



Office of the  
Children's Guardian

# Child Safe 'Pulse Check' Survey Summary

January 2021

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The Office of the Children's Guardian (OCG) is an independent statutory authority in NSW that works to protect the safety of children. We do this by supporting and regulating quality child safe organisations and services. Wellbeing and safety of children and young people is at the heart of all our efforts. We are a source of authority on quality in child safe practice, in out-of-home care (OOHC) and worker screening and cultivate relationships across child related sectors to promote evidence-based practice.

The OCG is leading the implementation of the Child Safe Standards in NSW, a key recommendation of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The Standards are designed to support organisations to create child safe cultures, practices and environments. For further information see the [Guide to the Child Safe Standards](#).

## About the survey

The OCG developed the Child Safe Survey to prompt organisations that we work with to consider their current child safe practice and where there are opportunities for improvement. We called it a 'pulse check,' also providing a valuable snapshot of organisational awareness of child safe practice and informing development of new OCG resources and training.

The survey was anonymous and circulated via the OCG website, social media and peak bodies (via the OCG Child Safe Coordinators) across NSW between October and December 2020. We invited individuals who work in, or have a child that attends<sup>1</sup>, an organisation that provides services to children in NSW, to participate in the survey. We wish to thank all the individuals who responded to our survey. Your feedback will help us improve the way the OCG supports your important work in keeping children safe.

The survey provided an opportunity for reflection and gauges respondent's perceptions of child safe practice within their organisation. It offers valuable insights (not findings) for the OCG and child-related sectors. The population characteristics are not reflective of child related organisations in NSW due to the survey method used, and insights cannot be generalised to the broader population. Self-selection of respondents has also affected responses, as we expect those that have already implemented some of the standards are more likely to participate.

## Survey Questions

The survey included a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions around Child Safe Standard implementation and organisational cultures. The survey included:

- Scaling questions to prompt reflection on child safe cultures and practices
- Questions on which child safe policies and practices are already in place, including human resource practices and reporting processes
- Open ended question on what would encourage leaders and staff to be open to change and continuous improvement
- Open ended question on strengths, challenges or areas for improvement.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to a low number of parent responses, this summary reflects the responses of people that work for child related organisations only.

## Characteristics of survey respondents

1426 people working in child related sectors responded to the survey. Figure 1 highlights that almost half of the respondents work in the Early Childhood sector (49%), 23% work in Health Services, and 7% work in the Education sector.

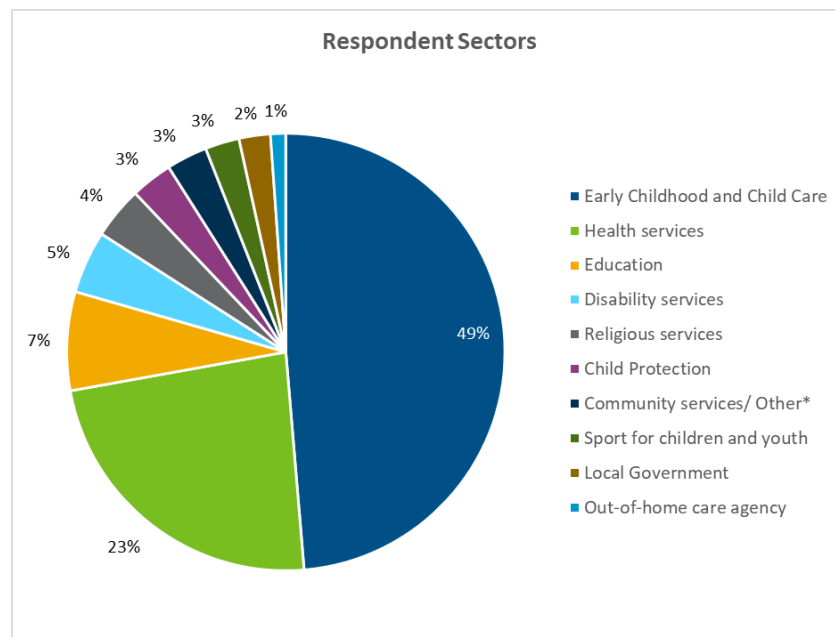


Figure 1 \*Includes Respite/VOOHC/Justice Services/Aboriginal Agencies

Respondents worked in organisations across NSW, with 56% working in the Sydney area, with the Hunter, Mid North Coast, and Illawarra Shoalhaven districts strongly represented. 6% of respondents noted that their organisations serve specific cultural communities – 3% work with CALD or Religious communities, whilst the other 3% work with Aboriginal communities. Most respondents (69%) work with children under 10, however 22% work with children of all ages and 9% work with youth between 10 and 18 years old.

Survey respondents work in a range of roles, with Directors, CEOs and managers representing a majority of respondents (61%), and 35% of respondents working as Frontline Staff.



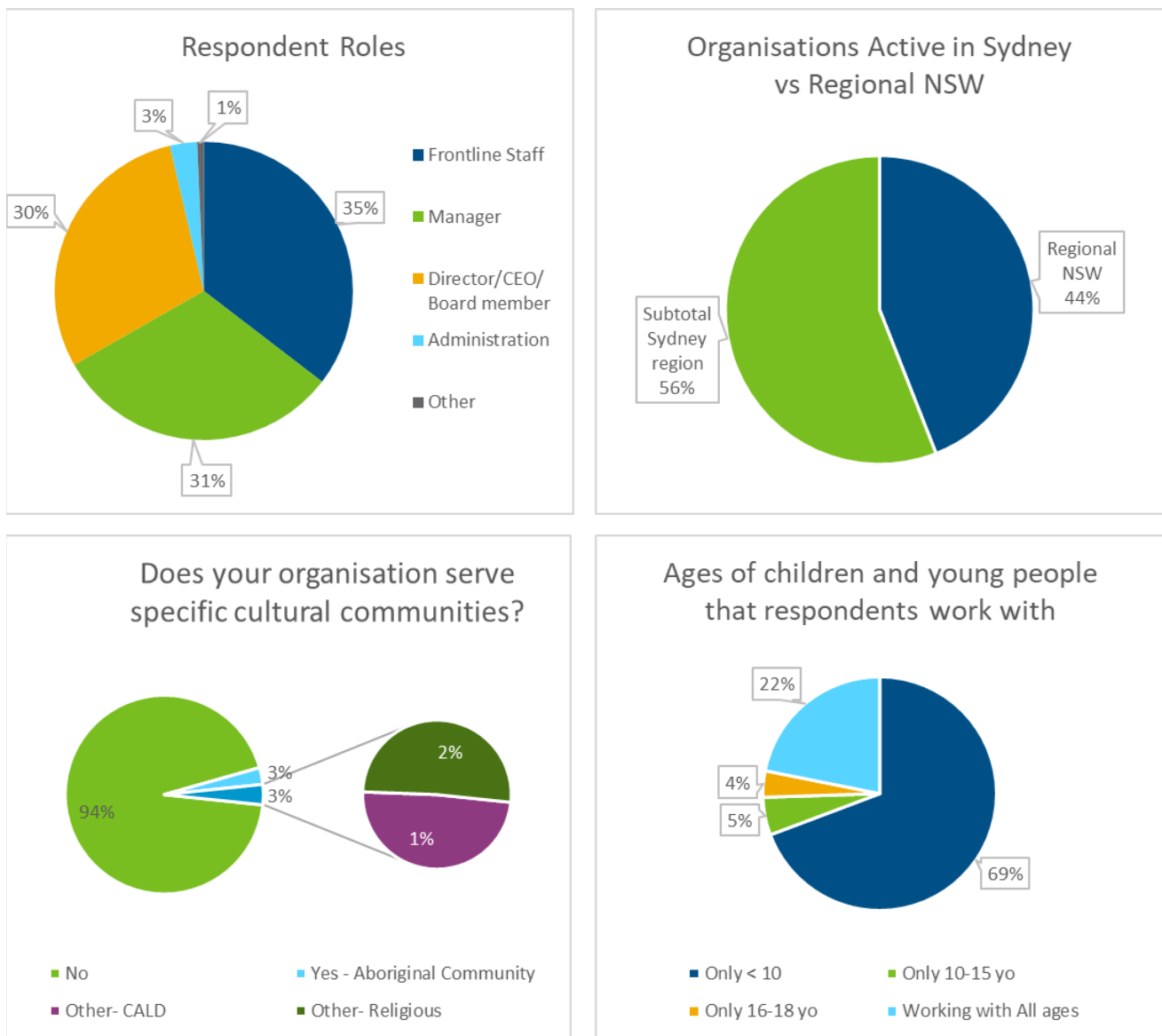


Figure 2

## Insights

### Perceived strong awareness of child safe culture and practice

- Most respondents indicated that they perceived that the organisations they work for are starting to implement the Child Safe Standards, although there is room for improvement when it comes to culture change and implementing practices.
- Based on responses to scaling questions related to child safe cultures in organisations, total scores were calculated for each response. A high score reflects that the respondent perceives that the organisation they work for fosters a child safe culture and engages children and communities. Respondents scored mostly in the medium and high categories.<sup>2</sup>
  - High score 39%
  - Medium score 43%

<sup>2</sup> There were 4 questions with a maximum of 5 points per question. A high score was defined as >17 points, Medium score was 13-16 points, Low score was <13 points.

- Low score 17%.
- We noted that the higher the total score of the scaling questions, the more child safe policies are in place according to the respondent. Although most respondents indicated that the organisation they work for has commenced implementing child safe practices, a smaller number of respondents indicated that their organisation is just beginning to implement child safe practices, suggesting that there will be many organisations still in their formative stages of being child safe.

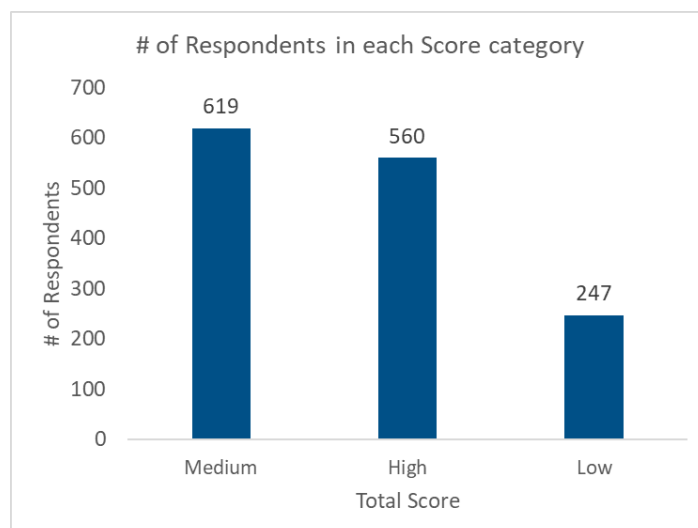


Figure 3

- Responses highlighted that leaders and staff in many organisations are generally supporting child safe cultures in their organisations and are open to continuous improvement. See Figure 4.



Figure 4

- When asked if their organisation is open to change and continuous improvement, almost all respondents (95%) agreed and provided multiple examples of how their organisation has embraced change or continuous improvement in the past 12 months.
- Most common responses were that
  - *Child Safe policies and practices are regularly reviewed (80%)*
  - *Leaders maintain a culture of continuous improvement (80%).*
- Least common responses were that
  - *Children are supported to provide feedback and this information is acted on (55%)*

- Leaders explore new ways to keep children safe (5%)
- Only 5% of respondents said that their organisation has not embraced change or continuous improvement.
- Respondents were divided when it comes to whether their organisation can improve on how child safety is embedded in organisations. See Figure 5.

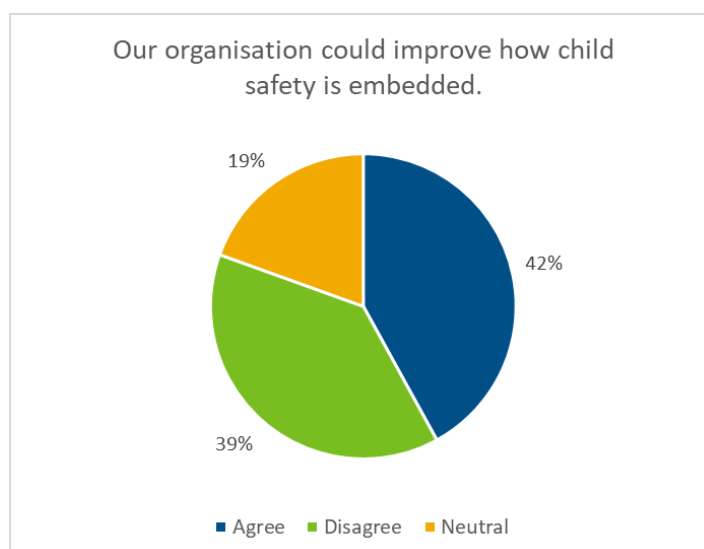


Figure 5

- Approximately half of the comments received on implementation of the standards indicated that respondent's organisations are actively implementing the Standards or are in progress of implementing. One respondent noted:  
*"We have developed an operational plan for child safety and this will be rolled out over the next 5 years with the most important aspects to be dealt with in the first 12 months – this includes the leaders being brought on the journey and developing a strong commitment to this new approach".*

## Opportunities for improvement

- When asked about their organisation's strengths, challenges and room for improvement, one third of open-ended responses highlighted challenges that organisations are facing or areas for improvement  
*"...more transparency from senior management would support cultural changes"*  
*"[Implementation of the standards is] difficult in an environment with multiple competing priorities and heavy workload."*
- For the same question, more than 10% of responses were only related to Child Protection and Work Health and Safety issues, rather than child safe practice and prevention more broadly. This highlights that there may be some confusion about difference between child safe organisations, child protection and work health and safety approaches.<sup>3</sup>  
*"Staff do monthly risk assessments on all rooms and outdoor areas. We do yearly child protection training"*

Another respondent summarised this challenge:

<sup>3</sup> 'Child Safe' is broader than child protection. A child safe organisation systematically: creates conditions to reduce the likelihood of children being harmed, creates conditions that increase the likelihood of identifying and reporting harm, and responds appropriately to disclosures, allegations and suspicions of harm.



*“Our organisation is looking at implementing the Standards. However, at this stage the focus has been on child protection which is reactive rather than the proactive stance used in the standards. We will get there but it will take some time.”*

## Engagement with children, families, and communities can be built upon

- Most respondents report that their organisations are actively engaging families, communities, and children in creating child safe environments. However, there is room for improvement in this area.

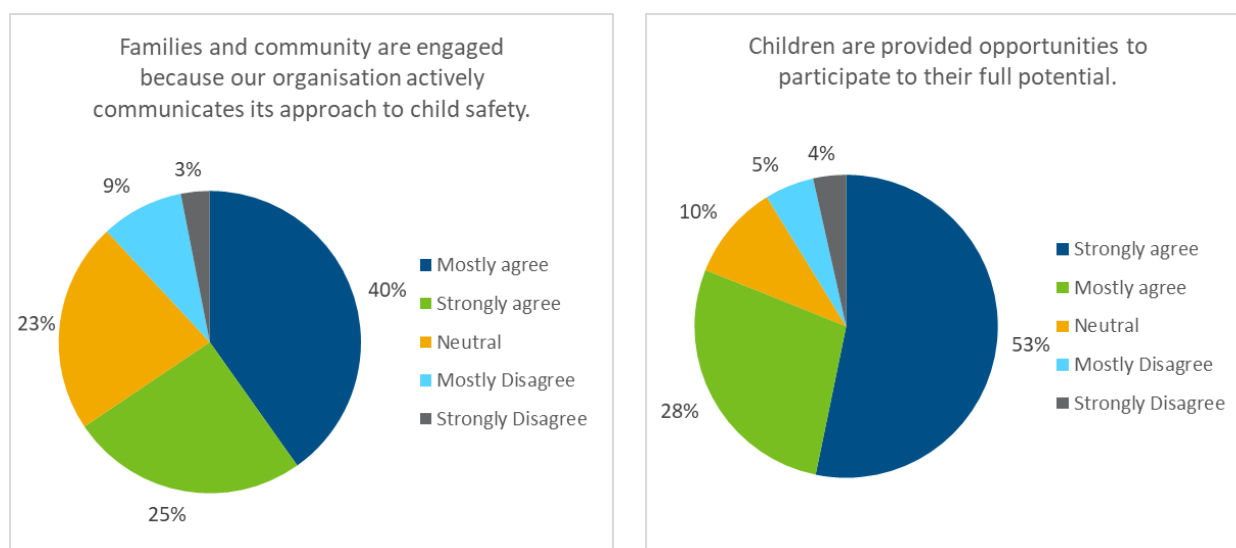


Figure 6

- Comments in the open-ended responses highlighted the need for tools and resources on how to best take children’s perspectives into account.

*“It is a challenge to consider how to express the policies in a way that is appropriate for children.”*

*“Better platforms for children to share their views and experiences in our services would encourage leaders and staff to be open to change and continuous improvement.”*

## Most organisations have child safe policies and procedures in place

- 75% of respondents said that their organisation had five or more policies in place that support child safe environments. 22% have between 1 to 4 policies in place, and 3% noted they were not aware of their organisation having any child safe policies or procedures in place.



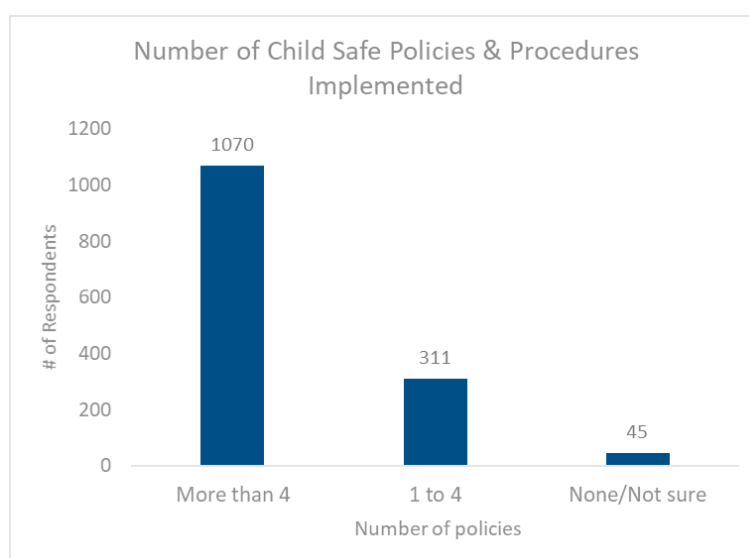


Figure 7

- We asked how these policies have been implemented in organisations. Most common responses were that policies are:
  - *Understood by staff (81%)*
  - *Specific to the organisation (70%)*
  - *Championed by leaders and staff (70%).*
- Least common responses were that policies are:
  - *Available in different languages (8%)*
  - *Child Friendly (26%)*
  - *Publicly accessible (55%).<sup>4</sup>*

## Policies and resources need to be accessible to children and diverse communities

- Respondents indicated that making policies child friendly poses a challenge. This was also reflected in the answers to the question on implementation of policies, as 74% did not respond that their policies are child friendly.

*“Our organisation... is generally committed to providing a child safe environment across a wide range of services and managers and some staff have been exposed to the Child Safe principles but we struggle to know how to implement some of them, for example involving children in decision making about their safety, and would like some clear information on what these things look like in reality.”*

*“It’s helpful to consider what we can do to make our policies more child friendly, but always a challenge to consider how to express the policies in a way that is appropriate for children.”*

*“It is a very big challenge. I think children often do not feel empowered to speak, hence it is difficult to know.”*

- Some respondents identified a need for policies and resources to be available in community languages.

*“As we are in Sydney West, we have a very diverse area and number of different languages, so will be great to have more fact sheets and information available in different languages...”*

<sup>4</sup> Organisations that display their policies and procedures publicly show that they are transparent and confident in their child safe approach.

*“...Our next focus for improvement is in child friendly policy development and policies available in different languages. The challenge to this is the cost of interpreting the policies into various languages.”*

## There is room for improvement when it comes to child safe human resource practices

- When asked if the organisation they work for has child safe human resources practices in place in addition to the Working With Children Check, 10% responded that they do not, and 16% were unsure. This insight reflects evidence from the Royal Commission which found that organisations are over-reliant on the WWCC.
- 23% of respondents indicated that their organisation had four or more human resources practices in place in addition to the WWCC.
- For those respondents that indicated their organisation has at least one practice in place, the top three practices selected by respondents were:
  - *Induction packages include Codes of Conduct, Child Safe Policies and Complaint Handling Policies (95%)*
  - *Job descriptions and duty statements describe the organisation's commitment to child safety (78%)*
  - *Child Safe Policy describes ways that recruitment occurs (50%).*
- Less common practices selected by respondents were:
  - *Employment advertising includes the organisation's Statement of Commitment to Child Safety (32%)*
  - *Additional Training (4%).*

## Procedures for reporting abuse are generally in place

- Most respondents reflected that they have procedures in place for identifying and reporting on child abuse.
- 92% of respondents noted that there are clear procedures in place at their organisation to deal with complaints about child abuse. A further 5% noted that these are currently being developed, whilst 3% noted a lack of procedures.
- 89% noted that their organisation provides training on identifying and reporting abuse, however 6% of respondents noted that this type of training is not provided. 5% of respondents noted that this type of training is currently being developed.
- When asked if instances of abuse had been reported by organisations in the past, most respondents (70%) indicated that this was the case. Of the respondents that were not aware of any reports of abuse, we asked if they were confident that a complaint of child abuse would be reported. 6% noted they were not sure and 2% indicated that they believed this would not be reported.

## Additional training and resources needed to support child safe cultures

Respondents shared their input on needs regarding the implementation of a child safe culture and continuous improvement in their organisation. Their responses were summarised in the following categories:

- Training & resources
- A shift in organisational culture
- More time allocated for training during paid work hours
- Clear guidelines from the government, including legislating the standards
- Communities of practice – collaboration within sectors
- Case studies and examples
- More communication with families

- Improved internal communication.

Some answers showed that this survey was a good reminder of areas that organisations still need to act on. This supports the work being done on further surveys to prompt self-reflection on implementation and change over time.

## Next steps

Efforts are underway to prepare organisations for the commencement of a legislated Child Safe Scheme.<sup>5</sup>

Additional resources are being developed by the OCG, and free trainings and webinars are ongoing. Resources such as the Guide to the Standards and other practical implementation guides can be accessed [here](#).

The following resources will be made available in 2021, using the Child Safe Standards as the framework to create child safe organisations:

- Children's empowerment resource
- Child Safe Standards videos
- Updated eLearning
- Induction video
- Child Safe Policies Resources

Free Child Safe trainings for specific sectors are being run on a regular basis to raise awareness and build capabilities. Free online training and requests for face to face training can be found [here](#).

The OCG is planning an evaluation of the implementation of the Standards and will be asking for more input from organisations on their experience of implementation in the coming year.

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<sup>5</sup> The Child Safe Scheme is anticipated to commence in mid-2021.