

## Who Is Praesidium? *Safeguarding* Partner, Sexual Abuse Prevention Experts

In 2003, the Church Pension Group (CPG) began collaborating with Praesidium, Inc., a Texas-based company, to develop a formal child sexual abuse prevention education program for Episcopal clergy, staff, and volunteers. That's how *Safeguarding God's Children* came into being. Thousands have been trained through face-to-face programs and the popular *SafeguardingOnline*.

B.J. Cohan, *Safeguarding* Program Manager for CPG, says, "Our collaboration with Praesidium has been an incredibly rewarding experience. As our program has grown in numbers, Praesidium has grown in expertise, allowing us to provide extensive training resources for Episcopal institutions. When the program began, we were excited to teach hundreds. Now, 13 years later, more than 100,000 people have benefited from not only the basic training but from additional topics that address more specific situations."

### **How Praesidium was formed**

Christy Schiller, Vice President of Religious Services at Praesidium, says that the company was unofficially started in the late 1980s and incorporated in 1992. "Our founder, Dr. Richard Dangel, was on the board of a local YMCA that had an incident of sexual abuse in one of the after-school programs, and they were devastated. They turned to him because he was a clinical psychologist who had worked with both offenders and victims."

Dr. Dangel began researching how sexual abuse happens in organizations and developed a model to help youth-serving organizations determine hazards; Praesidium was developed from there.

### **What sets Praesidium apart**

It's the comprehensive nature of Praesidium's model that sets it apart from other vendors. They offer best practices for the "eight critical organizational operations," which include:

- policies
- screening and selection
- training
- monitoring and supervision
- internal feedback systems
- consumer participation
- responding
- administrative practices

"We take a systems approach and look at the big picture," Christy says.

## **Who Praesidium serves**

“We started out working primarily with YMCAs and social services agencies. Now we work nationally with YMCA, the Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs of America, the Greek Orthodox Church, and the Salvation Army,” in addition to their work with the Church Pension Group and the Episcopal Church, Christy says.

They also work with the Presbyterian Church, Church of Christ, and Disciples of Christ through their insurer, Insurance Board. “We are the national accrediting body for Catholic men’s religious orders, and we work with many Catholic dioceses,” she says. This allows Praesidium to “have a national perspective of what’s happening across the industry.”

## **Training is a great place to start**

Christy says that Episcopal dioceses are beginning to move beyond training and really take the prevention of sexual abuse to the next level. “We use the slogan ‘Complacency, Compliance, Commitment,’” Christy says.

What that means is that organizations move from Complacency to understand they have to do something to prevent sexual abuse, at which point they enter the Compliance phase. “Training is a great place to start,” she says. “But then it’s time to have a bigger conversation than ‘how do we check this box?’.”

That’s when organizations have moved into the Commitment phase. “Because we’re invested in a systems approach to preventing sexual abuse, we have resources that can help committed organizations look at their institution comprehensively.”

## **Making a strong commitment**

Praesidium is working with some Episcopal dioceses directly to help them “redouble their efforts and make their program to prevent sexual abuse stronger,” Christy says. “One diocese we’re working with has a new bishop, and there was an incident at a school.” The diocese approached Praesidium to review best practices and do live training for clergy.

To combat issue fatigue, Christy says that organizations need to find a way to “breathe new life” into their sexual abuse prevention policies and programs. “In our hearts, we obviously want abuse to stop,” Christy says. “The next step is equipping people with the skills and best practices” to strengthen their commitment and keep abuse prevention top of mind.

## **Safeguarding resources as a foundation**

“CPG has provided a strong foundation with *SafeguardingOnline*,” Christy says. But that’s only the beginning of what churches can do to prevent sexual abuse. “We want dioceses to feel comfortable getting in touch with us directly. Many may not realize that we provide the full spectrum, including leadership training and tools to help them assess themselves, that could be so helpful.”

To contact Praesidium directly, dial (817) 801-7773. To reach Christy, email her at [cschiller@praesidiuminc.com](mailto:cschiller@praesidiuminc.com).