

## **EDINBURGH PRESBYTERY EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

### **Report To Presbytery on Child Protection 13 April 2004**

#### *The Code of Good Practice Is For Everyone*

- ◆ Firstly, I would encourage anyone, whether they work with young people or not, to come along to a volunteer training to find out for themselves what the Code is all about. It is not always recognised that it has an impact on everyone in the congregation, not only those directly involved in Children's and Youth ministry. People usually leave reassured that the Code, far from being the "Big Brother" bugbear which many perceived before its introduction, is actually the tool which liberates people, in this suspicious and distrustful society, to be able to work with children and young people in the caring and nurturing way which is natural in a Christian environment. This will allow our young folk to grow and develop in faith, in the knowledge that they are valued by everyone in the church community as well as by God. Surely that is one of the greatest gifts we can pass on to our youngsters, and worth a bit of care and effort!

#### *Six years of the Code of Good Practice*

- ◆ Six years after its implementation the Code of Good Practice is now firmly established in the Church and accepted as a routine part of the job. The workload in terms of training volunteers – far from diminishing as originally expected – has continued at a consistent pace year on year. As new legislation comes into force and the Church has become more aware of the issues involved, the workload steadily grows.
- ◆ In Edinburgh Presbytery we have now trained approaching 2400 volunteers and only a few new Co-ordinators are awaiting training. With such large numbers involved it quickly became necessary for me to request dedicated admin assistance for Child Protection work, and I would like to acknowledge my debt to John Mackie, whose efficient and faithful work continues to smooth the path for me.

#### *Kirk Sessions*

- ◆ At congregational level, the large majority of Co-ordinators do a very demanding job extremely well, and feel valued by their Kirk Session and supported by the Children's and Youth Ministry workers.
- ◆ However, it is important that Kirk Sessions remain conscious of the need for sensible and compassionate implementation of the Code, and to ensure that Child Protection issues are, if not a standing item on the Session Meeting agenda, at least a regular one. Continual developments and changes in lifestyle and legislation inevitably impact in this area and must be taken on board as they arise.

#### *The Child Protection Unit*

- ◆ Staffing levels at the Child Protection Unit in Young Street have had to expand steadily to meet the growing need. Now, with a settled team in place for the foreseeable future, the workload is now streamlined into four main sections: Recruitment, Training, Referrals, and Development.

- ◆ You should note however that because of the pressures on the work force the phone line (260 3116) may not always be answered, but *it is essential that a name and number is left* so that the caller can be contacted. Enquiries via e-mail on [childprotection@parished.org.uk](mailto:childprotection@parished.org.uk) are also welcome.
- ◆ I am privileged to be serving on a Training Review Forum which was set up in May of 2003 to review and strengthen the whole area of training for Child Protection. The induction process for new trainers was the first area to be tackled, and this has already proved beneficial to me. I, like other trainers, am now confident in the knowledge of support, encouragement and ongoing supervision, ensuring a high standard of training throughout the country. It is hoped to review training for ministers, Co-ordinators and volunteers in a similar way, and also to introduce a training package for Kirk Sessions, something which is long overdue.

#### Criminal Record Checks

- ◆ The introduction of Criminal Record Checks was undertaken in a typically careful and thorough way by the Child Protection Unit. Although the initial uncertainty about this measure has already lessened, it may be helpful to list here some of the points which are most often raised.
  1. For most people, it boils down simply to having to fill in one more form. The main impact for churches is that work must be planned in advance if it requires new workers.
  2. The Church is not a vetting agency, so a check should *only* be done as part of the recruitment process *and not in isolation*.
  3. It is important to note that although the decision from Disclosure Scotland will be posted out to the applicant, it is *the Child Protection Unit – not Disclosure Scotland* - which makes the final decision on an applicant's suitability. Therefore an applicant should not take up the post until the Child Protection Unit's decision is sent out.
  4. Nobody at congregational level – not even the Co-ordinator – will know the details of any disclosure application, even if the decision goes against the applicant.
  5. Kirk Sessions should be aware that any complaint or dispute by applicants should be directed to the Child Protection Unit, which is the only body with the relevant knowledge. An appeal system has been set up to arbitrate in such cases.
  6. The decision reached is based *solely* on the suitability of the applicant for working with children. Previous convictions pertaining to other matters will therefore not necessarily be a barrier and should not deter a would-be worker from applying.

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