



Giving children and young people a voice

A survey of how children
and young people
perceive safety in
Wesley Mission
programs

May 2022

‘Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.’



Foreword

Continuing to achieve our vision by engaging, learning and doing all we can to protect children and young people in our care.

At Wesley Mission, we have a responsibility to provide safe environments for children and young people in our care.

With over 120 years' experience in child and family services, you'd think we'd know everything; but that's a dangerous attitude. As soon as we stop learning, growing and investing in ourselves as an organisation, we can no longer provide the best service.

That's why I'm so pleased to share the results of this survey with you.

First conducted in 2018, in partnership with researchers from the Institute of Child Protection Studies (ICPS) at the Australian Catholic University, this survey once again reviews perceptions of child safety across Wesley Mission's programs and services, and provides useful insights into where and how we can continue to do better.

While responses to the survey overwhelmingly demonstrate that children and young people have positive perceptions of their safety when in our care, it's clear that we must continue to promote opportunities for them to contribute to decisions regarding their care and create safe spaces for open, honest communication with their families, friends, our staff and volunteers.

I would like to sincerely thank the ICPS, the children and young people who participated in the survey and their families. Your insights – and the actions we take because of them – will contribute to a safer Wesley Mission.

I would also like to thank the Wesley Mission staff who took the time to assist our participants. Your patience and dedication mean the voices of children and young people in our care can be heard.

I encourage you to fully immerse yourself in the information contained in this report. Children and young people have a right to feel safe and cared for, and it's everyone's responsibility to ensure this happens.



Rev Stu Cameron
CEO and Superintendent
Wesley Mission



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Executive summary

In 2021, Wesley Mission engaged researchers at the Institute of Child Protection Studies (ICPS) at the Australian Catholic University to survey children and young people about their perceptions of safety at Wesley Mission.

Children and young people across our programs were invited to complete the Australian Safe Kids and Young People (ASK-YP) survey developed by the ICPS.

This is the second child safety survey commissioned by Wesley Mission, the first conducted in 2018.

Background research: the Australian Safe Kids and Young People survey

In 2013, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse commissioned the ICPS to conduct the Children's Safety Study to develop an understanding of how children perceive safety and consider it within institutional contexts.

Specifically, the study explored:

- how children and young people conceptualise and perceive safety
- what they believe shapes their perceptions of safety
- their perceptions of safety within institutions
- what children and young people think is already being done to respond to safety issues and risks in institutions
- what they think should be done to respond to safety issues in institutions.

As part of this study, the ICPS developed the Australian Safe Kids and Young People (ASK-YP) survey, which they used to test children's perceptions of how adults and institutions demonstrate they're meeting children and young people's safety needs and respond when children and young people feel they're unsafe.

The results, detailed in the ICPS report, *Our Safety Counts*¹, provide benchmarks for children and young people's perceptions of safety, and responses to safety, in Australian institutions that work with children.

Why we conducted this survey

Wesley Mission commissioned the ICPS to administer a modified version of the ASK-YP survey as a means to self-audit, benchmark and improve child safety.

As a child safe organisation, we were motivated to conduct the survey because we recognise the importance of maintaining an open and aware culture that encourages the participation and empowerment of children.

The purpose of the survey was to also identify any areas in which we can strengthen our engagement with children and young people, ensure their voices are heard and incorporate their feedback into Wesley Mission's safeguarding processes. Specifically, children and young people were asked:

- to what extent Wesley Mission demonstrates child safe characteristics (as determined by focus groups)
- what they would do if they encountered an unsafe adult or peer at Wesley Mission
- what they would need if they were in an unsafe situation
- what they believe Wesley Mission already does and has in place to prevent and respond to safety concerns
- from whom they would seek support
- what would stop them from seeking and receiving support.

This report outlines the findings of our 2021 survey, discusses how the results compare to benchmarks from the ICPS' national implementation of the survey and our 2018 child safety survey, provides recommendations for future action.

Our specific aims for this research were to:

Monitor and maintain child safety and engagement in Wesley Mission

The 2018 survey provided a baseline of how children and young people in our programs and services perceive safety and responses to safety. We'll administer this survey across Wesley Mission programs and services involving children and young people on a regular basis to monitor and continually improve the way we engage with children and young people in our care.



Improve child safety across Wesley Mission programs and services

One of our aims was to identify opportunities to improve the way we engage with children and young people and how we involve them in the design and delivery of our programs and services.

The research findings provide important indicators regarding children and young people's perceptions of safety, safety needs and desires. This information will help us better respond to the safety concerns of the children and young people we serve.

Give children and young people a voice

Conducting this survey offered children and young people the opportunity to voice their views, talk about their experiences of safety in Wesley Mission and provide us with valuable information and knowledge about how children and young people understand, experience and respond to safety issues.

This survey allowed us to compare children and young people's perceptions of safety at Wesley Mission with benchmark data gathered in our 2018 survey and the *Our Safety Counts* report.

¹ https://safeguardingchildren.acu.edu.au/research_and_resources/institute_of_child_protection_studies_report_our_safety_counts

Participants

A total of 111 children and young people from the following Wesley Mission programs and services completed the survey between 25 November 2020 and 23 November 2021:

1. Wesley Out-of-Home Care which includes Wesley Foster Care, Wesley Aunties & Uncles, Wesley Reconnect, Wesley KickStart and Wesley Child, Youth & Family (Targeted Early Intervention)
2. Wesley Out of School Hours Care
3. Wesley Youth Hope
4. Wesley Young Healthy Minds.

The participants completed an online survey, which they could choose to complete alone or with assistance from familiar Wesley Mission staff, as needed.

The survey and assisting staff did not ask the children and young people about their own experiences, but about safety more generally.

Participants were chosen based on their age (10–18 years) and because they're involved with one of the

Wesley Mission programs or services selected for this study. Out of 111 participants, there were 72 female participants (64.9 per cent), 37 male participants (33.3 per cent) and two participants (1.8 per cent) who identified as gender diverse. The average age among participants was 12.2 years. However, it should be noted that since participants from Wesley Out of School Hours Care were aged between 10–12 years old, there was a significantly larger proportion of younger participants.

Almost one quarter of participants (21 per cent) indicated they speak a language other than English at home and 21 per cent identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

The largest group of participants was from Wesley Out-of-Home Care (56 participants). This group made up 50 per cent of all participants. The next largest groups were Wesley Out of School Hours Care (26 per cent) and Wesley Youth Hope (18 per cent). The remaining six per cent of participants were from Wesley Young Healthy Minds.

Table 1: Age and gender of participants

Gender	Age (Years)							Total
	10	11	12	13	14	15	16-18	
Males (N)	10	6	3	5	5	5	3	37
Females (N)	23	13	11	6	6	7	6	72
Gender diverse (N)	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
Total	33	20	14	12	11	12	9	111

1b: Breakdown of participant numbers by service and programs

Service	Participant numbers	Percentage
Wesley Youth Hope	20	18%
Wesley Out of School Hours Care	29	26%
Wesley Out-of-Home Care	56	50%
Wesley Young Healthy Minds	6	6%
All participants	111	100%





Executive summary: key findings

Children and young people feel safe at Wesley Mission

- Overall, participants in the Wesley Mission survey were more confident in the adults they interact with than the respondents in the ICPS Our Safety Counts survey.
- The overwhelming majority of participants said they feel safe either 'all of the time' (77.5 per cent) or 'some of the time' (11.7 per cent) they're at their Wesley Mission program or service.
- There was a vast improvement in children and young people's perception of safety in Wesley Out of School Hours Care (see Figure 4), increasing from 43.2 per cent in 2018 to 48.3 per cent in 2021, reducing the margin between services surveyed to 6.8 percentage points. This compares to a variance of 16 percentage points in the 2018 survey.

There is room for improvement

- Children and young people surveyed feel they're more likely to encounter an unsafe situation with a peer than an adult at their Wesley Mission program or service.
- Although there was a decrease in the percentage of children and young people who thought an unsafe

situation with an adult was 'very likely' at Wesley Mission (-1.3 per cent), there was an increase in the number of participants who believed an unsafe situation with a peer might occur (2.5 per cent).

- There was an increase in the number of children and young people who believed adults at Wesley Mission would only know if they were in an unsafe situation with an adult if they told them, rising from 16.5 per cent in 2018 to 29.5 per cent in 2021.

What children and young people need in order to feel safe

- Children and young people want a trusted adult who they can approach if they ever feel uncomfortable.
- Multiple barriers prevent children from feeling confident enough to discuss their safety with Wesley Mission staff, including feeling uncomfortable and being worried things could get worse.
- Children and young people were more likely to discuss unsafe situations with a friend or their mother, rather than an adult at their Wesley Mission program or service.



Findings

These findings are based on the responses given by children and young people involved in Wesley Mission programs and services to the Australian Safe Kids and Young People (ASK-YP) survey between 25 November 2020 and 23 November 2021. However, not all of the 111 participants answered all questions. This means the statistics presented in this report are descriptive and aim to summarise the sample of participants who answered the questions.

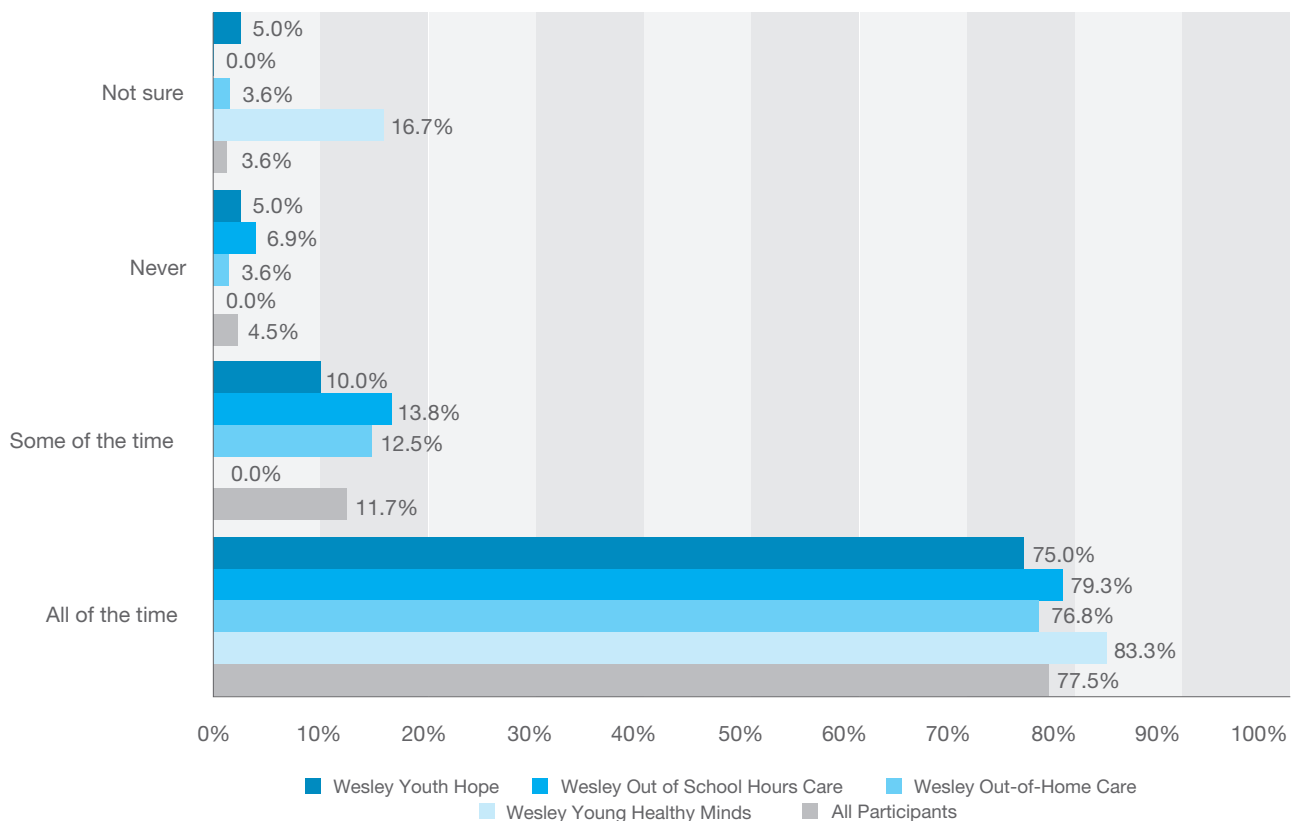
Young people feel safe at Wesley Mission

The survey asked participants how much they agree or disagree with the statement 'I feel safe most of the time that I'm at Wesley Mission'. The majority of young people answered 'all of the time' (77.5 per cent) or 'some of the time' (11.7 per cent). There was an increase in the number of participants who answered 'never', rising from 0.6 per cent in 2018 to 4.5 per cent in 2021. Additionally, the number of participants who answered 'I'm not sure' increased from 1.2 per cent in 2018 to 3.6 per cent in 2021.

Wesley Mission is a safe institution that responds to young people's safety needs

Participants evaluated how well Wesley Mission demonstrates a range of important characteristics of safe institutions and responds to young people's safety needs.

Figure 1: I feel safe most of the time that I'm at Wesley Mission - by service grouping



The majority of participants believed that adults at Wesley Mission pay attention to children and young people's concerns and worries. More than 60 per cent said this happens 'all of the time' and 21.4 per cent said 'some of the time'.

The proportion of participants who responded 'all of the time' is down slightly (-7.3 per cent) compared to 2018.

The participants who completed the survey felt there was a high level of dialogue between adults and young people about things that worry them; 57.1 per cent said 'all of the time' and 25 per cent said 'some of the time'. These results were identical to the 2018 findings.

Another important indicator of institutional safety for children and young people is the degree that adults value their views and opinions. Sixty one per cent of children and young people thought that this occurs 'all of the time'). There has, however, been an increase in participants indicating they're unsure; 10 per cent in comparison to five per cent in 2018 findings.

Overall, the majority of participants believed that adults at Wesley Mission care about children and young people; 79 per cent said 'all of the time' and 13 per cent said 'some of the time', a slight increase on 2018.

Additionally, children and young people who participated in the survey felt that adults who deliver Wesley Mission services pay attention to things that worry them; 63 per cent said 'all of the time' and 21 per cent said 'some of the time'. These results are collectively 5.4 percent below 2018 findings.

Figure 2: Adults at Wesley Mission care about children and young people

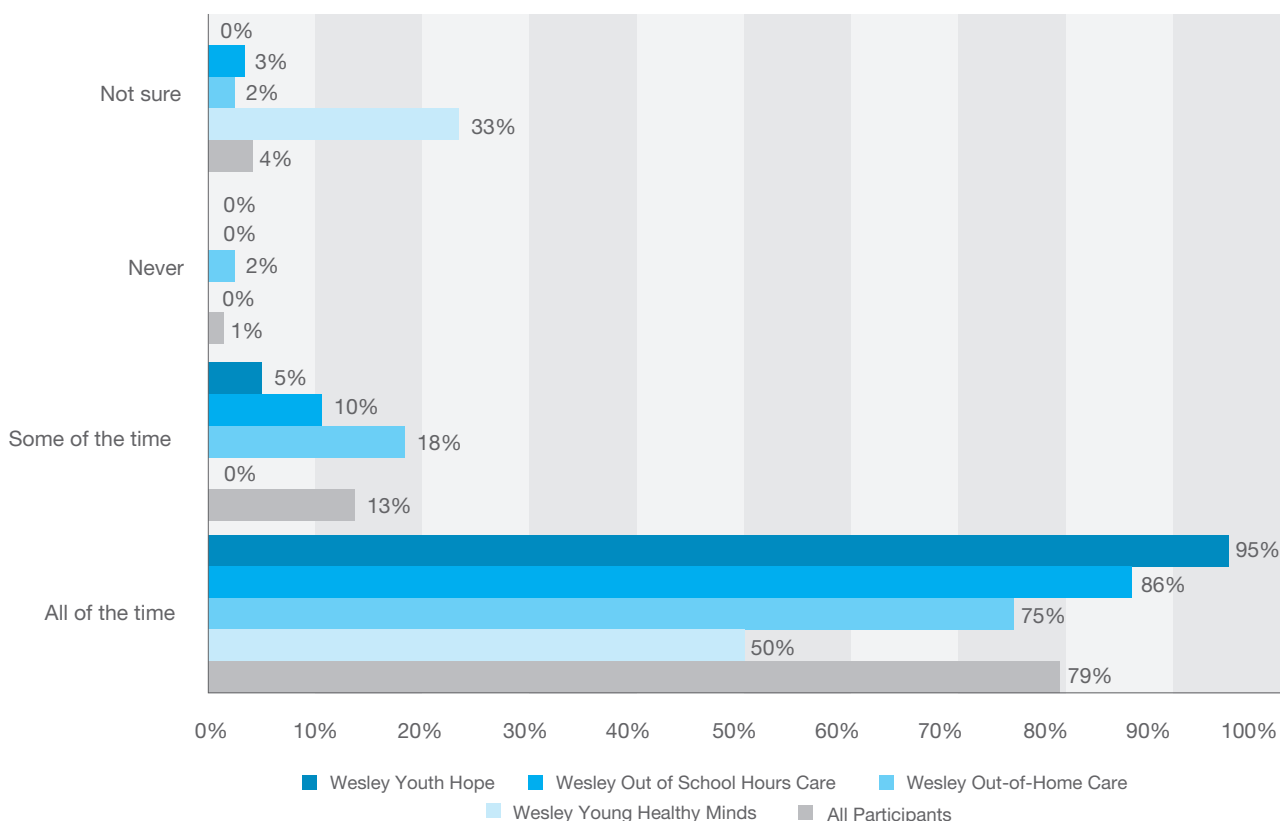


Figure 3: At Wesley Mission, adults pay attention when children and young people raise a concern or worry

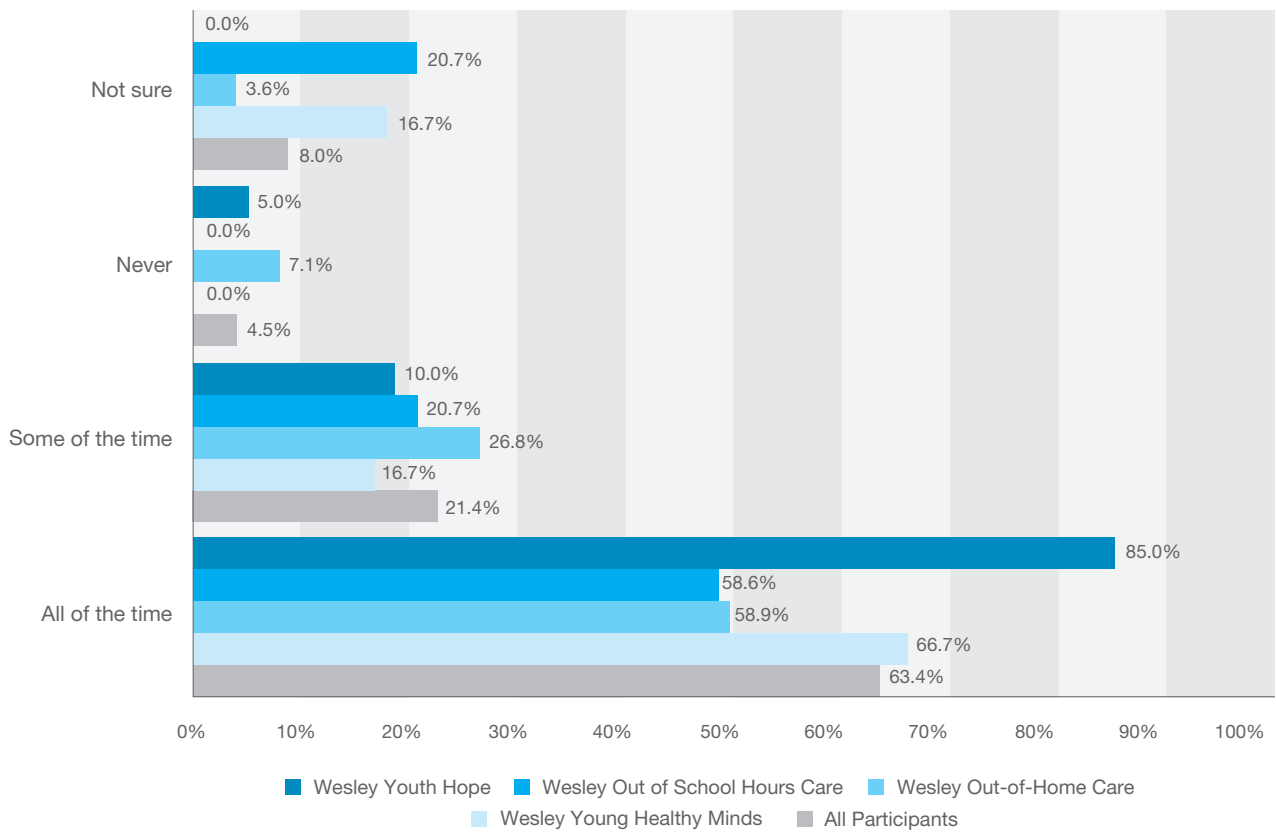


Figure 4: Adults at Wesley Mission know children and young people well enough to know if something isn't right

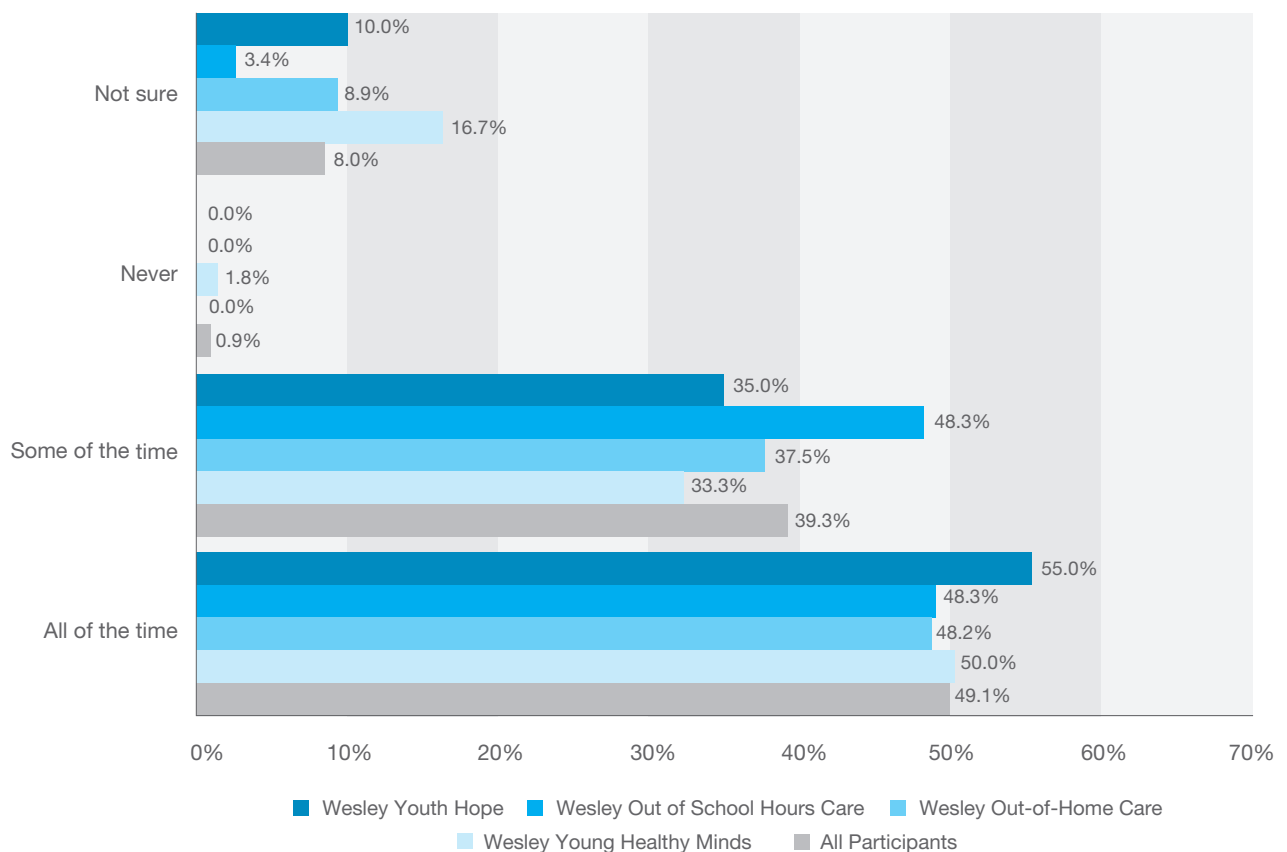
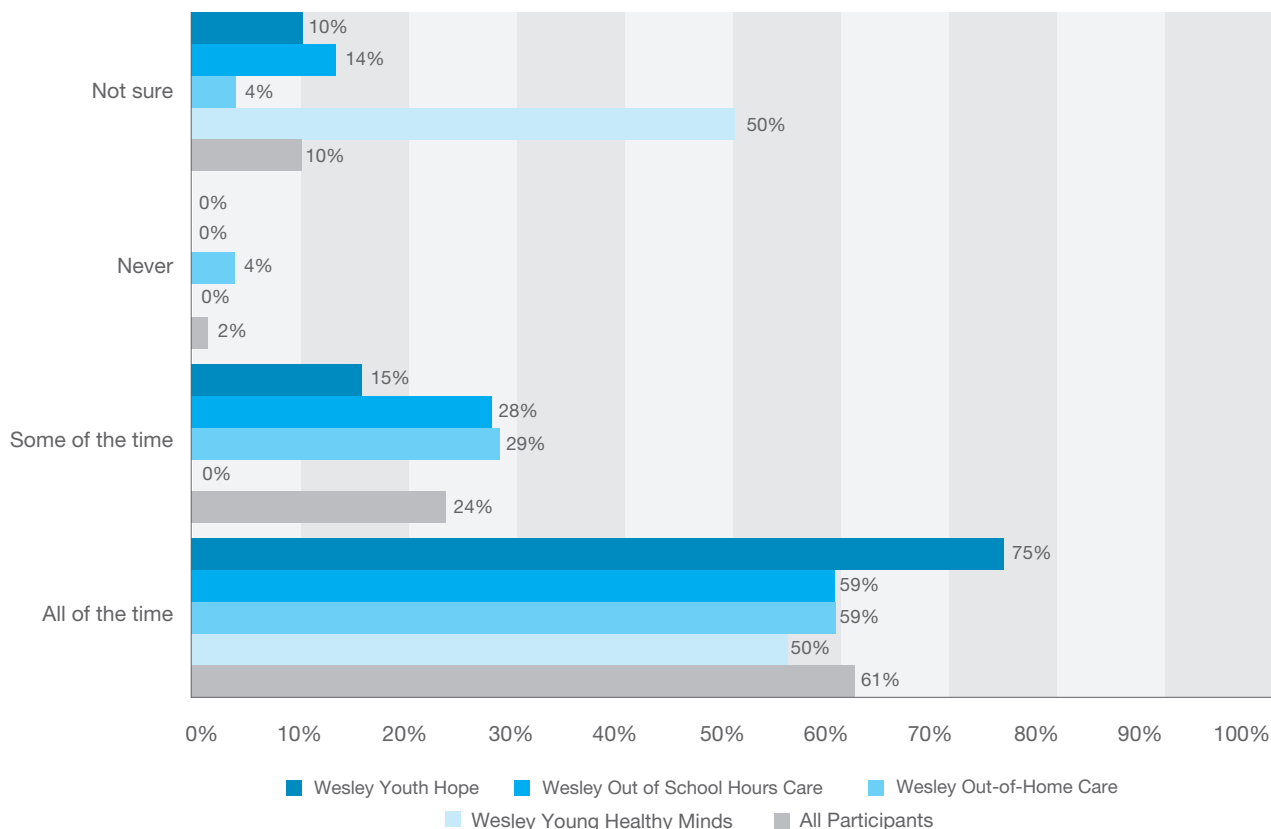


Figure 5: Adults at Wesley Mission value children’s views and opinions



Young people need adults to listen, believe them and act

The survey presented participants with two scenarios. In the first, an adult who demonstrated grooming-like behaviours that made the child or young person feel uncomfortable. In the second scenario, a peer made them feel uncomfortable.

For each scenario, the survey asked, “If you were in a situation like this, what do you think you would need most? You can choose up to three”.

For both scenarios, the priorities for children and young people were to have an adult who believed them, having a trusted adult available to talk to and having an adult step in and act. Additionally, young people indicated they’d need an adult’s assistance in knowing what to do. This reveals adults are crucial for children and young people in responding to unsafe situations at Wesley Mission.

Comparing the 2018 findings, most differences were within a 0–6 percentage point range. However, there was an increase (9.2 per cent) in the number of participants who said they’d want ‘for an adult to believe me when I said I felt uncomfortable’ in the adult scenario, rising from 52.4 per cent in 2018 to 61.6 per cent in 2021.

There was also a decrease in the number of participants who answered ‘to know what I could do or say so that I could get out of this situation’ to both adult (-10.9 per cent) and peer (-10.6 per cent) scenarios, and in the proportion of participants who would want ‘for another adult to notice that I might be unsafe and to step in and stop it’ in the peer-to-peer scenario (-7.4 per cent).

Overall, these changes largely confirm that children and young people want support when they feel unsafe.

Table 2: If you were in a situation like this, what do you think you would need most?

Scenario 1 (adult-to-child)	Total	WYHM¹	OOHC²	OOSH³	WYH⁴
For an adult to believe me when I said I felt uncomfortable	61.6%	83.3%	57.1%	69.0%	60.0%
For another adult to notice that I might be unsafe and to step in and stop it	42.9%	33.3%	44.6%	37.9%	50.0%
To know what I could do or say so that I could get out of this situation	21.4%	33.3%	17.9%	20.7%	30.0%
To have another adult I trusted be available to talk	53.6%	50.0%	48.2%	72.4%	45.0%
To know whether what the adult was doing was OK or not	27.7%	33.3%	23.2%	24.1%	45.0%
For another adult to notice that I was uncomfortable and to ask if I was OK	26.8%	16.7%	26.8%	34.5%	20.0%
To know what the rules are about situations like this	10.7%	16.7%	10.7%	13.8%	5.0%
To make sure that no one else knows because things would be bad if they did	9.8%	16.7%	5.4%	10.3%	20.0%
Scenario 2 (peer-to-peer)	Total	WYHM¹	OOHC²	OOSH³	WYH⁴
For an adult to believe me when I said I felt uncomfortable	53.6%	33.3%	51.8%	62.1%	55.0%
For an adult to notice that I might be unsafe and to step in and stop it	42%	16.7%	42.9%	44.8%	45.0%
To know what I could do or say so that I could get out of this situation	22.3%	33.3%	16.1%	20.7%	40.0%
To have an adult I trusted be available to talk	59.8%	33.3%	53.6%	72.4%	70.0%
To know whether what the guy was doing was OK or not	24.1%	50.0%	19.6%	31.0%	20.0%
For another adult to notice that I was uncomfortable and to ask if I was OK	21.4%	33.3%	21.4%	20.7%	20.0%
To know what the rules are about situations like this	8.9%	16.7%	5.4%	13.8%	10.0%
To make sure that no one else knows because things would be bad if they did	6.3%	16.7%	3.6%	6.9%	10.0%

¹WYHM = Wesley Young Healthy Minds

²OOHC = Wesley Out-of-Home Care

³OOSH = Wesley Out of School Hours Care

⁴WYH = Wesley Youth Hope



Most children and young people believe a peer-to-peer encounter was more likely than with an adult, but feel both are unlikely

The survey asked participants to indicate how likely it was that a child or young person at Wesley Mission would encounter a situation similar to the two scenarios described. Responses to this question were similar for both adult and peer scenarios, with more children and young people expressing concern that a peer-to-peer scenario was more likely. This indicates that participants believe they're more likely to encounter an unsafe situation with a peer than an adult.

While participants feel both scenarios were fairly unlikely to occur at Wesley Mission, a relatively high number still said they were 'unsure' how likely it would be for children and young people to encounter an adult-based situation at Wesley Mission programs.

When comparing these findings with 2018 results, there was a decrease in the number of participants who felt a peer situation was 'unlikely' (-10.5 per cent), but an increase in the number of participants who felt it was 'very unlikely' (6.4 per cent). There was also a noticeable decrease (-7.9 per cent) in the number of participants who were unsure if a peer situation like the one in the scenario was likely or not.

Table 3: How likely is it that a child or young person at Wesley Mission would be in a situation like this?

Scenario*	Very likely		Likely		Unlikely		Very unlikely		I'm not sure	
	Scen 1	Scen 2	Scen 1	Scen 2	Scen 1	Scen 2	Scen 1	Scen 2	Scen 1	Scen 2
All participants	5.4%	11.6%	17.9%	20.5%	18.8%	18.8%	27.7%	22.3%	22.3%	11.6%
Wesley Young Healthy Minds	0%	16.7%	16.7%	0%	33.3%	33.3%	50.0%	16.7%	0%	16.7%
Wesley Out-of-Home Care	3.6%	12.5%	19.6%	23.2%	21.4%	14.3%	14.3%	19.6%	28.6%	7.1%
Wesley Out of School Hours Care	3.4%	6.9%	17.2%	13.8%	10.3%	27.6%	58.6%	37.9%	10.3%	10.3%
Wesley Youth Hope	15.0%	15.0%	15.0%	30.0%	20.0%	15.0%	15.0%	10.0%	30.0%	25.0%

*Scen 1: An adult-to-child encounter that made the young person feel uncomfortable

Scen 2: A peer-to-peer encounter that made a young person feel uncomfortable

Most children and young people are confident adults can help them, but are concerned adults aren't aware of peer-to-peer encounters

The survey asked participants to indicate their confidence level in adults within Wesley Mission. The items in this section relate to previous actions adults might have taken to help prevent abuse or to actions which might support a child or young person if they felt unsafe or had experienced grooming or abuse. Participants answered each question in relation to each scenario (adult and peer-to-peer).

When comparing the 2018 and 2021 results on children and young people's confidence in adults, there was a noticeable number of participants who responded positively (i.e. confidence in adults' abilities to notice situations, be considered a trusted adult, and asking young people what they would want to happen) across many of the items in relation to the adult-to-child scenario.

This was not the case, however, when participants responded to "adults at Wesley Mission would only know if a child or young person was unsafe if they told them", which saw a 13 per cent increase.

This suggests there's an overreliance on children and young people to speak up in order for adults to be aware of concerning behaviour happening.

Table 4: Confidence in adults: Based on the scenario, how strongly do you agree or disagree with these statements for your Wesley Mission program?

Scenario*	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		I'm not sure	
	Scen 1	Scen 2	Scen 1	Scen 2	Scen 1	Scen 2	Scen 1	Scen 2	Scen 1	Scen 2	Scen 1	Scen 2
I would know what to do because we've talked about it at Wesley Mission	31.3%	22.3%	24.1%	23.2%	12.5%	18.8%	4.5%	8.9%	4.5%	1.8%	14.3%	10.7%
Adults at Wesley Mission would notice if another adult/a young person was doing the wrong thing	36.6%	30.4%	28.6%	31.3%	12.5%	7.1%	0.9%	6.3%	3.6%	1.8%	8.9%	8.9%
Adults at Wesley Mission would only know if a child or young person was unsafe if they told them	29.5%	20.5%	18.8%	17.9%	20.5%	18.8%	8.9%	8.0%	4.5%	5.4%	8.9%	15.2%
I have an adult at Wesley Mission I trust that I would talk to	52.7%	45.5%	20.5%	17.9%	10.7%	11.6%	0.9%	1.8%	2.7%	1.8%	2.7%	5.4%
Adults at Wesley Mission would probably not believe me	4.5%	3.6%	6.3%	4.5%	11.6%	12.5%	16.1%	25%	36.6%	33.9%	13.4%	6.3%
Adults at Wesley Mission would see it as their job to do something about a situation like this	39.3%	32.1%	22.3%	21.4%	9.8%	15.2%	0%	0%	2.7%	4.5%	16.1%	10.7%
Adults at Wesley Mission would know what to say to me if I told them I was unsafe	42.0%	36.6%	25.9%	25.9%	7.1%	12.5%	1.8%	0.9%	2.7%	1.8%	10.7%	8.0%
Adults at Wesley Mission would know what to do if I told them I was unsafe	44.6%	41.1%	26.8%	24.1%	6.3%	8.9%	1.8%	0%	1.8%	1.8%	8.9%	9.8%
Adults at Wesley Mission would ask me what I would like to have happen, instead of dealing with it without me	39.3%	34.8%	17.0%	18.8%	14.3%	12.5%	1.8%	4.5%	4.5%	2.7%	13.4%	12.5%

*Scen 1: An adult-to-child encounter that made the young person feel uncomfortable

Scen 2: A peer-to-peer encounter that made a young person feel uncomfortable

Most children and young people are likely to ask a parent, friend or Wesley Mission worker for help

In this section, participants were asked whether they would tell someone if they felt unsafe and to identify who they'd most likely seek assistance from if they were in a situation similar to the scenarios presented.

Participants indicated they'd most likely seek assistance from their mum, a friend or a worker at Wesley Mission, followed by dad, a sibling or a teacher at school about an adult encounter. However, they were less likely to share about a peer-to-peer encounter.

Compared with 2018 results, there was an increase in the proportion of young people (6 per cent) who said they'd tell a worker at Wesley Mission in the adult-to-child scenario but a slight decrease (-2 per cent) in the peer-to-peer situation. Similarly, there was an increase (4 per cent) in the proportion of young people who'd tell a friend in an adult-to-child situation, but a drop (-8 per cent) in the peer-to-peer situation. There was also a small increase in those who'd tell someone via a telephone support line (3-9 per cent), and a slight drop in the number of young people who said they wouldn't tell someone (-1-3 per cent).

Table 5: If you were in a situation like this and were going to tell someone, who would it most likely be?

Answer		Scen 1*	Scen 2*
A friend	All participants	54.5%	45.5%
	Wesley Young Healthy Minds	83.3%	50.0%
	Wesley Out-of-Home Care	48.2%	42.9%
	Wesley Out of School Hours Care	62.1%	48.3%
	Wesley Youth Hope	55.0%	50.0%
My Mum	All participants	62.5%	58.9%
	Wesley Young Healthy Minds	33.3%	16.7%
	Wesley Out-of-Home Care	60.7%	50.0%
	Wesley Out of School Hours Care	79.3%	79.3%
	Wesley Youth Hope	55.0%	70.0%
My Dad	All participants	37.5%	36.6%
	Wesley Young Healthy Minds	0%	16.7%
	Wesley Out-of-Home Care	25.0%	23.2%
	Wesley Out of School Hours Care	75.9%	75.9%
	Wesley Youth Hope	30.0%	25.0%
My sister or brother	All participants	34.8%	28.6%
	Wesley Young Healthy Minds	33.3%	16.7%
	Wesley Out-of-Home Care	30.4%	25.0%
	Wesley Out of School Hours Care	48.3%	44.8%
	Wesley Youth Hope	30.0%	20.0%
A worker at Wesley Mission	All participants	44.6%	42.0%
	Wesley Young Healthy Minds	66.7%	50.0%
	Wesley Out-of-Home Care	33.9%	33.9%
	Wesley Out of School Hours Care	58.6%	48.3%
	Wesley Youth Hope	50.0%	55.0%
Another adult at Wesley Mission	All participants	19.6%	16.1%
	Wesley Young Healthy Minds	50.0%	33.3%
	Wesley Out-of-Home Care	16.1%	12.5%
	Wesley Out of School Hours Care	24.1%	20.7%
	Wesley Youth Hope	15.0%	15.0%

Answer		Scen 1*	Scen 2*
A counsellor	All participants	23.2%	18.8%
	Wesley Young Healthy Minds	16.7%	0%
	Wesley Out-of-Home Care	19.6%	16.1%
	Wesley Out of School Hours Care	27.6%	20.7%
	Wesley Youth Hope	30.0%	20.0%
A teacher at school	All participants	34.8%	33.9%
	Young Healthy Minds	33.3%	33.3%
	Wesley Out-of-Home Care	28.6%	28.6%
	Wesley Out of School Hours Care	58.6%	55.2%
	Wesley Youth Hope	20.0%	20.0%
Someone else?^	All participants	13.4%	11.6%
	Young Healthy Minds	0%	0%
	Wesley Out-of-Home Care	12.5%	14.3%
	Wesley Out of School Hours Care	17.2%	10.3%
	Wesley Youth Hope	15.0%	10.0%
Someone on a telephone helpline (like Lifeline or Kids Helpline)	All participants	18.8%	14.3%
	Young Healthy Minds	16.7%	16.7%
	Wesley Out-of-Home Care	7.1%	5.4%
	Wesley Out of School Hours Care	34.5%	27.6%
	Wesley Youth Hope	30.0%	20.0%
I wouldn't tell anyone	All participants	7.1%	8.0%
	Young Healthy Minds	0%	16.7%
	Wesley Out-of-Home Care	7.1%	5.4%
	Wesley Out of School Hours Care	3.4%	6.9%
	Wesley Youth Hope	15.0%	15.0%

^42% of those who replied 'other' for Scenario 1 (adult-to-child) said they would tell their 'nan' or grandparent

Scen 1: An adult-to-child encounter that made the young person feel uncomfortable

Scen 2: A peer-to-peer encounter that made a young person feel uncomfortable



Most children and young people feel comfortable approaching Wesley Mission for help

In relation to the scenarios provided, participants were asked to answer questions relating to their perceived barriers to seeking help. The question was, “If you were in a situation like this, there might be a number of things that kept you from getting help. How strongly do you agree with the following statements?”.

As with the 2018 results, children and young people were confident that adults at Wesley Mission would care about them in these types of situations, as well as having the capacity and knowledge to respond appropriately.

Between the 2018 and 2021 findings, there was a small decrease in the number of participants who said they were not sure. Although this could indicate more children and young people are aware of the barriers to seeking help, there was no increase in the number of participants who ‘disagreed’/‘strongly disagreed’ that there were barriers to seeking help at Wesley Mission.

For both scenarios, there was very little difference between 2018 and 2021 responses to the barriers to seeking help questions.

Table 6: Barriers to help-seeking: How strongly do you agree with the following statements?

Answer	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		I'm not sure	
	Scen 1	Scen 2	Scen 1	Scen 2	Scen 1	Scen 2	Scen 1	Scen 2	Scen 1	Scen 2	Scen 1	Scen 2
I would feel uncomfortable talking to an adult at Wesley Mission about things like this	9.8%	11.6%	14.3%	10.7%	16.1%	19.6%	18.8%	17.9%	20.5%	21.4%	7.1%	4.5%
Adults at Wesley Mission don't really care about young people in situations like this so I wouldn't ask	1.8%	1.8%	2.7%	5.4%	10.7%	10.7%	19.6%	21.4%	48.2%	44.6%	3.6%	1.8%
Adults at Wesley Mission are too busy to deal with things like this	3.6%	6.3%	2.7%	4.5%	10.7%	9.8%	25.9%	25.0%	35.7%	33.0%	8.0%	7.1%
I would be worried that things would get worse if I told an adult at Wesley Mission	5.4%	8.0%	4.5%	9.8%	11.6%	11.6%	24.1%	23.2%	29.5%	27.7%	10.7%	4.5%
Adults at Wesley Mission wouldn't know what to do in situations like this	3.6%	2.7%	4.5%	8.0%	9.8%	10.7%	25.0%	18.8%	34.8%	37.5%	7.1%	8.0%
I would deal with this type of thing by myself	2.7%	5.4%	7.1%	8.9%	20.5%	15.2%	16.1%	21.4%	27.7%	26.8%	12.5%	8.0%
I don't feel confident that adults at Wesley Mission would fix a situation like this	1.8%	5.4%	0.9%	9.8%	17.0%	9.8%	20.5%	17.9%	36.6%	33.9%	9.8%	8.0%

*Scen 1: An adult-to-child encounter that made the young person feel uncomfortable

Scen 2: A peer-to-peer encounter that made a young person feel uncomfortable

Most children and young people believe Wesley Mission takes child protection seriously

In the final survey question, participants were asked how well they believe Wesley Mission responds to safety issues. They were asked to indicate their response to the sentence beginning with “I think my Wesley Mission is doing...”.

Well over half (59.8 per cent) of participants believed Wesley Mission was ‘doing enough’ to prevent children and young people from being unsafe.

Only 9.8 per cent believe Wesley Mission is only doing ‘some things’ to keep children and young people safe, down from 15.2 per cent in 2018. A response of ‘doing nothing’ was also infrequent (2.7 per cent, down from 3.7 per cent in 2018). However, a much higher proportion of participants whose data is included in this report did not answer this question in 2021.

Table 7: Finish this sentence: “I think Wesley Mission is doing...

Answer	All participants	WYH ¹	OOHC ²	OOSH ³	WYHM ⁴
enough to prevent children and young people from being unsafe	59.8%	60.0%	86.2%	46.4%	66.7%
some things but not enough to prevent children and young people from being unsafe	9.8%	10.0%	3.4%	14.3%	0%
nothing to prevent children and young people from being unsafe	2.7%	5.0%	0%	3.6%	0%
I’m not sure	14.3%	20.0%	6.9%	16.1%	16.7%

¹WYH= Wesley Youth Hope

²OOHC = Wesley Out-of-Home Care

³OOSH = Wesley Out of School Hours Care

⁴WYHM = Wesley Young Healthy Mind

Discussion: comparing the findings

Overall, the findings from the survey highlight many positive perceptions about safety among children and young people participating in Wesley Mission programs.

Despite the drop by almost one-third in the number of participants in the 2021 survey (111) compared with the 2018 survey (164), the results of the 2021 survey highlight many positive perceptions about safety among children and young people participating in Wesley Mission programs and services.

The difference in participation rates, however, is a potential issue for identifying how to improve safety as the data collected can be useful for Wesley Mission in understanding how safe children and young people feel when in our care.

Wesley Mission meets or exceeds many of the safety benchmarks outlined in the Institute of Child Protection Studies report, *Our Safety Counts*

The 2021 findings showed that around three quarters of the children and young people surveyed feel safe all of the time when attending Wesley Mission programs and services. The results were similar across the four different service areas surveyed (Wesley Out-of-Home Care, Wesley Out of School Hours Care, Wesley Youth Hope and Wesley Young Healthy Minds).

Their perspectives of the culture of safety within Wesley Mission programs and services is positive, particularly within Wesley Youth Hope. The level of confidence participants had in the adults they interact with remains high and, despite being of noticeable strength in 2018, has further increased.

Overall, these results were only slightly lower than benchmark¹ data, which could be because of the difference in the context of organisations as compared to those in the *Our Safety Counts* report.

When children and young people feel unsafe, they want an adult to listen and notice something is wrong

In relation to children and young people's perceptions of the culture of safety in services, results are largely positive, with 85 per cent or more participants saying 'all-' or 'some of the time' to items regarding adults caring, paying attention and valuing their opinions.

These responses were slightly lower than the 2018 report, however it's important to note that the service with the lowest scores (Wesley Young Healthy Minds) was not involved in 2018 data collection and could be seen as the service bringing the overall scores down. This could point to Wesley Young Healthy Minds being

a service to target for additional safeguarding supports, but requires further investigation given this service had fewer than 10 participants.

We need to help children and young people feel safe at Wesley Mission and more confident that adults can help them in unsafe situations

When asked about the likelihood of encountering an unsafe situation involving an adult or a peer, just under 50 per cent of participants felt this was unlikely (in both scenarios). The differences between the service areas was notable, with Wesley Out-of-Home Care and particularly Wesley Youth Hope participants responding it was more likely they would encounter a situation like this. When comparing these results with that of 2018, there were slight increase at both extreme ends of the responses (more participants said 'very likely', but more participants also said 'very unlikely').

In relation to the sense of safety, participants were most interested in having an adult believe them when they said they felt uncomfortable and were confident knowing who they would approach if they felt unsafe; although this is still likely to be their mother or a friend. This will be an important aspect of Wesley Mission's strategies moving forward as this trend of seeking support from family and friends is seen in many organisations.

When looking at the responses to the barriers to help-seeking, it can be seen that some children and young people would feel uncomfortable talking to adults, and that many would prefer to deal with these types of situations themselves. This supports the above findings that not all young people want a trusted adult or to have an adult to believe them or step in.

¹Collected regarding schools, churches and sports clubs as presented in the 2016 *Our Safety Counts* report (Moore et al., 2016)

Recommendations (for Wesley Mission)

This survey highlights that perceptions of safety at Wesley Mission are generally positive. Responses indicate that children and young people feel safe while in Wesley Mission's care and are confident in the ability of Wesley Mission staff to help in unsafe situations.

However, Wesley Mission recognises there are many areas in which our service can be improved. Therefore, we've identified the following recommendations to better inform the action taken following this survey.

- Commit to ongoing, regular surveys on the perceptions of child safety in Wesley Mission to track progress and continue to identify areas for improvement. Wesley Mission should also broaden the capacity of future surveys to include children in our disability services and other programs not represented in this study, while maintaining a stable respondent sample.
- Distribute this report internally and communicate findings and recommendations with the aim to raise awareness of where we're succeeding in making children feel safe and where we can improve.
- Make Wesley Young Healthy Minds a priority service for safeguarding strategies, as well as other out of home care services. These strategies should be trauma-informed and consider the characteristics of the children and young people engaging with these services.
- Give specific attention to policy and practice that prevents peer-to-peer abuse because:
 - this is seen by young people as 'more likely' to be a problem while in Wesley Mission's care
 - young people have less confidence adults can help in these situations
 - there are more barriers to seeking help in these situations.
- Give young people the tools to help them work through situations themselves (where appropriate). This should particularly include strategies aimed at preventing peer-to-peer abuse and encouraging disclosure.
- Communicate with children and young people in a variety of ways and on an ongoing basis when implementing new safeguarding strategies across Wesley Mission services.
- Consider how parents (particularly mothers) and other young people can be taught and encouraged to be a supportive adult or friend if a young person was to disclose feelings of lack of safety or concerns about the behaviour of an adult or peer (as these are the two most likely people a young person will approach for support).
- Reduce the 'I'm not sure' response by focusing on communicating what safety looks like. For example, explaining to children and young people what they can expect during their time in our care.
- Establish better lines of communication between children and young people and Wesley Mission staff, and ensure children and young people know who they can talk to at Wesley Mission, as their preferred person of support may not be someone they always directly deal with.





Conclusion

The findings from the 2021 Wesley Mission Children's Safety Survey report are largely unchanged from the 2018 survey and highlight many positive perceptions the children and young people who took part in the survey feel about safety when attending Wesley Mission programs and services. Largely, children and young people feel safe within Wesley Mission programs and services. Their perspectives of the culture of safety within Wesley Mission programs and services is positive.

The level of confidence participants had in the adults they interact with was very positive, and despite being of noticeable strength in 2018, had only increased in 2021. A potential shift in focus to removing barriers may support improved safeguarding over the coming months and years. Young people at Wesley Mission programs are confident knowing who they would approach if they felt unsafe.

The 2021 survey results provide Wesley Mission with information allowing us to continue to monitor our engagement with children and young people, identify areas for improvement and find ways to give children and young people more say in how they're supported.

Wesley Mission commissioned this research in the wake of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and we plan to actively encourage other organisations in the sector to conduct similar evaluations and ongoing studies of their services.



Get involved

To volunteer, donate or leave a gift in your Will visit wesleymission.org.au

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Wesley Mission is a part of the Uniting Church in Australia.



Wesley Mission acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures; and to Elders past and present.



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