

Safeguarding Children Policy

Introduction

ReturnMK (the Charity) is a registered charity (No. 1189422) based at 16–17 Denbigh Hall, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, MK3 7QT. The Charity is run for the following purposes:

To advance in life and relieve the needs of young people through:

(a) the provision of recreational and leisure time activities in the interest of social welfare, designed to improve their conditions of life;

(b) providing support and activities which develop their skills, capacities and capabilities to enable them to participate in society as mature and responsible individuals.

Additionally, the Charity aims to help young people in Milton Keynes by providing advice and assistance and organising programmes of physical, educational and other activities as a means of:

(a) advancing in life and helping young people by developing their skills, capacities and capabilities to enable them to participate in society as independent, mature and responsible individuals;

(b) advancing education;

(c) relieving unemployment;

(d) providing recreational and leisure time activity in the interests of social welfare for people living in the area of benefit who have need by reason of their youth, age, infirmity or disability, poverty or social and economic circumstances, with a view to improving their conditions of life.

The Charity has adopted this Safeguarding Children Policy and expects every adult working or helping at the Charity to support it and comply with it. Consequently, this Policy shall apply to all staff, managers, trustees, directors, volunteers, students, or anyone working on behalf of the Charity.

Purpose of the Policy

This policy is intended to protect children who receive any service from us (including the children of adults who may receive services from us). Under this policy, the term “children” means any person who is under eighteen years of age. The Charity believes that no child or young person should experience abuse or harm, and we are committed to the protection of children and young people. This policy provides guidance and overarching principles to our volunteers and staff to guide our approach to child protection and safeguarding.

The Risks to Children

Children can be vulnerable to many forms of abuse and harm. It is important to recognise that abuse or harm to children can occur in a wide range of circumstances and behaviours. For example, children can be at risk of:

- Physical or emotional abuse
- Neglect
- Sexual abuse
- Female genital mutilation (FGM)
- Grooming and exploitation
- Trafficking and modern slavery
- Exposure to or infliction of domestic abuse
- Bullying or cyberbullying
- Exposure to other inappropriate content or behaviour (e.g. violence or criminal behaviour)
- Self-harm
- Physical harm resulting from engaging in activities without adequate supervision

The causal factors of such harm and/or abuse can also be wide-ranging. For example, children might be placed at risk by family members or by members of the community.

Safeguarding Principles

Safeguarding children from harm and abuse is an essential responsibility for our Charity. We are committed to ensuring that any child who comes into contact with our services is properly safeguarded. Every person governed by this policy must play an active role in ensuring that children are kept safe. Every person under this policy holds responsibility for:

- Remaining alert and aware of possible safeguarding risks to children.
- Guarding children against harmful environments with appropriate actions (for example, providing adequate supervision or ensuring safe environments).
- Taking positive steps to maintain the safety and wellbeing of children engaging with the Charity.
- Reporting concerns expeditiously and appropriately, in line with child protection procedures.

- Understanding the duty to report specific concerns (and understanding how this duty interplays with confidentiality).
- Challenging any inappropriate or harmful behaviour by any other adult and reporting this accordingly.
- Acting appropriately in the presence of children.
- Not taking any inappropriate risks.
- Not smoking, drinking, or taking any illicit substances in the presence of children.

Safeguarding Officers and Contacts

Any question, report, or concern in relation to the safeguarding of children should be shared with our Designated Safeguarding Lead (Safeguarding Officer), or in their absence with the Deputy Safeguarding Lead:

Designated Safeguarding Lead: Jason Lawrence – Email: info@returnmk.org | Tel: 07498 923252

Deputy Safeguarding Lead: Timothy Stapley – Email: hipnoninja@yahoo.co.uk | Tel: 07767 047796

All safeguarding contacts for external agencies are listed near the end of this document for easy reference (including MASH, LADO, and emergency services).

Confidentiality and Data Protection

All personal information we process relating to children shall be handled and stored in accordance with our Data Protection Privacy Policy (available on our website at www.returnmk.org). Information will only be shared on a need-to-know basis, in line with safeguarding guidelines and data protection law.

Responding to a Safeguarding Concern

Where a child is at immediate risk of serious harm, any adult present should call 999 without delay. After contacting emergency services, the Safeguarding Officer (or Deputy) should be informed as soon as practicable. Where there is a safeguarding concern but no immediate risk of serious harm, the adult who has witnessed or received the concern should consult with the Safeguarding Officer as soon as possible and no later than the end of that same day. If a child makes a disclosure of abuse or harm to an adult, it is important for that adult to:

- Listen calmly and carefully, showing the child that their views and reports are taken seriously.
- Provide an appropriate and honest level of reassurance.
- Avoid interrogating the child or asking probing, intrusive, or leading questions.

- Avoid making false promises regarding secrets or confidentiality (the child should be informed that any disclosure of abuse/harm must be shared with the Safeguarding Officer and may lead to further action).

- Make a confidential written record of the discussion either during the conversation or immediately afterwards. The record should include key details of the disclosure, including any relevant times, dates, places, and people involved. (Audio or video recording of a child's disclosure is discouraged.)

- Refer all relevant information to the Safeguarding Officer as soon as practicable, and by no later than the end of the day.

Upon receiving any safeguarding concern, the Safeguarding Officer will consult with any other relevant persons and make any appropriate referrals to the relevant authorities (such as the local authority Children's Services department or police).

Reporting Concerns About Other Adults

If any person has a concern regarding the conduct of an adult connected to the Charity which poses, or may pose, a risk to children — such as:

- Harming a child (either physically or emotionally).
- Exposing a child to behaviour that may cause physical or emotional harm.
- Engaging in criminal activity concerning or involving a child.

— this must be raised immediately with the Safeguarding Officer. (If the concern relates to the Safeguarding Officer or it is not appropriate to report to them, it should be raised with a different senior member of the organisation.) The Safeguarding Officer or senior designee will then agree on the next appropriate steps and take action. We recognise that there could be circumstances where a person might need to report a matter that took place outside of their engagement with the Charity – such reports will still be handled under this policy. When a safeguarding referral or allegation is made about an adult involved with the Charity, appropriate steps will be decided case-by-case. These steps will usually include one or more of the following:

- Further initial inquiries to gather facts.
- Escalation to the appropriate local authority Children's Services department for assessment and/or to the police for investigation.
- Initiation of appropriate internal procedures (e.g. disciplinary action or formal investigation) within the Charity, which may include the suspension of the person concerned during the process.
- A referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and/or equivalent agencies (Disclosure Scotland, Access Northern Ireland), as well as any other relevant regulatory bodies.

Any person within the Charity who has an allegation made against them shall be informed, in a formal meeting, of the particulars of the allegation and the next steps to be taken. Such a meeting will ordinarily be conducted by the Safeguarding Officer. In certain cases, this meeting may be deferred until any external authorities (such as the police or local authority) have given approval to proceed, to ensure their investigations are not compromised. Any person within the Charity who has allegations made against them shall be treated fairly. All inquiries, investigations, and decisions shall be undertaken with justice and fairness, keeping the safety of any child concerned at the heart of the process. Likewise, any person from within the Charity who raises a safeguarding allegation against another person shall be listened to and taken seriously, and will be treated fairly and with respect throughout the inquiry, investigation, and decision-making process.

Process for Referring to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

Objective: The following process outlines the steps for appropriately referring cases that require multi-agency support or intervention to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH):

1. Identification of Concerns:

a. When staff or volunteers encounter concerns or suspicions regarding the safety or welfare of a child, young person, or vulnerable adult within our organisation's activities, they must document all relevant information promptly and accurately.

2. Internal Reporting Protocol:

a. Report any safeguarding concerns or suspicions immediately to the designated Safeguarding Lead or manager within the organisation.

b. Provide comprehensive details of the concern, including observations, incidents, or any disclosures made by the individual(s) involved. Document these details as part of the report.

3. Assessment and Decision-Making:

a. The designated Safeguarding Lead or manager will conduct an initial assessment of the reported concerns.

b. If the concerns meet the threshold for multi-agency support or intervention, the case will be referred to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) for further evaluation.

4. Referral Process to MASH:

a. Obtain the contact information for the local MASH team (telephone numbers, email addresses, and any relevant online referral portals or forms).

b. Complete the necessary referral form or provide the required case details through the designated MASH communication channels.

c. Include all pertinent information in the referral, such as the nature of the safeguarding concerns, the individuals involved, and any supporting documentation or evidence.

5. Follow-Up and Collaboration:

a. Maintain open communication with the MASH team after the referral. Respond promptly to any additional inquiries or requests for information from MASH.

b. Collaborate as needed with the MASH team and any other involved agencies to support their investigation, assessments, or intervention plans.

6. Record Keeping:

a. Maintain accurate and detailed records of all communications, referrals, and actions taken regarding the case. Ensure these records are kept in compliance with data protection and confidentiality policies.

7. Review and Learning:

a. Regularly review the effectiveness of our referral process to MASH. Use feedback, case outcomes, or changes in safeguarding guidance to make improvements to our procedures.

b. Provide learning and development opportunities for staff to enhance their understanding of safeguarding procedures and the MASH referral process.

Contact Information for MASH (Milton Keynes): In the UK, contact details for the local Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) can typically be found via the local authority's website or by contacting the local authority's children's services. For Milton Keynes Council, the key MASH contact information is provided in the "Safeguarding Contacts" section below.

Safeguarding Contacts

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) – Milton Keynes Council:

Phone: 01908 253169 or 01908 253170

Email: children@milton-keynes.gov.uk

Website: www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/children-young-people-families/ Milton-Keynes-Multi-Agency-Safeguarding-Hub

Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) – Milton Keynes Council:

Phone: 01908 254307 (or 01908 254306)

Email: LADO@milton-keynes.gov.uk

Emergency (Police): Dial 999 if a child is in immediate danger or at risk of serious harm.

Emergency social care: 01908 265545

Legal Framework

This policy has been drawn up in accordance with all relevant legislation and guidance in the jurisdictions in which the Charity operates. This includes key guidance such as the UK Government's Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023). We are committed to following the law and best practise in safeguarding to protect the children in our care.

Policy Approval and Review

This policy is approved and robustly endorsed by ReturnMK and is due for review every 12 months.

Jason Lawrence (DSL)

Signed. 

Policy Updated: 3rd January 2025