Brighter Communities Worldwide Child Safeguarding Policy

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Safeguarding Introduction

Safeguarding is the responsibility of everyone in an organisation to ensure that their people, operations and programmes do no harm to the individuals they work to support, and do not expose them to abuse or exploitation.

Brighter Communities Worldwide are signatories to the *Dóchas Leadership Safeguarding Charter*. This means "we pledge to exhibit leadership behaviours that show we are committed to safeguarding principles and advocate the implementation of organisational actions that align with international standards to foster positive safeguarding cultures".

We recognise the right of children and vulnerable adults to be protected, regardless of their gender, race, culture or disability. We recognise the power inherent in working with children and vulnerable adults and the potential for abuse and exploitation of these individuals by the staff involved.

Our safeguarding measures as an organisation include -

- Recruitment and screening processes for staff and volunteers (see our HR & Volunteer policies).
- Child Safeguarding policy and Vulnerable Adults safeguarding policy – these include annual training for staff and volunteers in Ireland and in Kenya and code of behaviour.
- HR policies - safeguarding our staff from harm and inappropriate behaviour such as sexual harassment in the workplace.
- Healthy & Safety policy – safeguarding staff and volunteers in the workplace.
- Data Protection Policy – commitment to the safeguarding of personal data shared with the organisation.
- BCW AI Usage Policy – governing the responsible and ethical use of artificial intelligence tools across all BCW operations, including strict restrictions on the use of AI in connection with safeguarding matters and an absolute prohibition on generating synthetic images of beneficiaries or community members. Staff must not use AI tools in connection with any safeguarding case, record, or investigation without prior written approval from the CEO/CD. See BCW AI Usage Policy, Section 8.
- Our Communications – we adhere to the *Dóchas Guide to Ethical Communications* to safeguard the people whose stories and images we share and we uphold the principle of Do No Harm in our communications both internal and external.
- Feedback model – we welcome feedback and have a model in place that includes a Beneficiary Feedback Mechanism and a Feedback & Complaints Procedure
- Anti Fraud & Whistle Blowing Policy – to safeguard the integrity of Brighter Communities Worldwide and ensure that those we work with act in the best interest of the organisation.

Purpose of this policy

- This purpose of this policy is to describe Brighter Communities Worldwide commitment to safeguard the rights and well-being of children in all the work that we do and in our practice, operations and programmes.
- There is a distinction between child safeguarding and child protection – child safeguarding is about keeping children safe within the work of the organisation – child protection is about outside forces e.g. child trafficking and child labour.
- It includes a code of behaviour for staff and volunteers to prevent misconduct that would harm children. This policy is for sharing with our partners, volunteers, staff, donors and any other person or organisation who wants to know how Brighter Communities Worldwide aims to safeguard children.
- This policy applies to Brighter Communities Worldwide in Ireland and our partner organisation Brighter Communities Worldwide in Kenya.
- All Stakeholders who sign up to a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Brighter Communities Worldwide will also agree to abide by this policy
- The guiding principle in safeguarding children is always 'what is in the best interest of the child'.

Aims of this policy

- **To provide guidelines**, based on international best practice, to be followed which will protect children from harm. This includes children who are disabled, from minority ethnic/faith groups and regardless of gender, sexuality or culture.
- **To raise awareness** of the need to safeguard children and how to do that among Brighter Communities Worldwide staff, volunteers and the partners we work with in Kenya.
- **To set out response guidelines** in the event of a disclosure of abuse from a child or an allegation of abuse against Brighter Communities Worldwide staff or volunteers.
- **To demonstrate our commitment** to a culture of safeguarding in the Irish humanitarian and development sector as signatories to the *Dóchas Leadership Safeguarding Charter*.

Definition of Safeguarding Children

"**Safeguarding**" or "keeping children safe" encompasses what is commonly understood as "child protection". Furthermore, it regards children as active agents engaged in keeping themselves and their peers safe, rather than passive recipients who have protective measures applied to them.

Child safeguarding is the responsibility of organisations to ensure they do no harm to children. This means doing all they can to prevent exploitation and abuse, and if abuse occurs, to respond appropriately. (www.keepingchildrensafe.global)

Child Protection is preventing and responding to all violence, exploitation and abuse against children. Child safeguarding is an essential component of child protection. (www.keepingchildrensafe.global)

Prevention of harm to children

Brighter Communities Worldwide recognises that safeguarding children is about identifying situations that could put them at risk and managing those risks to minimise them.

- **Recruitment of staff and volunteers** will include –
- Garda vetting/Police checks within the bounds of the relevant vetting authority guidelines.
- References from previous employers or voluntary organisations describing any previous experience of working with children.
- Interviews where staff and volunteers will be given the opportunity to state if there is any reason why they might not be suitable for working with children.

Management of staff & volunteers will include -

- A code of behaviour to be followed and signed (see annex)
- Training around Child safeguarding to include –
    - The purpose of child safeguarding.
    - Best practice to follow as a staff or volunteer working with children.
    - What are the guidelines to follow with Brighter Communities Worldwide if you come across a case of child abuse.
    - Discussion around the challenges posed by different cultural practices in relation to child safeguarding.
    - Recognising signs of child abuse or neglect.
    - Familiarity with the UN convention on the Rights of the Child; the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child; the Department of Children and Youth Affairs Children First (Ireland) – National Guidance for protection and welfare of children; National Council for Children's Services (NCCS) Kenya.
    - Provision of a copy of Brighter Communities Worldwide's policy on Child Safeguarding.
    - Familiarity with the list of Do's and Don'ts around working with children (see annex)
    - Best practice for working with imagery and messages in development and humanitarian settings following the Dóchas Guide to Ethical Communications.
    - Awareness of BCW's AI Usage Policy, including the prohibition on using AI tools in connection with safeguarding matters without CEO/CD approval, the absolute prohibition on generating synthetic images of beneficiaries or community members, and the data classification rules that prevent entry of safeguarding information (L3 data) into AI tools.
- The role of management and volunteer leaders is to lead by example as everyone has a responsibility to support the safeguarding of children. They will also ensure that staff & volunteers are observing the code of behaviour and following best practice as advised.
- The training for each staff member will be renewed every two years.
- At the beginning of each year, as part of creating annual work plans, safe guarding trainings for staff and for overseas volunteers are included as well as plans for reviewing the policy which happens every two years.

Working with partners

Brighter Communities Worldwide draw up a **Memorandum of Understanding** with all partners we work with to agree how the partnership will operate.

- Every MOU will include providing the partner with a copy of the Brighter Communities Worldwide's policy on Child Safeguarding and any changes to this policy will be provided to the partner within 30 days of adoption.
- All partners will be asked to agree to the aims of this policy (listed above).
- If the partner has their own child safeguarding policy they will be asked to share a copy with Brighter Communities Worldwide.
- In the event that a partner does not have their own child safeguarding policy, then they will be asked at least to agree to the aims of this policy (listed above), possibly adopt this policy's code of behaviour for themselves and consider developing their own policy in the future.
- Brighter Communities Worldwide will endeavour to keep the issue of child safeguarding on the agenda at all partner meetings to promote protection of the rights of the child and ensure protection of all Brighter Communities Worldwide staff & volunteers.

Public Awareness

- Each of the offices of Brighter Communities Worldwide will display a notice outlining a summary of the policy, and appropriate contact numbers. The notice will be accompanied by an organigram explaining the processes in the policy.

Response to Child Safeguarding issues

To aid staff, volunteers and partners to respond sensitively and seriously to a child who discloses information about abuse, and be confident and able to take appropriate action swiftly.

- **Response to a child making a disclosure -**

These are the steps to follow for immediate response to a child who discloses they are being, or have been, abused –

  - Listen to and accept what the child is saying.
  - Do not investigate, and do not inform, question or confront the alleged abuser.
  - Take the alleged abuse seriously.
  - Reassure the child that they have done the right thing by telling you.
  - Let them know you need to tell someone else. Do not promise total confidentiality.
  - In the case of a child in a school or other organisational setting, encourage the child to speak to an adult they trust within that organisation.
  - Let the child speak freely but do not press for information.
  - Let the child know what you are going to do next and that you will let them know what happens.

- Take the child to hospital for treatment if there is an urgent need for medical attention (this applies to Kenya specifically where ambulance assistance may not be available)
- Make a record of what you have heard whilst it is still fresh in your mind. Include the date and time of your conversation and any incident disclosed. Use the report template in the annex to help you.
- Inform Brighter Communities Worldwide that a child has spoken to you – a staff member should bring this to their manager and a volunteer to their Project Leader (if in Kenya) or the Operations Manager (if in Ireland).

- **Response from Brighter Communities Worldwide -**

If any staff member or volunteer reports that a child has made a disclosure of abuse to them, the following steps will be taken by Brighter Communities Worldwide -

- **Avoid any delay** – best practice is to respond within 24 hours.
- Brighter Communities Worldwide will have a board member on both the Irish and Kenyan boards who will have **special responsibility for child safeguarding**.
- In the event of the **disclosure coming from a child in Ireland** – The Operations Manager in Ireland will take the report to the relevant authorities in Ireland (Tusla Child & Family Agency and the Gardai) following guidelines from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs Children First – National Guidance for protection and welfare of children. If the disclosure is made in a school, then the report will be made to the school's child safeguarding office. The Operations Manager should inform the relevant board member in Ireland that this is happening.
- In the event of the **disclosure coming from a child in Kenya** – if it comes through an overseas volunteer, it is the responsibility of their project leader to bring it to the attention of the Administration Manager or CEO (when in country) and they will consult with the relevant member of the board in Kenya as to what steps to take next.
- In all cases, a record will be kept by The Operations Manager (Irl) or Administration Manager (Kenya) of the steps being taken and made available to the appropriate social services department and/or police station if required.

If a child alleges that a Brighter Communities Worldwide staff member or volunteer has abused them, the following steps will be taken by Brighter Communities Worldwide -

- **Avoid any delay** – best practice is to respond within 24 hours.
- That staff member or volunteer will be **asked to take leave from their duties immediately** until an investigation has been completed. In the case of a staff member, they will remain on full pay. In all cases, it should be made clear that suspension does not imply guilt but rather protects all parties whilst an investigation is undertaken.
- In the event of the **allegation coming from a child in Ireland** – the Operations Manager in Ireland will take the report to the relevant authorities in Ireland following guidelines from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs Children First – National Guidance for protection and welfare of children. The Operations Manager should inform the relevant board member in Ireland that this is happening.

- In the event of the **allegation coming from a child in Kenya** – the project leader will take the report to the project manager in Kenya (in some cases this may be the CEO if in country) and that person will consult with the relevant member of the board in Kenya as to what steps to take next.
- If the allegation happens in Kenya, it will be **treated as an incident** and the Brighter Communities Worldwide Incident Management chain of communication will be followed should it escalate further.
- **Confidentiality** around all records kept about the allegation will be scrupulously maintained and will only be released to those in positions of authority.
- If the allegation against a Brighter Communities Worldwide staff member or volunteer is proved to be true, **disciplinary action** taken will include removal of the person from their position and no further engagement with Brighter Communities Worldwide will be considered.

Policy review

Brighter Communities Worldwide will ensure that this policy is reviewed **every two years** and that an annual report on any incidents relating to child safeguarding is made to its board of directors.

Annex

Definitions with reference to this policy

- In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC); for the purposes of this policy, Brighter Communities Worldwide regards children as **any person under the age of 18 years** (UNCRC Article 1).
- Brighter Communities Worldwide **staff** refers to individuals who receive a regular salary for work in any part of Brighter Communities Worldwide including staff in Kenya and Ireland. Also included are individuals who are contracted to work for Brighter Communities Worldwide on short term basis.
- Brighter Communities Worldwide **volunteers** refers to a range of individuals who are committed to working with and supporting Brighter Communities Worldwide. It includes individuals on Harambee projects; visitors who travel to Kenya; members of board in Ireland and Kenya; volunteers who support the work done in Ireland on awareness raising, fundraising etc; volunteers involved in school link programmes. Brighter Communities Worldwide acknowledges that on occasion volunteers can be under 18 and as such are themselves within the age range that this policy is designed to protect. (See our Volunteer Policy)
- Brighter Communities Worldwide **partners** are all those people who work with Brighter Communities Worldwide in implementing programmes, from donors to volunteer to organisations in Kenya.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

This policy is informed by a set of principles that are derived from the UNCRC and include:

- All children have equal rights to protection from abuse and exploitation
- Each child has a fundamental right to life, survival and development.
- All children should be encouraged to fulfil their potential and inequality around discrimination should 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 or conflict with the law.
- Everybody has a responsibility to support the care and protection of children.
- Brighter Communities Worldwide has particular responsibilities to children who we come in contact with through our various programmes. No child must come to harm as a result of their engagement with Brighter Communities Worldwide.(www.ohchr.org)

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC)

Africa is the only continent with a region-specific child rights instrument. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) is an important tool for advancing children's rights. While building on the same basic principles as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the AU Children's Charter highlights issues of special importance in the African context. (www.achpr.org)

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs Children First (Ireland) – National Guidance for protection and welfare of children.

"Children First" provides a set of sound principles and good practice guidelines for organisations that provide services to children. Everyone has a duty to protect children and the Irish Government has introduced these national guidelines to strengthen arrangements for the protection of children. They emphasise the importance of inter-agency co-operation and outline the various steps to be followed in order to protect children at risk and try to prevent the recurrence of child abuse.

Good practice at the front line is based on clear policies and principles. The Irish Government's policy underpinning this Children First: National Guidance is:

- the welfare and safety of children, which is central to all Government policy;
- the promotion of and support for family life;
- the use of the minimum necessary intervention, in a timely way, to keep children safe;
- agencies working together to help children reach their full potential;
- agencies working together to provide safer and more effective services;
- the State and civil society working together to promote children's welfare.

www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/25844/b90aafa55804462f84d05f87f0ca2bf6.pdf#page=null

The National Council for Children's Services (NCCS) in Kenya

The National Council for Children's Services(NCCS) is mandated to exercise general supervision and control over the planning, financing and coordination of child rights and welfare activities and to advice the Government on all aspects thereof. The Councils objectives include the following:

- To provide enabling policy and conducive legislative framework.
- To promote and participate in enforcement of existing legislations and policies on children.
- To mobilize resources for delivery of child rights and welfare activities.
- To establish and operationalize coordination mechanism on service delivery to children.
- To enhance research on children issues and create conducive environment for sharing research
- To advocate for child rights and welfare.
- To enhance monitoring and evaluation of children activities and programmes.
- To coordinate the implementation of the national child protection framework.
- To mainstream children issues in Vision 2030.

In order to achieve the above objectives, the Council's activities are grouped into four thematic areas namely:

- Policy development and legal issues;
- Resource mobilization management and organizational development;
- Planning, research, monitoring and evaluation; and
- Advocacy, media participation and partnerships.

https://www.nccs.go.ke/

Dóchas Leadership Safeguarding Charter

Brighter Communities Worldwide is a member of Dóchas and a signatory to the Dóchas Leadership Safeguarding Charter.

The leaders of Ireland's International development and humanitarian NGOs are dedicated to building a world where justice, equality, solidarity and respect for human rights prevail. We are responsible for ensuring that our staff, operations and programmes do no harm to the individuals we work to support, and do not expose them to abuse or exploitation.

We pledge to exhibit leadership behaviours that show we are committed to safeguarding principles and advocate the implementation of organisational actions that align with international standards to foster positive safeguarding cultures.

https://www.dochas.ie/resources/safeguarding/dochas-safeguarding-charter/

Definition of Abuse

- Abuse is the violation of an individual's human and civil rights by any other person or persons. This occurs in many forms and may consist of a single act or repeated acts. It may also be shown by a failure to act in order to protect vulnerable people.
- Abuse occurs when adults hurt children, either physically or in some other way. In the majority of cases, the abuser is someone the child or young person knows well, such as a parent, friend or relative.
- There are four main kinds of abuse:
    - **Physical abuse** is actual or likely physical injury to a child such as hitting, kicking or shaking, where there is definite knowledge, or reasonable suspicion, that the injury was inflicted or knowingly not prevented.
    - **Emotional abuse** is harm done by persistent or severe emotional ill-treatment or rejection, such as degrading punishments, threats, not giving care and affection and bullying, resulting in adverse effects on the behaviour and emotional development of a child.
    - **Neglect** occurs when basic needs such as food, warmth and medical care are not met, or when there is failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger, resulting in serious impairment to their health or development.
    - **Sexual abuse** is the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions. It includes sexual slavery, pornography, child abuse and sexual assault. Sexual abuse may involve siblings or other family members, or persons outside the family.
        - **Sexual Exploitation –** is defined as an actual or attempted abuse of someone's position of vulnerability (e.g. a person depending on another person for survival, food rations, school books, transport, sanitary pads) differential power or trust, to obtain sexual favours including not only offering money or other social, economic or political advantages. It includes trafficking and prostitution.
- Abuse may be current or recent, or in some cases, historical, i.e. an adult may disclose sexual abuse that took place when he/she was a child. Abuse may be carried out by adult men or women, or by siblings or other young people.
- There are some groups of children who are particularly vulnerable; children with disabilities are among these, and children from ethnic minority communities who may be particularly vulnerable if their communities suffer from discrimination. Children who are refugees or asylum seeking, and children living in residential care are also among these groups. Abuse may also take place in families in which there is alcohol or drug abuse, domestic violence or mental health problems.

Code of Behaviour

There are some simple rules of behaviour that will help to create a safe and secure environment for children we are working with and avoid situations where abuse or allegations of abuse may occur.

- Respect children and listen to them.
- Encourage children to feel comfortable enough to talk to others about any concerns they have and to point out attitudes and behaviour they do not like.
- Consider situations which may present risks to children and/or adults and manage them so that the risks are minimised.
- Understand the definition of abuse (see policy) and be aware that this policy offers protection from sexual exploitation as well as sexual abuse.
- Do not spend time alone with children – plan activities so that more than one adult is present or, at least, other people are within sight and hearing.
- Ensure that adults and children have separate sleeping accommodation if it is a residential event.
- Do not take children alone in a vehicle, even for short journeys, unless this is unavoidable for safety reasons. If this is unavoidable, make sure that another adults or another member of staff is aware it is happening.
- Do not engage in inappropriate physical or verbal contact with children such as hugs or horseplay - suggestive remarks or gestures even in fun.
- Avoid being drawn into inappropriate attention-seeking behaviour, such as tantrums or crushes.
- Do not show favouritism to any child over another.
- Do not engage in sexually proactive or provocative games.
- Do not do things of a personal nature for children that they can do themselves, e.g. using the toilet/latrine.

  N.B. If it is absolutely necessary to do things of a personal nature for children, particularly if they are very young or are disabled, then the tasks should only be carried out with the full understanding and consent of their parents/carers. In an emergency situation that requires this type of help, you should endeavour to have someone present and fully inform the parent/carers as soon as it is reasonable possible. In such situations it is important that you ensure that all staff etc. are sensitive to the child and undertake personal care tasks with the utmost discretion.

- Do not use the internet to access child pornography sites.
- Do not use AI tools to generate synthetic images or representations of real or realistic children, beneficiaries, or community members. Do not use AI tools in connection with any safeguarding matter, case note, or investigation record without prior written approval from the CEO/CD. Do not enter any identifying information about a child or their circumstances into an AI tool. See BCW AI Usage Policy for full requirements.
- Do not trivialise or exaggerate child abuse issues.
- Do not rely on just your good name to protect you or believe that an allegation of child abuse could never happen to you.
- Make it clear to children you are working with that Brighter Communities Worldwide do not tolerate child abuse by staff, volunteers and associates.
- Use this code of behaviour as the basis for a devising a code directed at children's behaviour towards other children in circumstances where you are working with a group of children e.g. through school projects.

Reporting concern of Child abuse - Report template

Part One: Person Reporting

Name

Brighter Communities Worldwide Staff Member /Brighter Communities Worldwide Volunteer / Other (please circle relevant one)

Details of any other organisation involved

Your relationship to the child concerned

Part Two: About the Child/Young Person(s)

Name(s)

Male or female?

Age

Address

Who does the child or young person live with?

Part Three: About Your Concern

How did you come to have a concern: was abuse observed or suspected?

Was an allegation made?

Did a child disclose abuse?

Date, time and place of any incident(s)

Nature of concern/allegation

Observations made by you (e.g. child's emotional state, any physical evidence)

Write down exactly what the child said and what you said.

Any other relevant information? (e.g. disability? language?)

Were other children involved or aware?

Who have you reported this incident/concern to?

Time and date of reporting

Advice given and action taken

Reference - Children First : National Guidance for the Protection of Children

DECLARATION

Brighter Communities Worldwide is fully committed to safeguarding the well-being of children by protecting them from abuse of all kinds e.g. neglect, physical, sexual and emotional harm.

Working as an employee, contractor or volunteer with Brighter Communities Worldwide it is important that you have taken time to thoroughly read this Child Safeguarding Policy.

By being made aware of the policy it is our intention to ensure that we are all pro-active in providing a safe and secure environment for the children we come across in our work.

……

Declaration:

I have read and understand Brighter Communities Worldwide's Child Safeguarding Policy. I have read and understand the *Dóchas Leadership Safeguarding Charter.*

I accept the aims of this policy.

I agree to abide by its principles and follow the guidelines set out and adhere to the Code of Behaviour.

Signed:_____ Date:___/___/___

Name:_____

(Please print)

Position: _____

Office: _____

Please sign & return to Brighter Communities Worldwide

This will be kept in on file.