Our Soapbox

STA Safeguarding Training Australia

SAA Safeguarding Advisory Australia

Why Do Safeguarding Champion Networks Often Fail?

We see many forms and attempts at establishing and maintaining a safeguarding champion (or focal point, or designated lead) network across organisations.

The idea sounds promising, a group of passionate and skilled individuals, keen to disperse a child safeguarding lens more evenly across the organisation, and compliment and strengthen existing child safeguarding structures and resources.

But sadly, even with goodwill and initial resourcing, they often fail, fizzle out, become ineffective or organisations lose confidence.

Is the concept wrong, or are we setting them up to fail?

The promise is compelling

Building a network of safeguarding supporters who believe in the cause and your organisation — people who will start conversations, advocate and carry the safety message into rooms we can't always reach. In relationship-driven cultures, where reputation travels fast and trust is hard-won, champion networks feel like the natural path to sustainable growth.

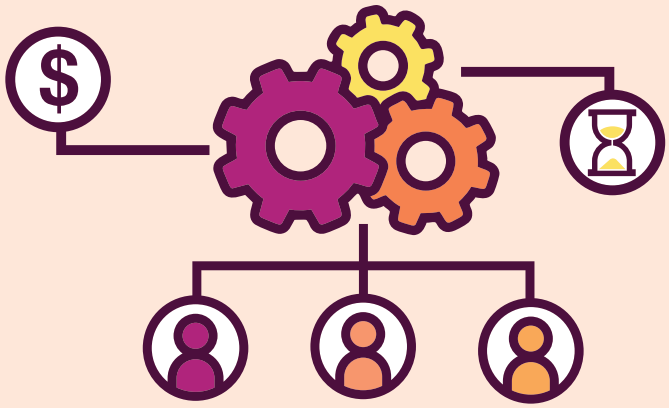
So why are they ineffective?

Shared values are not a strategy

The most common mistake leaders make is assuming that belief in the cause will sustain engagement. **It won't.** A safeguarding champion who cares deeply still needs to know what you are asking them to do, how to do it confidently, and what support they can expect.

We don't want people to volunteer just because they like the cause, or perhaps have lived experience. We want the right people, with the right skills and the right constitution.

Without that clarity, passion produces hesitation. Safeguarding champions go quiet not because they stopped caring, but because they were never properly equipped to act.



If we fail to plan, we plan to fail

If we launch a safeguarding network, or framework, or concept without an implementation plan, it is doomed before it even begins.

A champion network requires socialisation and buy in from leadership, a clear governance structure, sign off, resourcing (time, money, people), initial and ongoing support from key stakeholders, project management support and an accountability framework.

If we skip this step, we end up with a flurry of initial excitement, and poor sustainability.

Recruitment is not delivery

Most networks are launched, a briefing is held — and then the organisation waits.

Nothing happens.

Champions are busy people, often with substantive roles. They will not naturally allocate time to a champion role, unless you make it a clear and measurable part of their role.

Activation is a continuous responsibility, not a one-time event. Lack of strategy breeds dormancy, and dormancy breeds churn.

Networks built on people, not structure, don't survive transitions

Champion engagement is almost always anchored to an individual — a trusted leader, a key role, a particular staff member.

When that person moves on, the champion moves with them.

Organisations that fail to embed champions into formal structures find they don't have a network at all. They have an old contact list, with no agreed approach to attrition or succession planning.

Champions are set up to fail

Safeguarding roles are not for everyone, and include exposure to sensitive and potentially traumatic information.

The role of safeguarding champion should not be mandatory, consider a range of eligibility requirements, and provide significant learning and development support.

Ill equipped and unsupported staff will feel let down, disengaged and potentially unsafe.

Initial and ongoing professional development, supervision and self-care plans require investment and management, and are often missing in budget planning.

Governance and accountability

The safeguarding champion networks that endure share a common architecture:

Clear governance and structure
A framework, implementation plans, position descriptions, terms of reference, clear workplans, long term vision

Adequate resourcing
Realistic budgeting that falls from understanding what a network needs to survive and thrive

Supported roles
Champions receive dedicated and protected time, resources, and training.

Accountability
Both the network and individual champions are evaluated against a pre-determined process, performance indicators are clear, and senior leadership monitor regularly.

The right question is not how many safeguarding champions are on the list, but whether they are contributing to the overall cause.

Champion networks don't fail because the concept is flawed.

They fail because execution underestimates what it takes to create and maintain an effective and sustainable ecosystem.

