

Child abuse survivor spent 12 years building the child safety system, SAFE, that might have saved her

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- A survivor of near-fatal childhood abuse is now aiming to prevent this abuse from happening to other children by launching an early-warning detection system that identifies and prioritises behavioural warning signs of abuse in children.

["SAFE"](#) is a child safety intelligence infrastructure platform aimed at addressing Australia's childcare trust crisis by giving educators a structured way to record everyday behavioural observations that individually may not trigger concern, but collectively can signal risk.



Ruby O'Rourke, CEO and Founder of SAFE Inc

These include behaviours such as withdrawal, changes in appetite, unexplained fears, or altered attendance patterns, which often emerge long before a child is able to overtly understand, let alone articulate, what is happening to them.

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A systems-led approach to early warning infrastructure is what I needed as a child, and it is what children across this country still need today.”

*Ruby O'Rourke, founder of
SAFE*

The platform's Machine Learning (ML) and Natural Language Processing (NLP) engine analyses these fragmented observations as a collective pattern across time and locations, and surfaces the children who may need attention before concerns would ordinarily prompt a formal report.

It was developed by Ruby O'Rourke over 12 years in partnership with CSIRO/National ICT Australia, the University of Queensland, and the Child Abuse Prevention Service (CAPS). The

platform has been used across more than 1,000 Australian child-facing services, with assessment records for more than 68,900 children across every state and territory, achieving a ~97 percent accuracy rating across government pilots.

SAFE is powered by machine learning, but is human-governed. It does not make child protection decisions but rather identifies signals that deserve a second look. Every behavioural signal preserved by SAFE is reviewed and validated by trained child protection professionals before any action is considered.

O'Rourke was driven to build this infrastructure after enduring forced adoption, sustained violence, and near-fatal abuse as a child, including being drowned by her father at the age of 10 and left for dead near a river in Melbourne, where passers-by revived her.

Throughout her childhood, O'Rourke communicated this abuse through behaviour changes, drawings, withdrawals, and silence as her only language to express what was happening, but no adult connected the signs.

Ruby believes Australia still lacks any type of coordinated early-warning infrastructure for children at risk, despite the prevalence of systems across other industries such as fraud detection, aviation safety, or natural disaster management, driving her to create it herself.

[Productivity Commission reports](#) show Australia still relies heavily on fragmented notes, thresholds, and hindsight when children are at risk, potentially contributing to our national child care trust crisis and deepening regulatory scrutiny.

Research on trauma in children also indicates that children typically communicate distress through behaviour long before they can express it in words, highlighting the need for a system that can capture this.

According to O'Rourke, the scale of the challenge and the absence of any equivalent early-warning infrastructure demonstrates the urgent need for a systems-led approach to prevent more children suffering in silence for years like she did.

Ruby O'Rourke, founder of SAFE, said: "We have built a world where frontline educators are expected to spot danger one incident at a time, when children are communicating it in patterns, in the only language available to them.

"I do not blame the adults who missed what was happening to me. They were doing what they had been trained to do, which was to look at individual incidents in isolation. The system they were operating within was never designed to connect those incidents into a picture, and children paid the price for that design failure for generations.

"A systems-led approach to early warning infrastructure is what I needed as a child, and it is what

children across this country still need today. We have already built extraordinarily sophisticated infrastructure like this for almost every other category of national risk - systems that detect financial fraud in real time, that model bushfire spread, that flag aviation anomalies before they become disasters.

"And yet for children, we have continued to rely on fragmented notes, overworked carers and educators, and the hope that someone will notice in time. So SAFE is my answer to all of this.

"After everything I lived through, building something that might have changed my own childhood, and that will change the childhoods of children we will never meet, is the most important work I have ever done."

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Please contact safeinc@thirdhemisphere.agency for any interview requests.

SAFE Inc (www.safe.inc) is child-safety early-warning infrastructure built to help organisations identify risk earlier, act sooner, and protect children before concerns escalate into harm. Developed over 12 years in live early childhood settings, SAFE transforms fragmented frontline observations into structured, actionable intelligence, giving child-facing organisations clearer visibility of emerging risks, patterns, and warning signs.

Machine-assisted and human-governed, SAFE is designed for high-stakes safeguarding environments where compliance alone is not enough. The platform has been used across more than 1,000 Australian child-facing services, with assessment records for more than 68,900 children across every state and territory. Its current footprint includes early childhood, community, government, and child-facing organisations, with the potential to extend into schools, sport, and broader human services.

Founded by Ruby O'Rourke, SAFE is building the missing intelligence layer between frontline concern and formal child-safety response. Its mission is to make child safety visible, actionable, and measurable so children can be seen earlier, systems can respond sooner, and organisations can move from reactive compliance to intelligence-led prevention.

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