



POLICY ON CHILD PROTECTION

“The fight against poverty stands a good chance only when children are freed from exploitation, violence and abuse. Unfortunately, there is no quick-fix solution: A child cannot be immunised against abuse. But there is something that can be done. We can begin by ensuring that all children live in a strong protective environment” (UNICEF 2005: 26-27).

Hands of Hope Foundation (HOH) affirms its commitment to the welfare of children and their protection from abuse and exploitation.

HOH upholds the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989), Article 19, which states “State Parties shall protect the child from all forms of physical and mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse.”

We believe that child protection is both a corporate and an individual responsibility. Every person who shares in the work of HOH (including staff, volunteers, contractors, and supporters) also shares in the responsibility to take every precaution to protect the children and families we serve, regardless of their gender, race, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, social background and culture.

The Challenge

Every year hundreds of millions of children suffer some sort of abuse. Some 1.2 million children are trafficked into exploitative work, many of them into commercial sexual exploitation. Orphaned, displaced, homeless and abandoned children are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse, as are children with disabilities. Children are also highly vulnerable during emergency and disaster situations (natural or conflict based), because they are often separated from their parents and other caregivers who would normally protect them from harm.

Child sex offenders may seek employment in children’s organisations or may volunteer to work in remote or vulnerable communities. Sex offenders may seek opportunities to perpetrate child abuse through paid or unpaid employment with organisations implementing development activities in circumstances that make children inherently vulnerable to such risks.

The risk of child abuse is elevated when activities bring workers into regular contact with children (for example, in disaster responses, primary and secondary education activities, women’s refuges and some health, infrastructure and

human rights activities). It is essential to ensure that risks of child abuse are managed effectively. It is also vital that organisations remain alert to child protection issues and have the capacity to manage them effectively.

The Policy Guiding Principles

The overall goal is:

To protect children from abuse of all kinds in the delivery of HOH assistance

Child Abuse is defined as 'all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse'.

The policy follows three guiding principles:

1. Zero tolerance of child abuse: Child abuse is not tolerated by HOH, nor is possession of or access to child pornography. HOH actively manages risks of child abuse associated with delivering assistance activities and trains its staff on their obligations.

HOH will not knowingly engage, directly or indirectly, anyone who poses an unacceptable risk to children, nor fund any individual or organisation that does not meet HOH's child protection compliance standards in their operations and activities.

2. Recognition of children's interests: Australia is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and HOH is committed to upholding the rights and obligations of the convention. HOH recognises that some children, such as children with disabilities and children living in areas impacted by disasters (natural or conflict based), are particularly vulnerable.

3. Risk management approach: While it is not possible to eliminate all risk of child abuse, careful management can reduce the incidence of child abuse associated with aid activities. This policy introduces risk assessments and treatments for a range of recognised risks to children.

The Policy

1. Staff Training – a key step in reducing risks to children when delivering assistance activities is to increase awareness of risks and how to manage them. HOH staff, volunteers, and directors will receive training by the Executive Officer or other qualified person on child protection issues and on their obligations under this policy during their induction, including mandatory reporting of concerns or allegations of child abuse. Training will also be received every time this policy is updated.

2. Internal recruitment and screening processes - HOH's internal recruitment processes employs screening measures to ensure inappropriate persons are not employed as follows:

Advertising: Our commitment to child protection will be clearly stated in recruitment advertisements.

Police Record Checks – All applicants for paid or voluntary work, where considered appropriate given the nature of the task and potential for contact with children and/or handling of funds, will be asked to undertake a police record check as part of the application process. Police record checks will be carried out for all permanent and long-term contract staff, appointees and Board members. A police record check will be carried out for anyone involved in assistance projects as a representative of HOH. All staff or others are required to undergo a further police record check if their previous one is more than three years old.

Application forms – When applications forms are used, reference will be made to child protection policy and procedures. They will include questions about criminal convictions and any other information of which the organisation needs to be aware.

Interview – Our policy on child protection will be discussed openly and comments invited.

Reference checks – At least two work-based phone checks will be carried out.

Training – Staff, supporters or others connected with HOH are to undertake an induction in the form of a workshop or meeting, to inform and educate regarding appropriate behaviours when interacting with children. They will also be educated in the appropriate procedure to follow should a situation occur where there is abuse or suspected abuse.

3. Use of communication systems – HOH has zero tolerance of use of its communication systems to access child pornography. Using HOH systems to access child pornography is dealt with promptly, including reporting to relevant law enforcement agencies, as appropriate.

4. Risk management procedures – risks of child abuse are assessed as part of the initial risk assessment for assistance activities. Procedures are developed to ensure these risks are assessed efficiently and that effective risk management strategies are in place. Risks to children identified during initial risk assessments are managed throughout assistance activity implementation.