



The Mental Shift CIC – Protecting Vulnerable People

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For the purposes of this policy a Vulnerable Person will be the term used to cover children, young people and vulnerable Adults. This policy also has signs of abuse and abuse indicators attached.

1. A Vulnerable Person is deemed to be a child aged under 18 by law or an adult who is over the age of 16 and who is or may be in need of community care services. This could be by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness, and who is or may be unable to take care of him/herself or unable to protect him/herself against significant harm or exploitation.

The Mental Shift C.I.C. are an inclusive company and by the very nature of our work, have a responsibility to ensure that every member/Vulnerable Person using their services have a safe environment to learn and develop no matter their race, colour,

religion, disability, or financial circumstances. Where there are language barriers we will seek support to ensure every child, young person or vulnerable adult has the same opportunities.

This policy has been put in place by The Mental Shift C.I.C. to safeguard any Vulnerable Person using our services. This is in line with Health & Safety Rules & Regulations laid down by the law for people who work with children, young people or vulnerable adults. And to ensure their rights to be safe are adhered to by all volunteers and staff.

The Mental Shift C.I.C. fully recognises its responsibilities for Vulnerable Person protection. This policy applies to ALL volunteers and staff recruited for or involved in or our work.

The Mental Shift C.I.C. and all its appointed volunteers and staff believe that a Vulnerable Person has a right to be protected from physical, sexual or emotional abuse, and neglect. They are our members, and their welfare is the underpinning principle guiding this policy.

Responsibility

In relation to the work of The Mental Shift C.I.C. who are not responsible for the day to day care of Vulnerable Persons, their volunteers and staff must also take responsibility for any child, young people or adult during the period they are involved with or using our services.

The Mental Shift C.I.C. will protect Vulnerable Persons By:

- Adopting a policy statement on safeguarding the welfare of Vulnerable Persons (page 4 of this document).

- Having a recruitment and selection policy for volunteers and staff.
- Providing an environment where all Vulnerable Persons feel safe, secure and valued
- Providing clear lines of communication, making all volunteers and staff aware of the groups' policy on protecting Vulnerable Persons and know who they can approach with their concerns and be listened to.
- Make all volunteers or any staff employed by the group aware of this policy and the procedures for dealing with situations concerning abuse and know how to identify and report possible cases of abuse.
- Make it clear to volunteers and staff that they have a role to play in protecting Vulnerable Persons from harm and that this applies to everyone and any work or service the group is involved in.

Carrying out Disclosure and Barring checks on all volunteers or staff involved with the work of the group.

- Nominating a Named Vulnerable Person Protection Officer (VPPO) and introducing a system whereby volunteers may take their concerns to and who will be responsible for handling any abuse situation (page 4 of this document).
- Source appropriate training for the VPPO, volunteers and staff to undertake to raise awareness and allow them to recognise situations where abuse may have taken place, and know how to deal with situations of abuse.
- Carrying out risk assessments and designing the work with Vulnerable Persons in mind and apply safety mechanisms were relevant for their protection
- Treating all would-be volunteers as job applicants for any position involving contact with Vulnerable Persons

Safety Guidelines

It is our policy that volunteers and any staff recruited to work with or support our members must take responsibility for their concerns on safety. They must act on any suspicion or concern they have regarding the abuse or neglect of any Vulnerable Person when they are using our services. Volunteers and staff are required to pass on any concerns or disclosures made to them by any individual to the Vulnerable Persons Protection Officer whose responsibility it is to act on any information received, also to follow the guidelines laid out in this policy.

The *Vulnerable Persons Protection Officer (VPPO)* volunteers/staff should approach with any concerns or information on abuse is:

Name: Kai Leighton

Contact telephone No: 07510600722

Email: kai@thementalshift.org

Rules of Care

All volunteers and staff of The Mental Shift C.I.C. should be aware that there may be other issues concerning a Vulnerable Person, for example, bereavement, divorce, bullying, offending etc. In any such cases volunteers and staff are expected to use a caring, non-judgemental attitude in their approach, to be a good listener, to offer appropriate support or other assistance with or for the Vulnerable Person.

- If a Vulnerable Person wants to speak to you, give time to listen in a quiet but visible place. Avoid isolated situations out of sight, volunteers and staff should always avoid any situation

where they are alone with any member of the group (male or female)

- Volunteers and staff should always exercise great caution in physical contact with any member of the group
- Be prepared for what you might hear, don't appear shocked, horrified, disgusted or angry
- If the volunteer or member of staff feels the situation is one of immediate danger always call the emergency services (e.g. police, ambulance)
- Remember to have regard for your own safety, leave the situation if it is not safe for you
- Where the situation is safe, listen to the Vulnerable Person and give the necessary support and reassurance
- Do not press them for details, do not make comments or judgements other than to show concern, do not confront the abuser
- Issues of confidentiality must be clarified early on. For example, volunteers must make it clear that they will have to discuss the situation with the Vulnerable Person Protection Officer (VPPO) and tell them why
- Where a Vulnerable Person expresses a wish for concerns not to be pursued then this should be respected wherever possible. However, decisions about whether to respect their wishes must have regard to the level of risk to the individual and others, and their capacity to understand the decision in question. In some circumstances their wishes may be overridden in favour of considerations of safety
- Decisions to override the Vulnerable Person's wish not to take the matter further should be the product of discussions with the VPPO

- Volunteers and the VPPO should note any concerns and information given to them or witnessed by them
- Do not seek evidence, support the Vulnerable Person and log down any information given at this stage. All information may be used later for an effective formal investigation
- All records of any incident concerning any member of the group should be kept in a locked confidential file
- If a crime has been committed preserve any evidence without contaminating it. For example, if the person making the complaint uses bad language when explaining themselves, you should write it down word for word as they have said it

Vulnerable Person Protection Officer (VPPO) Procedure

In the first instance, if a volunteer informs the VPPO that a member has made a disclosure they should follow the procedures listed below:

- Listen carefully to the volunteer or member of staff.
- Listen carefully to what is being said by the Vulnerable Person, taking care to write it down word for word the way they have said it to you, for example, use of bad language to explain their situation. Also record the time and the date of the interview.
- Allow the volunteer or member of staff to recount what was disclosed to them and in what context.
- Find out how the volunteer or member of staff handled this and if commitments were made.
- Do not promise confidentiality to the volunteer or staff member or the member making the disclosure.
- Having carefully assessed the information, speak to the Vulnerable Person with the volunteer or member of staff present, both as support, a witness and to write down what the Vulnerable Adult is saying.

- Reassure the member that they are not to blame but do not ask searching questions, it's not an interrogation.
- Find out if anyone else has been told or if another agency may be involved, the Vulnerable Person may have already disclosed to someone in this agency who is dealing with it.
- Suggest that they should not talk to anyone else about the matter.
- Record the time and the date of the interview.
- If satisfied that the above recommendations have been followed and there is cause for some concern or you're not sure what the next step should be, the VPPO should contact the appropriate support or helpline.

Vulnerable Person Protection Officer (VPPO) – GUIDELINES BEFORE REFERRAL

The decision to refer or not to refer should be made by the VPPO after they have ascertained the following:

- Have this policy, known indicators and definitions of abuse to hand
- Ensure the wishes of the Vulnerable Person and their right to self-determination has been accounted for
- Gauge the seriousness of the abuse and the level of risk to the individual, take account of the effect of the abuse on the individual and the level of risk to others
- Consider whether a criminal offence has been committed
- Take account of the ability of others (the police, social work etc who may make a positive contribution to the situation- contact and ask for advice when not sure if a referral is required)

Discussion and Consideration for Volunteers and Staff

Volunteers and staff with concerns should discuss these discreetly with the

Vulnerable Person Protection Officer (VPPO) in all circumstances as soon as possible after a disclosure has been made or suspicions of abuse are observed. If they are unavailable, then any concerns should be discussed with a member of the groups Management Committee. Staff and volunteer concerns about colleagues should be addressed initially with the Chairperson of the Management Committee, if this is not possible or the concern is about the Chairperson or other members of the Management Committee, they should refer the issue to the appropriate support agency qualified to give the right advice. These are as follows:

For a Child or Young Person

The NSPCC Child Protection Helpline is 0808 800 5000, helpline advisers are all Child Protection Officers. If you have suspicions but are worried that there may be an innocent explanation, you can talk in confidence to the Helpline Adviser who will help you decide what to do. If necessary, where the child's safety is at risk, they will pass the information on to social services to investigate the matter further. Other contacts regarding adults are:

General Descriptors for recognising types of abuse concerning Vulnerable Persons

There are different types of abuse that happen to Vulnerable Persons like physical, emotional, sexual abuse, and neglect. Below are general descriptors volunteers and staff should take account of when adhering to the groups Vulnerable Person Protection Policy

SIGNS OF ABUSE

The following may indicate abuse, but do not readily jump to conclusions.

Physical – unexplained or hidden injuries, unexplained bruising, lack of medical attention.

Emotional – reverting to younger behaviour, nervousness, sudden underachievement, attention seeking, running away and stealing or lying.

Sexual – pre-occupied with sexual matters evident in words, play, drawings, being sexually provocative with adults, disturbed sleep, nightmares, bedwetting, secretive relationships with adults or children, tummy pains with no apparent cause.

Neglect – looking ill-cared for and unhappy, being withdrawn or aggressive, having lingering injuries or health problems.

Child or Young Person

- **Physical** – where children’s bodies are hurt or injured
This can happen by hitting, shaking, kicking, punching, scalding, suffocating and other ways of inflicting pain or injury to a child. It also includes giving a child harmful substances, such as drugs, alcohol or poison. If a parent or carer reports non-existing symptoms of illness in a child, or deliberately causes illness in a child, this is also a form of physical abuse.

- **Emotional** – where children don’t receive love and affection, may be frightened by threats or taunts or are given the responsibility beyond their years

This could be where a parent or carer behaves in a way that is likely to seriously affect their child’s emotional development. It can range from constant rejection and denial of affection, through to continual severe criticism, deliberate humiliation and other ways of verbally “terrorising” a child.

- **Sexual abuse** – is when a child or young person is pressurised, forced or tricked into taking part in any kind of sexual activity with an adult or young person.

This can include kissing, touching the young person's genitals or breasts, intercourse or oral sex. Encouraging a child to look at pornographic magazines, videos or sexual acts is also sexual abuse.

- **Bullying** – if you know or are told a child is being bullied you should try to help, use a sympathetic and caring approach at all times.
 - Listen to young people's feelings and concerns
 - Help them to explore their options and don't take over
 - Talk to other adults, explore options
 - Encourage children to feel good about themselves – those who bully and the bullied often lack self-esteem
 - Encourage children to understand that we are all different, yet all equally important
 - Encourage children to think about their own and each others' feelings.
- **Neglect** – a persistent lack of appropriate care of children, including love, stimulation, safety, nourishment, warmth, education and medical attention. This can have a serious effect on a child's physical, mental and emotional development. For babies and very young children it can be life threatening.

Vulnerable Adult

DEFINITIONS OF ABUSE (*Centre for Policy on Ageing 1996*)

Abuse is the harming of another individual usually by someone who is in a position of power, trust or authority over that individual. The harm may be physical, psychological or emotional or it may be directed at exploiting their vulnerability in more subtle ways. For example, through denying access to people who can come to the aid of the person, or through misuse or misappropriation of his or her financial resources.

PHYSICAL ABUSE SIGNS

Please note: Some ageing processes can cause changes which are hard to distinguish from some aspects of physical assault e.g. skin bruising can occur very easily due to blood vessels becoming fragile.

- A history of unexplained falls or minor injuries
- Bruising in well protected areas, or clustered from repeated striking
- Finger marks
- Burns of unusual location or type
- Injuries found at different states of healing
- Injury shape similar to an object
- Injuries to head; face; scalp

SEXUAL ABUSE SIGNS

- Disclosure or partial disclosure (the use of phrases like 'it's a secret')
- Disturbed behaviour e.g. depression, sudden withdrawal from activities, loss of previous skills, self injury, showing fear or

aggression to one particular person, inappropriate seduction behaviour.

- Circumstances – e.g. two service users found in an isolated area, one in a distressed state

PSYCHOLOGICAL/EMOTIONAL SIGNS:

- Isolation
- Unkempt, unwashed, smell
- Over meticulous
- Inappropriately dressed
- Withdrawn, agitated, anxious not wanting to be touched
- Tearfulness
- Unexplained paranoia or excessive fears

NEGLECT SIGNS

- Physical condition poor
- Clothing in poor condition
- Untreated injuries or medical problems
- Poor personal hygiene

FINANCIAL OR MATERIAL SIGNS

- Unexplained or sudden inability to pay bills
- Unexplained or sudden withdrawal of money from accounts
- Disparity between assets and satisfactory living conditions
- Extraordinary interest by family members and other people in the vulnerable person's assets

DISCRIMINATORY SIGNS

- Lack of respect shown to an individual
- Signs of substandard service offered to an individual

- Exclusion from rights afforded to others, such as health, education, criminal justice

OTHER SIGNS OF ABUSE

- Where there is sensory deprivation e.g. where a vulnerable adult is prevented from getting access to their spectacles or hearing aid; restricted access to toilet and mobility equipment; and lack of personal clothing or possessions

PEOPLE WHO MIGHT ABUSE

- Informal carer, family, friends; neighbours, paid staff, volunteers, other service users, tenants, or strangers.