

An Analysis of International Safeguarding Initiatives

Gretchen Kerr, PhD, Ashley Stirling, PhD, Erin Willson, B.KIN, & Alexia Tam, B.KIN

Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education
University of Toronto

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Introduction

As Canada contemplates a national independent body to address safe sport, it is timely to review and to learn from existing safeguarding programmes around the world. To inform the potential development of a pan-Canadian programme to safeguard athletes from harm in sport, we conducted an analysis of existing initiatives, looking at various structures, mandates, strengths and weaknesses. The purpose of this project therefore was to analyze the four major existing international safeguarding programs in sport.

The research questions that guided this analysis included:

1. What is the mission and mandate of each organization?
2. How is each organization structured?
3. What resources are available to each organization?
4. What role does the organization play in education and training?
5. What role does each organization play in policy and codes of conduct development and dissemination?
6. What role does each organization play in case management, investigation and adjudication?
7. Do the organizations play an advocacy role?
8. Do the organizations provide support for victims?

Methods

Four safeguarding organizations exist internationally: (i) United States Center for Safesport, (ii) Children 1st (Ireland), (iii) The Child Protection in Sport Unit (United Kingdom except Ireland), and (iv) Play by the Rules (Australia). The content of each of the organization's websites was analyzed within the context of the above research questions. Following the content analysis, interviews with key stakeholders from each of the organizations were conducted for additional insight and clarity.

Organizations

U.S. Center for SafeSport (United States)

SafeSport is a relatively new initiative, launched in March 2017. It's mission is to "make athlete well-being the centerpiece of our nation's sport" (SafeSport, 2018). The focus of this program is on prevention, education, and outreach. The center is an independent non-profit organization, that has jurisdiction within the US Olympic (USOC) and Paralympic (USPC) movements. Therefore, they hold authority over athletes, coaches, and sport organizations that are affiliated with the USOC and USPC, at every level of competition. As of 2018, the federal legislation has changed to give the Center full institutional authority on all matters of investigating, case handling and sanctioning in relation to maltreatment in sport. This means they have exclusive authority on sexual abuse cases, as well as discretionary authority on any other safe sport cases.

The Centres includes three components: education and outreach, response and resolution, and compliance/disciplinary records. Its educational components include a comprehensive, online training program for athletes, coaches, and volunteers, a shorter program for parents, and a hockey specific program, and a 30-minute refresher program to be taken 1 year after the initial course. Their website also contains resources on preventing bullying, recognizing, reducing and responding to misconduct in sport and a pamphlet on "training and educational policies for National Governing Bodies." There is also an opportunity to request in-person training for organizations.

The second component of The Center is response and resolution. The USOC entrusts the authority to respond to sexual misconduct reports that occur within the U.S Olympic and Paralympic Movements. At this time, they are primarily focused on sexual abuse, and leave other forms of abuse to the organizations. For other forms of abuse, their philosophy is to provide tools and resources and to foster empowerment of organizations to self-regulate.

The Center also provide consultants, intake counselors, as well as a SafeSport helpline that is live and confidential, available 24/7 for athletes, which can be accessed through the phone, online, or through their app. Along with responding to complaints, the Center is responsible for creating policies and procedures to prevent emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of their athletes. A code of conduct has been created, which is a 41-page document that outlines the application of the policy, it's jurisdiction, and the areas of abuse the Center is responsible for overseeing. In the coming year, they are also planning to implement a compliance team that will be responsible for auditing clubs to ensure policies are being upheld.

In terms of prevention, a common challenge within sport is the limitations presented by background checks, especially if the coach has not faced previous criminal charges. There are many cases of coaches being removed from their clubs due to misconduct only to be hired by another organization, sometimes in another country.

The Center has addressed this challenge by providing a disciplinary record of coaches who have violated the code of conduct. This is a public record that can be accessed by anyone through their online portal.

The Center has a variety of strengths that include:

- being an external regulatory body
- the Center has full jurisdiction over all sports within the USOC and USPC as mandated by federal legislation
- policy and education are grounded in current research on the subjects
- provides case handling
- provides support for athletes who have been victims of abuse

Areas that could be potentially improved upon include:

- independent funding sources: right now, they are completely funded by the USOC, which leaves the potential for USOC influence and perceived conflicts
- resources and capacity to ensure their policies are being upheld within organizations (i.e. compliance checks)
- as it is very new, it has not been empirically evaluated at this time

Children 1st (Scotland)

Children 1st Safeguarding in Sport program is a Scottish program formed through a partnership of Scotland's National Children's Charity (Children 1st) and the National Agency for Sport (SportScotland). Their mission is to ensure children stay safe and have fun while participating in sport. They offer training and resources that cover all child protection and welfare issues, provide consulting services to organizations, offer support and education for child welfare officers, support sport governing bodies to establish requirements for child protection (<https://www.children1st.org.uk/help-for-families/safeguarding-in-sport/about-safeguarding-in-sport/>).

The Children 1st program is primarily used to support sport organizations in making their own organizations safe through a variety of resources and recommendations. While they don't have regulatory authority over sport organizations, they provide resources for sport organizations to implement their own practices. For example, they provide a "10 steps to safeguarding children in sport" guide that is available for clubs, sport governing bodies and organizations (<https://www.children1st.org.uk/help-for-families/safeguarding-in-sport/10-steps-to-safeguard-children-in-sport/>). The 10 steps are designed to ensure the minimum operating requirements for protecting children in sport. This can be used as a reference to assess the safeguarding capabilities within an organization, and offers suggestions to promote and enhance the safety of athletes. These steps include how to appoint a child

protection officer (including job description and training workshops), how to implement a child protection policy, and how to respond to concerns.

Children 1st also provides a variety of introductory courses for child protection: Safeguarding and Protecting Children, Safeguarding and Protecting Children 2, and In Safe Hands 1 & 2 (specifically designed for Child Protection Officers) (<https://www.children1st.org.uk/help-for-families/safeguarding-in-sport/training/>). All of these are 3-hour in-class workshops offered throughout the year by Children 1st. The Safeguarding and Protecting Children programs addresses codes of conduct, and provides information on recognizing child abuse and responding to concerns. The “In Safe Hands” courses cover necessary skills to fulfill duties as a child protection officer, provides guidance on how to implement child safety practices and procedures, and action planning on responding to scenarios. Additional workshops offered by Children 1st include supporting clubs to keep children safe, identifying and managing risk, and involving children in decision making. Within their website, they offer a variety of educational resources on child protection in sport.

Finally, because Children 1st is a children’s charity dedicated to prevention, protection and support, they have a variety of reporting and resolution resources available for children and adults. This includes insisting on Child Protection Officers in sport organizations, a Parentline and a Childline for support and reporting, and a link to Open Secret, which is dedicated to helping abused individuals and their families.

Children 1st has a variety of strengths including:

- being a part of the national child care system, meaning they have resources and support staff available who are trained in the field
- provides support for victims
- provides follow up resources to ensure that the educational aspects are not lost upon completion of the program
- provides a variety of resources to enable clubs to implement their own policies

Areas that could be potentially improved upon include:

- accessibility of their courses. They offer in-class workshops only which may limit their reach
- website does not provide a large variety of resources for organizations or coaches, and instead, focuses primarily on the “10 steps to safeguard children”
- does not have the authority to regulate sports
- does not have the authority or ability to intervene – this responsibility is placed on safeguarding officers

Child Protection in Sport Unit (United Kingdom)

The Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) was established in 2001 in the United Kingdom, through a partnership between the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), Sport England, Sport Northern Ireland and Sport Wales. The Unit is funded by sports councils of Northern Ireland, Wales and England, and UK sport. The Unit was designed in response to several high-profile cases of abuse in sport, including the Paul Hickson case in 1995, who was a national swimming coach sentenced to 17 years in prison for sexually abusing his swimmers (Independent, 1995). The purpose of the program is to work with national Governing Bodies, County Sports Partnerships and other organizations to minimize the risk of child abuse in sport, and to support organizations to protect children in and through sport (<https://thecpsu.org.uk/about-us/#heading-top>). The Unit is intended to help clubs, local business, National Governing Organizations and county sports.

The unit offers a variety of training courses including an online introductory course that covers recognizing, responding, reporting and recording concerns about children. This course is intended to be for individuals who do not frequently have contact with children and can be a precursor for more advanced courses. Adults who have frequent contact with children are offered face-to-face courses that are provided by UK coaching or Local Safeguarding Children Boards. There are also refresher workshops that are offered for individuals who have already taken the course. In addition, a series of webinars are available on CPSU's website, with new content added every 3-4 months.

A variety of resources are also provided through CPSU's website, including Standards for safeguarding and protecting children in sport. Other resources include: sample policies and codes of conducts; best practices for topics including LGBT bullying, suicide, social media safety, and athletes with disability; sample forms, such as incident reporting, safeguarding athletes with disability checklist, bullying reporting; toolkits for standards of safeguarding in sport, positive parenting behaviour, anti-bullying, and organization self-assessment; a consolidated hub for the recent research in maltreatment and child protection in sport; and sample leaflets and posters for clubs and organizations.

CPSU also offers a variety of consultant services to support sport organizations, including: assistance developing and implementing safeguarding policies, supporting organizations to promote good safeguarding practices, and to maintain and embed safeguards. Their standards of safeguarding recommend that organizations have safeguarding officers who are responsible for case handling and care; the CPSU provides training resources specifically for officers to enable them to effectively care for the athletes. Additionally, the NSPCC offers support for children, including a childline that offers support and advice 24/7 by phone or online.

The Child Protection in Sport unit has a variety of strengths including:

- being a comprehensive organization with a variety of safeguarding resources
- linked with child protection UK which provides access to substantial and diverse training, tools, and professional support
- have the capacity to support clubs and safeguarding officers
- ability to case handle (because of ties with child protective services)
- ability to provide victim support
- combine online and in class courses for optimal learning
- provide standards for safeguarding in sport

Areas that could be potentially improved upon include:

- The way knowledge is disseminated is unclear – do clubs know that these resources exist?
- Unclear whether they are able to regulate within organizations
- Unclear if they can provide consequences for non-compliance of organizations

Play by the Rules (Australia)

Play by the Rules (PBTR) began in 2001 as a response to a lack of resources on racialized violence in sport, and quickly grew to become an educational resource for discrimination, harassment and child protection in sport (<https://www.playbytherules.net.au/about-pbtr>). PBTR is primarily a resource hub that offers information on safe sport for children, governance, inclusion, sideline behaviour, team selection, social media, bullying, girls playing on boys' team, integrity in sport, physical contact with children and intimate relationships. While it functions an independent body, its partners include the Australian Sports Commission, Australian Human Rights Commission, state and territory departments of sport and recreation, the Office for the Children's Guardians, Australia New Zealand Sport Law Association and the Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW. It is funded primarily through the Australian Sport Commission.

PBTR focuses on education for sport organizations, coaches, parents, administrators, and athletes. It provides a free, online training course covering the topics of child protection, harassment, discrimination and complaint handling (<https://www.playbytherules.net.au/online-courses>). It also provides mini-courses that can take 30-45 minutes to complete, which include letting kids be kids, ethical decision making in sport and integrity of sport. There is also a separate course specifically for Member Protection Information Officers. PBTR is not mandatory for organizations, however, many states have established laws for clubs to have safeguards in place, and PBTR is the only resource in Australia that has everything organizations need to become legally compliant.

As a resource centre, PBTR provides templates for policies, including a Coach Code of Behaviour, Social Media Policy, Chaperone Policy, Communications Policy, and Disability Inclusion Policies. PBTR is not a regulatory body so does not offer support or consultation on club policies, or implement policies within clubs; instead, it offers materials for organizations to make themselves legally compliant and ethically sound. It also has many resources to help safe sport officers with case handling, including reporting, complaint handling, and mediation.

Play by the Rules has a variety of strengths including:

- Their comprehensive resource library, which extends beyond maltreatment to other areas of concern for harm in sport
- Provides a variety of tools and resources for clubs to be compliant with state regulations
- Provides a monthly newsletter to drive traffic to their website, this can also help with retention of education and knowledge
- It is an independent body, meaning it is not influenced by the government

Areas that could be potentially improved upon include:

- They do not have regulatory authority over sport organizations
- Do not have authority to provide consequences to organizations for non-compliance
- Do not have the resources to consult organizations about policies/implementation
- Operate completely online and therefore may be difficult to translate knowledge to the club

Comparison Charts of Four International Organizations

Table 1. Overview of Mission, Mandate and Governance

	US Center for SafeSport	Children 1st	Child Protection in Sport Unit	Play by the Rules
GENERAL				
Mission/Vision	<p>“To make athlete well-being the centerpiece of our nation’s sports culture. All athletes deserve to participate in sports free from bullying, hazing, sexual misconduct or any form of emotional or physical abuse.”</p>	<p>“Ensure children stay safe and have fun while taking part in sport.”</p>	<p>“Build the capacity of sports to safeguard children and young people in and through sport and to enable sports organisations to lead the way in keeping children safe from harm.”</p> <p>"Support organizations to protection children in and through sport"</p>	<p>“Making sport safe, fair and inclusive”</p>
Mandates	<p>Vision is that every athlete will be safe, supported, and strengthened through sport:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe: Athletes are protected from emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. • Supported: Athletes enjoy welcome, respectful environments and diversity is actively embraced. • Strengthened: Athletes use the skills they’ve learned in sport to contribute to the well-being of their communities. Every athlete thrives, on and off the field of play. 	<p>Advice on a wide range of issues from how to access training and resources to case specific advice and support regarding any child protection or welfare issue consultancy to help organisations develop ways to keep children safe including recruitment, selection and codes of conduct training to provide basic awareness about child protection or more detailed training for Club Child Protection Officers and officials support to sports governing bodies and local authorities to adopt minimum operating requirements for child protection and</p>	<p>Being a lead voice, champion, pioneer UK wide and internationally</p> <p>Providing expert safeguarding and child protection advice to sports organisations contributing safeguarding knowledge to their policies, procedures and programmes</p> <p>Developing and delivering sports specific training, resources and guidance</p> <p>Coordinating, lobbying and advocating on behalf of the sports sector in response to government</p>	<p>Provides information, resources, tools and free online training to increase the capacity and capability of administrators, coaches, officials, players, parents and spectators to assist them in preventing and dealing with discrimination, harassment, child safety, inclusion and integrity issues in sport.</p>

		network groups to share good practice. We also influence policy makers and government bodies involved with child protection and child welfare.	<p>consultations</p> <p>Commissioning and supporting research into a range of issues, developing understanding and an evidence base</p> <p>Consulting with children and young people working with international organisations to promote safeguarding work with other countries</p>	
Personnel	9 independent board of directors + CEO.	Not indicated on website	<p>Director</p> <p>Six consultants across the UK</p> <p>Six other employees.</p>	Two co-chairs
Organizational Structure	<p>Designated by Congress through the Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse and Safe Sport Authorization Act of 2017 to serve as the independent national safe sport organization, with the responsibility for developing policies and procedures to prevent the emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of amateur athletes.</p> <p>Serves as an independent organization entrusted by The United States Olympic Committees/National governing bodies</p>	Scotland's National Children's Charity & Sport Scotland (national agency for sport)	<p>Part of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)</p> <p>Partnership with Sport England, Sport Northern Ireland, Sport Wales</p> <p>Designed to support clubs, local business, small charities, national governing bodies of sport, and county sports partnerships</p>	<p>Collaboration between Australia Sport Commission, Australia human rights commission, all state and territory departments of sport and rec, all state and territory anti-discrimination and human rights agencies, the office of the Children's Guardian (NSW), the Aus New Zealand Sports law association (ANZSLA, and the anti-discrimination board of NSW.</p> <p>Governed by National Management Committee, partners from sport and recreation and</p>

				human rights agencies
Funding Sources	Independent, non-profit - most comes from USOC and NGB's	Donations – some funding from government	Sports Counsels of Northern Ireland, Wales, England and UK sport	ACT government
Mandatory?	Yes	Unclear	Yes	No

Table 2. Policies and Codes of Conduct

POLICY	US Center for SafeSport	Children 1st	Child Protection in Sport Unit	Play by the Rules
National Policy?	Yes	No, but provides resources for organizations to develop their own policy	No	No
Standards/Codes of Conduct?	Yes	No - this is provided by the government, Children 1 st provides recommended guidelines to improve compliance	Yes – standards for safeguarding and protecting children in sport	No
Consistent with Research	Yes	N/A	Yes	N/A
Are there sport-specific violations that differ from sport to sport?	Not indicated on website	N/A	Not indicated	Not indicated

Table 3. Compliance

COMPLIANCE	US Center for SafeSport	Children 1st	Child Protection in Sport Unit	Play by the Rules
Disciplinary Record	Yes	No	No – provides guidelines on how organizations can make their own	No
Policy Adherence	Yes	No	No	No
Public Searchable Registry of Offenders	Yes	No	No	No

Table 4. Education and Training

EDUCATION AND TRAINING	US Center for SafeSport	Children 1st	Child Protection in Sport Unit	Play by the Rules
Education that focuses on creating awareness and understanding of what constitutes abuse, harassment, racism, etc.?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Education specific to the policy and rules that define stakeholders' roles and responsibilities with respect to jurisdiction, authority, asserting sanctions, hearings, etc.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Is education on creating awareness of policies and rules mandatory?	Not indicated on Website	No	No	No
Target Audiences	Coaches, team volunteers, officials or team staff members (athletic trainer, team doctor, etc.), parents	Coaches and volunteers	Anyone who has infrequent contact with children in a sports organisation 4 different courses are available for different levels of coaches	Coaches, administrators, parents, athletes
Research-informed	Yes	Not available for assessment	Not available for assessment	No
Delivery Mechanisms	Online Also offer in person training courses by request	3 hour in-class workshop 2 different workshops are offered	Online introductory course Face-to-face safeguarding and child protection workshops To be completed every three years	Online

			Online refresher courses	
Provision of Resources	Yes	<p>Yes - 10 steps to safesport, various other resources for clubs and specific topics (ex. social media. good practices for clubs).</p> <p>A variety of safeguarding resources and FAQ's for athletes, parents, coaches and organizations</p>	Substantial portal of external resources	<p>Yes – the main premise of this organization is to be a resource and information hub.</p> <p>They collect resources from around the world and become a centralized library for sport organizations to gain information on safe sport.</p>

Table 5. Disclosure and Reporting

DISCLOSURE AND REPORTING	US Center for SafeSport	Children 1st	Child Protection in Sport Unit	Play by the Rules
Organizational Structure	Serves as an external authority for all case handling of the USOC on safeguarding measures	<p>Is part of Children's Charity dedicated to preventing abuse and neglect, and protecting children from harm</p> <p>Recommend organizations have safeguarding officers for case handling/reporting</p> <p>Hotlines exist for both children and parents through Children 1st</p>	<p>Recommend organizations have safeguarding officers for case handling/reporting</p> <p>Hotline exists for children</p>	<p>Does not handle reports</p> <p>Provides resources for clubs and safeguarding officers to handle this</p>
Local/National (centralized)	National	National	National	Local
Reporting Mechanisms	<p>Serves as an independent body that any NGB member can report to</p> <p>Provides intake consultants</p> <p>Provides hotline to report sexual abuse</p>	<p>Provides hotline and an email address for reporting</p> <p>Encourages safeguarding officers in organization whose job it is to respond to cases</p>	<p>Consultants are provided</p> <p>Mandate safesport officers within every NGB</p> <p>Provides hotline for reporting of abuse</p>	<p>None – primarily built as a resource hub</p> <p>Recommends reporting sexual abuse to police</p>

	(phone, online chat, and app)		Provides flowchart to indicate the reporting path within various events and organizations	
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Table 6. Advocacy Initiatives

ADVOCACY INITIATIVES	US Center for SafeSport	Children 1st	Child Protection in Sport Unit	Play by the Rules
Advocacy Initiatives	<p>Along with the educational program there are a variety of online resources available</p> <p>Focus on empowering organizations to regulate on their own</p>	Provides information, guides and fact sheets on their website	Many resources available on their website	Many resources available on their website

Table 7. Support for Victims

SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS	US Center for SafeSport	Children 1st	Child Protection in Sport Unit	Play by the Rules
Provision of Support	Doesn't discuss on the website	<p>Not directly but encourages safeguarding officers</p> <p>Provides links to Open Secret which helps victims of abuse and their families</p>	<p>Not directly but offers courses for safeguarding officers</p> <p>Provides link to ChildLine UK</p>	Unclear but doubtful as this is a resource hub only
Referrals	Not available on website	Not available on website	Not available on website	Not available

Summary of Analyses

A review of the major existing safeguarding initiatives from Scotland, the U.K., the U.S. and Australia, reveal that each programme has its strengths and addresses maltreatment in sport in different ways. For example, while the U.S. Center for Safe Sport offers education and assistance with case investigation and adjudication, the Play By The Rules organization in Australia serves as a resource centre only. In fact, the U.S. Center for Safe Sport is the only programme of the four that has been granted regulatory authority over sport organizations.

All four programmes offer important and relevant education, training and advocacy. However, without legislated authority to address complaints and apply sanctions, countries are limited in the extent to which they can address and prevent maltreatment in sport. One particular strength of the U.K. model is its positioning within the broader child protection framework. As a part of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), sport benefits from the resources and expertise of broader child protection services and programming. The U.K. model is a de-centralized one in which safeguarding officers are mandated within sport organizations, however, without evaluative information, the extent to which this system is successful is unknown. The Australian model, Play by the Rules, has exemplar information on its website but is unfortunately not mandated or resourced to engage in case management and adjudication.

Across all programmes is an absence of supports for victims. Given the interests/mission and/or mandate of each organization to ensure safe experiences for athletes, it is surprising that none of the programmes explicitly refer to, let alone offer, support services to victims of maltreatment.

Also, common to all programmes is a primary focus on sexual abuse of athletes. There is no question about the importance of addressing sexual abuse in sport and the potential, long-term effects of sexual abuse on athletes. However, it is equally important to address other forms of maltreatment which can be just as devastating to athletes' health and well-being, both in the short and long-term. For example, psychological abuse has consistently been found to be the most commonly experienced form of maltreatment among athletes, across sports, and across countries, and yet, the existing programmes focus primarily, if not exclusively, on sexual abuse. The U.S. Centre for Safe Sport for example, has regulatory authority over sexual abuse in sport but leaves other forms of maltreatment to the jurisdiction of individual sport organizations, including local clubs.

In sum, although the existing international safeguarding programmes offer more advanced safeguarding than currently exists in Canada, each has weaknesses that Canada has an opportunity to advance. In the next section we recommend an ideal state for Safe Sport and athlete protection in Canada.

Implications for Pan-Canada System for Athlete Protection

Ideally, a comprehensive system of athlete welfare and athlete protection would encompass the pillars of policy, education, case management, compliance measures, supports for victims, and advocacy, all of which are informed by current and relevant research. To-date, none of the international safeguarding programmes address all of these pillars fully, creating opportunities for Canada to be an international leader in safeguarding. A Pan-Canadian system for athlete welfare and protection would include the following:

1. Address all forms of maltreatment (sexual abuse, psychological abuse, physical abuse, and neglect, bullying and harassment)
2. Acquire regulatory authority for case management, investigation and adjudication, and sanctioning.
3. Develop a national policy that applies to all sports.
4. Incorporate compliance mechanisms.
5. Develop a public, national registry of those who breach codes of conduct.
6. Develop partnerships with broader child protection organizations.
7. Mandate foundational education for anyone who interacts with or has influence over young people in sport. Mandate advanced education for those who interact more frequently with young people.
8. Advocate for safe, athlete-centred sport.
9. Offer supports to victims

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