



Walking together with victim/survivors

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Background

- I have worked in **charity leadership** for over 10 years, as a trustee, CEO and consultant.
- Originally this work was focused around **survivors of abuse** running a therapeutic service for survivors of sexual abuse. In this role I continuously pushed for change, development and improvement to survivor services.
- From here I identified one of the most **meaningful areas of change was within the Church**.
- This led to working with Religious and then the structural changes needed and finally to my current position in the Religious Life Safeguarding Service (RLSS).



Information about the RLSS



Vision

It is not enough to replace safeguarding structures we have to make things **better than they were before**. Better for Victims, better for Religious Life Groups (RLGs) and better for all who come into contact with the Church.

We can achieve this by working together and being truly empathetic in our approach to safeguarding.





Our purpose

- 1. We believe we can create a safer Catholic Church by putting victims and survivors at the centre of safeguarding and developing an empathy-driven culture.**
- 2. We believe we can create a safer Church by supporting Religious so that they can feel more confident, knowledgeable and supported in the area of safeguarding by providing tailor-made training, support, advice and casework.**
- 3. We believe we can create a safer Church by embracing the One Church standards based approach to safeguarding and working hard to ensure every person who interacts with the service receives the highest professional response.**



For the protection of all people

The Charity Commission indicates our duty of care to each and every person who directly or indirectly comes into contact with us. Overall, the Commission expects trustees to protect all people who come into contact with their charity through its work.

Goal

The Church is actively ensuring it is creating a safe environment for all, identifying any potential risks at all touch points and effectively mitigating against them by using national policies and practice and being committed and professionally curious in this commitment to keep all people safe.

The RLSS is built on Empathy

- **Our empathy driven culture has allowed us to employ a committed staff team dedicated to safeguarding and determined to change things for the better.**
- **Willing to spend time understanding the varied needs of Religious and the day to day difficulties they face.**
- **Allowing us to create solutions to these problems, to make safeguarding easier and less intimidating for Religious.**
- **We put survivors at the centre of our work and are mindful of their needs and the difficult journey which has brought them to us.**



What does the RLSS currently provide?

Working in collaboration with Religious we developed the following membership service:

- Safeguarding case management
- Safeguarding advice and support
- Safeguarding Training
- DBS checks

Added bonus:

- Collective voice



Why did safeguarding go so wrong?

The 'One Church' approach is still not embedded meaning that people are working in siloes. Good practice is not shared and replicated, bad practice is not identified or addressed due to this closed way of working.

Abuse hides behind closed doors and there are still many of those in the Church. A culture of **openness and transparency** needs to be promoted.

Safeguarding is **relational**, when it works well it is because the people working in safeguarding have good and respectful relationships. The RLGs rarely had a relationship with those they were reporting safeguarding concerns to.

Those employed in safeguarding roles were often people from police, probation, justice, social worker etc without giving consideration to the **softer skills** needed for a safeguarding role within the Church.

Professional curiosity has sometimes been lacking, this is linked to softer skills to think outside of role and remit, be self-aware, open to training and development and collaboration.

What are our current challenges?

Throughout the Church in England and Wales

1. Collaboration
2. A standardized approach

For Religious:

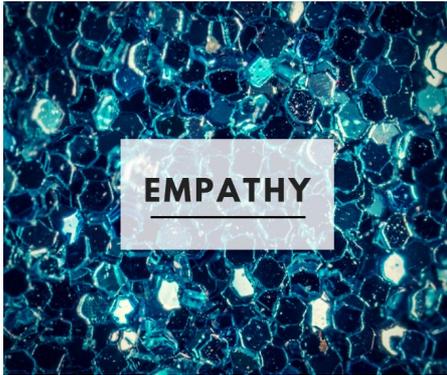
1. Religious are scared of safeguarding
2. Even though safeguarding links with just about every RLGs charism we've seen, the work hasn't been done to explain how and why it fits with what they already do.
3. Resources – RLG are aging and reducing in size
4. Volume and variety of RLGs

Key Message

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**We may have different roles and functions but we are all working to the same goals –
..... a safer Catholic Church.**

“If you want to go fast travel alone, if you want to go far travel together.”

How do we walk together with victim and survivors?



Empathy - We need to understand victims

Introspection - We need to understand ourselves

Knowledge - We need to understand the systems, processes, policies and structures



Empathy



How has abuse impacted Survivors?

- **Children are placed in a difficult situation as they usually love or respect the person sexually abusing them. It can make the abuse itself very confusing.**
- **Children and adults alike often blame themselves and feel a lot of guilt and shame around the abuse**
- **This often leads to the abuse being kept a secret for many years.**
- **The emotional impact of carrying this, along with the confusion described above and the trauma of the sexual violence can lead to some very complex impacts and issues.**

The impact of the stress response

- **Doing anything other than running or fighting leads to a tremendous amount of guilt and shame but complying (friend/flop) or freezing is much more common.**
- **Timeline - remembering the order of events is tricky**
- **Memories of the event – sometimes memories or chunks of memory are missing during the abuse itself**
- **Self-doubt – all of the above leads to the survivor blaming and doubting themselves and wondering if anyone would believe them if they can't answer basic questions.**

Impacts

- **Physical**
- **Relationships**
- **Social**
- **Well-being**
- **Religious**



Common Complexities

- Trauma / traumatisation
- Substance Misuse
- Personality Disorder
- Complex PTSD
- Dissociation
- Anxiety / depression
- Self harm
- Suicide
- Flashbacks
- Panic attacks



Seeking Help

- It can take an adult victims around 2 years before they are ready to seek help
- With CSA it often takes a lot longer, some people wait decades to share what happened. What keeps them hidden?
 - Fear
 - Shame
 - Trying to forget
 - Love
 - Secret Bind
 - Victim Blaming
 - Myths
 - Negative coping strategies
 - Impacts
 - Not understanding what happened / what happened was wrong



Useful things to know when dealing with Survivors

- Survivors have been lied to and manipulated it is really important we are **transparent** with them at all times.
- Trust and **belief** is key
- **Choice** is important
- Abuse can have a detrimental effect on all aspects of someone's life
- The scars of abuse are always there, they may fade or they may not it depends on the individual
- Survivors are resilient
- Survivors need to feel heard, to feel believed, to know what will happen next.



Introspection





How abuse has impacted you?

- **Directly or indirectly abuse has affected everyone in this room.**
 - **It comes with feelings of loss, grief, trauma sometimes anger or desensitization**
- **These feelings are normal**
- **We often don't talk about the impact on us or on our communities but we should.**

Why don't we talk about abuse and the impact on us?

- **Someone else's need is greater than ours**
 - **Survivors are more important**
 - **Those directly involved need our support**
- **We are worried others don't feel the same**
- **The subject of sexual violence is uncomfortable**
- **We are worried about making things worse or upsetting others**
- **We have our own relationships with trauma**

Why should we talk about the impact on ourselves?

- **Understanding ourselves is the key to helping others**
- **It is harder to do certain tasks with a physical injury, it is the same for emotional tasks.**
- **To normalize our feelings**
- **Ultimately to be able to respond better when the subject is raised**



How has the management of abuse impacted Survivors?

- **At the time**
 - **If a Survivor spoke out at the time of the abuse and it wasn't heard or acted upon for any reason then this reinforced all of their incorrect thinking about who is responsible / who is to blame. This often adds to the trauma of the event itself.**
- **Years later when Survivors are ready to tell and we do not have a prompt, empathetic and effective response**
 - **They do not feel heard or seen or believed.**
 - **Anger / frustration / despair / injustice**

How we can manage disclosures differently

- **By understanding the impact of abuse and what Survivors need from us now.**
 - **Recognition about the harm done to them, how big an impact it has had on their lives and the acknowledgment that the institution where it happened had a duty of care to them which wasn't upheld.**
- **By starting to address how abuse has impacted us personally - It is really easy to get bogged down in our own feelings and that is why exploring how abuse has impacted you is so important**
- **By being mindful to shift your thinking away from your personal response over to what the Survivor needs – to feel heard, to feel believed, to know what will happen next.**
- **Treat them as you would want to be treated.**



Knowledge is power

- **To provide a prompt, empathetic and effective response you also need knowledge of what your duties and responsibilities are.**
- **You need to know how to enact these duties and responsibilities – who to talk to, when to escalate etc.**
- **But also the limitation of your role, be honest about it with victim/survivors – sometimes they want something that simply isn't within your gift.**

So how do we walk together with victim/survivors?



In order to this we need to view it like climbing a mountain. We need to know which path up the mountain to take and we need to know the individuals who are climbing with us, their ability and the equipment they carry. We need to know this about ourselves also so everyone on the journey is on a suitable path, with suitable gear.

Without this knowledge we are unlikely to reach the top or worse we may get lost or injured.

Many Thanks



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