

SAFEGUARDING MATTERS

in the Catholic Church in Scotland

MAY 2025



SPOTLIGHT on Safeguarding Training

In this issue, our focus is on **Safeguarding Training**, both as it is being experienced by practitioners and as it is being developed at a national level.

We report on the views expressed by many of those who have participated in the **Safeguarding Induction Training 2024** course which has been introduced in the past year.

It is gratifying that the overall rating for the new course has been overwhelmingly positive, with 99% of responders rating it as *Good overall* (17%) or *Very Good overall* (82%). This shows that national training is heading in the right direction. You can find more details of these evaluations inside.

We are always keen to learn from the experience of training course participants and to respond to their ideas for improving training to ensure that it meets needs appropriately.



Also, in this issue we rightly shine a light on some of our excellent volunteer **Safeguarding Trainers** operating in a few of the Dioceses - *Tony, Kathleen, Theresa and Margaret* - to learn from their interesting experiences of training volunteer PSCs who operate in different contexts around the country.

We are so fortunate to be able to benefit from the expertise and commitment of so many good people who volunteer their time for this important work.

We hope to feature the work of more Trainers in future issues.

Please email [Helena Rameckers](#) if you want us to put particular questions to Trainers, or if you want to put a trainer who has impressed you “under the spotlight”.

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Safeguarding Induction Training (2024)

The new **Safeguarding Induction Training (2024)** is being used in its final form – following a period of trial and feedback – since July 2024.

Embedded in the final presentation of the course is a QR code which enables attendees to complete their own evaluation of the session in such a way that the SCSSA receives a copy of their evaluation. Between July 2024 and March 2025, **148** evaluations were received via the QR code. Below we provide a summary of those evaluations. [You can access the full analysis of these evaluations here on our website.](#)

Induction Training can be delivered either in person or online, via a trained Safeguarding Trainer. Of the evaluations received, **68%** had participated in an online session. The table below shows how attendees rate the training session overall. It is gratifying to see that online delivery clearly does not detract from the learning experience.

Safeguarding Induction 2024

Overall rating	online		in person		Total
Very Good overall	82	68%	39	32%	121
Good overall	18	17%	7	28%	25
Indifferent	-		1		1
Poor overall	1				1
TOTAL	101		47		146

It is pleasing that the overall rating for *Safeguarding Induction Training (2024)* is overwhelmingly positive, with 99% of responders selecting *Good overall* (17%) or *Very Good overall* (82%).

These evaluations show that the training session is largely deemed to be pitched at the right level, to the right audience, and paced correctly. Enough time is reported to be allocated for discussion and questions, group activities are reported to be useful for ensuring focus, the presentation and handouts are thought to be concise, and the case studies were considered to be interesting and helpful.

Some participants provided helpful suggestions for improving the session further, including:

- making the video content more dynamic with images on screen
- introducing 'tactile exercises' such as a card game
- providing more case studies and discussion time.

Following their participation in this training:

- **144** reported that they understood safe recruitment procedures well
- **144** reported that they understood the standards of conduct well
- **138** reported that they felt well equipped to recognise signs of potential abuse
- **143** reported that they felt confident in how to pass along concerns.

Several attendees commented on how reassuring they find it that the Catholic Church in Scotland is serious about everyone's role in safeguarding – a testament to the work of safeguarding teams across the country.

While the evaluations received so far are highly encouraging, the content of the session is only one part of the picture. Equally important is the dedication, expertise and commitment of our volunteer Safeguarding Trainers across the country, who are able to deliver the session in ways that are described by attendees as being "engaging", "informative", "clear", "concise", "approachable", "professional", "well prepared", and much more.

In this edition of *Safeguarding Matters*, we are spotlighting four Safeguarding Trainers who have been singled out in evaluations as doing a fantastic job. We hope to repeat this in future editions, so please do let us know if you have attended a training session that has been particularly good!

WHAT'S NEXT FOR INDUCTION TRAINING?

- Although evaluations from people who have just attended a session are essential, it is important that we gain an insight into whether the training equips you to understand safeguarding risks and requirements while carrying out your ministry. If you would like to attend a focus group with SCSSA to share your feedback, please let Helena know by [email \[helena.rameckers@scssa.org.uk\]\(mailto:helena.rameckers@scssa.org.uk\)](mailto:helena.rameckers@scssa.org.uk) or by phone 07394 862279. (NB if you have already indicated your willingness to do this via an evaluation form, please be assured that we do have a note of this.)
- We are working a version of Induction Training (2024) that will be a self-paced online module, which can be used by anyone in our communities who is either unable to access a trainer, or who wishes to refresh their knowledge. If you have experience of creating and/or evaluating online modules and would be willing to assist with this job, please contact Helena using the details above.
- If you would like to join the country's cohort of volunteer safeguarding trainers, please contact your Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor in the first instance.

Spotlight on Trainers

Our Safeguarding Training Advisory Group (STAG) are keen to acknowledge the tremendous work being done by trainers across the country. Many of the evaluations of Induction Training contain tributes to trainers:

- ◇ for taking the time to answer questions, however small
- ◇ for going above and beyond to offer e.g., IT support for online delivery
- ◇ for valuing attendees' professional insights and knowledge
- ◇ and for taking time to ensure that everyone understands key points during the training.

In this and future issues, we'll shine a spotlight on some of those trainers who (as we have been told by attendees) are doing a fantastic job.

If you have come across a trainer who you found to be particularly helpful, please consider nominating her/him to "come under the spotlight" in future issues of Safeguarding Matters. You can email HELENA RAMECKERS to provide their name and she will take it from there.

TONY LIVESEY

Tony has been a trainer in the Diocese of Argyll and the Isles for approximately 8 years, both face to face, and on line via Zoom. The latter has been a great help in our diocese, given the geography. He delivers training perhaps once every 3 weeks.



EVALUATION COMMENT:

"Tony managed the technical aspects of Zoom well, with clear and audible communication throughout, contributing to a productive session."

What do you enjoy about delivering training?

I have always loved delivering teaching and training in my professional life. In the context of Safeguarding, a chance to meet a range of volunteers, from a variety of backgrounds, invariably enthusiastic and committed, and to engage with them, enjoying their perspectives and questions. Importantly to portray Safeguarding as a very positive aspect of any activity within the Church, whilst addressing previous wrongs.

What is the most challenging aspect of being a trainer?

Occasionally helping someone who is not very technically able, to connect. Sometimes encouraging dialogue. The rest is a joy.

What is the most challenging or memorable question you have been asked during safeguarding training?

"Can we ever hope to truly stamp out all types of abuse within the Church?"

Is there a particular question you are often asked during safeguarding training?

How to explain and work with mandatory reporting whilst maintaining a relationship with survivor / victim.

What one tip would you like to share with new trainers?

The need to refer on, regardless of how 'minor' a concern may appear.

Do you have a favourite / least favourite part of Induction Training (2024)?

Meeting these great people who are willing to volunteer for and within our Church. Least favourite ...not really, but maybe co-ordinating a date and time to suit a group - always preferable to training a single individual as within a group there can be useful interaction.

What do you think is the most important skill you bring to your training sessions?

My ability to be feel comfortable in relating to, and communicating with, newly met volunteers.

What one wish do you have for the future of training?

That it develops, keeping pace with new developments, and that it is tailored to the needs of the various groups (eg. Clergy, PSCs, eucharistic ministers, Children's liturgists, etc.)

Have you ever had an attendee that had a big impact on you, and why?

A number have left a lasting impression, but one stands out because of the genuine empathy, warmth and enthusiasm she brought to her role, and to the training session.

Can you comment on the progression of safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Scotland over the years you have been a trainer?

The benefits the SCSSA has brought to training (not being sycophantic), and the gradual change in mood and emphasis from being mired in past failures, to this being a genuinely positive subject - and one which will never be 'completed'.

Is there anything not covered above that you want to share?

Perhaps the ongoing need to refresh and support trainers.



Spotlight on Trainers 2

KATHLEEN HOY

has been a trainer in the Diocese of Aberdeen for almost 19 years. She usually delivers 5-6 sessions per year.

EVALUATION COMMENT:

"Kathleen was very accommodating, clear and well prepared."



What do you enjoy about delivering training?

Meeting people passionate about undertaking a new role in the church, learning from their experiences both in and out of church life.

What is the most challenging aspect of being a trainer?

When I was new to training, I lacked confidence both in my knowledge and delivery. Nowadays the biggest challenge is fitting in this voluntary role around a full-time job and family!

What is the most challenging or memorable question you have been asked during safeguarding training?

I used to get very nervous when volunteers asked about online safety, until I realised that the principles we apply to our physical safety in the "real" world and those of our children also apply in the virtual world, i.e. you wouldn't open the door to a stranger or without knowing who's on the other side. Similarly, be sure you know who you are communicating with online before giving any details. Just as you would let someone know where you are going and what time you expect to return, talk to someone about the online platforms you use and how often. Openness helps prevent risky situations. Whilst we need guidelines and procedures we often get bogged down by them and forget to apply common sense when keeping ourselves and others safe.

Is there a particular question you are often asked during safeguarding training?

Yes, almost every session someone asks with regards to mandatory reporting: "What if someone discloses then says they don't want you to pass on?" I've given the same answer to this question but in so many different ways over the years. Recently a volunteer gave a very good answer to this question & that was not to think, "what will happen if I report this?" Consider rather, "what will happen if I don't". That really does reassure on mandatory reporting.

What one tip would you like to share with new trainers?

Buddy up with an experienced trainer and do some shared training. You will learn a lot from them and this will allow you to practice delivery of smaller sections before going live on a full session. Give yourself time to prepare and practice.

Do you have a favourite / least favourite part of Induction Training (2024)?

I really enjoy the way the new material has the case studies interspersed throughout the session. It helps the volunteers put what they've learned into practice in bite-size chunks. The start of a session is always nerve-wracking as you don't know how chatty (or not!) your attendees will be. The videos used take a lot of weight off the trainer, as delivering signs and indicators of abuse in former training packages was always difficult.

What do you think is the most important skill you bring to your training sessions?

I like to ensure everyone has a chance to join in, facilitating good discussion, without running over time!

What one wish do you have for the future of training?

That my WiFi doesn't cut out when I'm delivering online!

Have you ever had an attendee that had a big impact on you, and why?

Yes, they mentioned nothing of it during the session, but shared with me afterwards that, as a child, they had experienced abuse and had always blamed themselves. Taking part in the training, they realised it wasn't their fault and they were really lifted. It had a huge impact on me, I was moved to tears, it helped me see training in a very different light, helping to heal the past as well as preventing harm in the future.

Can you comment on the progression of safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Scotland over the years you have been a trainer?

When I first started training, volunteers were reluctant to attend. There was denial among many that abuse happened in church environments and suspicion about having to undergo a disclosure check back then. Nowadays, that trend has changed. Many professionals note with interest the similarities between safeguarding practice in their secular settings and the Catholic Church and there are fewer myths regarding abuse. It is encouraging to see the change in attitude among the laity with regards to Safeguarding. It is a constant journey to ensure we are robust yet proportionate in our measures. We need to constantly check and recheck if we are getting the balance, just right. Best practice is best implemented at local levels within a national framework.



Spotlight on Trainers 3

THERESA ALLAN

has been a trainer in the Diocese of Aberdeen for two and a half years.

EVALUATION COMMENT:

"Theresa presented very clearly and answered questions well."



What do you enjoy about delivering training?

I enjoy meeting volunteers from across the diocese and supporting them to safely volunteer in their parishes. Initially I offered face to face training sessions locally to support volunteers in the parishes in Banff and Buckie. For the last year I have also been offering online sessions. This has allowed me to help support volunteers from across the diocese and allow them to access safeguarding training without travelling long distances and at times that suit their work and family commitments. I generally offer 1 or 2 sessions a month. As I am retired, I can be flexible, so I am happy to suit the needs of volunteers.

What is the most challenging aspect of being a trainer?

The biggest challenges in delivering the training online are making sure that everyone invited can manage to access the session and that the technology works on the night! It can also be more difficult to make sure that everyone is actively engaged with the training when you are not face-to-face. Keeping the group sizes small and encouraging the quieter participants to speak out in the scenario sections helps me to manage this better. Feedback from volunteers has identified that they like the smaller group size.

What one tip would you like to share with new trainers?

Be organised. Make sure you can share your screen and the sound! I found that a couple of trial runs at home with family members helped with this. I also like to have a paper copy of the PowerPoint and the notes pages handy.

Do you have a favourite / least favourite part of Induction Training (2024)?

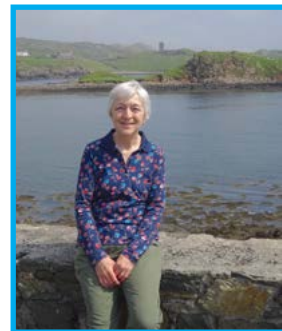
I like it. It flows well and covers everything we need to share with volunteers. I feel that the training sends out a clear message about everyone's responsibility to ensure our parishes are a safe place for everyone. For me, the most important message to get across in training is for volunteers to pass on any concerns, no matter how small!

What do you think is the most important skill you bring to your training sessions?

In various roles before I retired, I had responsibility for both the safeguarding of children and for delivering safeguarding training for staff. I regularly worked with multi agency teams to support the safety and well-being of pupils. This experience allows me to be confident in supporting volunteers to understand their role in the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults in their parishes.

MARGARET ANDOW

has been a trainer since 2018, initially in the Diocese of Argyll and the Isles, and since 2021 in the Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh. Generally she delivers training twice a month.



EVALUATION COMMENT:

"Margaret was fantastic at articulating main points and also in recapping important considerations."

What do you enjoy about delivering training?

Keeping my hand in as a retired teacher, but, more importantly, the satisfaction when you can see that participants recognise the importance of being trained, lose their worries about being involved in safeguarding and can see that they are helping to build up their own parish communities.

What is the most challenging aspect of being a trainer?

Overcoming the 'barriers' of training online. You need to be aware of the issues for 2nd language speakers and those daunted by the technology, or participants who are less confident speaking in front of people they don't know; and it is not always easy to ensure that all present can participate comfortably and effectively.

What one tip would you like to share with new trainers?

It is important to be really familiar with the material you are delivering, and the possible questions which each section might stimulate, so that you can concentrate on direct communication with participants, rather than referring to notes too often. Alternative tip: don't be afraid to say you don't know the answer to something! It is always better to record a tricky question, refer it on and then get back to the questioner later, rather than trying to wing it. It's too important to get wrong.

What do you think is the most important skill you bring to your training sessions?

Not sure it is a skill, more an approach. I try to remember that many participants will already have undergone safeguarding training professionally, and may well have far more practical experience of safeguarding issues than I do.

Have you ever had an attendee that had a big impact on you, and why?

A participant who was asked to comment on a scenario said that they were, coincidentally, dealing with that specific issue as a family. They were very happy to comment on the scenario but it brought home to me forcefully that the training is far from theoretical, even though the scenarios are fictional.

Can you comment on the progression of safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Scotland over the years you have been a trainer?

Having felt slightly 'out on a limb' as a trainer in the early years, I feel that the team effort is really apparent now and do feel very well supported.

FINAL APPEAL FROM POPE FRANCIS:

“Preserve us from the temptation to dismiss grief instead of healing it.”



In his final address on Safeguarding, **Pope Francis** issued a strong call for the Church to move beyond treating Safeguarding as a reactionary measure and instead embed it as a fundamental part of Church culture - “oxygen” for local parishes and religious communities.

In his address to the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors (PCPM), published on 25th March 2025, Pope Francis emphasised that safeguarding efforts should not be a crisis-driven response but a structural commitment:

“Abuse prevention is not a blanket to be spread over emergencies, but one of the foundations on which to build communities faithful to the Gospel.”

He reminded those responsible for Safeguarding: ***“When you establish prevention policies . . . you are making a promise: that every child, every vulnerable person, will find a safe environment in the ecclesial community.”***

He warned against reducing Safeguarding to the application of protocols; rather, it must consist of ***“formation that educates, measures that prevent, and listening that restores dignity”***. He stressed the need to create an environment where victims and survivors are welcomed and supported in their healing process: ***“so that every testimony is not treated as a record to be compiled, but a profound opportunity for mercy and newness of life”***.

Pope Francis also stressed the need for the Church to work alongside external institutions, including civil authorities, experts, and advocacy groups, to establish a universal standard of Safeguarding, so that ***“Safeguarding may become a universal language”***.

PSCs' opinions help to shape future training



In March 2025, all Parish Safeguarding Co-ordinators (PSCs) in Scotland's eight Dioceses were invited to rank their activities in order of how much time they normally allocated to each activity.

We are grateful to have obtained these views which, alongside data from the 2024 self-evaluation exercise, will help us to make decisions about the contents of future national Safeguarding training. We wish to thank all those who took the time to send us a return.

Key messages from the returns received:

(Returns were received from **103** PSCs out of 390 parishes in Scotland.)

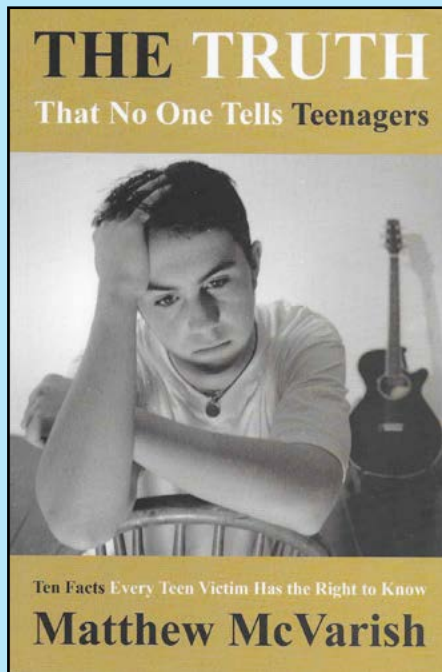
- ❑ While there were some broad points of consensus from PSCs across dioceses, there were significant differences in the experiences of PSCs.
- ❑ In terms of the **activities which take up most of their time**, 'Safe Recruitment' and 'Meetings with Parish Clergy' were ranked highest.
- ❑ Dealing with 'Safe Worship plans' appears to take up the least time by far.
- ❑ In terms of the **training subjects which PSCs regard as being most important in enabling parishes to discharge their safeguarding duties**, 'Safeguarding Risk Assessment' was clearly most prominent.
- ❑ **Record keeping** and **Self-evaluation / Audit** appear to take up a fair amount of time for many PSCs.

[You can find the analysis of the completed survey returns here on the SCSSA website.](#)

PSCs WANTED

In the **new PSC Training package** which is now in development, resources for PSCs provide practical assistance for carrying out the role. If you are a PSC who would be willing to spend a Saturday (lunch provided) at the SCSSA office in Glasgow to examine these resources and to provide feedback on their usefulness and accuracy, email helena.rameckers@scssa.org.uk or phone 07394 862279 to discuss.

Book Review



THE TRUTH THAT NO ONE TELLS TEENAGERS TEN FACTS EVERY TEEN VICTIM HAS THE RIGHT TO KNOW

Author: **Matthew McVarish** Publisher: Raphael Publications, 2019

Matthew McVarish is an actor, writer, award-winning human rights activist and survivor of childhood sexual abuse. He has appeared on TV, in theatre and film in the UK and worldwide, and has written various plays. He has chaired international discussions on children's rights at the United Nations and the first Global Survivor Forum for ECPAT International, the largest organisation in the world tackling childhood sexual exploitation.

Matthew will be the keynote speaker at the National Safeguarding Conference on 8th November 2025. He will speak from his experience of why, while growing up in a Catholic household, attending Catholic schools, and being an altar boy, as a child he found it particularly difficult to speak about his experience of being abused by a family member. He will explore ways in which Catholic communities can be enabled to have healthier conversations about abuse.

"Recovery is a direction, not a destination. You're either getting better or you're not, and getting to a good place after what they did to you can take a while. It's so unfair, but if you think about it, the sooner you start healing the sooner you'll be okay again."

In this book **Matthew McVarish** tells something of his story of being abused as a child by his uncle who was trusted absolutely by his parents and his extended family. It took until twenty years after the abuse for him to be able to speak about it.

But, from the beginning and throughout the book, he also speaks directly to children who have suffered like him and he offers them reassurance and advice about how they too might journey to healing and recovery.

Matthew structures his story around ten 'Truths':

- "It's not fair."
- "There was nothing you could have done to stop what they did."
- "You did nothing wrong - they did!"
- "It's okay to be not okay."
- "None of this is your fault."
- "Talking about it helps."
- "Your whole life is not ruined."
- "You will be stronger because of what you have lived through."
- "You have nothing to be ashamed of."
- "You are awesome and the world needs you."

He signposts the parts of his story that might trigger a response from those who come to recall their own memories of abuse and again reassures the reader that they are now 'safe'.

Matthew recounts the classic 'grooming' behaviour of his uncle - the special treatment he received, the random gifts, the trips away. He also admits to frustration, self-loathing, anger and harmful behaviour - all caused by his uncle's manipulative behaviour and his betrayal of what should have been an innocent, loving relationship.

Matthew's pain and confusion continued into his teenage years, even after the abuse by his uncle had stopped. He was shocked to discover that his older brother had also been abused by the same uncle. At the age of 25, his brother suffered a mental breakdown and related his abusive experiences to Matthew. Later, it was discovered that two other brothers had also been abused by the same uncle - all unknown to the parents.



MATTHEW MCVARISH
Actor Writer Activist

It was four years after the abuse ended - at the age of 17 - when Matthew started therapy. Eventually, over a decade after his abuse ended, Matthew's abusive uncle was prosecuted and imprisoned.

Matthew has gone on to become something of an activist and an ambassador for survivors of abuse. But he stresses that each survivor must concentrate on their own healing first and foremost.

"You don't have to devote your life to saving others just because you have been abused. You can if you really want to, but right now just focus on saving your own life. Like on an aeroplane when they tell you to put on your own oxygen mask before helping someone to put on theirs."

New Chair for Religious Safeguarding Commission



CONGRATULATIONS to **Marie Clare Lunny** who has been appointed Chair of the Safeguarding Commission of the Religious in Scotland (CRSSC) which supports Religious to meet their safeguarding responsibilities.

Marie Clare has spent nearly all of her career as a solicitor working in local government before taking early retirement. She worked for just over seven and a half years with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (the Western Isles) and then for nearly twenty two years with South Lanarkshire Council. Her work over the years was predominantly in civil litigation and advice, with a little contract work, covering most areas of local

government law including Education and Social Work (both Child & Adult); and which also included devising and delivering training, attending and advising various committees and the Fostering & Adoption Panels.

Safeguarding Day for Religious 2025

Theme: Addressing Safeguarding Concerns in an Ageing Population

Date: Friday 23rd May 2025 (10am - 3.30pm)

Place: St Francis Xavier Hall, Carfin Grotto, Motherwell ML1 5AJ

This year's conference theme will be of particular relevance to religious communities which bear responsibility for caring for and/or safeguarding elderly members of their communities. Expert speakers and NHS24 will provide information and advice on aspects of ageing and on the support available.



[CLICK HERE](#) or [SCAN QR Code TO BOOK NOW](#)

SAVE THE DATE



The National Safeguarding Conference

will take place on

Saturday 8th November 2025.

Building on last year's theme, the keynote input and workshops will enable participants to consider how the Church can be proactive in preventing abuse.

Details to follow.



LOOK OUT FOR

the **SCSSA ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24**

which will be published on the SCSSA website by the end of June 2025.

In it, Paul Donaldson will detail the work of the agency and outline how it is planning for the development of compliance monitoring and safeguarding training at a national level.