Child safety at the forefront of local council strategy: Pioneering training program underway

A collaboration between Inner West Council and ACWA will see 400+ frontline council staff trained in how to identify and respond to common child safety concerns. This bespoke training will enhance staff capabilities, understanding and strengthen Council's existing commitment to ensuring that Council's public spaces and environments are welcoming and safe for children and young people.

The pilot program is the first of its kind in a Sydney Metropolitan area and was identified as an important component of the Council's overall child safe strategy for staff working in service areas involving contact with children and young people.

The course has been designed and delivered by ACWA's Senior Consultant, Julianna Demetrius, a safeguarding specialist and former statutory officer with the NSW Ombudsman's office involved in administering the reportable conduct scheme.

The half-day, strengths-based training focuses on the practical steps that can be taken to promote the rights of children and young people to feel and be safe, and to prevent, reduce, or identify the risk of harm. A key feature of the program is the development of a series of bespoke case studies reflecting the "real life" work environments of Council staff participating in the sessions – so far, staff from the various aquatic centres and libraries have been trained.

The program started in November last year and will run into 2025 for other staff across Council's operating areas.

"Ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of children and young people who use Council's services is paramount. This bespoke training has been developed to ensure that our teams understand that child safety is everyone's business – staff, parents and community. Our aim is to ensure that our teams have the information and understanding to understand safeguarding principles, to help promote overall safety across the community and take appropriate action to protect children if necessary," – IWC representative.

Feedback from participants has been very positive, with many finding the course engaging and practical, the highlight usually cited is group work on the practical case studies.

"The scenario section of the course was very specific and useful. Sometimes we are unsure how to handle some situations so discussing this in a group was great," said a recent participant.

Another component of the training involves advising managers representing relevant service areas on how to identify common issues in dealing with child protection concerns reported by staff, parents and/or community members:

“I didn't know anything about mandatory reporting obligations and the different institutions and different incidents need to be reported to. I am now familiar with the Office of the Children’s Guardian, the Department of Communities and Justice, and obviously the police, but I have a greater understanding of which groups do what/their jurisdiction. It was interesting to read through all the child safe standards as well,” reflected an IWC librarian.

To find out more about the program please contact: julianna@acwa.asn.au

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About the Association for Children’s Welfare Agencies

The Association of Children's Welfare Agencies is the NSW peak body representing non-government organisations that provide services to vulnerable children, young people and their families.

We work with our members, partners, government and non-government agencies and other peak bodies to bring about positive systemic reform that will deliver better outcomes to the lives of children and young people, including those living in out-of-home care.

The Centre for Community Welfare Training (CCWT) is the name of ACWA’s learning and development arm. CCWT has been operating as a Registered Training Organisation for more than 20 years, delivering quality, cost effective training that is tailored to meet the needs of the NSW community services workforce, particularly those working with vulnerable children, young people and families.