



Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Procedures

Introduction

This Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy demonstrates the strong commitment of management, staff and volunteers to child safety and wellbeing, and how our organisation keeps children safe from harm, including child abuse.

Purpose

This Policy outlines how WNH prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children and what steps we will take to do this.

Scope

This policy applies to all staff, volunteers, Committee of Governance members, children and other individuals involved in our organisation. This policy applies to all programs, activities and social interactions conducted by and held at WNH.

Definitions

Committee of Governance means the President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and ordinary committee members who provide strategic direction and are responsible for legal and compliance oversight of WNH.

Child abuse means:

- a sexual offence committed against a child
- an offence committed against a child under section 49M(1) of the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic), such as grooming
- physical violence against a child
- causing serious emotional or psychological harm to a child
- serious neglect of a child.

Harm is damage to the health, safety or wellbeing of a child or young person, including as a result of child abuse by adults or the conduct of other children. It includes physical, emotional, sexual and psychological harm. Harm can arise from a single act or event and can also be cumulative, that is, arising as a result of a series of acts or events over a period of time.

Child/Children means a person who is under the age of 18 years.

Concerns and complaints

A concern refers to any potential issue that could impact negatively on the safety and wellbeing of children.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction to WNH related to one or more of the following:

- our services or dealings with individuals

- allegations of abuse or misconduct by a staff member, a volunteer or another individual associated with WNH
- disclosures of abuse or harm made by a child or young person
- the conduct of a child or young person at WNH
- the inadequate handling of a prior concern
- can take the form of general concerns about the safety of a group of children or activity.

Child Safe Standard 1: Strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety, including through effective leadership arrangements

Role of the Committee of Governance

The Committee of Governance has the role of making sure WNH prioritises children's safety and that action is taken when anyone raises concerns or tenders a complaint about children's safety.

The Committee of Governance will champion and model a child safe culture at WNH. We encourage anyone involved with the organisation to report a child safety concern. The Committee of Governance will work to create a positive culture around reporting so that people feel comfortable to raise concerns.

The Committee of Governance will enable the achievement of Child Safety standards by adequately resourcing the organisation through our annual budget process. Monthly reporting on the organisation's Child Safe Standards Action plans will ensure that training plans, risk assessments and policy and procedure updates are completed.

The Committee of Governance will conduct an annual review of how effectively WNH is delivering child safety and wellbeing through policy and procedure reviews.

Role of the Manager

The Manager acts as Child/Youth Safety Office and ensures that all Child Safe policies are upheld.

If you have any concerns about the safety or well-being of a child or young person at Watsonia Neighbourhood House please speak to the Manager, Lucie Holden, immediately on 0430 200 058 or email manager@watsonianh.org.au.

Child Safe standard 2: Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

Watsonia Neighbourhood House (WNH) is a child-safe organisation. All children or young people who attend services, programs and events delivered by, and spaces managed by WNH have the right to feel and be safe. We have zero tolerance of child abuse and are committed to creating and maintaining a safe and empowering environment, where protecting children and preventing and responding to child abuse is embedded in our culture.

Child Safe Standard 3: Code of Conduct

WNH has a Child Safe Code of Conduct. Staff, volunteers and the Committee of Governance must comply with the Code of Conduct at all times. Breaches of the Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary action including termination of a person's involvement with the organisation.

All third-party contractors are also expected to abide by the Code of Conduct, and where they are engaging with children will have to sign an agreement to comply with the code, prior to delivering any services.

Commented [CS1]: Typically (to my understanding) there is a brief overview of roles and responsibilities eg. who has reporting responsibilities if a disclosure is made how is this managed etc. This may differ for community groups versus school settings with mandatory reporting requirements. I assume a disclosure would be referred to VicPol?

Commented [CS2R1]: This might just be a table that lists each member of the team and what their responsibility is.

Child Safe Standard 4: Human resources practices

Recruiting staff and volunteers

WNNH puts child safety and wellbeing at the center of recruitment and screening processes for staff and volunteers as outlined in the recruitment and screening policy. We only recruit staff and volunteers who are appropriate to engage with children. Members of the Committee of Governance must also be screened.

We require a Working with Children Check, Police Checks and referee checks for all staff and volunteers who have a role with children or have access to children's personal information. We require staff to have appropriate qualifications for their roles and check to make sure these qualifications are valid. Members of the Committee of Governance must hold a valid Working with Children Check and a national Police Check is required.

Supporting staff and volunteers

WNNH is committed to ensuring that all leaders, staff and volunteers receive training to ensure they understand their responsibilities in relation to child safety and to support their engagement with children. WNNH assists its leaders, staff and volunteers to incorporate child safety considerations into decisions and to promote a safe environment where children are empowered to speak up about issues that affect them.

Child Safe Standard 5: Processes for responding and reporting suspected child abuse

Complaints and reporting

All reports of child abuse and child safety concerns will be treated seriously, whether they are made by an adult or a child and whether they are about the conduct of an adult or a child. All complaints and child safety concerns will be responded to promptly and thoroughly.

WNNH has a complaint/concerns procedure that includes information for staff and volunteers about how a complaint or child safety concern will be responded to. An easy-to-understand complaints information sheet is available for children, families and the community to know about the complaint process and the supports available to those making a complaint and those involved in the complaint process.

If a complaint includes an allegation or incident of child abuse or harm, then staff and volunteers at WNNH must report it in accordance with the complaint/concerns procedure. WNNH staff and volunteers are required to prioritise children's safety in any response and to report all potentially criminal conduct to Victoria Police. Under the complaint handling and disciplinary policies, staff and volunteers may be subject to actions to support child safety including:

- being stood down during an investigation or terminated following an investigation
- having their duties altered so they do not engage with children at WNNH
- not being allowed unsupervised contact with children at WNNH
- removing their access to the WNNH IT system and facilities.

Complaints can be emailed to manager@watsonianh.org.au or you can speak with the Manager or Committee member

If there is concern for the immediate safety of a child, immediately call 000.

Commented [CS3]: Might need to be hyperlinked or added as a footnote.

Record keeping

WNH is committed to making and keeping full and accurate records about all child-related complaints or safety concerns.

All child safety complaints, concerns and incidents will be recorded in the incident reporting system.

Records which may assist with the investigation of a complaint or safety concern will be identified and kept as part of the record of an investigation. Records will be kept even if an investigation does not substantiate a complaint.

We will record and keep the outcome of any investigations, and the resolution of any complaints. This includes findings made, reasons for decisions and actions taken.

Records will be stored securely and kept by WNH for at least 45 years.

Child Safe standard 6: Strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse

We recognise the importance of identifying and managing risks of child harm and abuse in the physical and online environments.

We conduct regular risk assessments and have a risk management plan to address the risk of child abuse and harm at WNH. The risk management plan will be developed in consultation with our staff and volunteers. We will ensure that any risk controls put in place balance the need to manage harm with the benefits of participating in programs and activities. The Committee of Governance is responsible for approving the risk management plan.

Any contractors or other providers of services using our venue will be provided with a copy of this Policy to ensure child safety when room booking. The WNH Code of Conduct applies to all room hirers.

Child Safe standard 7: Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children

Children's empowerment and participation

WNH actively seeks to include children's views and ideas in our organisational planning, delivery of services, and management of facilities.

We want children to develop new friendships through WNH programs and activities and encourage children to be supportive of each other. We do not tolerate bullying or abusive behaviour between children and take action if this occurs.

We respect the rights of children and provide them with information about their rights, including the right to be safe at WNH. We actively seek to understand what makes children feel safe in our organisation. We regularly communicate with children about what they can do if they feel unsafe.

WNH values the voices of children and will act on safety concerns raised by children or their families. WNH supports children's participation in the following ways:

- At the commencement of any Children's or Young people's programs, discussions with children, including child-led conversations on what makes them feel safe and unsafe and what to do if they feel unsafe or concerned by any behaviours by adults or children at the organisation

Commented [CS4]: I see all the standards are included. Would it help to make these more explicit eg. Standard #2 - Children's...

- Consultation with children in any strategic planning or when possible, about any proposed significant changes to the physical environment, policies, procedures, programs or staffing that affect them
- Information will be provided to children and families about WNH changes in operations, staffing and programs.

Families and communities

WNH recognises the important role of families and involves parents and carers when making significant decisions about their child. Parents, families and communities are welcome to provide feedback at any time through our contact email address and are encouraged to raise any concerns they have with us.

WNH provides information to families and community about our child safe policies and practices including through:

- publishing this Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Code of Conduct on our website
- including information about our operations and Committee of Governance and management structure, on our website
- including articles and information on child safety and wellbeing, and reminders about our policies and procedures, in our newsletter and posts on our social media channels.

Creating culturally safe environments for all Aboriginal children and their families

WNH is committed to creating environments where Aboriginal culture is celebrated and Aboriginal children, families and community members are welcomed and included. Strategies to embed cultural safety for Aboriginal children include:

- An Acknowledgement of Country at all formal meetings
- Consulting with families, members of the Aboriginal community and local Aboriginal-led organisations to identify opportunities to promote Aboriginal culture and practices in our programs and activities
- Acknowledgement of Country plaques at the entry to our buildings.
- Providing training for staff and volunteers on the strengths of Aboriginal culture and its importance to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal children
- Celebrating NAIDOC Week and acknowledging significant events including National Sorry Day and National Reconciliation Week
- Not publicly acknowledging 26 January as Australia Day.

Valuing diversity

We value diversity and equity for all children. To achieve this, we:

- Welcome and support participation of all children, including children with disability, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those who are unable to live at home, LGBTIQ children and Aboriginal children and their families
- Have zero tolerance of racism and other forms of discrimination and take action when discrimination or exclusion is identified
- Deliver programming that reflects the diversity of our community, their interests and cultures

Commented [S05]: I've added 'publicly' because otherwise I think we risk contradicting the NHACE and SCHADS employment conditions. We can still offer the option to staff, separate to this policy.

- Strive to reflect the diversity of our community through representation in our staff and Committee of Governance members
- Acknowledge and celebrate important cultural dates
- Have a physical and online environment that actively celebrates diversity
- Commit to ensuring our facilities and online activities promote inclusion of children of all abilities.

Confidentiality

WNH may share relevant information to promote the safety and wellbeing of children, where it is appropriate and in their best interests. WNH will keep information about complaints confidential, except where it is necessary to share information to respond properly to a complaint or to prioritise child safety. We may also need to share information about incidents or complaints with external authorities to comply with the law or to prioritise safety.

Non-compliance with this policy and the Code of Conduct

WNH will enforce this policy and the Child Safety Code of Conduct. Potential breaches by anyone will be investigated and may result in termination of room hire, restriction of duties, suspension or termination of employment or engagement or other corrective action.

Review

WNH will review all child safe practices and policies at least every two years. We also review relevant practices and policies in response to a child safety incident or 'near miss'. Findings from reviews will be reported to the people involved in our organisation and also inform our approach to continuous improvement of our child safety practices. Reviews are conducted and approved by the Committee of Governance and will be informed by consultation with children, families and staff.

References

Child Safe Standard as made under section 17(1) of the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005.

Related policies and documents

Workplace Health and Safety Policy
Concerns, incidents and complaints policy
Concerns, incidents and complaints report form
Venue Hire policy
Critical incident debriefing policy
Recruitment and selection policy
Code of Conduct

Policy status

The Committee of Governance is responsible for reviewing this policy.