**Keeping young people safe from abuse (safeguarding policy)**

**Date of last revision: February 2014**

Everybody who works with children / young people has a legal and moral obligation to keep them safe from abuse. Abuse can be physical, emotional or sexual. At Voice of Youth we believe in keeping our policies short so every worker including volunteers can be very familiar with them. However, safeguarding is a complicated issue so workers including volunteers must ensure they discuss concerns with colleagues and attend regular training on safeguarding issues. In addition, co-op members meet regularly to look at safeguarding issues in VOY.

**Do's and don'ts**

We use a 'traffic light system' to show how co-op members and volunteers can safeguard children:

**RED: STOP. These things should never be done.**

* Don't run a session on your own with a group of children/young people unless agreed by the co-op.
* Don't meet up with a child / young person outside work time (unless they are part of your existing family / social life: discuss any questions with colleagues).
* Never promise a child/young person you will keep a secret and never ask a child/young person to keep a secret.
* Don't give or buy a child/young person cigarettes, a light, alcohol or drugs.
* Don't share your personal contact or social media details with children/young people.
* Never lend / give money outside of an emergency situation.
* Never harm a child/young person physically and avoid play fighting.
* Never make sexual comments, nor physical contact that could be perceived as sexual e.g. kissing.

**AMBER: THINK.** Do not do these things without a good reason. Discuss these with a colleague, preferably someone with more experience than you, and bring up at the next VOY co-op meeting.

* We do not have a 'no touch' policy at VOY. However, be aware of young people's personal boundaries and how your actions may come across.
* We do not usually talk to parents/carers about something their child told us, or inform them about how they behaved. There may be exceptions, so discuss this with colleagues.
* Where possible we avoid shouting at children/young people.
* We would not usually bring a friend / relative to work outside of public events, or invite adult members of the public into sessions.
* Usually we would not give a child / young person a lift in a worker's car.

**GREEN: GO**. Things we can do.

* Listen to a child / young person who is trying to tell you something.
* You can speak with a child/young person one-to-one, but ensure you are in public view and inform colleagues.
* Always take action if you are worried about the well-being of a child/young person.
* Always take action on any complaint or allegation about another staff member.
* Always debrief after every session and let your colleagues know if you are worried about a child's safety or wellbeing.

**If you are worried that a child / young person is being abused**

If a child says that he or she is being abused or provides information that suggests that they are being abused, the person receiving that information should:

* Be calm and reassure the child / young person
* Discuss with the child / young person who needs to be told about the situation –say that you will probably need to discuss it with one of your colleagues, and that if we are really worried we might need to tell someone else for more advice
* Take what the child / young person says seriously
* Use open questions rather than putting words in their mouth, and don't put pressure on them or ask too many questions
* Let the child / young person know you understand what they have said and you will act upon it
* Get in touch with the safeguarding contacts (below) as soon as possible
* If the child / young person does not say anything but you are concerned for other reasons (e.g. persistent unexplained injuries, information from other people) get in touch with the safeguarding contacts (below) for support or advice.

**Safeguarding contacts**

Please ensure you know who the VOY safeguarding coordinators are, and put their phone numbers in your phone –if you're not sure, ask any colleague. If you cannot contact a safeguarding coordinator and you think the issue might be urgent, contact the local social services team immediately for further advice (Hackney Social Services out of hours support: 020 8356 2710 or 020 8356 4865). Alternatively, contact the NSPCC 24-hour helpline that provides counselling, information and advice to anyone concerned about a child / young person at risk: 080 8800 500.

**Complaints and concerns:**

If a child, parent / carer, colleague or member of the public complains that a worker is behaving inappropriately with children / young people, or if anybody raises any concerns about Voice of Youth or any of its workers or volunteers, ensure this complaint / concern is taken seriously. Use the contacts below to discuss the issues and gain further support. The matter must be raised at the earliest possible VOY co-op meeting. If necessary, a special meeting may need to be called and /or social services contacted.

**Staff recruitment**

**All** staff including volunteers **must** apply for an Enhanced DBS through Voice of Youth **before** starting any work with children / young people. All staff including volunteers must share any criminal record (including spent convictions) with a safeguarding coordinator. Staff will not be unfairly prejudiced if they have a criminal record that does not affect their ability to work with children / young people. Staff including volunteers who are waiting for their DBS to be returned may start work but must be supervised **at all times** by a worker with DBS clearance. DBS checks must be renewed every three years.6

**Working with young colleagues**

Some of our volunteers and co-op members are also young people (aged 16-17). Some are 'young people' (participants) on one of our programmes while volunteering on another, whereas others are purely volunteers or co-op members. In either case, they must be treated as young people in relation to this policy. They also need to be treated as colleagues when we are working alongside them, and they must do their best to understand and follow this policy in relation to the children / young people they work with.