

Safeguarding Policy

January 2024

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to protect children and adults at risk from any harm that may be caused through contact or work with the Commonwealth Foundation (the Foundation). This includes harm arising from:

- The conduct of staff or personnel associated with the Foundation
- The design and implementation of the Foundation's programmes and activities

'Harm' includes, but is not limited to:

- Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA)
- Child abuse
- Physical, emotional, and psychological abuse
- Abuse perpetrated both online and offline
- Financial abuse
- Modern slavery

The Foundation recognises that unequal power dynamics in relationships, particularly gender inequality and inequality related to age differentials, can lead to increased vulnerability. The Foundation commits to creating a safeguarding environment where potential risks are identified, considered, and minimised with clear processes and procedures in place for redress.

The policy lays out the commitments made by the Foundation and informs staff and associated personnel of their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding.

Scope

This policy applies to:

- i) Commonwealth Foundation staff
- ii) non-staff personnel working with the Foundation through an established arrangement such as interns, volunteers, mentors, Board members & Chairs, or other similar assignments
- iii) individual consultants and contractors with a contractual arrangement; and
- iv) partner organisations and grant recipients that deliver activities and services on behalf of the Foundation.

This policy does not cover:

- i) Sexual harassment in the workplace which is dealt with under the Dignity at Work Policy
- ii) Safeguarding concerns in the wider community not perpetrated by the Foundation or associated personnel

Policy statement

The Foundation believes that everyone we come into contact with, regardless of age, sex, gender identity, disability, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, or religion, has the right to be protected from all forms of harm, abuse, neglect and exploitation. At the Foundation everyone has a responsibility to promote the welfare of children and adults at risk of harm.

The Foundation will not tolerate abuse or exploitation by staff or associated personnel.

This policy addresses child safeguarding, adult safeguarding, and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

The Foundation commits to addressing safeguarding throughout its work, through the three pillars of **prevention**, **reporting** and **response**.

Definitions

Safeguarding is the responsibility that organisations have to make sure that their staff, operations, and programmes do no harm to children or adults at risk, that is that they do not expose children or adults at risk to the risk of harm and abuse, and that any concerns the organisation has about the safety of children or adults at risk within the communities in which they work, are reported to the appropriate authorities. For the purposes of this policy document, this includes sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment.

Please see the **glossary** at end of this document.

Accountability

Safeguarding is the responsibility of every staff member at the Foundation, however professional responsibility for safeguarding sits with the Director-General, Deputy Director-General, and programme managers, to ensure that there is a strong culture of safeguarding across the organisation. The Senior Office Manager is the designated Safeguarding Lead, with programme managers responsible for safeguarding issues that arise within their respective teams. The Safeguarding Lead will ensure that safeguarding policies, processes and systems are operating effectively across the Foundation and that staff receive appropriate training.

Prevention

Foundation responsibilities for prevention

- Ensure all staff and others working with the Foundation who fall within the scope of this policy as above have access to, are familiar with, and know their responsibilities within this policy
- Ensure all staff and others within scope of this policy adhere to the relevant Code of Conduct
- Design and undertake all its programmes and activities in a way that protects people from any risk of harm that may arise from their coming into contact with the Foundation. This includes the way in which information about individuals in our programmes is gathered, communicated, and stored
- Implement stringent safeguarding procedures when recruiting, managing and deploying staff and associated personnel
- Ensure staff receive training on safeguarding at a level commensurate with their role in the organisation
- Maintain a zero-tolerance policy to violence, exploitation and abuse
- Follow up on reports of safeguarding concerns promptly and according to due process

Staff responsibilities for prevention

Foundation staff and associated personnel are obliged to:

- Contribute to creating and maintaining an environment that prevents safeguarding violations and promotes the implementation of the Safeguarding Policy
- Report any concerns or suspicions regarding safeguarding violations by a Foundation staff member or associated personnel to the appropriate staff member.

Recruiting and engaging staff

All roles will be assessed for their level of potential contact with children or adults at risk, and where access is likely then DBS checks or police checks will be sought as appropriate. Prior to the Foundation confirming any offer of employment, all potential staff members will be required to make a safeguarding declaration and to disclose unspent convictions or cautions, and any prior issues of sexual or other misconduct, termination of past employment, criminal records, and concerns registered with government authorities regarding contact with children, if relevant to the role.

References will be sought as standard during recruitment and selection processes. If relevant to the role, reference requests will include a request to disclose any information or concerns about the prospective candidate working with children or adults at risk.

All consultants will be required to sign the Code of Conduct for Consultants and adhere to its safeguarding principles.

Grant partners

All grant or formal partnership agreements will include safeguarding clauses requiring partners to have measures in place to keep children and adults at risk safe from harm, and to

have systems in place for effective reporting.

Education and training

All new Foundation employees will receive an introduction to the safeguarding policy as part of their induction programme.

Communications and outreach

All staff are required to be vigilant when engaging in communications, outreach, or advocacy work which involves children or adults at risk. Activities which include taking photographs, film, or sound recordings of children must only be done with informed written consent from the individual and their parent/carer.

Staff must not upload images of children from work-related trips onto their private social media accounts unless they have received written informed consent from the subject/s and written approval from their relevant manager.

Safeguarding guidelines will be shared with participants of any Foundation online groups or discussion platforms so that all communications remain appropriate and do not cause harm to participants.

Events

Safeguarding issues must be considered and integrated when planning and risk assessing both in-person and online activities and events.

Reporting

The Foundation will ensure that safe, appropriate, accessible means of reporting safeguarding concerns are made available to staff and the communities we work with.

Any staff reporting concerns or complaints through formal whistleblowing channels (or if they request it) will be protected by the Foundation's Whistleblowing Policy.

The Foundation will also accept and investigate complaints from external sources such as members of the public, partners, and official bodies.

Staff who receive a disclosure from a child, young person, or adult at risk should respond with compassion and acceptance, let the person know what they will do next to keep them safe, and then contact the Safeguarding Lead or appropriate person to make a safeguarding report while otherwise maintaining confidentiality of the person disclosing.

In some contexts, involving the authorities can sometimes exacerbate the risk of harm. Staff should consult with partner organisations in country to get guidance and advice on what is the best way to respond.

How to report a safeguarding concern

Internally: staff members who have a concern relating to safeguarding should report it immediately to the Safeguarding Lead or their line manager. If that person is implicated in the concern, the staff member may report to any other appropriate senior manager or Director.

Externally: staff members who would prefer to raise a safeguarding concern using an external reporting services can contact SeeHearSpeakUp, the agency appointed by the Foundation to provide an external and independent confidential reporting service for raising concerns under this policy. The service is available 24/7 (www.seehearspeakup.co.uk):

- a) secure email report@seehearspeakup.co.uk or
- b) Phone from the UK: 0800 988 6818 or from elsewhere: +44 1224 379303
- c) secure web reporting: <https://www.seehearspeakup.co.uk/file-a-concern/new-report>

Concerns raised with SeeHearSpeakUp will be passed to the Authorised Receivers of Information, currently the Safeguarding Lead and the Deputy Director-General, or to the Foundation's Director-General if the concern involves these nominated Authorised Receivers of Information. SeeHearSpeakUp will not share with these Foundation personnel the personal details of the reporting staff member unless that individual has given permission to do so.

No retaliation

The Foundation will fully support and protect anyone, who in good faith, reports his or her concerns that a colleague is or may be abusing a child, young person, or adult at risk.

Response

The Foundation will follow up safeguarding reports and concerns according to policy and procedure, and legal and statutory obligations.

In the case that the safeguarding concern involves a child or young person, the Foundation will act in accordance with the best interests of the child or young person to ensure that they are safe from harm.

The Foundation will apply appropriate disciplinary measures to staff found in breach of policy.

The Foundation will offer support to survivors of harm caused by staff or associated personnel, regardless of whether a formal internal response is carried out (such as an internal investigation). Decisions regarding support will be guided by the survivor.

On receipt of a report of a safeguarding concern, the Safeguarding Lead will:

- Review the allegation and obtain more information from staff members and others as appropriate
- Make a written record of any incidents or concerns
- Assess the information quickly and ask for further information as appropriate.
- Discuss the incident with the Director-General or appropriate Senior Manager to agree on appropriate follow-up action, which may involve an internal investigation where a staff member is concerned
- Report to and consult with a child safeguarding representative of a local partner organisation, if appropriate
- If necessary, contact UK statutory safeguarding agencies, local authority's social care department or the police.

At times, the Foundation may be informed of concerns for the welfare of children and adults outside of the organisation's direct work, projects, activities, events or funding. The Foundation recognises that it has a responsibility to raise, report and refer such concerns to relevant services and/or authorities. Such concerns may be classified as protection concerns rather than safeguarding concerns.

The Foundation reserves the right to refer any matter regarding a staff member or volunteer to social services, the police, and/or the UK Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) as appropriate.

Confidentiality

It is essential that confidentiality is maintained at all stages of the process when dealing with safeguarding concerns. Information relating to the concern and subsequent case management should be shared on a need-to-know basis only, and should be kept secure at all times.

Reporting and review

The Chair of the Executive Committee of the Foundation's Board of Governors will be informed of all reports falling within this policy, with the identity of individuals protected as appropriate in accordance with this policy.

This policy will be kept under review and will be formally reviewed every three years. All updates to the policy will be circulated to staff and made available on the Foundation website.

Associated policies

- Code of Conduct
- Dignity at Work Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Confidentiality Policy
- Recruitment and Selection Policy

Glossary of Terms

Abuse: the violation of an individual's civil and human rights which causes significant harm. It can be physical, sexual, or emotional. It also includes acts of neglect or an omission to act. In all forms of abuse there are elements of emotional abuse. Other examples of abuse include inflicting physical harm such as hitting or misuse of medication, rape and sexual assault, exposure to sexual acts that are inappropriate for a child or without informed consent, emotional abuse such as threats, humiliation and harassment, exploitation, ignoring medical or physical needs, withholding of necessities of life such as food and heating. This list is not exhaustive.

Adult at risk: a person aged 18 or over whose physical, social, economic, environmental, and situational factors increase their susceptibility to difficulties and hazards which can then place them at risk of loss, insecurity and harm.

Child: a person below the age of 18.

Harm: psychological, physical and any other infringement of an individual's rights.

Psychological harm: emotional or psychological abuse, including (but not limited to) humiliating and degrading treatment such as bad name calling, constant criticism, belittling, persistent shaming, solitary confinement and isolation.

Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA): term used by the humanitarian and development community to refer to the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse of affected populations by staff or associated personnel.

Safeguarding: taking all reasonable steps to prevent harm, particularly sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment from occurring; to protect people, especially children and adults at risk, from that harm; and to respond appropriately when harm does occur.

This definition draws from our values and principles and shapes our culture. It pays specific attention to preventing and responding to harm from any potential, actual or attempted abuse of power, trust, or vulnerability, especially for sexual purposes.

Safeguarding applies consistently and without exception across our programmes, partners and staff. It requires proactively identifying, preventing and guarding against all risks of harm, exploitation and abuse and having mature, accountable and transparent systems for response, reporting and learning when risks materialise. Those systems must be survivor-centred and also protect those accused until proven guilty.

Safeguarding puts beneficiaries and affected persons at the centre of all we do.

Sexual abuse: actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.

Sexual exploitation: any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. This definition includes human trafficking and modern slavery.

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA): all forms of inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature perpetrated by staff associated with the Foundation's work against project participants.

Survivor: the person who has been abused or exploited. The term 'survivor' is often used in preference to 'victim' as it implies strength, resilience and the capacity to survive. However, it is the individual's choice how they wish to identify themselves.