



# PROTECTION STARTS HERE: PREVENTING SEXUAL ABUSE AGAINST CHILDREN

**Cayman Islands Red Cross**

**CASE STUDY**

Photo description: Participants at Cayman Islands Red Cross child protection session  
Photo credit: Cayman Islands Red Cross

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Photo description: Sample child sexual abuse prevention messages from the Cayman Islands Red Cross  
 Photo credit: Cayman Islands Red Cross

## Background

The Cayman Islands Red Cross (CIRC) has delivered child-protection and sexuality-education programming for over two decades. The origins trace back to 2002, when CIRC adopted and launched the *“Together We Can (TWC) HIV & AIDS Peer Education Programme”* created by the Jamaican Red Cross in the late 1990s and standardised by the IFRC in the early 2000s. TWC is a comprehensive sex education programme that teaches youth ages 13-19 with correct information about HIV and AIDS, transmission and testing, abstinence, and safer sex and empowers them with the skills to teach their peers.

In the Cayman Islands, the TWC programme ran from a period of 10 years, during which time the CIRC collected information from the youth involved and determined that child sexual abuse was a key risk factor driving the HIV epidemic, not only in Cayman but within the Caribbean region. In response, the CIRC decided to address prevention at its roots.

In 2012, the *Protection Starts Here (PSH)* initiative was launched to bring together stakeholders working in child safeguarding, raise public awareness of child sexual abuse and to strengthen community capacity to prevent and respond to it. PSH shifted the organization’s focus from risk education to proactive protection, aiming to create a culture where adults take responsibility for the safeguarding of children.

The PSH working group was made up of representatives from education, mental health, public health, police, social work, veterinary sciences, and human services. The group worked collaboratively and determined the priority areas for action. The multi-agency approach garnered support from funders, such as Help For Children (formerly Hedge Fund Cares) who has been a consistent supporter of the project since 2013.

Since the project was established, the group has undertaken and delivered:

- A thought provoking public education campaign [Protection starts here campaign- Men Calling Out Men PSA](#)
- An educational documentary, “UNSPEAKABLE: Confronting Child Sexual Abuse in the Cayman Islands” released as a way to both challenge the stigma attached to child sexual abuse and to openly highlight the existence of such a problem in the Cayman Islands [UNSPEAKABLE- Confronting Child Sexual Abuse in the Cayman Islands \(Int'l Version- 30 mins\)](#)
- A series of educational presentations, ranging from breaking down what child sexual abuse is, to how to speak to children and youth about sex and body safety, to understanding gender and sexuality, captured as a resource for professionals on island.
- Establishing free Darkness to Light: Stewards of Children and Recognising and Reporting Abuse training for teachers, youth workers, community partners and other lay persons.
- Establishing free training on how to develop safeguarding policies, practices and procedures for youth serving organisations.
- Creating and disseminating a free child protection lesson, “My Body is My Own”, for local and international teachers and youth workers working with children ages 4-7.
- Undertaking a ‘health and wellness’ check following the COVID-19 lock down that kept Cayman’s kids isolated for nearly 6 months.
- Creating messaging and resources for children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Culturally, the programme challenges taboos around discussing sex and abuse while recognising Cayman’s small-island context where confidentiality, reputation, and faith influence disclosure.

The rationale for PSH has been clear: to break the silence, equip adults with tools to protect children, and provide developmentally appropriate education to young people. Over time, PSH has grown into a cornerstone of the CIRC’s humanitarian mandate, now recognised nationally as the lead civil-society actor in child protection.

## Who was Supported and How

The *Protection Starts Here* programme supports both **children** and **adults** across multiple layers of prevention and education. Its interventions reach parents, teachers, youth workers, community volunteers, and children as young as three.

CIRC employs several key approaches:

- **Training and Capacity Building:** The internationally recognised *Darkness to Light – Stewards of Children* curriculum teaches five key steps to protect children. Sessions combine video, workbook learning, and group discussion to empower adults to recognize, reduce, and respond to child sexual abuse. In 2020, training was expanded to also include D2L’s Recognising and Reporting Abuse component, to help support local training needs and strengthen skills building among professionals.

- **Organisational Standards:** The *Seal of Protection* initiative aimed to help youth-serving organisations develop and implement child-protection policies and procedures, including background checks, codes of conduct, and reporting pathways. While this initiative has ended, it has served as a major influencer in the discussion relating to the establishment of national standards for youth-serving organisations within the Cayman Islands.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** PSH produced seven public service announcements, an educational documentary (“edu-mentary”), and a DVD training tool for community use. These were disseminated on television, in cinemas, and online.
- **Child-Focused Education:** The *My Body Is My Own* programme, designed for children aged 3–7, uses animated local characters to teach body boundaries and safe/unsafe touch in an age-appropriate way. Teachers and caregivers receive training to deliver it safely.
- **Multi-agency Collaboration:** CIRC coordinates with the RCIPS, government departments, and NGOs to ensure consistent messaging and referrals.

Gender and diversity are integral to the programme design. Training content acknowledges the realities faced by girls and boys, including LGBTQIA+ youth, those with disabilities, in institutions, or from migrant families. Facilitators ensure inclusive language and culturally sensitive delivery.

Recently, over **40 participants from 14 education- and youth-serving organizations** had been trained to deliver *My Body Is My Own*, reaching 80 students during its pilot phase. Hundreds more adults have since attended Darkness to Light sessions, with growing demand from churches, sports clubs, and service providers. In 2024 alone, over 1300 adults were trained in the Darkness to Light training sessions and 5 additional schools started the *My Body Is My Own* curriculum in their classrooms.

CIRC continually adapts materials to ensure accessibility, including Spanish versions for translated materials when needed. By linking awareness, training, and institutional change, the programme strengthens Cayman’s national child-protection system from the ground up.

## Successes

Over its first decade, *Protection Starts Here* achieved major milestones in awareness, capacity building, and cultural change. It normalised open discussion of child sexual abuse—a subject long considered taboo in the Cayman Islands— not only in professional spaces and households, but also, in media awareness and reporting, and created a common prevention language across sectors.

Key achievements include:

- Establishing **national awareness** of child sexual abuse through multimedia campaigns viewed across the islands.
- Training **thousands of adults** through the *Darkness to Light* curriculum, improving knowledge of warning signs, reporting obligations, and safe-environment practices.

- Launching **My Body Is My Own**, which gives young children vocabulary and confidence to speak up.
- Strengthening **multi-agency cooperation** between the Red Cross, police, educators, and health professionals.
- Raising the visibility of children and their needs in national emergencies (i.e.: COVID 19 response) as a safeguarding action.
- In 2022, the program celebrated its **10th anniversary**, marking a decade of sustained advocacy.
- In 2024, CIRC announced plans for a **confidential helpline** aimed at people struggling with sexual thoughts toward children—a preventive innovation unique in the Caribbean.

PSH's consistent community presence has earned CIRC recognition as a trusted civil-society leader in child protection, influencing national dialogue and contributing to a gradual shift from reactive responses to proactive prevention.

## Challenges and Difficulties

Implementing a child-protection programme in a small, close-knit society presented significant challenges.

- **Stigma and silence** remained the most persistent barriers. Discussing child sexual abuse openly was initially seen as culturally inappropriate, leading to reluctance from institutions and community members. CIRC overcame this through sustained engagement, use of trusted local voices in PSAs, and relationship-based advocacy with schools and churches.
- **Resource limitations** also constrained early progress. As a small National Society, CIRC relied on short-term donor funding to maintain staff and materials. Strategic partnerships with Help For Children (HFC) and other donors allowed the programme to stabilise and grow.
- **Lack of national standards for youth serving organisations** posed another obstacle. Few YSOs had written protection policies, vetting mechanisms, knowledge of best practices and standards in safeguarding, and codes of conduct to protect children and staff. The Seal of Protection initiative was created to fill this gap by providing templates and coaching, turning a challenge into an opportunity for system-wide improvement.
- **The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted in-person trainings** and school visits, but CIRC adapted rapidly by offering virtual Darkness to Light sessions and re-broadcasting PSAs.
- **Measuring impact** remains a challenge. While awareness and participation numbers are strong, long-term indicators such as reporting rates and behavioural change require coordinated data collection beyond CIRC's control. Despite these difficulties, the programme continues to expand and influence policy reform discussions at the national level.

## Lessons Learned

- 1- **Prevention must start with adults.** Empowering parents, teachers, and community leaders to talk openly and take responsibility is foundational for child safety.
- 2- **Multi-agency collaboration is essential.** Real progress occurred only when CIRC, government departments, police, and schools aligned on messaging and procedures.
- 3- **Cultural sensitivity builds trust.** Framing the issue through local stories, faith-compatible language, and Caymanian voices helped dismantle resistance.
- 4- **Early-childhood education works.** Teaching protective behaviours in safe, age-appropriate ways (through *My Body Is My Own*) empowers children without fear.
- 5- **Flexibility and innovation are key.** Adapting during COVID-19 and exploring secondary prevention tools such as the 2024 helpline demonstrate the value of continuous learning.

For other National Societies, PSH illustrates how a small branch can catalyse national change by combining awareness, education, and policy advocacy. Success depends on persistence, trusted partnerships, and the courage to address difficult issues publicly.

Ultimately, *Protection Starts Here* reaffirms that safeguarding is not a specialized activity but a humanitarian responsibility central to the Red Cross and Red Crescent mission.