supervision should also respond to the emotional and psychological needs of staff and volunteers. This is especially important in fields of practice regarding the protection of children and young people, where evidence shows a growing concern regarding the negative impacts of child protection work (Bradbury-Jones, 2013) and unreasonably large caseloads (Sawyer, Green and Moran, 2007) on the mental and physical health and wellbeing of both new and experienced workers. This, in consequence, negatively impacts the overall safety of the children, young people and families they engage with in practice (Munro, 2011).

Employees, volunteers and supervisors therefore all share responsibility to participate in regular, critically reflective supervision in order to address complex emotional demands. This protects against

exposure of the child or young person to further harm, and builds confidence and self-efficacy in responding to challenging situations involving children and young people (Beddoe, 2010).

Commitment to ongoing support and supervision is an essential element of creating child safe organisations (Child Wise, 2004; Child Safety Commissioner, 2006). The more employees and volunteers are 'nurtured and protected' in their practices within the organisation, 'the more they will be able to provide this for the children they seek to protect' (Ferguson, 2005: 794).

If employees and volunteers are to openly reflect on their practices, respond to their experiences, and actively engage in their own professional learning and development (Beddoe, 2012), supervisors have a responsibility to establish formal supervision practices that are conducive to the provision of confidentiality and safety. Central to this is the capacity for supervisors to build relationships of mutual trust and respect with their supervisees in both individual and group supervision contexts. Both individual and group based formal supervision are valuable in providing spaces for multi-layered critical reflection and professional development for practitioners and volunteers. Individual supervision can allow the practitioner or volunteer the private space to explore their self-awareness, assumptions and values and how they inform their own practice. On the other hand, group supervision can assist in holistic and collaborative collegial reflection (Bradbury-Jones, 2013), building team unity and cohesion, and providing a safe platform for the identification and timely removal of poor practices from the organisational culture.

Critically reflective group supervision can assist supervisors, employees and volunteers alike, to 'identify stress and potential burnout' in their colleagues, and to collaboratively explore and implement whole-of-community 'supportive mechanisms' (Bradbury-Jones, 2013: 255) to assist the struggling worker in managing their roles and responsibilities. This will, in turn, help to ensure the safety and protection of the children and young people in their care. Group supervision may also play a role in the resolution of collegial conflicts within the organisation. This is an important component of any organisational practice, as collegial conflicts can often impact the overall culture of an organisation, inhibiting capacity to work in cohesion and unity, to the ultimate detriment of the children, young people and families engaging in the service.

Strengthening the argument for the provision of regular supervision in community service organisations is evidence that the cumulative impact of individual stress and conflict on safe organisational cultures is considerable (Maunder and colleagues, in Bradbury-Jones). Supervisors have a responsibility to respond to the emotional stresses of practitioners at their inception in order to prevent further risks posed to the safety of children and young people as a result of fatigued practices.

Organisation and Community

The capacity for organisations to create safe spaces and places for disclosure and reflection should not be isolated to the organisation and its volunteer community. Safe spaces and places, and a firm belief that information received will be acted on and kept confidential are crucial elements required by citizens in order to facilitate disclosure of suspected or actual incidents of abuse. Employees and volunteers of community service organisations therefore also have a social responsibility to also extend the facilitation of safe spaces and places towards their wider local community in order to

create a child aware community culture which respects the rights of children and young people to be safe from abuse and exploitation. Community partnerships, public awareness campaigns, and open and inclusive public events are just a few examples of how community service organisations can assist the local community to create the conditions required to identify and disclose unsafe practices with children and young people.

Education and training

In the organisation

Participation in ongoing education and training programs will assist organisations to generate new, innovative practice ideas by remaining up-to-date with emerging evidence-based practice studies within the sector (Irenyi, Bromfield, Beyer and Higgins, 2006; CFECFW, 2012). Education and training programs must be specifically tailored to educate employees and volunteers on:

- the indicators and complexities of child abuse;
- the legal processes of responding to disclosures and allegations of abuse;
- ways to work through personal feelings invoked by the legal process; and
- the necessity for holistic, therapeutic supports for victims and families following events of abuse (Child Safety Commissioner, 2006; COAG, 2009).

Professional development training programs around child safety and well-being should be attended by all employees and volunteers and should not be the preserve of direct practice workers.

Opportunities to discuss current organisational practices at all levels are increased by this approach. Moreover, this will contribute to the evidence-based discussions and negotiations which should occur during the periodic reviews of Child Safety Policies, Code of Conduct and service delivery.

Attending external training programs also allows employees and volunteers to network with those from other like organisations, improving community connectedness and partnerships between organisations through sharing of knowledge regarding programs and experiences which may be beneficial for their own practices.

Organisation and community

The capacity of the community service organisation to collaborate with other service sectors through locally relevant, targeted programs, can be cost effective, efficient and more relevant to the needs of families, e.g. education, health and other relevant community services. The provision of grassroots programs for information sharing and support serve to educate citizens about child safety issues in their community, for example an awareness program about sources of information and support for children and their families. Educational programs should have a strong emphasis on building the protective factors that are already inherent in families and their children. Grassroots initiatives encourage the community service organisation to explore the perception of child safety at a local level while distinguishing areas of concern requiring attention. This can be achieved by specifically addressing the gap between the perceptions of child abuse and how someone can act to address the issue (Nair, 2012). Initiatives can also be an opportunity to highlight child safe strategies that are

already working effectively in community in order to encourage citizens to expand these ideas and work together to address other areas.

Limitations of a whole-of-community response to child safety in organisations

Adopting whole-of-community responses to safeguarding children and young people has been proven effective in reducing the prevalence of abuse and exploitation of children and young people in the community. Research produced by Young, McKenzie, Schjelderup and Omre (2012), Goodwin and Young (2013), Wright (2004), Jack and Gill (2010) and Muir et al. (2010), provides practical insight into some of the programs and initiatives that communities have undertaken to effectively safeguard their children and young people from abuse. However, there are some limitations to the whole-of-community approach which should be acknowledged.

First, an organisation and its employees and volunteers may not have the existing skills to work from a community orientated approach. Training may be required to provide theoretical and practical applications of community development approaches to child safety and to assist employees and volunteers overcome gaps in knowledge, increase understanding of the uniqueness of each community and to explore how all citizens can contribute to the safety of children. Additional training may also allow attendees to explore their shared partnership role with parents, families and communities from a preventative rather than investigative approach, while accepting that they as professionals do not know and cannot provide all the answers (Young, McKenzie, Schjelderup and Omre, 2012).

Secondly, while an organisation might adopt a whole-of-community approach to safeguarding children and young people there are specific requirements that must be implemented where children and young people are at immediate risk. A whole-of-community approach to child safety will assist in building better relationships and communication between all stakeholders in a child's community network, enabling community service organisations to be more responsive and develop more informed and holistic interventions (DHS, 2012). However, where the safety of an individual child or young person is at risk it is essential for the statutory response to be implemented (Young, McKenzie, Schjelderup and Omre, 2012).

Finally, facilitating community consultation to understand and act on the needs of the local community is a resource intensive process (Muir et al., 2010; Daro and Dodge, 2009), that requires a long-term commitment by all stakeholders to develop the 'solid foundations for partnership work with the child, family and community,' (Young, McKenzie, Schjelderup and Omre, 2012: 175). Meaningful consultation processes, though resource intensive can, however, empower citizens to actively participate in the education and direction of child safety needs in their community, embrace a collective social responsibility of child safety, and adopt practices which challenge intergenerational cycles of abuse and exploitation of children and young people.

There is no definitive approach to ensuring the complete safety and wellbeing of all children and young people in any community. However, Community service organisations serving the best interests of children, young people and families in their community can contribute to establishing child safe cultures by adhering to child safe policies and procedures, providing support, supervision and ongoing training and education opportunities to employees and volunteers. While necessitating a long-term commitment, whole-of-community responses to child safety incorporating collaboration and shared responsibility, provide the best possibility of minimizing the occurrence of abuse and exploitation of children and young people.

Universal frameworks

While there are common components for developing the 'child safe' organisation which might be usefully brought together across sectors and jurisdictions, the Centre believes that individual flexibility is required to ensure that frameworks are not driven by the risk management focus referred to earlier in this submission.

There is, however, the need to establish a universal definition of child abuse and a need for further education of legal responsibilities regarding the reporting of child abuse to authorities. This is supported by national and international literature.

Inconsistencies in the definition of what is child abuse and exploitation can often be the underlying cause of accounts of abuse going unrecognised or unreported either by the child or young person involved, or by the adults around them (Beyer, Higgins and Bromfield, 2005; Nair, 2012). Children and young people who are not made aware of their intrinsic rights to be safe and protected from abuse and exploitation are less likely to report the abuse to significant figures as they may not understand the event which has occurred as being abusive (Schaeffer, Leventhal and Asnes, 2011). Victims may also fear the potentially negative consequences that may arise through disclosure, such as embarrassment, stigma, not being believed and conflicts in family relationships where the abuser is related to the victim. (Hunter, 2011). Similarly, fear of reporting by adults, lack of understanding of the reporting processes involved in disclosing abuse of a child or young person and low understanding of legal responsibilities to report, can militate against reporting and, therefore, play a significant role in the perpetuation of child abuse and exploitation (Irenyi, Bromfield, Beyer and Higgins, 2006).

In conclusion, accepted definitions of child abuse should consider the inherent vulnerability of children and young people to abuse and exploitation, as well as their unique strengths and capabilities to identify and act in potentially unsafe situations. In establishing accepted definitions of child abuse in communities, organisations should acknowledge that the abuse of children is inextricably linked to the exploitation of power in order to gain submission or silence. Community practices where adults do not value the voice and experiences of children and young people further exacerbate these power imbalances. A child safe organisation respects that children and young people should be treated as a unique and 'discrete social group in their own right with their own sets of interests' and protective capabilities (Frost and Stein, 1989; Nair, 2012). A commitment by community service organisations to encourage children and young people to be more aware of their own personal safety will assist in

breaking down the power inequalities inherent in most relationships between adults and young people.

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