

ATTACHMENT 7

Child Protection Policy





AS4AK CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Introduction

AS4AK raises money for the advancement of children in need in Africa.

Since 2007 AS4AK has supported a children's centre in Accra, Ghana operated by a funded partner organisation, BASICS. For this significant project, AS4AK is assisting with funding to construct a large multi-functional education facility, with the objective of providing an after school academic and vocational program centre where children can incorporate academics, visual arts, music and dance, sports, sewing and computer work as part of their education.

As AS4AK funds projects that exclusively support children, the protection of all children associated with our funded projects is paramount. This policy sets out our commitment to ensuring the protection of children by our funded partner organisations.

Commitment to Child Protection

We recognise that many of the children supported by our funded projects have been abused and neglected. We take our responsibilities to keep them safe while they are in care of our funded partner organisations, very seriously. We have a duty of care to the children and their families that covers all aspects of the way we do our business. We support the rights of children and will act without hesitation to ensure a child safe environment is maintained.

AS4AK is committed to the protection of children from harm, abuse and exploitation. Children have a right to survival, development, protection and participation as stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. AS4AK upholds these rights and requires funded partner organisations to similarly support these rights.

AS4AK takes its duty of care seriously and will aim at all times to ensure the safest possible programs and environments for children. This will be achieved by identifying and managing risks that may lead to harm.

The Purpose of the Policy

We have developed this child protection and child safety policy so that our funded partner organisations are aware of our commitment and understand our expectation of their responsibilities for keeping children safe.

The AS4AK Child Protection policy has been developed to provide a practical guide to prevent child abuse in funded programs.

This Child Protection policy:

- aims to educate funded partner organisations about child abuse and promote a child safe and child friendly culture where everyone is committed to keeping children safe;
- aims to create an open and aware environment where concerns for the safety and wellbeing of a child can be raised and managed in a fair and just manner which protects the rights of all;
- provides guidance on how to respond to concerns and allegations of child abuse;
- provides guidance to funded partner organisations on how to work respectfully and effectively with children.

AS4AK funded partners are obliged to adhere to local and international child protection criminal laws which prohibit the abuse and exploitation of children. These include local laws and international laws and Conventions in relation to all forms of child abuse and child exploitation, including: child sex tourism, child sex trafficking, child labour and child pornography.

Guiding Principles

AS4AK believes that any form of child abuse and exploitation is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the universal foundation for child protection. The fundamental principle of the Convention is that children have their own indivisible rights.

AS4AK believes that all children have a right to be safe at all times and we have an obligation to provide safe and protective services and environments.

AS4AK recognises its duty of care to take all reasonable steps to ensure that children are safe from harm

AS4AK will take proactive steps to create child safe and child friendly programs

Acknowledgement of adherence to this policy is a mandatory requirement for all organisations accepting funding from AS4AK.

Funded partner organisations will ensure that all staff and others are made aware of this Child Protection policy and their responsibilities.

All decisions regarding the welfare and protection of children are made based on the best interests of the child principle. "Best interests of the child" refers to decisions where the child receives maximum benefit possible from services provided and that the positive impact of any course of action outweigh any negative impacts.

Where possible, children will be consulted in the development of child protection measures adopted by our partner organisations and the implementation of child safe practices. Children and young people involved in our funded projects should, where possible, be given opportunities to express their views on matters affecting them.

AS4AK believes that all children should be equally protected and assisted regardless of their gender, nationality, religious or political beliefs, family background, economic status, physical or mental health or criminal backgrounds.

CONTEXT

Child abuse is a global problem that affects both boys and girls. It has existed since the beginning of time and is deeply rooted in cultural, economic and social practices. Children are abused physically, sexually, emotionally and through neglect. Children are forced to endure the most hazardous forms of child labour including sweat shops and prostitution. In some countries boys and girls are kidnapped and forced into armed conflict as soldiers. In many countries children experience severe corporal punishment in schools. Children living in poverty are more at risk of child abuse and exploitation.

Whilst most child abuse occurs within families and communities, children also experience abuse and exploitation in organisations which provide them with support and services. Experience has found that physical, emotional abuse and neglect in child focussed organisations and institution is less systematic and usually un-planned. It is usually the result of poor conditions, bad work practices and negligent managements. However child sexual abuse in organisations is often planned and premeditated.

Over the last decade many Western countries have enacted tougher laws against child sex offending and many child focussed organisations have implemented tighter screening practices for the staff and volunteers. These improved child protection measures have led to increasing number of child sex offenders moving overseas to seek work in developing countries and development programs. They will seek work in countries with inadequate child protection laws and law enforcement as well as countries where children and their families are vulnerable to exploitation. It was widely reported during recent responses to natural disasters and emergencies that people who pose a risk to children (e.g. convicted child sex offenders) applied for positions in programs that brought them into contact with vulnerable children.

While there are examples of children being sexually abused by foreign offenders there are also numerous examples of local staff and volunteers sexually abusing child in aid and development programs. In 2002 widespread sexual abuse and exploitation of children by aid workers was exposed by the media in West African refugee camps. It is alleged that 67 aid workers from more than 40 agencies were trading shelter, education, food and medicine for sexual favours. Most of the allegations involved male national staff who traded humanitarian commodities for sex with girls under 18. It is believed that this information had been known to the agencies for some time.

Family life in Africa is strong and matriarchal. AS4AK recognises the first responsibility for the safety of children lies with the families and they should be involved.

AS4AK is aware of this context and our protocols for working with funded partner organisations will take the risks into account.

Code of Conduct

Funded partner organisations are responsible for maintaining a professional role with children, which means establishing and maintaining clear professional boundaries that serve to protect everyone from misunderstandings or violation of the professional relationship.

Funded partner organisations will be expected to screen staff and volunteers using such screening methods as may be available to ensure so far as possible that all staff and volunteers are suitable for safe working with children.

All staff and volunteers at funded partner organisations are expected to conduct themselves as a positive role model to children.

They are expected to adhere to a code of conduct which includes:

- Treating all children and young people in our program with respect.
- Provide a welcoming, inclusive and safe environment for all children, young people, parents, staff and volunteers.
- Respecting cultural differences.
- Encouraging open communication between all children, young people, parents, staff and volunteers and have children and young people participate in the decisions that affect them.
- Reporting any concerns of child abuse.
- At all times being transparent in actions and whereabouts.
- Taking responsibility for ensuring they are accountable and do not place themselves in positions where there is a risk of adverse allegations being made.
- Self-assessing their behaviours, actions, language and relationships with children.
- Speaking up when they observe concerning behaviours of colleagues.

Funded organisations will be required to describe the procedures for notification of instances of child abuse according to the relevant local law.

Funded partner organisation's staff and volunteers will not:

- Engage in behaviour that is intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade children.
- Use inappropriate, offensive or discriminatory language when speaking with a child or young person.
- Do things of a personal nature that a child can do for him/herself, such as assistance with toileting or changing clothes.
- Take children to their own home/hotel or sleep in the same room or bed as a child.
- Smack , hit or physically assault children.
- Develop sexual relationships with children or relationships with children that may be deemed exploitative or abusive.
- Behave provocatively or inappropriately with a child.
- Condone or participate in, behaviour of children which is illegal, unsafe or abusive.
- Act in a way that shows unfair and differential treatment of children.
- Photograph or video a child without the consent of the child and his/her parents or guardians.

- Hold, kiss, cuddle or touch a child in an inappropriate, unnecessary or culturally insensitive way.
- Seek to make contact and spend time with any child or young person outside the program times.
- Use our computers, mobile phones, video and digital cameras inappropriately and not for the purpose of exploiting or harassing children.
- Hire minors as domestic labour.

In addition, funded partner organisation's volunteers and visitors will be supervised at all times and will not be left alone with children.

Employment of AS4AK Staff and Volunteers

Staff

All applicants for positions will be required to provide a detailed application for a position. Applicants for positions working directly with children will require the highest level of screening. This will involve a police check if possible. Reference checks will be made. Applicants will be assessed for their understanding of children and their motivation for wanting to work with children.

All staff will be required to provide proof of their identity using original documents.

All positions will be subject to a probationary period depending on the length of the contract.

Issues relating to child protection will be included in staff performance reviews.

Volunteers

Volunteers and visitors will not be left alone with children. They must be supervised.

Volunteers are expected to observe similar standards of behaviour and ethical conduct to that required of staff. They will sign a charter which would include:

- To act within the law, be honest and fair, respect other people (including students) and work to the best standard of your ability.
- Appreciate that teachers have a special duty of care for students that can not be delegated or transferred to others. Appreciate also that the principal is the spokesperson for the school
- Appreciate that students have rights and aspirations. Treat students with dignity and respect.
- Observe confidentiality in respect of all information gained through your participation as a volunteer. For example, volunteers should not discuss nor disclose personal information about students, staff or student's parents /carers to others.
- Accept and follow directions from the principal and seek guidance through clarification where you are uncertain of tasks or requirements.
- Observe practices which keep children and young people safe including the proper boundaries for disciplining children.

- Report any instance of abuse to the principal.

For children

Students are trained in respectful behaviour to each other.

They will be made aware that they are respected and will not be subject to any unnecessary discipline or abuse.

General

If a staff member or volunteer of a funded partner organisation becomes aware that a child is being abused outside the school environment, they will immediately notify the appropriate local authorities.

Websites

No pictures of children will be placed on any funded partner organisation website other than official promotional material which has been approved by AS4AK and the relevant funded partner organisation.

DEFINITIONS

Duty of Care

Duty of Care is a common law concept that refers to the responsibility of the organisation to provide children with an adequate level of level of protection level of protection against harm. It is the duty of the organisation to protect children from all reasonably foreseeable risk of injury.

Child and young person

A child or young person is regarded to be any person under the age of 18 years, unless a nation's laws recognise adulthood earlier.

Child Protection

Is the term used to describe the responsibilities and activities undertaken to prevent or stop children being abused or maltreated.

Child Abuse

Abuse happens to male and female children of all ages, ethnicity and social backgrounds, abilities, sexual orientation, religious beliefs and political persuasion. Child abuse includes physical, sexual, emotional, neglect, bullying, child labour and domestic violence.

Both boys and girls can be the victims of abuse, and abuse can be inflicted on a child by both men and women, as well as by young people themselves.

In some cases, professionals and other adults working with children in a position of trust also abuse children.

Physical abuse

This occurs when a person purposefully injures or threatens to injure a child or young person.

This may take the form of slapping, punching, shaking, kicking, burning, shoving or grabbing.

The injury may take the form of bruises, cuts, burns or fractures.

Emotional abuse

This occurs when a child is repeatedly rejected or frightened by threats. This may involve name calling, being put down or continual coldness from parent or caregiver, to the extent that it affects the child's physical and emotional growth.

Neglect

Neglect is the persistent failure or the deliberate denial to provide the child with clean water, food, shelter, sanitation or supervision or care to the extent that the child's health and development are placed at risk.

Sexual abuse

This occurs when a child or young person is used by an older or bigger child, adolescent or adult for his or her own sexual stimulation or gratification - regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally.

These can be contact or non-contact acts, including threats and exposure to pornography.

Child-Sex Tourism

ECPAT International defines child-sex tourism as:

'...the commercial sexual exploitation of children by men or women who travel from one place to another, usually from a richer country to one that is less developed, and there engage in sexual acts with children, defined as anyone aged under 18 years of age.' (ECPAT International, 2006)

Bullying

Bullying is the inappropriate use of power by an individual or group, with an intent to injure either physically or emotionally. It is usually deliberate and repetitive. The bullying may be physical or psychological (verbal and non-verbal).

- Physically, bullying includes pushing, hitting, punching, kicking or any other action causing hurt or injury.
- Verbal bullying includes insults, taunts, threats and ridicules.
- Psychological bullying includes physical intimidation and ostracism.

Exposure to Domestic Violence

Domestic violence occurs when children and young people witness or experience the chronic domination, coercion, intimidation and victimisation of one person by another by physical, sexual or emotional means within intimate relationships (adapted from the Australian Medical Association definition).

Particularly vulnerable children

Child abuse takes place not only within the family environment, but also outside the family, including institutions, at work, on the streets, in war zones and emergencies.

Children in emergencies

Children in emergencies are especially vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. In an emergency or crisis situation, children are extremely vulnerable when they become part of a displaced or traumatised population.