

# Safeguarding policy

**N.B.** Where either 'children', 'young people' or 'vulnerable people' are mentioned all three are usually intended.

## Introduction

### 1.1 Statement of Intent

Durham Community Action values and encourages the involvement of people who may be vulnerable, both in its own work and in the work of other organisations. Through its *Child and Adult Protection Policy*, Durham Community Action is committed to promoting their well-being and enjoyment and protecting their health, safety and general welfare while in the company or care of Durham Community Action staff or volunteers.

Vulnerable people may be involved with Durham Community Action either as volunteers or as general service users. As a membership organisation Durham Community Action also has members who work with vulnerable people. In promoting this policy Durham Community Action is keen to take reasonable steps to:

- Provide a welcoming, secure and comfortable environment for the benefit of vulnerable people;
- Keep them safe from harm while in the care of its staff or volunteers;
- Comply with relevant statutory requirements;
- Support and protect the interests of staff and volunteers who have contact with, or access to, children, young people and others who may be vulnerable.
- Promote good practice within its membership

Durham Community Action will also work in partnership with others, including the Durham Safeguarding Children and Young People's Board and the Adult Protection Committee to ensure that good practice is implemented.

### 1.2 Content

This policy has been compiled as a reference guide to Durham Community Action policy and practices affecting vulnerable people. To help clarify the content, the document has been broken down into:

**Policy:** the guiding principles, definitions of those affected and the manner of implementation

**Guidelines:** instructions for best practice based on the guiding principles, which must be followed.

Although detailed, this policy is not intended to be comprehensive and as such does not attempt to deal with all the issues of working with children, young people and others who may be vulnerable. Instead they are intended as a practical guide for staff and volunteers involved with them.

## Scope of the policy

### 2.1 Durham Community Action personnel affected

This policy applies to all employees and volunteers (including Board members), and others representing Durham Community Action who have contact with children, young people and vulnerable people.

## **2.2 Children, young people and other vulnerable people affected**

In law a child is anyone under the age of 18. However older children, for example teenagers, may prefer to be called young people.

A vulnerable adult is anyone aged 18 or over who is, or maybe, unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation. They also need, or may be in need, of extra support such as community care because they are elderly and frail or someone with a physical or learning disability or someone with a mental health problem.

It should be recognised that people who are vulnerable are able to cope in many situations, so sensitivity and common sense should be exercised.

## **2.3 Activities affected**

Activities and involvement within the scope of this policy include:

- Interviewing vulnerable volunteers or service users,
- Holding meetings with vulnerable volunteers or service users;
- Supporting and working with vulnerable people volunteering in Durham Community Action Working with vulnerable people in a residential setting;
- Working with vulnerable people during Durham Community Action advice sessions;
- Working with vulnerable people during training sessions;
- Interviewing families with children;
- Organising events or activities which involve children, young people and vulnerable people.
- Any other activity that might involve substantial, unsupervised access to children, young people or vulnerable people;
- Applications for membership of the organisation from groups that work with children, young people and vulnerable people.

## **Guiding principles**

3.1 In welcoming and working with people who are vulnerable Durham Community Action aims to:

- 1) Provide a friendly welcome for them and promote their general welfare;
- 2) Recognise their rights as individuals and treat them with dignity and respect;
- 3) Consistently apply fair and objective methods of selecting employees, volunteers and contractors;
- 4) Plan activities involving vulnerable people with care to minimise risks to their health and safety;
- 5) Raise awareness of the dangers to which vulnerable people may be susceptible;
- 6) Develop appropriate procedures for responding to accidents, incidents and alleged or suspected harm.
- 7) Promote good practice amongst its members in relation to safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults

Guidelines for good practice under each of the six points listed above are set out in Part 2.

## **Implementation of the policy**

### **4.1 Distribution of copies**

Full copies of this policy will be distributed as a detailed reference guide to:

- Board members
- Staff
- Volunteers

The policy will be included in induction packs for all Durham Community Action Board members and in staff handbooks. Durham Community Action volunteers will receive a summary copy of this policy within their induction packs.

### **4.2 Training**

A training programme to support the policy and good practice will be provided to appropriate Board members, staff and volunteers.

New Board members, staff and volunteers will receive training as part of their induction into Durham Community Action.

Durham Community Action will also assist its members and other local organisations working with children, young people and vulnerable adults to access introductory and advanced training in safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable people.

Guidelines for good practice under each of the six points listed above are set out in Part 2.

## **General conditions**

### **1: Welfare paramount**

The fundamental principle, both in law and good practice, is that whenever the interests of a vulnerable person are involved, their welfare must always be paramount. Durham Community Action recognises this, and all staff and volunteers should seek to implement this principle.

### **2: People as individuals**

#### **2.1 People as individuals**

Durham Community Action recognises the need to be aware of each person's needs and capabilities when working with vulnerable volunteers or other service users.

Where practical, time should be taken to get to know each person individually in order to make their experience with Durham Community Action more rewarding. It also enables Durham Community Action to be more responsive should a vulnerable person be suffering harm.

#### **2.2 Children and young people's rights**

The Children Act 1989 gives children and young people certain rights, including the right to be listened to and to talk about any worries they may have, as well as the right to be protected if they are in danger, or at risk of harm.

Children, young people and other service users who may be vulnerable should feel able to approach a Durham Community Action representative for help, without fear of recrimination. As a result, they should be better able to protect themselves.

### **3: Recruitment and Selection of employees and volunteers**

Durham Community Action works from the premise that anyone who applies to work or volunteer with Durham Community Action may have the potential to cause harm, whether they are a member of staff, a volunteer, service user, or other.

In the light of this Durham Community Action has in place thorough recruitment and selection procedures for positions, both paid and unpaid, which could involve unsupervised access to any vulnerable groups. This probably the most effective way of assessing a person's suitability, and acts as a deterrent to potential abusers.

#### **3.1 New appointments**

Durham Community Action will rigorously apply the following procedures with applicants for all employee or volunteer posts that involve substantial unsupervised access to vulnerable people.

#### **3.2 Job / task description**

A job description will be drawn up for all employees within Durham Community Action. Volunteers will have a volunteer task description outlining their role and general duties.

Person specifications will also be drawn up for all Durham Community Action employees and volunteers will have a list of 'particular skills/qualities required' for any opportunities which involve working with children, young people and vulnerable adults.

#### **3.3 Application form**

All applicants will be asked to complete an Employee Application Form/Volunteer Application Form as applicable.

These ask applicants to provide:

- Details of previous experience with the relevant client group, either voluntary or paid;
- Details of two referees, one of which should be familiar with the applicant's previous experience of work with the relevant client group;
- Details of any 'unspent' convictions;
- Details of 'spent' convictions, where the role necessitates a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) disclosure
- Consent for a DBS check to be undertaken.

These forms are returned to Durham Community Action Executive Director in the case of applications for paid posts, or the appropriate staff member for applicants to voluntary posts. To protect confidentiality these forms will be kept in a locked drawer or cabinet.

#### **3.4 Parental Consent forms**

If anyone under the age of 18 applies to become a volunteer, then a consent form should be completed by the parent/guardian. This form will request details of any medical conditions or special needs.

### **3.5 Interview**

Applicants for paid posts within Durham Community Action involving work with vulnerable people will be interviewed by at least two Durham Community Action employees/Board members. Ideally one of these will have experience of working with the client group.

All applicants for voluntary positions will be interviewed by a minimum of two staff members. Ideally one of these will have experience of working with the client group.

In both instances the interview will explore information contained in the Application Form. Particular care will be taken over any previous job/volunteering history connected with vulnerable people and why the applicant left. Any gaps in work history will be investigated and motives for working with the client group discussed carefully.

If there are concerns about the identity of an applicant they will be asked to provide two forms of identification, for example a driving licence, passport, or other form of identification should be checked.

### **3.6 References**

All applicants, whether paid or voluntary, will be asked to provide names of two independent referees. References will be sought before the applicant is formally offered a position within Durham Community Action.

For potential employee's references should be provided by an ex-employer or professional person who can comment, from first-hand knowledge, on the applicant's experience and suitability for working with children, young people and vulnerable people.

Wherever possible individuals applying for voluntary positions within Durham Community Action should also be asked to provide professional references. In instances where this may not be possible a character reference is acceptable. However, this should not be a member of their immediate family.

Written references will be read carefully for ambiguities or hidden meanings. If there is anything that raises doubts about the applicant, the referee will be contacted to discuss the matter further.

All applicants will be made aware that any appointment, whether paid or voluntary, is subject to satisfactory references. References will be treated confidentially and stored securely.

### **3.7 Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks**

Employees who will have substantial, unsupervised contact with children, young people and vulnerable people will be DBS checked. Forms should be completed by the applicant and a copy of the returned check kept by Durham Community Action's HR Manager in accordance with data protection procedures.

Volunteers who may be working with vulnerable people must not be left unsupervised. They should also be checked by the DBS to assess their suitability where appropriate.

All applicants should be made aware that any appointment, whether paid or voluntary, is subject to satisfactory DBS checks and references. Information gathered through this process will be treated in the strictest confidence.

### **3.8 Probation / settling-in period**

For employees, written confirmation of appointment will state that the position is conditional upon the successful completion of a specified probation period, usually six months. Occasionally appointments may be short term in which case the person should be supervised as if undertaking a probation period.

During the probation period a new employee should be supervised closely, especially if they have never worked with vulnerable people before. They must not be left unsupervised or be working alone with a vulnerable person/people during their probationary period.

At the end of the probationary period a formal review should be carried out and written confirmation given that this has been carried out.

A probation period is also recommended for volunteers as they too will require time to settle into a new role and ensure they are suited for the role and responsibilities. At the end of the probationary period there should be an informal review.

During the probationary period volunteers should not be working in an unsupervised setting or working alone with anyone who is vulnerable.

### **3.9 Irrelevant matters**

Certain information revealed by the selection procedures may be immaterial to the prevention of harm to vulnerable people. Assurances will be given that information will be dealt with confidentially.

An applicant may disclose, for example, a minor offence that may have no relevance to their current lifestyle or behaviour. Having a conviction should not automatically eliminate someone without first considering its relevance and age, whether there is a pattern of convictions and if their circumstances have changed since the offence was committed.

### **3.10 New and existing appointments**

All new and existing employees, Board members and volunteers will receive a copy of this policy. This will be included in the Staff Handbook and Volunteer's Induction Pack, along with other relevant policies and procedures.

Awareness training will be offered to employees, Board members and volunteers in relation to this policy.

### **3.11 Support, supervision and personal development**

All employees will receive regular formal support and supervision sessions with their line manager. For those employees who are working with vulnerable people, time will be taken to explore their working practice and to check that this complies with the good practice as defined in this policy.

Support and supervision sessions and appraisals will give either party the opportunity to identify training needs and discuss any areas of concern in relation to the employee's work with children, young people and vulnerable adults.

Support and supervision sessions and appraisals will be recorded in writing and both parties will be given a copy.

Volunteers will also receive regular, informal support and supervision from the designated staff member.

This should provide both parties with the opportunity to discuss any concerns or problems the volunteer may be experiencing and to identify any training needs they may have.

## **4: Planning activities to minimise harm**

### **4.1 Risk assessments and other general considerations**

Health and safety requirements in accordance with Durham Community Action policy and practice must be carefully considered when planning and carrying out activities involving people who may be

vulnerable. Durham Community Action Health and Safety Policy applies to volunteers as well as employees.

All employees and volunteers must carry out thorough risk assessments prior to undertaking events/activities with children, young people and vulnerable people. By doing this any problems can be addressed before any accident or harm takes place. Risk assessments should consider:

- The suitability of the task to be tackled/activities to be undertaken;
- The suitability of premises, tools and equipment;
- The provision of appropriate clothing (e.g. wet weather clothing, footwear);
- The provision of safety information to all staff, volunteers and participants;
- The provision of first-aid facilities;
- Communications and emergency procedures, including action in the event of an accident;
- Fire precautions;
- The provision of appropriate training.
- Whether non- Durham Community Actions employees/volunteers will have access to the client group

## **4.2 Planning and supervision**

Durham Community Action guidelines on appropriate planning and supervision need to be observed to reduce the risk of harm. This applies whenever an employee or volunteer works with people who may be vulnerable (whether or not carers remain ultimately responsible).

- Activities involving vulnerable people should be carefully planned to ensure the maximum protection is provided at all times;
- Particular attention should be paid to health and safety requirements as outlined in Durham Community Action Health and Safety Policy, the Violence at Work Policy and the relevant section of these guidelines;
- Those who are involved in an activity organised by Durham Community Action should be supervised and supported wherever possible, ensuring that the appropriate ratio of employees is present. This will depend on the nature of the activity, the number and age range of the people involved and whether anyone involved has any special needs;
- A common-sense approach should be adopted regarding the supervision of vulnerable adults. Where deemed appropriate, vulnerable adults may be left unsupervised. However, each situation should be judged on its own merit. At all times staff should know where they are and what they are doing;
- Wherever possible at least two workers (paid or unpaid) should be present to protect workers from allegations of abuse and ensure that the correct ratios of child to adult are met;
- Consent forms should be completed by the parent/guardian of anyone who is under 18 or particularly vulnerable and who wishes to participate in a residential, or in a particularly hazardous activity, (e.g. abseiling).

## **4.3 Code of conduct**

Some actions, no matter how well intentioned, may be misinterpreted and leave all parties vulnerable. The following is a quick reference guide to appropriate behaviour when working with those who may be vulnerable.

Employees and volunteers should:

- Remember they are a role model and provide an example for those they work with to follow;
- Bear in mind that some actions, no matter how well-intentioned, may be easily misinterpreted and so leave all parties vulnerable;
- Be alert to any potential harm or inappropriate behaviour by people who are vulnerable;
- Aim for separate sleeping accommodation for males and females during residential activities;
- Ensure they have adequate training if supervising sports or games (e.g. football);
- Respect individuals rights to privacy;

- Provide access for vulnerable people to discuss any concerns they may have;
- Speak to their line-manager

Employees and volunteers should not:

- Arrange to see vulnerable people in circumstances unconnected with their work;
- Be left alone for substantial periods of time with anyone who is vulnerable. Where one-to-one work is necessary they should inform another staff member where they are going, with whom, for and how long. They should report in at end of the meeting if not returning to the office after the visit.
- Permit abusive behaviour by others or engage in it themselves (e.g. ridiculing and bullying);
- Show favouritism to or become too closely associated with an individual. Nor should they get drawn into inappropriate attention-seeking behaviour (e.g. crushes);
- Allow or engage in suggestive remarks, gestures or touching of a kind which could be misunderstood;
- Promise to keep secrets;
- Jump to conclusions about others without checking facts;
- Do anything which might undermine Durham Community Action good reputation for providing a safe environment;
- Hesitate to share concerns on any of these matters with the appropriate Durham Community Action representative.

#### **4.4 Durham Community Action's Membership Procedures**

At the discretion of the Board of Trustees, organisation without a policy in place may be granted membership status subject to their producing and presenting appropriate policies to Durham Community Action within a six-month period.

### **5: Raising awareness of dangers**

#### **5.1 Types of harm**

- Physical – where vulnerable people receive physical hurt or injury;
- Neglect – where adults fail to care for vulnerable people and to protect them from danger, seriously impairing their health, well-being or development;
- Emotional – where vulnerable people are harmed by a constant lack of love and affection or intimidated by threats or taunts;
- Sexual – where vulnerable people are encouraged or forced to observe or participate in any form of sexual activity by adults or children. This also includes the use of sexualised language.
- Financial (applies to adults only) – where an individual's funds or resources are being inappropriately used by a third person. It included withholding money or inappropriate use of a person's money or property.
- Discriminatory (applies to adults only) – this is when values, beliefs or culture result in a misuse of power that denies mainstream opportunities to some groups or individuals. This denial is motivated by prejudice and discrimination.
- Institutional (applies to adults only) – this occurs in group settings such as residential, nursing or day care. and involves the mistreatment of an individual by a regime or individual within an institution. It can include inadequate care, neglect or poor professional practice.

Common sense should be relied upon to recognise the warning signs. However, it is essential to rely on facts rather than opinions and not jump to conclusions.

#### **5.2 Who can harm**

An abuser is often known to the person being abused, whether a parent, sibling, other relative, family friend or neighbour. Not only adults can harm. Children and young people can also suffer abuse from their peers. Sometimes the abuser may be an adult who holds a position of authority over a young

person. There is no certain way of identifying a would-be abuser. They can be people of any background and do not appear different from the rest of society.

## **6: Responding to accidents, incidents and harm**

### **6.1 Responding to accidents / incidents**

In the event of an accident to an individual, first-aid should be administered, preferably by a trained first-aid-er and the situation managed to ensure the welfare of the individual and the safety of others. The emergency services should be called for where appropriate.

An Accident/Incident Report Form must be completed. Where appropriate the circumstances to the accident should be investigated to establish the cause and to identify what remedial action should be taken to minimise the possibility of a recurrence.

Fatal accidents, major injuries and dangerous occurrences must be notified without delay to the appropriate line manager, after alerting the appropriate authorities.

Where an accident/incident involving vulnerable people has been narrowly avoided, employees and volunteers should detail its nature and pass the information on to the appropriate line manager or Durham Community Action's Health and Safety Officer.

### **6.2 Responding to alleged or suspected harm**

#### **If a person wants to talk about harm**

If a vulnerable person wants to talk about harm, it is essential that the employee or volunteer:

- Listens carefully to what the person says, keeping calm and looking at them directly;
- Lets them know that to help them someone else must be told;
- Reassures them that they are not to blame;
- Is aware that they may have been threatened;
- Does not push them for information;
- Reassures them that they are right to talk about it and what they say is accepted;
- Lets them know what will happen next and undertakes to let them know the outcome.

#### **Dealing with alleged or suspected harm**

If a person who may be vulnerable has talked about harm, or harm is suspected, the employee or volunteer **must** do two things:

1. Write down accurately what the person has said using the proforma for recording disclosures or signs of abuse witnessed (see 1).
2. Notify the appropriate Durham Community Action representative, giving them the completed proforma/written information.

It is vitally important that employees and volunteers notify the appropriate Durham Community Action representative, so that they can then inform and liaise with the relevant authorities (Social Services Child Protection Unit or Police Family Liaison Officer). Durham Community Action representatives are, in the first instance the Executive Director and in their absence a member of the Senior Management Team.

Where a nominated representative is unavailable, and the vulnerable person is in imminent danger, employees or volunteers should contact the relevant authorities themselves. They should then inform the representative as soon as possible on their return.

Dealing with incidents of harm is difficult for any individual so employees and volunteers should not:

- Act alone;
- Start to investigate; or
- Make any assumptions about the persons involved.

Any employee or volunteer who is involved in a disclosure of any kind may feel that they need to speak to a child care professional to reassure themselves that they have done the right thing. The NSPCC operates a 24-hour help line for anyone concerned about a child or young person. It is primarily for use by adults and can be used anonymously: 0800 800500.

### **6.3 Dealing with alleged or suspected harm involving an employee or Durham Community Action volunteer**

Where it is suspected that a Durham Community Action employee or volunteer may be involved in the abuse, employees and volunteers should let the appropriate Durham Community Action representative know as soon as possible. The employee or volunteer should be immediately removed from access to vulnerable people but be assured that no presumptions have been made and that the allegation will be fully investigated by the relevant authorities. Where it is suspected that the Executive Director or staff member may be involved in the abuse, employees and volunteers should let the alternative Durham Community Action representative know as soon as possible

If gross misconduct is reasonably suspected, it may be appropriate to ask them not to attend the office or property at all while the matter is under investigation (suspended on full pay if an employee). Once the relevant authorities enquiry has concluded, the Durham Community Action Board should decide what further action is appropriate in conjunction with Durham Community Action other relevant policies. (For example, policies on Grievance, Discipline and Complaints for employees and Durham Community Action Volunteer Policy for volunteers).

### **6.4 Accurate notes**

Full and accurate notes (i.e. word for word) must be written as soon as possible, using Durham Community Action pro forma if available Where a pro forma is unavailable notes should include:

- The date and time of the alleged incident or disclosure;
- The parties involved;
- What was alleged; and
- The action taken.

Records should be as accurate as possible as they may be invaluable to the investigation and used as evidence in court. A copy will be kept by the appropriate Durham Community Action representative.

### **6.5 Confidentiality and sensitivity**

When dealing with personal and emotive details of this nature, confidentiality must be maintained at all times since the allegations or suspicions may prove to be unfounded. Notes and records should be kept in a secure place and shared only with those who need to know about the incident or allegation.

A sensitive approach should be taken with the accused to explain why an investigation has to take place and to reassure them that the matter will be handled discreetly and even-handedly by Durham Community Action.

No assumptions of guilt should be made unless and until an actual conviction has been obtained in the proceedings. Impartial contact will be maintained by a nominated Durham Community Action's staff member during this process.

### **6.6 Reporting Suspected Abuse to the Authorities**

- I It is not the responsibility of Durham Community Action to investigate any allegations of abuse, only to ensure that the appropriate agencies are informed.

- During Office Hours
- 2 The Durham Community Action representative is responsible for alerting social services. They should contact during normal working hours (9-5.30pm)
  - 3 Where the allegations or concerns are with regard to another professional who is not an employee of Durham Community Action they should also be shared with the Durham Community Action representative and the matter referred to the appropriate agencies.
- Out of Hours
- 4 If you need to contact someone out of hours regarding a concern or to make an emergency referral for either children, young people or vulnerable adults then contact the relevant Duty Social Worker.

Guidelines for good practice under each of the six points listed above are set out in Part 2.

## Summary

Durham Community Action has a detailed policy and set of guidelines on working with children, young people and others who may be vulnerable which must be read and understood by all employees and volunteers in appropriate posts. It is important however that all employees and volunteers are encouraged to read this summary code as an essential and quick reference guide.

### 1. Welfare paramount

Durham Community Action values and encourages the involvement of vulnerable service users within its work and activities. Through this policy Durham Community Action is committed to promoting their well-being, as well as protecting their health, safety and general welfare whilst in the company of Durham Community Action employees or volunteers.

### 2. Health and safety

Health and safety requirements, in accordance with Durham Community Action's Health and Safety Policy, must be carefully considered when planning and carrying out activities with anyone who is vulnerable. These should include:

- Undertaking thorough risk assessments prior to activities/events;
- Ensuring adequate supervision and support is available from Durham Community Action's employees and volunteers.

### 3. Code of conduct

It is important that all Durham Community Action's employees and volunteers remember that they are role models for others, particularly children and young people. They should also be aware that some actions, no matter how well intentioned, may be misinterpreted and as a result leave all parties vulnerable.

Employees and volunteers should not:

- Arrange to see vulnerable people on circumstances unconnected with their work;
- Be left alone for substantial periods of time with a vulnerable person out with their usual role;
- Permit abusive behaviour by others, or engage in it themselves, including making suggestive remarks, inappropriate gestures, etc;
- Jump to conclusions about others without checking facts;
- Promise to keep secrets;
- Hesitate to share concerns on any of these matters with the appropriate representative;

- Do anything which might undermine Durham Community Action good reputation for providing a safe environment.

#### **4. Dealing with alleged or suspected harm**

All Durham Community Action employees and volunteers should be aware of the types of harm that vulnerable people can suffer from. These include physical, emotional and sexual abuse, as well as neglect.

If a vulnerable person wants to talk about harm to any Durham Community Action employee or volunteer, the employee or volunteer should do the following:

- Write down accurately what the person has said, (i.e. word for word) using the pro forma for recording disclosures or signs of abuse witnessed.
- Notify the appropriate Durham Community Action representative, giving them the completed pro forma/written information

It is vitally important that employees and volunteers notify the appropriate Durham Community Action representative, so that they can then inform and liaise with the relevant authorities (Social Services Child Protection Unit or Police Family Liaison Officer). Durham Community Action representatives are, in the first instance, the Executive Director and in their absence a member of the Senior Management Team.

In the absence of a nominated Durham Community Action representative, and where a vulnerable person is in imminent danger, employees or volunteers should contact the relevant authorities themselves, (i.e. Social Services or Police). They should then inform the Durham Community Action representative as soon as possible on their return.

Where it is suspected that an employee or volunteer may be involved in the abuse, employees and volunteers should inform the Durham Community Action's representative as soon as possible.

Dealing with incidents of harm is difficult for any individual so employees and volunteers should not:

- Act alone;
- Start to investigate;
- Make any assumptions about the persons involved.

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