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Enhancing child safety within the Australian Jewish community: Exploring the role of a culturally specific safeguarding serviceMichelle Meyer¹ *Rachel Averbukh²**Affiliations**¹ Maoz, Melbourne, Vic. 3161, Australia² Safeguarding Unit, Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, Melbourne, Vic. 3002, Australia**Correspondence**

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Abstract

This exploratory study examines the safeguarding needs of organisations within the Victorian Jewish community, focusing on the need for a Jewish-specific safeguarding unit. The study employed a qualitative case study methodology, incorporating semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders to explore the safeguarding needs of Jewish organisations. Findings indicate that a Jewish-specific safeguarding unit such as Maoz plays a role in future safeguarding services – encompassing resource development, continuous training and policy forums. Participants suggested further resources, including technological support such as online complaints, reporting and incident management platforms. There was also interest in receiving support for managing and conducting investigations into safeguarding concerns. In addition to compliance, the study highlighted the critical importance of culturally informed safeguarding strategies and the impact of these measures on fostering long-term cultural change and creating a safer environment for children within the community. The implications of this research underscore the necessity for ongoing, culturally attuned safeguarding training and support for organisations to protect and ensure the wellbeing of children effectively.

Keywords:

cultural and religious factors, Jewish institutions, safeguarding service, Victorian Jewish community.

Introduction

Studies on the cultural aspects of child sexual abuse (CSA) highlight how the sociocultural context shapes the perception of the abuse, responses to a disclosure and institutional responses (Lusky-Weisrose et al., 2022). Current safeguarding services are not routinely culturally sensitive, an important factor in identifying and responding to specific institutional risks. This study explores the place for a Jewish-specific safeguarding service in the Victorian Jewish community.

Historical context

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (RC) was a monumental examination of the nature and adequacy of institutional responses to CSA. It targeted a significant number of religious institutions. Of the fifty public hearings conducted in the form of case studies, thirty were of religious institutions, and almost 60% of survivor testimonies in private sessions were disclosures of abuse within religious institutions.

Jewish institutions did not escape the RC's attention (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017a). Twenty-five Jewish victim-survivors provided testimonies in private hearings. Case Study 22 in the RC conducted in 2015 examined the Yeshivah Centres of Melbourne and Sydney, two prominent ultra-Orthodox institutions. In a follow-up hearing in 2017, Case Study 53 shed further light on those institutions' current policies and procedures concerning child protection.

In those case studies, the RC's attention was also drawn to the cultural context of the Jewish communities served by those two institutions. It heard how certain aspects of Jewish law (*halacha*) and culture intertwined to affect one another and to jointly affect children's ability to disclose CSA and the responses to those disclosures by the institutions and by the members of the communities they served. Much of that evidence was about institutional stigmatisation and marginalisation of victims and their families (Davey, 2015). This public hearing was the first to examine institutional responses to CSA within the Jewish community.

Since the RC, there have been many highly publicised international criminal and legal investigations into institutional cases of CSA within Jewish communities, including in the United States, Israel and the United Kingdom (UK). These include the 2012 lawsuit against Yeshiva University High School for the coverup of allegations of abuse by a staff member and at least 11 lawsuits and against SAR Academy, a Modern Orthodox school in the Riverdale section of the Bronx, related to accusations that two former teachers had molested students (Dolsten, 2019).

The UK Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA, 2021), established in 2015, conducted a thematic review of child protection practices across 38 religious organisations and settings, including those within the Jewish community. While the report did not feature case studies of Jewish organisations akin to the Yeshivah in the RC inquiry, it included the case of Todros Grynhaus, an ultra-Orthodox Jew convicted of sexually abusing a young girl in his religious community and sentenced to thirteen years in prison. The report also highlighted specific barriers within Jewish child protection practices, such as Halachic beliefs that hinder reporting, fear of statutory authorities, the absence of child

protection policies in some ultra-Orthodox institutions and insufficient staff training in safeguarding practices (Mendes et al., 2024).

Other cases include claims against the highly popular Israeli Haredi children's author Chaim Walder, which came to light in November 2021 after several women's allegations of sexual assault against him while in therapy were reported to the media. The Safed Rabbinical Court later found that Walder had sexually abused women, girls and boys over a 25-year period. Soon after the Walder case came to light, the Israeli newspaper Yediot Aharonot revealed allegations of sexual abuse by a prominent female teacher, Tzipi Dinar, at a religious girl's high school, Sha'alavim (JPost Editorial, 2022).

These high-profile cases of abuse have prompted increased awareness and scrutiny of safeguarding practices across Jewish communities globally. In this context, it is important to consider the demographic and cultural landscape of the Jewish community in Australia, where safeguarding responses must be attuned to local communal structures and religious diversity. Australia is home to a vibrant Jewish community of approximately 118,000 individuals, of whom 46% live in Melbourne, Victoria (Graham & Markus, 2018). The community is diverse in its expressions of religiosity and cultural identity. The spectrum of observance ranges from the ultra-Orthodox (inclusive of the Haredi and Chabad communities), Conservative and Progressive Judaism to secular and cultural affiliations. Many Australian Jews maintain a strong connection to Jewish traditions and communal life, with varying levels of observance and practice. Despite the different levels of observance, Jewish people are linked by a common history, language, tradition and by the connection to the Torah. The Torah is a written code of Jewish values, beliefs and codes of behaviour.

Approximately 4% of Australian Jewish Jewry are ultra-Orthodox (Graham & Markus, 2018). This cohort refers to a tightly knit group that prioritises strict adherence to Jewish law (Halacha) and traditional lifestyles, often within the framework of Haredi (ultra-Orthodox), or the Chabad stream of Judaism. The Chabad community in Australia dates back to the early 1900's and was extended by a wave of post-World War II immigrants from Russia. The Haredi community established Adass Israel in 1949 and consists of Jews of European origins.

The Haredi and Chabad communities have come to public attention due to institutional cases of CSA. The RC, established in 2013, held inquiries into how public and private institutions responded to cases of CSA. Two of the public hearings were conducted into CSA of boys in two Jewish ultra-Orthodox Chabad institutions in Sydney and Melbourne (unconnected), Yeshiva Bondi and Yeshivah Melbourne.

Another high-profile case, the Jewish Adass Israel School response to CSA by female principal, Malka Leifer, was not investigated by the RC. Leifer, a former principal of the Adass Israel School in Melbourne, was accused of sexually abusing several female students. After fleeing to Israel in 2008, she was extradited back to Australia in 2021 and found guilty of multiple charges in 2023. The case highlighted failures in the community's response, including facilitating her escape (Mendes et al., 2024).

Cultural and religious sensitivities

The Jewish community often deals with unique cultural and religious factors. Understanding the risks with various aspects of religious rules, rituals and customs that impact safeguarding strategies is essential. Some examples are discussed below.

Differing levels of religiosity

Discussing CSA is sensitive and complex, regardless of one's religious affiliation. Even within a single Jewish community, there is a spectrum of religiosity and a diversity of religious observance ranging from ultra-Orthodox to Progressive Judaism with wide differences of opinion about Judaism.

There is no universally agreed 'one-way' to be Jewish; each grouping within a community has different practices, behaviours, rituals and expectations and differing degrees of engagement with the secular world. The more a community is focused on extreme piety and the more insular it is, the more difficult it becomes to discuss sexuality and sexual abuse.

Contrary to common assumptions, CSA is not confined to ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities. Empirical research and inquiry findings demonstrate that abuse occurs across all Jewish denominations, including Modern Orthodox, Reform and secular groups. For example, a 2018 study found that North American Jews from diverse denominational backgrounds – Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and secular – reported similar rates of CSA (Rosmarin et al., 2018). Similarly, a 2014 study in Israel comparing ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) and secular Jewish women found no significant difference in rates of CSA (Greenberg & Weiss, 2014). The IICSA report also collected evidence from survivors across the Jewish spectrum, including mainstream Orthodox, Modern Orthodox, Reform and unaffiliated communities.

This diversity of religious observance is a challenge to delivering effective education programs and creating child protection policies. An overarching, generic program or policy cannot be applied. To be implemented successfully, a program or policy must be specific to a community's needs and behaviours and must consider each community's religious standards.

Absence of language around sexuality

In some Jewish communities, particularly, but not exclusive to, ultra-Orthodox communities, sex education and discussion of sexuality and protective behaviours are regarded as antithetical to the high value they place on personal modesty. The result of their resistance to this kind of education is that some children and teenagers are not provided with the proper vocabulary to refer to private body parts, and they do not know what CSA is or what constitutes safe and unsafe sexual behaviour (Goldsobel, 2020).

Educating children on protective behaviours cannot be relied on alone as an effective prevention strategy. Children are not responsible for their safety. However, introducing children and young people to awareness about personal safety through protective behaviours and respectful relationships education is vital in giving them the language to disclose an incident of CSA, should they ever need to (Epstein & Crisp, 2018). The risk of CSA in the more closed ultra-Orthodox communities is heightened by

perpetrators' greater ability to exploit children who have little or no knowledge about their own bodies or safe and unsafe sexual practices and are devoid of the vocabulary to speak of it.

Lack of access to media and technology

Accessing information about sexuality and CSA is compounded as members of most ultra-Orthodox communities are not consumers of any general media and are usually not active online. This results in a limited understanding of how the media operates and unawareness of updates to CSA legislation and public discussion about CSA. The means of communicating within such schools are minimal. For example, in Melbourne Australia, an internet search highlights that most ultra-Orthodox schools provide very limited information on their websites. Because of this, parents and students have no access to child protection policies or information about where they can get help for CSA. If a child is being abused, the parents are less likely to talk face-to-face to school leaders and would not know how to approach the issue properly.

Historical and social considerations and distrust of secular authorities

The Jewish people have endured a long and painful history of persecution, most recently exemplified by the 7 October 2023 terrorist attack on Israel by Hamas – the deadliest in the nation's history – and a subsequent, unprecedented global surge in antisemitism. This history has contributed to a deep-rooted mistrust of secular authorities. As a result, some Jewish individuals may approach engagement with external agencies more cautiously than others, often preferring that information about CSA within the community remain internal. Concerns about the community's reputation can also contribute to reluctance in reporting incidents, due to fears of external judgment and unwanted secular intervention. The RC found that leaders in some ultra-Orthodox communities, such as Yeshiva Bondi and Yeshivah Melbourne, actively discouraged victims from reporting abuse to secular authorities, instead promoting internal mechanisms of resolution (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017b). This approach is deeply problematic, as community leaders often lack the specialised training and resources necessary to respond effectively to CSA, unlike external secular authorities.

Not speaking ill of others within the community

In some parts of the Jewish community, members place high importance on personal and family privacy and refrain from speaking ill of others. This attitude translates into a reluctance to report CSA to community leaders, believing that these are private matters and that such incidents should be kept to themselves (Sigad, 2024). This inhibits victims from reporting or speaking about the abuse and helps protect the perpetrator. The effect of the abuse is even more destructive if the perpetrator is a leader in the community. In such cases, the victim feels even more powerless and fearful of speaking out against a highly revered and influential person within the community. Research conducted into Haredi men in Israel revealed that victims often feared that reporting abuse would bring shame to their families and communities. This fear was compounded by concerns about damaging marriage prospects and violating community norms (Zalcberg, 2017).

Lashon Hara and Mesira

Lashon hara (Hebrew for 'Evil tongue') is a law protecting individuals' reputations, prohibiting derogatory speech about another person. Another law, *mesira* (Hebrew for 'turning over'), which forbids informing on a fellow Jew to secular authorities, is somewhat of an anachronism and out of place in modern times and countries like Australia, where Jews have full equality and in which Jewish law demands full allegiance to the country's laws. The RC identified the use of *mesira* and *lashon hora* as barriers for some members of the Jewish community to reporting child sexual abuse. Australian rabbis have ruled that in cases of CSA, these two laws are abrogated in line with the Jewish legal principle of *pikuach nefesh* (Hebrew for 'saving life'), which states that the protection of life overrides other laws as noted by a public statement by the Rabbinical Council of Victoria re the RC into Case Study 53 (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017b).

Reverence for community leaders

While there have been some positive changes and Jewish leaders have been more cognisant of child safety (Rabbinical Council Victoria, 2017), there is still resistance from some leaders to child protection education programs and policies (Nadan & Roer-Strier, 2020). Some have objected that they do not show *kavod Harav* (Hebrew for 'honour of the Rabbi') and *kavod haTorah* (Hebrew for 'honour of the Torah'). This concern for their professional dignity and status is an obstacle to child protection and adversely affects abused children in several ways.

In such a community, its rabbi is more likely to be the person of choice to turn to for support and help with a case of CSA rather than secular authorities. But rabbis are not qualified to properly handle and manage such reports, to provide the kinds of support and assistance that the victim often requires, or to ensure that an alleged perpetrator is denied further access to children to ensure that no further harm can occur. Without the intervention of the proper authorities, further and worse harm can ensue. The emphasis within such faith communities on reverence for religious leaders can create another hurdle to proper intervention in cases where a religious leader or teacher has behaved inappropriately. The person alleging such behaviour may not be believed because the religious leader is widely thought to be above suspicion.

Familial relations between students and teachers

Within the ultra-Orthodox community schools, students are frequently related to their educators. Personal accounts (e.g. Erlich, 2024) provide anecdotal feedback that schools often hire staff from within their community, increasing the likelihood of family members working together. This context may supersede the traditional student-teacher boundaries and blur the line between an educator's professional and personal worlds. Although another school's child-protection policy might prevent a teacher from driving a student home, the situation may be treated differently in this case. It may not raise any concern even though the student may be in danger. Also, it may be far more difficult to properly manage or discipline an alleged perpetrator who is related to many of the students.

Sex segregation

Rules governing worship in Orthodox synagogues require the separation of men and women by a *mechitza* (Hebrew word for 'partition'), and the practice is sometimes followed at other types of events. This can sometimes hamper communication between parents about the whereabouts and supervision of their children, who, at a tender age, are free to migrate from one parent to the other at such venues. Children often roam the facility unsupervised, which may provide an opportunity for potential perpetrators to approach them. A child protection policy for synagogues should explicitly state that parents or guardians are responsible for ensuring their child's supervision during synagogue activities. This includes services, educational programs, events and social gatherings. Parents should be made aware that supervision means not only being present but actively monitoring their child's interactions, behaviours and whereabouts.

Policies must also address a synagogue or institution's responsibilities to identify risks that impact the physical and online environments and how they affect the supervision of staff and children (Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP), n.d.).

The Jewish life cycle

Practice wisdom, from a social work perspective, refers to the knowledge gained through direct experience, reflective practice and professional judgment and reveals many safeguarding considerations regarding Jewish life cycle events and activities (Meyer & Absler, 2023). For example, children and families attend synagogues for many Jewish festivals. Synagogues need to conduct risk assessments for potential structural risks that prevent children from being within line of sight to supervising adults. Larger crowds at communal events provide an opportunity for more people to have access to children. The larger the crowd, the harder it is to supervise children. Synagogues often run childcare services and children's programs during the High Holy Days. Adults running these programs should be thoroughly screened per safeguarding policies. Screening is more complicated in smaller communities where young people might provide childcare services. Some festivals and activities may occur at different times of day. Organisations may hold all-night events, such as during the festivals of Shavuot (Jewish festival of weeks, marking the end of the counting of the Omer) and Simchat Torah (a Jewish festival marking the conclusion of the annual cycle of the public reading of the Torah readings), or host sleepovers for a Sabbath, all of which require appropriate supervision and monitoring.

The use of alcohol is incorporated into many Jewish festivals and rituals. Organisations have a duty of care and safeguarding responsibility to prevent children and young people from accessing alcohol. Adults using alcohol in the presence of children also pose a risk because they may become disinhibited or intoxicated. Children's observations of intoxicated adults may prevent them from seeking help from those responsible for their safety.

Youth group programs are common throughout the Jewish calendar, with associated risks of mixing of children and young people of varying ages, less adult supervision, and risks for vulnerable children with a disability or identifying as LGBTIQI. These risks are addressed by consideration to sleeping and toileting

arrangements for LGBTQI children, choice of clothing, names and pronouns, accessible environments and supervisory arrangements for children with a disability and encouraging participation of young people and families in religious and community life to promote social inclusion and self-advocacy (Mirvis, 2018).

A common practice during the Sabbath in Orthodox congregations is the presence of the lolly man (also known as the candy man). This person (a role also assumed by women) in a synagogue traditionally hands out sweets to children to make the synagogue a child-friendly place. This may be an innocent role, but in the wrong hands, there is potential for it to double as grooming behaviour because the children become accustomed to talking to the lolly man.

They gain children’s trust and make an emotional connection with them. Children would have difficulty discerning the difference between innocent intent and predatory motives. The lolly man should be considered like any other volunteer and undergo the same safeguarding procedures. To date, it is unknown if any synagogues have these procedures and is an area of focus for future policy development.

Visits to a *mikvah*, (a ritual immersion pool for spiritual cleansing), are a frequent occurrence during the Jewish life cycle for women and men. Of necessity, the bathers are unclothed during immersion. A women’s mikvah is more commonly only available to adults and offers privacy. Women’s immersion in the mikvah has been known to be a triggering experience for women who have experienced sexual abuse or family violence, and consideration should be given to information being made available on support services. The male mikvah is a single-sex facility, but it is often not age-segregated and is often unmonitored. From the perspective of CSA prevention, organisational risk assessments, policies and training need to be conducted to manage this risky environment.

Methods

Research design

This study was conducted by a consultant, Rachel Averbukh, engaged by Maoz in Melbourne Australia in 2022, to inform the establishment of a Jewish-specific safeguarding unit. The qualitative methodology (Darlington & Scott, 2002) and semi-structured interviews provided insights into the specific safeguarding needs of the organisations. Ethics approval was not sought as the study was focused on policy and procedures, information that was freely available in the public domain, and the study is thus, arguably, low risk. Participants were acting within their area of expertise, discussing topics related to their work rather than personal experiences. The research did not affect their professional standing because no personal data were collected. Participants were told explicitly that they could withdraw at any time, aligning with ethical standards for autonomy and informed consent.

Six participants were recruited from six Jewish community organisations, leveraging access to known safeguarding officers. Given the limited scope of the study, there were no exclusion criteria. The priority of the study was to capture the

perspectives of both small and large community-led organisations, of varying religious observance. The participants were asked four questions:

- What has happened so far in your organisation in relation to safeguarding children and young people?
- What are the factors that have supported your safeguarding processes and any obstacles?
- What are the specific safeguarding services that would assist your organisation?
- What is the need for, and viability of, a purpose-built safeguarding unit for the Australian Jewish community?

Participants

The participants were de-identified but categorised by gender and organisational type (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participants gender and role and a description of the organisation.

Participant	Description of organisation
Young female Executive Officer	Australian Zionist Youth Council (represents youth group affiliates with a range of different religious and cultural ideologies).
Senior male Operational Leader	Modern Orthodox (a movement within Orthodox Judaism that attempts to synthesise Jewish values and the observance of Jewish law with the modern world) Jewish Day School.
Female Volunteer Safeguarding Coordinator	Small Orthodox Synagogue.
Female Founder and Director	Orthodox Early Learning Centre.
Female Former Chair Child Safety Committee	Large Modern Orthodox Synagogue.
Young female Co-President	Progressive Synagogue (a denomination of Judaism that has modified many traditional Jewish practices, adapting to the changed conditions of the modern world).

Findings

The approach to the data analysis was thematic analysis, identifying recurring patterns from the participant’s responses. Table 2 summaries the key safeguarding themes identified by this study.

Table 2. Themes and key findings identified during thematic analysis.

CCYP: the Commission for Children and Young People. JCCV: Jewish Community Council of Victoria.

Theme	Key findings
Policy awareness and implementation	- Broad understanding of safeguarding legislation - Universal presence of policies, but timing of implementation varied - Gaps in policies addressing cultural risks (e.g. risks with Jewish lifecycle, managing persons of concern)
Compliance vs. implementation	- Strong focus on complying with Victorian Child Safe Standards (Commission for Children and Young People, n.d.) - Inconsistent implementation strategies - Need for better integration of safeguarding into daily practices

Continuous improvement	- Acknowledged need for regular reviews and ongoing strategy development - Recognition of safeguarding as an evolving process
External support and resources	- Engagement with mainstream safeguarding services for professional input - Initial grants helped, but sustainability issues persist
Financial sustainability	- Mixed capacity to fund safeguarding initiatives - Some proactive budgeting, but smaller organisations struggle to maintain support long term
Technology and infrastructure needs	- Strong interest in digital tools for complaints, reporting and incident management - Need for investigative support and telephone helplines
Training and governance	- Identified need for board member training to strengthen governance and strategic oversight
Community engagement and learning	- Desire for face-to-face forums to share practices and foster mutual learning
Advocacy needs	- Need for culturally informed advocacy with the CCYP - Support for a liaison body to represent communal interests
Support from peak body (JCCV)	- Strong support for a safeguarding unit within the JCCV to provide centralised, community-based coordination and leadership

Most participants demonstrated an understanding of relevant safeguarding legislation and recognised the importance of ongoing audits and policy updates. All participants confirmed that their organisations have safeguarding policies in place, with some variance in the timing of policy implementation. Some organisations had proactively developed and implemented their policies before the introduction of the Child Safe Standards. In contrast, others had only recently established policies in response to these standards. Not all participants had considered or established policies to address cultural risks, such as policies to manage persons of concern.

There was a strong emphasis on compliance with the legislated Victorian Child Safe Standards, indicating a commitment to following the mandated legislation. Despite the focus on compliance, there was a notable gap in the emphasis on developing and executing effective implementation strategies for some. This suggests that while policies exist, the practical application and integration of these policies into everyday practices may require further attention. Participants highlighted the necessity of a continuous improvement process to support the regular review of mandatory compliance requirements and the development of robust implementation strategies.

Participants identified factors supporting safeguarding processes and the obstacles encountered. Most participants had engaged with mainstream safeguarding services for professional support. This external expertise has been instrumental in shaping and enhancing their safeguarding measures. Some participants reported receiving initial community grants to establish or implement their safeguarding efforts. This support played a crucial role in setting up necessary procedures and frameworks. They noted that the funding was time-limited and sought other safeguarding support sources.

Some participants emphasised that the importance of safeguarding transcends financial concerns, indicating a strong commitment to finding the necessary resources. Some organisations had proactively set aside funds for ongoing

safeguarding support. It was noted that others faced significant challenges in maintaining the necessary budget. While some organisations had dedicated budgets, this was not the case for smaller organisations. For other organisations, the initial financial support did not translate into long-term sustainability.

In exploring the specific safeguarding services that would best assist organisations, one participant raised the need for a service to support the organisation nationally and in New Zealand. Most participants indicated a lack of technological support and expressed a strong interest in receiving assistance with implementing online platforms for complaints, reporting and incident management. There was also interest in receiving support for managing and conducting investigations into safeguarding concerns, ensuring that these are handled professionally and effectively. The inclusion of telephone support services was seen as a valuable addition, providing immediate and accessible help for safeguarding issues.

Almost all participants expressed a desire to attend face-to-face forums. These forums would provide valuable opportunities to share policies, training initiatives and best practices, fostering a community of learning and support among organisations.

Participants also identified a need for advocacy on behalf of communal organisations to the CCYP. The participants proposed that advocacy efforts should focus on representing the community's interests, with the representative serving as a liaison, capable of engaging directly with the CCYP to seek clarification on regulatory and policy matters. Such an organisation could provide culturally informed insights, address specific concerns and advocate for policies that respect and reflect the community's values and traditions.

Training for board members was identified as a critical area requiring attention. Feedback highlighted that effective safeguarding requires robust governance, and equipping board members with the necessary knowledge and skills is essential for oversight and strategic direction.

There was substantial support for a unit hosted by the peak body for Victorian Jewry, the Jewish Community Council of Victoria (JCCV). Participants believe a centralised and well-regarded community organisation like the JCCV would effectively anchor and facilitate safeguarding efforts.

Discussion

Based on the findings presented in this study, safeguarding children and young people within organisations is a complex and multi-faceted issue that requires careful consideration and ongoing support. Several key themes emerged from the participants' responses, highlighting the strengths and challenges in safeguarding efforts. The study was limited by the absence of representatives from larger organisations, including sporting and disability services and the ultra-Orthodox community.

Support for a culturally specific safeguarding unit

Cultural sensitivity in safeguarding efforts emerged as an important consideration, with participants recognising the need for more tailored support to address the diverse needs of the communities they serve.

Furthermore, the desire for additional support in the form of technological tools, training programs, and face-to-face forums reflects a keen interest among participants in enhancing their safeguarding capabilities. There is a strong emphasis on continuous learning, collaboration and sharing of best practices within the safeguarding community.

Safeguarding as a community-wide initiative

One safeguarding organisation cannot single-handedly drive change within the community. In the context of child safety, influencers play a critical role in promoting the values and principles that lead to creating a child-safe community. The small sample size of participants is not a reliable reflection of the broader safeguarding achievements. The participants in this study were instrumental in establishing policies and procedures that were compliant with the legislative requirements. Some had commenced introducing safeguarding procedures before the introduction of the Child Safe Standards.

From compliance to cultural change

While there was a focus on compliance with legislation and policy, some participants highlighted the need for more robust implementation strategies and continuous improvement processes. Gaps were identified in implementation strategies and the practical application and integration of safeguarding policies into everyday practices. The participants acknowledged the value of a safeguarding unit in effectively translating policies into actionable practices within organisations through services, including training and education opportunities.

Financial considerations

Financial support was also identified as a critical factor impacting safeguarding efforts. While some organisations had dedicated budgets for safeguarding and received initial financial assistance, others struggled to secure ongoing funding for sustained support. This financial discrepancy highlighted the varying capacities among organisations and the challenges in maintaining comprehensive safeguarding measures over time.

Funding models will be an important consideration for the safeguarding organisation to ensure accessibility to services, particularly for smaller organisations. Learnings from other jurisdictions include the Jewish Leadership Council in the UK, which works in collaboration with other organisations to run a Safe Communities Program supported by both government grants and philanthropic donations, helping Jewish organisations across the

UK to implement safeguarding policies and providing resources and training for smaller communities (Jewish Leadership Council, 2025). The Jewish Community Foundation of Montreal (JCFM) uses a membership-based funding model, where Jewish organisations contribute to the foundation's efforts to support safeguarding programs, including training and policy development (Robinson, 2017). These funding models demonstrate that there are multiple ways to ensure Jewish safeguarding organisations are well-supported. Each model can be adapted depending on the size of the community, ensuring that even smaller Jewish organisations can access essential safeguarding training and resources. To successfully build sustainable safeguarding programs, these diverse funding approaches will need to be considered and tailored to local community needs.

Positioning of a safeguarding unit in a faith-based community

The placement of a safeguarding unit within another Jewish organisation was further explored after this study, regarding issues of independence and potential conflicts of interest. After an initial affiliation, Maoz and the JCCV amicably separated, recognising the challenges of the governance arrangement in a close-knit community. Learnings from a Victorian Anglican safeguarding lawyer, highlighted that

independence protects faith based safeguarding organisations from any risk of a conflict of interest, ensuring that the primary focus remains on the welfare of those at risk rather than on the agendas or interests of related entities (Anonymous personal communication, legal profession, 2024)

Moreover, independence fosters greater trust and confidence from the public and stakeholders, knowing that all actions and decisions made are without undue interference.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of a culturally specific safeguarding service for addressing the identified gaps and challenges in safeguarding efforts, including the need for robust child protection policies with more effective implementation strategies, culturally specific support and additional resources and training opportunities. Such a service can build trust within the community, improve reporting and response mechanisms and, ultimately, ensure better protection for children in the Jewish community.

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