



### 3.21 Child safe policy

Section B:	Organisational policies and procedures	First Issue:	23 Feb 2017
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#### Policy statement

CHP is committed to the safety of all children.

CHP has a zero tolerance of child abuse

CHP aims to create a child safe and child friendly environment where children feel safe and welcome. All children who come to the CHP office or we engage with in other settings, for example at CHP events, have a right to feel and be safe.

The welfare of the children CHP provide a service to or engage with will always be the first priority.

#### Application

##### Scope

This policy applies to all CHP employees, volunteers, students on placement and board members.

##### Definition

In the homelessness sector a distinction is often made between children and young people as the sector is funded to work with young people and funding guidelines define a young person as aged between 15 and 25. However for the purposes of this policy children are defined as anyone under 18 years of age.

##### Failure to Disclose offence

A new offence came into effect on 27 October 2014 for adults who fail to disclose child sexual abuse to police. The new offence applies to all adults, not just professionals who work with children. Any adult who holds a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child in Victoria must report that belief to police, unless they have a reasonable excuse for not reporting. More information about this offence can be found [here](#).

##### Failure to Protect offence

A new 'failure to protect' offence came into effect on 1 July 2015 that applies to people within organisations who knew of a risk of child sexual abuse by someone in the organisation and had the



authority to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently failed to do so. More information about this offence can be found [here](#).

### **CHP engagement with children**

CHP has limited direct engagement with children. The Homelessness Advocacy Service (HAS) predominately works with adults, though some clients have children. HAS is mainly a phone based service delivery model, with occasional outreach visits. On occasion, a client will bring their children into the office when coming in for a meeting.

The Peer Education and Support Program (PESP) team leader works with the PESP members not their children and the program is not a support service. That said the PESP team leader remains alert to any concerns about PESP member's children and provides support (eg advice, referral information) when required. PESP members may bring their children to the office or to CHP events on occasion. Engagement with children may also occur during PESP activities, for example school tours, school visits and consumer surveys.

The Policy and Communications program might engage with children as part of policy and advocacy work, for example consumers they organise to do media with might have children or they might seek feedback from children to inform the development of a policy position.

More generally, direct engagement with children might occur at CHP events (eg children of people attending the event, or speakers presenting) or when the children of employees or board members come to the office.

### **Raising the awareness of the impact of homelessness on children**

CHP recognises that homelessness has a major impact on children. Homelessness can negatively impact on children in many ways including:

- Disrupted attachments to caregivers and a distorted sense of self.
- Inhibiting a child's cognitive, social, physical, emotional and psychological development
- A sense of not being connected to their peers and the broader community
- Difficulty engaging with and maintaining education (including early education services such as childcare and kindergarten)

CHP believes we have a responsibility to raise awareness about the impact of homelessness on children. We do this in a number of ways, including:

- Regular children specific editions of Parity
- Media stories addressing the impact of homelessness on children
- Advocacy
- Policy development
- Membership on the Youth Refuge Coordinators Network



- Victorian representative for the National Youth Coalition of Housing
- Engaging with the Statewide Children's Resource Program
- Capacity building events and forums focused on children

### **Children's rights to safety and participation**

CHP recognises the right of children to participate and encourage children to express their views. CHP listen to their suggestions, especially on matters that directly affect them.

CHP actively encourage all children who use our services to 'have a say' about things that are important to them. CHP listens to and act on any concerns children, or their parents, raise with us.

CHP is currently exploring how we can provide more structured opportunities for children to participate in CHP, for example in the development of policy positions and seeking feedback about our organisation.

### **Working with children in HAS**

CHP is committed to respecting and supporting the rights of children, including the right to complain. A child might want support from HAS, for instance to make a complaint against a homelessness provider. If safe and appropriate to do so HAS will work with the child's parent or guardian to determine the best way to assist a child that has contacted HAS for support. Where possible the HAS advocate should also discuss strategies with the Manager Consumer Programs prior to the interview.

When working with children it is important that child sensitive practices are employed. The [homeless kids count website](#) has some excellent resources, including [guidance on how to engage with children, do assessments and deal with feelings](#).

### **Valuing diversity**

CHP values diversity and does not tolerate any discriminatory practices. To achieve this, we:

- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children and their families
- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and their families
- welcome children with a disability and their families and act to promote their participation

### **Recruiting employees and volunteers**

CHP applies the best practice standards in the recruitment and screening of employees and volunteers. CHP interview and conduct referee checks on all employees and volunteers and require police checks and Working with Children Checks.



### **Supporting employees and volunteers**

CHP seeks to attract and retain the best employees and volunteers. We provide support and supervision so people feel valued, respected and fairly treated.

A [Code of Conduct](#) provides guidance to our employees, board members and volunteers. All employees, board members and volunteers have to abide by the Code of Conduct.

### **Reporting a child safety concern or complaint**

In addition to being required to report to police any reasonable belief a child has been sexually abused all CHP employees have a responsibility for responding to child safety concerns or complaints raised or made by employees, volunteers, parents or children.

In the event someone raises child safety concerns or complaints with an employee or volunteer it is very important the employee or volunteer is sensitive, respectful, supportive and clear about the next steps. The employee or volunteer should advise a manager or the CEO as soon as possible about the issue and the manager and CEO will determine what the next steps will be. Confidentiality is critical and the matter should only be discussed with the complainant and the CEO or manager.

People, including children are encouraged to report a child safety concern or complaint. The CHP complaints policy can be viewed at the CHP website [here](#).

### **Risk Management**

CHP recognises the importance of a risk management approach to minimising the potential for child abuse or harm to occur and use this to inform our policy, procedures and activity planning.

### **Related policies**

There are a number of policies that inform and provide context for this policy with which employees, board members, students and volunteers of CHP should familiarise themselves. The key policies are set out under the *Related policies and documents* header below.

#### **Responsibility**

- CEO
- Management team
- CHP employees, board members, students and volunteers

#### **Related policies and documents**

- 1.2 CHP purpose, vision and mission
- 3.15 Privacy



- 3.16 Complaints
- 7.6 Injury and incident reporting
- 8.4 Code of Conduct
- 8.7 Whistleblowers
- 8.11 Discipline
- 10.8 Client critical incident reporting