

# THE YOUNG SEEDS FOUNDATION

Policy July 2016

**Title:** Child Protection Policy

**Target:** All Young Seed Executive, Committee Members, Employees and Partnership Agencies

<b>Function Reviewed by Responsible Officer</b>		<b>Approved By</b>	
		<b>Approved date</b>	
		<b>Last reviewed</b>	

## Policy Statement:

The Young Seeds Foundation of Tasmania (YSF) has a strong commitment to the safety, wellbeing and protection of *children and young people*. We aim to safeguard children and young people in the course of our work by promoting circumstances that are consistent with safe and effective care. This enables young people to develop with optimum chances in life. This policy outlines the framework that YSF uses to ensure we advocate for, and maintain protective environments for children and young people. The YSF *Child Safe Code of Conduct* outlines the expectation of YSF staff, Executive and Committee when working with children and young people.

## Scope:

The following people must comply with this policy in the course of their work and when representing YSF. Sanctions may be applied if the policy is breached:

- YSF Executive
- YSF Committee members
- YSF paid employees
- Any person representing the organisation at YSF's request

## Background:

YSF is founded on the belief that Education is a fundamental human right and that every child deserves a chance to acquire quality education. YSF strongly believes that education is the core pillar of a fair and just society which will enhance human dignity and worth. The YSF is a charitable non-profit organisation based in Tasmania, Australia, which is managed by a small group of volunteers. YSF aims to gain direct sponsorship to provide for the education needs of impoverished children in South Sudan and Uganda.

YSF and therefore the disadvantaged children rely completely on the generosity of sponsors to fulfil the children's right to education. YSF strongly believe that 'education is the most powerful weapon which can be used to change the world' (Nelson Mandela). Without education, these vulnerable children are not able to escape the most dire life circumstances which would see them live a life of abject poverty if they survive to adulthood.

With education, these children can not only secure an appropriate standard of life for themselves but they will also create a ripple effect which in the long term will build sustainability in their community and for their country.

YSF promotes a rights based approach to child and youth protection and has expected standards of behaviour for all YSF members, staff, and participants. YSF encourages a culture of open discussion of issues regarding safeguarding and protecting children and young people. These measures empower our people to raise incidents and risks related to child and youth wellbeing and to seek guidance and direction in all situations involving the well-being of children in the care of YSF.

### **Child Protection:**

As a non-profit, child-centred organisation whose work is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)<sup>1</sup>, YSF considers child abuse unacceptable in all circumstances and is committed to ensuring the fulfilment of children's rights including their rights to protection. YSF is committed to protecting children from harm and ensuring children's right to protection under Article 19 of the UNCRC is fully realised. We promote child safe practices and protect children from harm, abuse, neglect and exploitation in any form. In addition, we will take positive action to prevent those who abuse children from becoming involved with YSF and take stringent measures against any YSF Staff, YSF Associates, YSF Committee Members or YSF Executive member who abuse a child.

### **Guiding Principles:**

#### **1. The Best Interests of the Child are Paramount**

Consideration of what is in the best interests of the child is key in any decision related to our work with children and youth. We will be guided by appropriate laws but our policy may go beyond these (i.e. YSF will not necessarily be limited in our response to complying with relevant laws).

#### **2. Safeguarding and Protecting Children is a Shared Responsibility**

It is everyone's responsibility to maintain vigilance, practice risk management, and to promote optimum life chances for children and young people.

#### **3. Taking a Risk Management Approach**

YSF acknowledges that the work we do is associated with child protection risks. We are committed to identifying and minimising preventable risk, and mitigating the impacts of unavoidable risks as they arise. Further, that everyone working for or associated with YSF's work must be aware of and adhere to the provisions of this policy and the Child Safe Code of Conduct.

#### **4. Recognising Children's Rights**

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child underpins YSF's approach to decisions about safeguarding and protecting children and young people. YSF will promote children's rights to protection from abuse and exploitation; to be safe at all times, survival and development; participation; non-discrimination and to have their best interests considered in any decision making.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, 1989, Convention on the Rights of the Child.

All children should be encouraged to fulfil their potential, and inequality and discrimination will be challenged.

Children will be assured the right to express their views freely and this will be given 'due weight' in accordance with their age and level of maturity. We will not discriminate against the child. The child will be treated with respect irrespective of gender, nationality or ethnic origin, religious or political beliefs, age, physical or mental health, sexual preference and gender identity, family, socio-economic and cultural background, or any history of conflict with the law.

### **Responsibilities and Processes:**

YSF recognises that many of its participants have the best intentions towards children and work along with YSF to promote the well being and safety of children. YSF also recognises that unfortunately by the nature of its work it is at risk of being targeted by those wanting to exploit or harm children and that there are a number of potential risks to children supported by YSF. We understand that the effects of abuse on children are both devastating and long term.

YSF considers that protecting and safeguarding children and young people is a shared responsibility of all people. YSF will promote awareness and expected behaviours to all those associated with YSF through maintaining clear procedures (child safe code of conduct) and encouraging a culture of open discussion and proactive risk management about protecting and safeguarding children.

#### **1. Recruitment**

YSF will take all reasonable precautions to ensure YSF staff and program participants have passed screening procedures and do not pose an unacceptable risk to children. We will consistently apply robust recruitment procedures. All YSF members will be required to comply with this Policy and the Code of Conduct. Written record of agreement will be retained on file by YSF. This includes an agreement to inform YSF about incidents and risks related to children.

#### **2. Education, training and communication**

All program participants receive clear and direct communication on the expectations of YSF to support children and young people in a safe environment. Examples of unacceptable behaviours will be conveyed.

#### **3. Child protection in program planning and implementation**

YSF works in partnership with partner organisations. We provide support to our partners to develop and fulfil their responsibilities for child protection, as well as offer clear guidelines on what is (un)acceptable in relation to the safety and well-being of children and young people.

A range of factors are carefully considered in order to determine how to best collaborate with each partner organisation regarding child protection. YSF conducts formal organisational appraisals of all organisations prior to beginning our relationship. YSF will work in partnership with host organisations to monitor, support and report regarding child protection.

#### **4. Use of images and messages**

Appropriate behaviour in engaging with children is expected when engaging children for the purposes of creating written stories (articles, blogs, etc.). Consideration should be given to whether stories or opinions expressed will endanger or adversely affect children.

YSF will educate and increase awareness of ethical approaches to working with children for publicity, promotional and marketing activities at all pre-departure briefings and inductions. Photographic images should be consistent with our approach to safeguarding and protecting children and should avoid damaging stereotypes. The best interests of the child must be paramount.

#### **5. Reporting Incidents or Risks**

While working in Australia or overseas, YSF staff or program participants may observe incidents where children and young people are harmed, risks to children and young people, or suspicions or disclosures about breaches of the Child Protection Policy.

Immediately reporting such instances to local authorities may not always be in the best interests of the child involved. In many of the contexts we work, local authorities do not have the resources available to effectively handle these types of situations so YSF will typically engage local expertise to determine a response that is in the best interests of the child.

All committee members and staff must inform YSF when they have a *reasonable belief* that a child or young person has been harmed or is at potential risk of harm:

- When it is due to the actions or inactions of an YSF committee member, staff or program participant.
- When it is due to the actions of a person representing YSF

Overseas partner organisations are also encouraged to inform YSF in the above circumstances.

Within 24 hours (maximum) of becoming aware of the incident or risk, you must inform one of the Executive members.

Incidents or risks include:

- An observation or disclosure (by an adult or child) of actual harm or abuse to a child
- An observation or disclosure of potential risk of harm or abuse to a child
- A breach of the YSF child protection policy
- A situation or environment which is working in opposition to, or poses a threat to children's rights
- An observation or disclosure of behaviour which could be considered *grooming*
- Child exploitation materials that are received on YSF electronic equipment (this can include, but is not limited to, SPAM, popups, text messages, emails, or social media communications)

#### **6. Response**

All incidents will *be investigated and responded to*. Risks will be assessed and assigned a risk rating. This rating will determine how the risk is managed.

We will take all concerns and reports of child abuse seriously and investigate and act on these reports immediately, with the highest priority, according to the reporting and complaints mechanisms.

YSF is committed to preventing a person from working with children and youth if they pose an unacceptable risk. Following a formal investigation, a confirmed breach of the Child Protection Policy will lead to the instigation of performance and disciplinary procedures, which will involve termination of employment for staff, and immediate dismissal from the Committee for members.

Participants should be reassured that there will be no action taken against those who inform YSF in good faith of incidents and risks.

## **7. Persons Responsible**

The YSF Executive body is responsible for the implementation of this policy.

Everyone who works with and engages with YSF has a responsibility to ensure that children are protected. The responsibilities detailed below are mandatory for those who fall within the scope of the policy.

All associated with YSF must:

1. Never abuse and/or exploit a child or young person or act/ behave in any way that places a child or young person at risk of harm.
2. Sign onto and agree to abide by this Policy and Child Safe Code of Conduct.
3. Report any Child abuse and Child protection concerns they have.
4. Respond to a Child who may have been abused or exploited in accordance with applicable local office procedures and this policy.
5. Cooperate fully and confidentially in any investigation of concerns or allegations of Child abuse.
6. Participate in Child protection induction and training as relevant to their relationship with YSF
7. Contribute to building an environment where children are respected and encouraged to discuss their concerns and rights.
8. Always treat children in a manner which is respectful of their rights, integrity and dignity, considers their best interests and does not expose them to, or place them at risk of, harm. For example: when taking images/pictures during visits, interacting with children or generating stories of children, ensure that this is done in a manner consistent with the appropriate YSF policies and procedures.
9. The YSF Executive will ensure that local procedures are in place that is consistent with this Child Protection Policy. Local procedures should be developed with the assistance of local advisers in accordance with local law. It should also be ensured that this policy and local procedures are made available in local languages and child-friendly formats

Breaches of this policy and failure to comply with these responsibilities may incur the following sanctions:

- For YSF Staff or YSF Committee members, disciplinary action leading to possible dismissal.
- For YSF Associates or YSF partners- up to and including termination of all relations including contractual and partnership agreements with YSF.
- Where relevant - appropriate legal or other such actions.

## **Responsibility of YSF Executive:**

The primary responsibilities of the YSF Executive body are to ensure the well-being and safety of children under the care of the program and to be highly accountable to sponsors and donors.

The Executive Body will achieve this by:

- Organising financial payments for children to attend the local school in Pajok, and other parts of South Sudan.
- Locating and contracting with boarding schools in the neighbouring country of Uganda for those students who demonstrate the ability for a higher standard of education.
- Maintaining regular fortnightly contact with the school principals, the Co-ordinator based in Africa, and where possible the children. The regular contact will help ascertain that the children have received all that is needed and been financed for (school fees, uniforms, all personal and health needs). This regular contact is also to ensure the physical, mental and emotional well-being of the children.
- Responding immediately to any concerns or complaints raised by the children or on behalf of the children. All Executive members will be notified that a concern / complaint has been made and kept informed of progress until the issue is satisfactorily resolved.
- One member travelling to Africa annually to visit the children, the schools and the Co-ordinators to ensure that children in YSF care are being well provided for as well as meeting prospective children for the following school year. This member will also write a report on their return which will be tabled at the first Executive meeting following their return and then be made available for sponsors / donors.
- Ensuring that sponsors receive regular updates on the children they are caring for. This would include an end of year report including photos of sponsored children.
- Being available and responding to sponsor / donor queries in a timely manner.

### **Confidentiality:**

YSF will ensure that any incidents or risks will be handled according to the principles of confidentiality, safety, impartiality, procedural fairness, timeliness and accuracy.

All incidents or risks, and the names of people involved, will be handled in the strictest of confidence. Details will only be disclosed on a “need to know” basis, when required by relevant local or Australian law, or when a notification to police or appropriate authorities must be made.

### **Related Policies:**

YSF Child Safe Code of Conduct

### **References:**

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

ACFID Code of Conduct

DFAT Child Protection Policy

Plan ANO Child Protection Policy and Code

AVI Child Protection Policy March 2016

### **Review of this Policy:**

This policy will be reviewed each two years and staff will be consulted in this process.

### **DEFINITIONS:**

In line with the UNCRC, for the purposes of this policy, a Child is defined as any person under the age of 18 years (UNCRC Article 1). National law and guidance or local customs may be based on different

definitions/notions of age of childhood/adulthood, but the standard for YSF is that children should receive equal protection as far as possible, regardless of local age limits.

**Child protection** is defined in this policy as the responsibilities and preventative and responsive measures and activities that YSF undertakes to safeguard children ensuring that no Child is subject to Child abuse as a result of their association with us, their contact with YSF Staff and/or their participation in any YSF activity, including our projects and programs.

In addition, it incorporates our responsibility to ensure that where there are concerns over a Child's welfare or where a Child has been subject to Child abuse, actions are taken to address this; concerns are reported and responded to appropriately and in line with the relevant global and local procedures; and incidents are analysed so as to ensure continued learning and growth.

**Child Abuse** is defined as all forms of physical abuse, emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse and exploitation, neglect or negligent treatment, commercial or other exploitation of a child and includes any actions that results in actual or potential harm to a child. Child abuse may be a deliberate act or it may be failing to act to prevent harm. Child abuse consists of anything which individuals, institutions or processes do or fail to do, intentionally or unintentionally which harms a child or damages their prospect of safe and healthy development into adulthood.

*The Star Education Centre agrees to abide by the Young Seeds Foundation Child Protection Policy and the Child Safety Code of Conduct:*

*Signed: Director, Richard Amadro*

*Date:*

*Signed: Head Teacher, Eric Ubuya*

*Date:*

*Signed: On behalf of Young Seeds, Coordinator, Okot Vinansio*

*Date:*