

How our parish safeguarding officers play a key role

WHEN Val Strutt was originally asked to become parish safeguarding officer (PSO), she was told it wouldn't involve much extra work – that was 19 years ago!

In fact, Val has been faithfully supporting the work with children, young people and vulnerable adults at St Wilfrid's Church, Cowplain, ever since.

Her work includes safely recruiting volunteers for activities, ensuring their training is up to date, and dealing with any safeguarding issues that arise.

And she regards it as worthwhile, as she is able – like other PSOs up and down the country – to work hard at enabling parish activities with children and young people to go ahead safely.

As well as ensuring volunteers fill in their Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) forms every three years, she also handles the 'dashboard' which reveals any training people are due to have next, and monitors standards and mandatory requirements. This is a good tool for the PCC to establish where each parish is at.

"When the parish needed someone to lead on safeguarding, I happened to be the parish administrator at the time," she said. "I was told it would just involve some extra filing, but of course it ended up being much more than that as the years rolled on!

"People assume that being the safeguarding officer just involves paperwork around DBS forms. But safer recruitment is much more than that.

"It also involves reminding people that they need to get



Val Strutt with young people from St Wilfrid's Church, Cowplain

the latest safeguarding training, and also monitoring any pastoral uses, and dealing with policies and practices.

"Sometimes you feel that it can be seen as safeguarding placing obstacles in the way of good ideas, but it is actually all about ensuring these activities can go ahead as safely as possible.

"It is very important that people are aware of what to do if they have safeguarding concerns, and familiarise themselves with flowcharts and posters around the building. I can't emphasise that enough as safeguarding is everyone's business.

"I enjoy the regular training that I have, including the annual safeguarding conference. It's good to network with other parish safeguarding officers who are in the same situations. And it's quite rewarding to be able to listen and help one another.

"And when a difficult situation happens, that's when the training becomes really useful. You may need to sit down and listen

to people who have different experiences of what happened and listen to all views, trying to be objective and not judgmental.

"I know I can always talk to the diocesan safeguarding team and my vicar, who are all very helpful. It can also involve going through the more formal process of a core group.

"I wouldn't have known that the role of parish safeguarding officer would develop in the way that it has, but it is rewarding when you see activities for children, young people and vulnerable adults going ahead in a safe way. I have been blessed with the help available to me, including the diocesan safeguarding team and parish team."

Our policy is that every parish in our diocese should have its own safeguarding officer, filling the role that Val has done for St Wilfrid's. A full induction programme and ongoing training is provided.

Find out more on www.portsmouth.anglican.org/PSO

A survivor's story of support

WHEN John was abused as a teenager by a vicar who was giving him extra tuition, he didn't tell his parents.

He didn't want them to think they were to blame in any way, because they sent him to this Reverend's house for lessons. Instead he went and reported it to the police with his girlfriend.

After telling the police officers some details of what had happened, he tried not to dwell on it and got on with his life. He didn't even know if the evidence he'd given had been part of any court case.

Several decades later, when he retired from work, he started to wonder what had actually happened. By then his parents had died, having never known of the abuse. So he felt able to make enquiries.

After contacting the Crown Court and the local Constabulary, as well as various victim support agencies, he still hadn't found all the information he needed.

They put him in touch with our diocesan safeguarding team to see if they could help. And John has been very happy with the support given by safeguarding adviser Claire Lewis.

"I had more time in my retirement and I started digging into some records," he said. "I discovered that the Reverend had been prosecuted in the 1980s. I also discovered the Church of England's Redress Scheme for survivors.

"I contacted the court to see if I had been mentioned in his court case, but they had limited information. And I contacted the police, who were able to tell me that my perpetrator had died.

"And I went via victim support to an agency called First Light, who put me in touch with Claire from the diocese.

"One thing that was troubling me was there seemed to be no mention of me in connection with court proceedings, even though I had given a statement.

"I didn't feel particularly vulnerable, but I had found it hard over many years to trust people who represent the Church. And I'm sure the abuse has affected relationships I've had over the past 40 years or so.

"Claire suggested that some counselling might help, and I've had six or seven sessions, which the diocese has paid for.

"It has been good to talk about these things and it has helped me to come to terms with what happened. Claire has been very supportive and organised a second set of sessions for me.

"People imagine the Redress Scheme is all about claiming compensation. That is part of it, but I wasn't after financial compensation, just some kind of support from the Church.

"I'm glad that support has happened and is being recognised."

**John's name has been changed to preserve his anonymity.*



The Rev Sam Cullen lights a candle for survivors at Holy Trinity, Fareham

Our safeguarding procedures will also be examined by external consultants, the Ineqe Safeguarding Group, in June. This is part of a series of audits agreed by the Archbishops' Council to ensure consistency in safeguarding across dioceses and cathedrals.

Our Head of Safeguarding Emily Hassan said: "Because I came here

from a role where safeguarding procedures and policies were statutory – and therefore always done in a specific way – I wouldn't want to be doing this job unless I was confident that our safeguarding practices were just as robust.

"We are, of course, never complacent and always have more

to learn. But I am as confident as I can be that we have the right policies and practices in place, to minimise any potential risk to the thousands of children, young people and vulnerable adults that our churches support every week.

"I can understand why some may have lost faith in the Church of England over recent months. All we can do is make sure we get our safeguarding right, to rebuild that trust and to give families confidence in the amazing activities that our parishes provide."

Anyone with concerns about safeguarding issues can contact our safeguarding team on safeguarding@portsmouth.anglican.org or 023-9289 9665 (9am-5pm). For urgent out-of-hours advice, the diocese has commissioned the organisation thirtyone:eight to offer out of hours cover. They can be contacted on 0303 003 1111. Further details are on www.portsmouth.anglican.org/safeguarding