

Rescuing the future

An important aspect of the Royal Commission is the series of issues papers related to the work of the Royal Commission. The types of issues the Royal Commission is dealing with are complex and require national co-operation from non-government providers and various levels of government.

All organisations, institutions and individuals are invited to prepare responses to the issues papers. The Truth Justice and Healing Council (TJHC) has recently submitted our third issues paper - [Child Safe Institutions](#) and we are just finalizing our fourth submission - *Preventing Sexual Abuse of Children in Out of Home Care*.

We understand future papers will require recommendations and policy advice on compensation and redress schemes, support needs for survivors and their families and programs for offenders.

It is vital that the Church is an advocate in public policy and law reform and it is important that we speak from our own experience and not set ourselves apart.

A fine balance is required between the dead weight of heavy legislations and bureaucracy and the flexibility of services to respond to the needs of local communities. It is also the conundrum for policy makers – not to make the process too rigid that it actually becomes counter productive, and not to make them so lax that people fall through the gaps.

The Catholic Church is absolutely committed to improving services to children and is putting significant resources, time and energy into the research and development of these issues papers. This demonstrates how serious we are about not only supporting victims to tell their story, but in grappling with difficult public policy issues.

In each of our submissions we are necessarily setting the bar high so that we, along with the community, reach best practice and develop services that safeguard children. Convenience for organisations and practicalities of operations are important, but they are not central. The main goal has to be sound, foolproof safeguarding for children.

We have a great deal of expertise across our Catholic child welfare sector and our submissions reflect this experience and have been well received. It is pleasing to see other groups, including the Australian Law Reform Commission, are supporting our recommendations. Pia Akerman writing for *The Australian.com* last week ([“Children’s advocates push for national protection agency”](#)) highlighted a number of our key recommendations from our *Child Safe Institutions* paper.

In this submission the TJHC called for the establishment of a national mandatory accreditation scheme overseen by a national body with responsibility for auditing organisations against child safe standards and practices.

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This national approach would require Commonwealth and State Governments to work together to introduce a set of clear and consistent national child safe standards, supported by an accreditation scheme that included both self-assessment and external audit processes.

As the Royal Commission turns its attention to the Catholic Church from 9 December, we will reach out to victims as they tell their sad and shocking stories. Their stories further motivate and inspire us to rescue the future. Following the reforms in *Towards Healing* we will continue working hard in developing policies and issues papers that will ensure the Catholic Church is a safe and enriching place for all children.

Francis Sullivan

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www.tjhcouncil.org.au