



Diocesan Protection and Safety Council

QUARTERLY REPORT

October-December 2023

Diocesan Protection and Safety Council Meetings

During the fourth quarter of 2023, the Diocesan Protection and Safety Council ('Council') met on Wednesday 29 November. The meeting lasted three and a half hours and was conducted face to face, with one member joining via Zoom.

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

The last quarter for the year saw lots of practical work happening at the House!

While the caseworkers, Leanne and Michelle were on a short stint of leave, Brenda and Magda got into the Christmas spirit and made a video for the Bishops Staff Day '2023 Dance'. They had a lot of fun being Zimmerman Elves!

We take this opportunity to thank everyone for your support through the year.

Client Updates

New referrals continued this quarter, bringing current client totals to 49 people with 47% of clients

undertaking counselling. Clients ages range from 17 to 81 years old.

Bishops Healing Fund

The Bishops Healing Fund continues to receive interest and applications. 2023 saw a variety of applications come forward and we are pleased that the budget allocation of \$25,000 was just about exhausted. We continue to encourage Survivors to explore ways that we can assist them in their ongoing journey. The staff of Zimmerman Services Healing & Support are available for any such consultation.

Report from the Convenor of the Standing Committee for Assisting in Resolving Claims

During the fourth quarter of 2023 the Standing Committee met twice, in October and November.

On 12 October there were two claims, one had been previously considered by the Standing Committee, the other had not been previously considered. Both claims were litigated in the Supreme Court. The alleged abusers in both claims included clergy, religious and laity. Instructions to attempt to resolve the claims (or revised instructions) were issued by the bishop for both claims.

On 30 November there were two claims considered by the Standing Committee, both had not been previously considered. The alleged abusers in both claims included clergy and laity. The bishop issued instructions on one of the claims, the Standing Committee recommended that the other be rejected.

There were three mediations held during the quarter, two of which were settled, including a joint settlement with The Daughters of Charity.

During the fourth quarter of 2023, the Office of Safeguarding responded to four National Redress Scheme requests for information (RFI).

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

The fourth quarter of the 2023 was dominated by the ongoing preparation for the field audit (stage two) of the Diocese's compliance audit with the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (Ed. 2) which was conducted by Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd. (ACSL) and Prolegis Lawyers whose senior auditor was a solicitor for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

The field audit was conducted over two weeks from 6 to 17 November and involved on-site audits of:

- fourteen (37%) of the Diocese's parishes
- two primary schools and one high school
- Diocesan head offices, including the Diocesan Curial offices at 841 and 984 Hunter Street

The auditors interviewed over 100 clerics, employees, volunteers, parishioners and school community members.

The ACSL-Prolegis Audit Report was published on 28 February 2024, the Diocese achieving a very pleasing 98% 'compliance rating', i.e. 96 of 98 indicators applicable to the Diocese were assessed as being fully implemented or substantially progressed.

There was a significant level of professional development and learning undertaken by OoSG personnel during the quarter, including:

- all new staff commenced the Online [SBS Inclusion Programme](#)
- three of the Investigators, the Senior Investigator and Executive Manager commenced the *Certificate IV in Government Investigations*, completing the face-to-face component, with submissions of workplace evidence due in the coming months
- the Executive Manager and Redress Coordinator attended the Legalwise Abuse Law Intensive
- one Investigator completed the *Certificate IV in Compliance and Risk Management* and one completed a *Certificate in Child Psychology*.

There were a number of interagency meetings in which the OoSG participated, including:

- the Operations Manager attended the *NSW Child Protection Practitioners' Network, Catholic Schools NSW*
- the Director of Safeguarding attended the *Interdenominational Child Protection Practitioners Meeting*

- the Director of Safeguarding and Vicar-General attended the *NSW/ACT Safeguarding Community of Practice*.

With the continued rise in the rate of Intake, it became untenable to have a single worker allocated to Intake. In mid-October a second worker was appointed to the 11-week Intake Roster.

During the fourth quarter of 2023 the Office of Safeguarding undertook the single most demanding, complex and challenging inquiry since the Office was established. The two lead investigators involved in the case were commendable in their dedication, thoroughness and care.

