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Safeguarding Vulnerable People

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PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to help communicate the BSWA's policy on Safeguarding to all members, volunteers, committee, subcommittee members, staff, and visitors.

TERMS USED

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is protecting the welfare and human rights of people that are, in some way, connected with the BSWA or its work – particularly people that may be at risk of abuse, neglect or exploitation.

The definition of safeguarding used to be narrower – it used to refer to protecting children or vulnerable adults. However, Australian legislation broadened the definition to include everybody. As such, safeguarding is part of a charity's primary duty of care.

Vulnerable people

Being able to recognise vulnerability in its various forms is important and the first step to being able to protect vulnerable people. Vulnerable people as defined by the ACNC are those under the age of 18, or those who may be either unable to take care of themselves – due to their age, an illness, trauma, disability, or some other disadvantage – or unable to protect themselves against harm or exploitation. This could include:

- children and seniors
- people with impaired intellectual or physical functioning
- people from a low socio-economic background
- people who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders
- people who are not native speakers of the local language
- people with low levels of literacy or education
- people subject to modern slavery, which involves human exploitation and control, such as forced labour, debt bondage, human trafficking, and child labour.

According to regulations, vulnerable people are not limited to our beneficiaries or the users of our services, but can also include staff, volunteers, and people in third parties, such as partners both domestic and abroad.

POLICY

As a not-for-profit, the BSWA complies with the ACNC and other applicable regulations. This includes the External Conduct Standards of the ACNC on protecting vulnerable people.

It is the BSWA's wish that all sentient beings should be free from harm, and it is our practice to free our minds from the intention of hurting or harming others. Additionally, there are legislative considerations for protecting vulnerable people. It therefore is our policy to protect vulnerable individuals and make the safety of vulnerable people an important criterion when we select third parties and partners.

The BSWA follows the Buddha's teachings on non-harm of sentient beings. In addition, we shall:

- Observe this policy and our codes of conduct;

- Help ensure the safety of vulnerable people;
- Educate committee members, visitors, staff, and volunteers to report suspected abuse;
- Report suspected abuse within the BSWA;
- Verify the status, reputation, and procedures of third parties and partners and have a written agreement with their compliance with External Conduct Standards and Safeguarding.¹
- Apply background checks (such as police screenings and working with children checks) when appropriate to certain volunteer positions that work with vulnerable people;
- Provide a confidential complaint process on the ‘contact us’ section of our website;
- Provide for the safety and wellbeing of volunteers or staff if working overseas, and;

¹ *The BSWA’s scope of activities abroad is limited primarily to receiving donations from overseas. Monks who travel overseas who function independently as Buddhist monks following ancient Buddhist cultural traditions. Occasionally this will involve using overseas partners who may organise donations. In such cases, it is our policy to that partners provide a statutory declaration of their compliance with the ACNC’s standards on Safeguarding and the External Conduct Standards.*

The BSWA will give care in its criterion when selecting and training people who are likely to work with vulnerable individuals. Before beginning work, they shall receive an induction (including review of key policies such as the code of conduct, whistleblower policy, and this policy) and review and sign any relevant paperwork. This could include background checks such as police screenings or working with children checks if appropriate for the position.

We believe that all individuals have equal and significant value and we make all efforts to keep individuals safe, protected, and uphold their dignity, particularly if they are in a vulnerable situation. We shall endeavour to follow the Buddha’s principles on Virtue, Metta, and Karuna in our interactions with one another.

PROCEDURE

Reporting

If we, our visitors, or our members are aware of incidents within the BSWA or by our partners, it must be reported. If a person is at the risk of immediate harm, 000 should be contacted. Otherwise, the BSWA must be contacted in writing on the ‘contact us’ section of bswa.org, or in writing to one of the following persons:

- The Spiritual Director;
- President;
- Operations Manager;
- Secretary;
- Vice President;
- Treasurer.

Reportable risks that may arise include:

- Sexual harassment, bullying or abuse
- Serious sexual offences, such as rape
- Threats of violence or actual violence
- Verbal, emotional or social abuse

- Cultural or identity abuse, such as racial, sexual or gender-based discrimination or hate crimes
- Coercion and exploitation
- Abuse of power.

If risks are not reported or appropriate steps are not taken to protect vulnerable people, the BSWA risks:

- abuse or harm to vulnerable beneficiaries
- health and safety issues, including injury to beneficiaries, staff and volunteers
- compensation claims and legal action due to stress or harassment
- damage to its reputation as well as the reputation of the wider charity sector.
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All concerns and allegations will be appropriately escalated and followed up according to regulatory guidelines and this policy. It may include reporting to relevant authorities where applicable, and the BSWA is bound by certain mandatory reporting guidelines.

To ensure shared of reports of incidents involving vulnerable people, the person receiving the report will consult with the Operations Manager to determine the best response to any concerns or allegations. If the concern involves the Operations Manager, they shall consult with the Spiritual Director and/or Executive Committee.

All reports will be handled in a way which upholds the principles of Buddhist ethics, Right Speech, the protection of all parties involved, confidentiality, expedient reporting, fairness and professionalism.

If things go wrong

While good planning and the presence of good policies and procedures help reduce the chances of something going wrong, risk will never entirely be eliminated. In the event of something going wrong, the BSWA will:

- prevent or minimise any further loss or damage;
- provide counselling for any parties involved;
- report the incident to the responsible authority (for example, the police) if required;
- plan any statements to the media, the public or its own staff and volunteers;
- update its risk management plan and take reasonable steps to prevent the incident from re-occurring.

RELATED POLICIES

Code of Conduct
 Harassment Policy
 Grievance Policy
 Whistleblower Policy
 Child Safety Code of Conduct
 Workplace Safety
 Risk Management