Digital Child Rights

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY DIGITAL CHILD RIGHTS

INTRODUCTION

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Digital Child Rights

1. CHILD PROTECTION PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

Based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

This Child Protection Policy deals with the protection of children and young people as defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. All children and young people involved in DCR activities, projects and programmes have the right to have their well-being and their best interests considered as top priority. This policy is also based on digital children's rights regarding the UN General Comment 25.

Non-negotiable duty

All organizations working for children's rights have an absolute duty to protect children from abuse, maltreatment, and exploitation both from within and external to organizations and therefore are required to have adequate standards, policies and mechanisms for protection in place.

Open environment

DCR therefore believes that in order to prevent abuse or address abuse of a child or young person it is important to create an environment where:
- issues of child protection are discussed openly and are understood by children and adults;
- there are open lines of communication both internally and externally within and between member organizations to improve awareness and implementation of child protection policies and practices;
- there is a framework to deal openly, consistently and fairly with allegations concerning both direct and indirect abuse.

Children's Participation

DCR works with and for children throughout the world, striving for a society that respects the rights of children. DCR believes that children's participation promotes the protection of children. DCR aims to create spaces where children feel able and willing to speak about abuse, free from abusers and which empowers them to become actors in their own protection without further discrimination or shame. DCR members work to empower children by making them aware about their rights and creating a safe environment in which they can exercise their rights.

Implementation and accountability

This Child Protection Policy is developed to ensure the highest standards of professional behavior and personal practice to ensure no harm occurs in any situation to children and young people during their involvement in DCR activities, projects and programmes.
The Child Protection Policy is supported by clear guidelines on how it needs to be implemented by organizations participating and supporting children in DCR activities, projects and programmes. Special procedures and checklists are part of the Child Protection Policy, including reporting procedures and actions following behavior, which is not in compliance with the child protection standards.

These principles underpin all of the following standards set out in this document.

1.1. DEFINITIONS

Child

A child is defined as anyone under the age of 18, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). It is recognized that some Independent Children's Rights Institutions have remits for young people over the age of 18.

Direct contact with children

Being in the physical presence of a child/children in the context of DCR's work, whether contact is occasional or regular, short or long-term. This includes all the DCR work and could involve attending meetings and conferences at which children are present.

Indirect contact with children

DCR has a responsibility to ensure appropriate child protection processes are in place in instances of indirect contact which will include:

1. Having access to information on children in the context of DCR's work, such as children's names, locations (addresses of individuals or projects), photographs and case studies.

2. Providing funding members that work 'directly' with children particularly through DCR. Although indirectly, this nonetheless has an impact on children, and therefore confers upon the donor organization responsibility of child protection issues.

1.2. DEFINITIONS OF CHILD ABUSE

According to the World Health Organization, "child abuse" or "maltreatment" constitutes 'all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power'.

Our understanding of child abuse and exploitation includes, but is not limited to:

Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child.

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional ill-treatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless and unloved, inadequate, or valued only so far as they meet the needs of another person. It may involve age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. It may involve causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of ill-treatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative (e.g rape) or non-penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic materials or watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet the child's basic physical and/ or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's physical or cognitive development.

Commercial sexual exploitation of children comprises sexual abuse by the adult and remuneration in cash or kind to the child or a third person or persons. The child is treated as sexual object and as a commercial object. The commercial sexual exploitation of children constitutes a form of coercion and violence against children, and amounts to forced labour and a contemporary form of slavery.

Commercial exploitation means exploiting a child in work or other activities for the benefit of others and to the detriment of the child's physical or mental health, education, moral or social-emotional development. It includes, but is not limited to, child labour.

Criminal exploitation – children being forced to participate in illegal activities such as forced begging, shoplifting and pickpocketing, cannabis cultivation, drug dealing. A child who is being abused may often experience more than one type of cruelty.

2. THE NEED FOR A CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

"States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child." Article 19, UNCRC

It is the responsibility for all independent children's rights institutions to ensure that Article 19 is realized for all children.

DCR needs a child protection policy to fulfill its commitment to protecting children and such a policy applies to everyone associated with the Network who will be expected to read DCR's Child Protection Policy and sign a commitment to adhere to its principles and procedures.

3. RISK ASSESSMENTS AND SAFE PROGRAM DESIGN

DCR is committed to designing and delivering programmes that are safe for children. Risk assessments are therefore conducted accordingly.

4. DCR'S CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

This Policy is developed to ensure the highest standards of professional behavior and personal practice to ensure no harm occurs in any situation to children during their involvement in any DCR activities or projects.

4.1. STAFF AND PERSONNEL

As a condition for working with DCR, all staff; Management Board members; interns and volunteers and all those acting on behalf of DCR, such as members, consultants or trainers are required to:

1. Accept and commit to the Child Protection Policy

a. Staff, volunteers, interns and consultants are recruited with clear job or role descriptions that include a statement on the position or role's responsibilities to meet the requirements of DCR's child protection policy.

b. All recruitment interviews should include a discussion on child safeguarding and protection, the candidate's understanding of this and DCR'S commitment.

2. Sign a personal declaration stating any criminal convictions, including spent convictions. DCR job application forms include a question asking for consent to gain information on a person's past convictions/pending disciplinary proceedings.

For those working directly with children, are added:
Where such systems exist that satisfactory clearance through a police check conducted by the responsible authorities of the country of origin/birth.

3. Provide the name and contact information of two character references they have known for no less than two years, excluding family members, who have knowledge of the candidate's experience and suitability to work with children. The identity of the referees will be verified.

4.2. MANAGEMENT

A Child Protection Officer (CPO), a member of DCR with expertise and experience in Child Protection, is nominated by the Board and report to the Board. The term of office will be one year, renewable at the discretion of the Board.

The CPO will be responsible for:
- Promoting awareness and implementation of the Child Protection Policy throughout the organization;

- Monitoring implementation of the Policy and reporting to the Board;

- Acting as a source of support and information for staff on safeguarding issues;
Specific procedures and checklists are part of the Child Protection Policy and are referred to in section 7 which address the implementation strategy for the Child Protection Policy, including reporting procedures and monitoring and evaluation processes. Safeguarding will be included within the development of projects by DCR.

5. DCR'S CHILD PROTECTION CODE OF CONDUCT

DCR will take all necessary actions to prevent and/or respond to child protection situations. DCR will never ignore and will respond to all reports of actual or alleged abuses based on its Child Protection Policy, irrespective of the nature of the referral, who the allegations are about or who the referrer is or where she/he is from. This response must not include investigation which will be undertaken by the relevant child protection and police services.

This Code of Conduct includes guidance on ethical and proper standards of behavior of adults towards children, and also of children towards other children. It has been developed with the best interests of the child as the primary consideration and should be interpreted in a spirit of transparency and common sense. DCR aims for everyone, children and adults, to participate in a safe and happy way in DCR'S work and activities.

DO:

Be aware what constitutes child abuse and exploitation (included in the Child Protection Policy) and understand its provisions.

Know signs of abuse and reporting any suspicious observations immediately to the Child Protection officer.

Ensure that you know who the Child Protection Officer is. Respect lines of authority and reporting procedures.

Treat all children equally: be inclusive and involve all children without discrimination.

Maintain high standards of personal and professional conduct both personally and in others.

Protect the health, safety and well-being of yourself and others.

Be aware of high-risk peer situations (e.g. unsupervised mixing of older and younger children and possibilities of discrimination against minors) and the potential for peer abuse.

Be concerned about the way in which your language, actions, and relationships with children could be perceived.

Develop special measures/supervision to protect younger and especially vulnerable children from peer and adult abuse.

Provide an enabling environment for children's personal, physical, social, emotional, moral and intellectual development.

Encourage and respect children's voices and views.

Limit access to and/or not expose children to any inappropriate electronic material.

At all times respect the confidentiality of children's personal information.

Obtain written consent from the child and parent/carer when photographing, filming or requesting personal information for activities.

Ensure that there is a minimum of two staff members present in meetings with children (to allow one to go out to deal with any immediate needs of children).

When participants are invited to stay overnight, room sharing arrangements are agreed in advance and with consent of the parents/guardians and children.

DON'T:

Engage in any form of sexual activity with children.

Never have a child stay overnight in the adult's room, unless prior consent is provided by both the child and his/her parent/guardian. Never sleep in the same bed as a child.

Do not perform activities for children that they can do themselves, including dressing, bathing and grooming.

Do not discriminate, shame, humiliate, belittle, or degrade children. This includes anything that may be considered emotional abuse (e.g. use language that will mentally or emotionally abuse a child or tell a story/show pictures that will mentally or emotionally abuse a child).

Do not hit or otherwise physically assault participants.

Do not act in any way that may be abusive or place others at risk of abuse.

Do not condone violations of this code by others – staff, interns, consultants, etc.

Do not be alone with a child in any circumstances that might be questioned by others

Do not allow children to engage in sexually provocative games with each other.

Do not suggest inappropriate behavior or relations of any kind or encourage any crushes by a child.

Do not take photos, film or request personal information if not required for DCR'S activities.

Do not use inappropriately contact details (including social media accounts) from children out of DCR'S programmes.

Never guarantee confidentiality to a child.

Do not investigate any disclosures from a child.

Report any suspicious observations or alleged abuse as well as any circumstances or situations, which may be subject to misinterpretation to the Child Protection Focal Person.

6. IMPLEMENTATION

6.1. REPORTING PROCEDURE

All witnessed, suspected or alleged violations of DCR'S Child Protection Policy will be immediately reported to the Child Protection Officer – using the safeguarding reporting form. The guiding principle is that the safety of the child is always the most important consideration.

At meetings and activities where children are directly involved, children will be informed about DCR's safeguarding policy and complaints mechanism in a child-friendly manner.

The first stage is to decide whether the concerns are internal to the organization or relate to an external situation.

Disclosures or Suspicions of Abuse

If a child or young person discloses abuse or there is reason to believe that the child or young person has been or is at risk of abuse the following steps must be taken:

1. Details of the statement or suspicion must be recorded as soon as possible after the conversation takes place.

2. Should the information come from a third party DCR has a duty to report it to the Child Protection Office.

3. The CPO will decide the appropriate action to take including whether a referral to the authorities is justified.

4. In the case of suspicions the CPO will advise the staff member whether to discuss concerns with or inform the child or young person of referral to the relevant authorities.

5. If for some reason, no CPO is contactable, then the employee should contact a member of the Board.

Allegations or Suspicions of Abuse against DCR staff

If allegations or suspicion of abuse of a child or young person is made against a staff member the following procedure must be followed:

1. All allegations or suspicion by member of DCR staff must be reported to the CPO and the Board.

2. The protection of the child is the priority and the CPO in consultation with the Chair will decide if a referral to the relevant authority is appropriate.

3. The Chair will proceed in accordance with DCR'S Disciplinary Policy.

6.2. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY: THE INTERNAL SAFEGUARDING PROCEDURE

DCR will immediately suspend any employee, volunteer, intern, board member, consultant, adviser who is alleged to have violated the Child Protection Policy, pending the outcome of the investigation. DCR reserves the right to take any disciplinary action against any of the above who have been proven guilty in an investigation, which may include reporting the incident to the police.

The investigation completed by the designated Board member will be submitted to the Board who will come to a decision about action to be taken. Decisions from any investigation will be confirmed in writing to the individual concerned.

Acts of a criminal nature will be referred to the police and/or Children's Welfare Services in the relevant jurisdiction.

When investigating concerns DCR will abide by the disciplinary policy.

In cases where staff from DCR members or accompanying adults with children are alleged to have violated DCR's Child Protection Policy in meetings and activities organized by DCR, this must be reported to the CPO, who will investigate discreetly, report and make recommendations to the Chair of the Board and appropriate action will be taken. This could include a referral to police or child welfare services or a complaint to the employing member. In case the person or organization is not able or willing to change its behavior according to the standards of DCR's Child Protection Policy, the Board may recommend to suspend further the member organization in accordance with DCR statutes.

7. REVIEW

The aim of monitoring and evaluating the Child Protection Policy is to learn from practical case experiences, which will contribute to inform policy reviews and changes to the Child Protection Policy.

DCR will regularly monitor the implementation of its Child Protection Policy and procedures. Progress, performance and lessons learned are reported by the CPO to the Board annually. Monitoring and evaluation will be done by checking whether the standards from the Child Protection Policy are implemented and whether safeguards are working. This will be done by carrying out a survey among DCR staff, interns and volunteers on how the standards from the Child Protection Policy are being met, how effective they are and what needs improving.

Next to the overall monitoring and evaluation of the Child Protection Policy, reactive monitoring will take place, after incidences have occurred, which will contribute to a learning process for DCR and if necessary changes to the Child Protection Policy or reporting procedures.

8. STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT TO DCR CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

I, ……., have read and understood the standards and guidelines outlined in this Child Protection Policy. I agree with the principles contained therein and accept the importance of implementing and promoting the child protection policies, procedures and practices contained within this document while working or associated with DCR.

I understand that any failure to respect this policy may result in the termination of my engagement with DCR, or further disciplinary or judicial proceedings as mentioned above.

Furthermore, I declare that I have no criminal records regarding an offense towards a child (which I have not previously declared) and nor do I know of any reason why anyone would deem me unsuitable to work with children.

…….. (Name)

…….. (Job title/role)

…….. (Date)

…….. (Signature)