Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Policy Name	Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy	Policy No.	P0027
Effective Date	15/11/2024 Date of last revision	15/11/2024	Version Number 1
Policy Owner	Board of Governance	Responsible Person	Meaningful Lives Chair
Applies to	Meaningful Lives staff, volunteers, labour hire, contractors, consultants, children and other individuals involved in the organisation		

Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 Meaningful Lives provides disability supports and services to children and young people under the age of 18. As such, Meaningful Lives is subject to mandatory requirements set out by the Victorian Child Safe Standards. These standards are designed to ensure organisations have systems, policies, and practices in place to keep children safe from abuse and harm in organisational settings.

1.2 All children who receive support from Meaningful Lives have a right to feel and be safe. The welfare of the children supported will always be the organisation's first priority and Meaningful Lives has a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse and harm. Meaningful Lives aims to create a child safe and child-friendly environment where children feel safe and are supported to live meaningful lives.

2. Purpose

2.1 This policy outlines how Meaningful Lives prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children and the steps taken to do this.

3. Scope

3.1 This policy applies to all staff, volunteers, labour hire, contractors, consultants (all referred to herein as team members) children and other individuals involved in our organisation. This policy applies to all activities delivered to children by Meaningful Lives.

4. Definitions

4.1 Child abuse – child abuse means:

- a sexual offence committed against a child
- an offence committed against a child under section 49M(1) of the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic), such as grooming
- physical violence against a child
- causing serious emotional or psychological harm to a child; or
- serious neglect of a child.

4.2 Harm – is damage to the health, safety or wellbeing of a child or young person, including as a result of child abuse by adults or the conduct of other children. It includes physical, emotional, sexual and psychological harm. Harm can arise from a single act or event and can also be cumulative; that is, arising as a result of a series of acts or events over a period of time.

4.3 Child/Children – means a person who is under the age of 18 years.

4.4 Concern – a concern refers to any potential issue that could impact negatively on the safety and wellbeing of children.

4.5 Complaint – a complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction to Meaningful Lives related to one or more of the following:

- its services or dealings with individuals
- allegations of abuse or misconduct by a team member
- disclosures of abuse or harm made by a child or young person
- the conduct of a child or young person at Meaningful Lives
- the inadequate handling of a previous concern; or
- general concerns about the safety of a group of children or activity.

5. Policy

5.1 Children's empowerment and participation

5.1.1 Meaningful Lives is a child-focused organisation. Meaningful Lives actively seeks to include children's views and ideas in organisational planning and delivery of services.

5.1.2 Meaningful Lives wants children to develop new friends through Meaningful Lives and encourages children to support of each other. Meaningful Lives does not tolerate bullying or abusive behaviour between children and acts if this occurs.

5.1.3 Meaningful Lives respects children's rights as outlined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and provides them with information about their rights, including the right to be safe at Meaningful Lives. Meaningful Lives actively seeks to understand what makes children feel safe in the organisation. Meaningful Lives regularly communicates with children about what they can do if they feel unsafe.

5.1.4 Meaningful Lives values children's voices and will act on safety concerns that children, their families, or any other stakeholders raise. Meaningful Lives supports children's participation in the following ways:

- regular discussions with children, including child-led conversations on what makes them feel safe and unsafe
- a suggestion email inbox for children that is regularly read, with suggestions assessed and acted on where appropriate. Children are provided with feedback on their suggestions
- consultation with children about any proposed significant changes to the physical environment, policies, procedures, programs or staffing. Children's views are collected by team members, provided to management and considered in the decision-making process; and
- information provided to children and families about Meaningful Lives operations, staffing and programs are made suitable for different ages and diversity groups. Child safety information sessions will be offered where needed.

5.2 Families and communities

5.2.1 Meaningful Lives recognises the important role of families and involves parents and carers when making significant decisions about their child. Parents, families and communities are welcome to provide feedback at any time through the organisation's feedback form on the website and are encouraged to raise any concerns they have directly with Meaningful Lives.

5.2.2 Meaningful Lives provides information to families and community about its child safe policies and practices including through:

- publishing this Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and Code of Conduct on our website
- including information about Meaningful Lives' child safety approach, its operations, Board of Governance (Board) and management structure in the Meaningful Lives persons supported handbook
- including articles and information on child safety and wellbeing, and reminders about the organisation's policies and procedures, in Meaningful Lives' newsletters.

5.3 Creating culturally safe environments for all Aboriginal children and their families

5.3.1 Meaningful Lives is committed to creating environments where Aboriginal culture is celebrated and Aboriginal children, families and community members are welcomed and included. Strategies to embed cultural safety for Aboriginal children include:

- Acknowledging Country at all meetings and public events
- providing opportunities for children to share their cultural identity and express their culture
- supporting children who wish to explore their culture, including consulting with their family and relevant Aboriginal organisations
- providing training for team members on the strengths of Aboriginal culture and its importance to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal children
- celebrating NAIDOC Week and acknowledging significant events including National Sorry Day and National Reconciliation Week
- seeking feedback from Aboriginal children, families and communities on their experience at Meaningful Lives, particularly how safe they feel expressing their identity including their culture.

5.4 Valuing diversity

5.4.1 Meaningful Lives values diversity and equity for all children. To achieve this, Meaningful Lives:

- provides training for all Board members and team members on understanding diversity and how to support inclusion and cultural safety
- welcomes and supports participation of all children, including children with disability, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those who are unable to live at home, LGBTIQA+ children and Aboriginal children and their families; and
- offers students and families through its enrolment forms the opportunity to provide information about themselves, including any specific needs to participate fully in Meaningful Lives' services
- has zero tolerance of racism and other forms of discrimination and acts when discrimination or exclusion is identified
- delivers supports that reflect children's diversity, their interests and cultures
- strives to reflect community diversity through representation in its workforce and Board
- acknowledge and celebrate important cultural dates
- have a physical and online environment that actively celebrates diversity; and
- commit to ensuring Meaningful Lives' facilities and online activities promote inclusion of children of all abilities.

5.5 Code of Conduct

5.6 Meaningful Lives has a Code of Conduct which includes child safe principles. All team members must comply with the Code of Conduct at all times. Breaches of the Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary action including termination of a person's involvement with the organisation.

5.7 All third-party contractors are also expected to abide by the Code of Conduct, and where they are engaging with children will have to sign an agreement to comply with the code, before delivering any services.

5.8 Recruiting team members

5.8.1 Meaningful Lives puts child safety and wellbeing at the centre of recruitment and screening processes for team members as outlined in the Values Based Recruitment Policy. Meaningful Lives only recruits staff and volunteers who are appropriate to engage with children. Board members are also screened.

5.8.2 In line with its NDIS Worker Screening Policy Meaningful Lives requires a Working with Children Check, National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Safety Screening and referee checks for all team members. Meaningful Lives requires that team members have appropriate qualifications for their roles and check to make sure these qualifications are valid.

5.9 Supporting team members

5.9.1 Meaningful Lives is committed to ensuring that all team members receive training to ensure they understand their child safety responsibilities and to support their engagement with children. Meaningful Lives assists its team members to incorporate child safety considerations into decisions and to promote a safe environment where children are empowered to speak up about issues that affect them.

5.9.2 All Meaningful Lives team members (including Board members) are required to complete annual child safety training. Training will be recorded in the organisation's Training Plan.

5.9.3 Team members will receive supervision to support their engagement with children and for compliance with the Code of Conduct and Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy.

5.9.4 Issues or concerns about the behaviour of any Meaningful Lives Team Members with children will be raised immediately and addressed in line with the Code of Conduct, Complaint Handling Policy and Misconduct Policy.

5.10 Complaints and reporting

5.10.1 All reports of child abuse and child safety concerns will be treated seriously, whether they are made by an adult or a child and whether they are about the conduct of an adult or a child. All complaints and child safety concerns will be responded to promptly and thoroughly.

5.10.2 Meaningful Lives has a Complaint Handling Policy that includes information for team members about how a complaint or child safety concern will be responded to. An easy-to-understand complaints information sheet will be provided for children, families and the community to know about the complaint process and the supports available to those making a complaint and those involved in the complaint process.

5.10.3 If a complaint includes an allegation or incident of child abuse or harm, then team members at Meaningful Lives must report it in accordance with the Incident Management Policy and Complaint Handling Policy. Meaningful Lives staff and volunteers are required to prioritise children's safety in any response and to report all potentially criminal conduct to Victoria Police. Under Meaningful Lives' disciplinary policies, team members may be subject to actions to support child safety including:

- being suspended during an investigation or terminated following an investigation
- having their duties altered so they do not engage with children at Meaningful Lives
- not allowing unsupervised contact with children at Meaningful Lives; or
- removing their access to the Meaningful Lives IT system and facilities.

5.11 Child Safety Officer

5.11.1 Meaningful Lives has a trained Child Safety Officer with responsibility for responding to any child safety related complaints or concerns.

5.11.2 The Child Safety Officer is introduced to children so they know and understand who the appointed officer is, and how and when they may contact them. Photos and names of the Child Safety Officers are displayed on Meaningful Lives' noticeboard, on the website and newsletters.

5.11.3 If a person does not feel comfortable making a report to the Child Safety Officer, they may report their concern to the Chief Executive Officer or Board Chair.

5.12 Record keeping

5.12.1 Meaningful Lives is committed to making and keeping full and accurate records about all child-related complaints or safety concerns.

5.12.2 All child safety complaints, concerns, incidents and near misses will be recorded using Meaningful Lives' Incidents, Complaints, Feedback and Continuous Improvement Opportunities Form.

5.12.3 Records which may assist with investigating of a complaint or safety concern will be identified and kept as part of the investigation's records in line with the Conducting Investigations Policy. Records will be kept even if an investigation does not substantiate a complaint.

5.12.4 Meaningful Lives will record and keep the outcome of any investigations, and the resolution of any complaints. This includes findings made, reasons for decisions and actions taken.

5.12.5 Meaningful Lives will store records securely and in line with the Information Management Policy.

5.13 Information sharing

5.13.1 Meaningful Lives may share relevant information to promote children's safety and wellbeing, where it is appropriate and in their best interests. Where possible, this will be done with consent. Meaningful Lives will keep information about complaints confidential, except where it is necessary to share information to respond properly to a complaint or to prioritise child safety. Meaningful Lives may also need to share information about incidents or complaints with external authorities to comply with the law or to prioritise safety. More information is available in Meaningful Lives' Privacy and Confidentiality Policy.

5.14 Risk management

5.14.1 Meaningful Lives recognises the importance of identifying and managing risks of child harm and abuse in the physical and online environments operated by Meaningful Lives.

5.14.2 Meaningful Lives conducts regular risk assessments and have a risk management plan to address the risk of child abuse and harm at Meaningful Lives. The risk management plan will be developed in consultation with Meaningful Lives' team members, parent representatives and children. Meaningful Lives will ensure that any risk controls put in place balance the need to manage harm with the benefits of participating at Meaningful Lives.

5.14.3 Any contractors or other providers of services will always be supervised by a team member while working with Meaningful Lives to ensure child safety.

5.15 Non-compliance with this policy and the Code of Conduct

5.15.1 Meaningful Lives will enforce this policy, the Code of Conduct and any other relevant policies (see list below). Potential breaches will be investigated and may result in restriction of duties, suspension or termination of employment or engagement or other corrective action. More information can be found in the organisation's Misconduct Policy.

5.16 Review

5.16.1 Meaningful Lives will review all child safe practices and policies at least every two years. Meaningful Lives also reviews relevant practices and policies in response to a child safety incident or 'near miss'. Findings from reviews will be reported to the people involved in the organisation and also inform the approach to continuous improvement of child safety practices. Reviews are overseen by the Board and will be informed by consultation with children, families and staff.

Procedure

1. Responsibilities

1.1 Board of Governance

1.1.1 The Board of Governance (Board) is responsible for:

- prioritising children's safety and ensuring that action is taken when anyone raises concerns about children's safety
- championing and modelling a child safe culture at Meaningful Lives and encouraging anyone involved with the organisation to report a child safety concern
- leading a positive culture around reporting so that people feel comfortable to raise concerns
- authorising the Child Safe Risk Management Plan annually; and
- reviewing the organisation's child safe practices at least every two years.

1.2 Executive

1.2.1 The Executive is responsible for ensuring:

- everyone at Meaningful Lives understands they have a role in identifying and managing risks of child abuse and harm
- team members are conducting risk assessments and acting to manage risks in accordance with this policy
- appropriate child safety training for staff and volunteers is identified and completed; and
- an appropriate Child Safe Risk Management Plan is developed annually for Board authorisation.

1.2.2 The Executive will conduct an annual review of how effectively Meaningful Lives is delivering child safety and wellbeing and report this to the Board. The input of people involved with Meaningful Lives will be sought as part of this review.

1.3 Child Safety Officer

1.3.1 The Child Safety Officer at Meaningful Lives is the Director, Quality and Practice. They are responsible for responding to any child safety complaints or concerns.

1.4 Team Members

1.4.1 Team Members are responsible for:

- familiarising themselves with this policy and complying with its requirements – in particular the requirements on reportable conduct
- conducting risk assessments on child safety and wellbeing and managing these risks; and
- attending training on child safety and wellbeing as required.

2. Related Documents

- Code of Conduct
- Charter of Rights and Responsibilities – People Supported

- Complaint Handling Policy
- Incident Management Policy
- Conducting Investigations Policy
- Values Based Recruitment Policy
- NDIS Worker Screening Policy
- Managing Performance Policy
- Misconduct Policy
- Incident, Complaint, Feedback and Continuous Improvement Opportunity Form
- Information Management Policy
- Privacy and Confidentiality Policy
- Risk Management Policy

Authorisation

Drafted By	Chief Executive Officer		
Approved By	Board of Governance		
Approved Date	15/11/2024	Review Date	15/11/2024