

Child Safe Policy

Policy Statement

At Wilsonton Heights Neighbourhood Centre every child has the right to be safe and feel safe. We commit to the safety and wellbeing of every child in our care, including the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

To keep children safe, we commit to:

- implementing the ten Child Safe Standards
- providing a safe and supportive environment for all children
- making sure that children are not exposed to any form of harmful conduct or abuse
- empowering children to participate in decisions that affect them and share any concerns they may have
- making sure children know who to approach if they feel unsafe or have any safety concerns

As a child safe organisation, we commit to:

- educating everyone involved in our organisation about what it means to be a child safe organisation, so that we can prevent, detect and effectively respond to child abuse
- making sure everyone involved in our organisation knows how to appropriately respond to complaints, allegations, disclosures and breaches to our Child Safe Code of Conduct
- welcoming feedback to continuously improve our child safe policies, procedures and practices
- making sure that when family and community members interact with our organisation, they are aware that the safety of children is everyone's responsibility, and their behaviour aligns with our child safe practices.

Scope

All governing body members, employees and volunteers are required to understand and adhere to this policy.

Standards

Queensland Child Safe Standards

Legislation

Child Protection Act 1999 (QLD)

Child Safe Organisations Act 2024 (Qld)

Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 (Qld)

Definitions

Child: A person under the age of 18 (unless otherwise specified in relevant legislation).

Child abuse: “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.¹”

Child protection: Any measure taken to safeguard children from abuse or harm.

Grooming: Any act with the aim of befriending, building rapport, and gaining the trust of a child for the purpose of subjecting them to abuse. Signs of grooming include giving gifts or special attention, or inappropriate touching such as tickling or wrestling with a child.

Online grooming: Establishing a relationship with a child or young person online with the aim of meeting him/her in person for sexual activity. This can include online chat or sexting, and the abuser may lie about their age or identity.

Harm: Different states or territories may have differing definitions of harm in relation to child protection legislation, but in general it refers to any significant detrimental effect on a child’s physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing.

Reasonable grounds for belief: “A belief based on reasonable grounds (see below) that child abuse has occurred when all known considerations or facts relevant to the formation of a belief are taken into account and these are objectively assessed. Circumstances or considerations may include the source of the allegation and how it was communicated, the nature of and details of the allegation, and whether there are any other related matters known regarding the alleged perpetrator.

A reasonable belief is formed if a reasonable person believes that:

- (a) the child is in need of protection,
- (b) the child has suffered or is likely to suffer “significant harm as a result of physical injury,” or
- (c) the parents are unable or unwilling to protect the child.

A ‘reasonable belief’ or a ‘belief on reasonable grounds’ is not the same as having proof, but is more than mere rumour or speculation.

A ‘reasonable belief’ is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds².

Sexual abuse: Occurs when an adult or another child or young person uses power and authority to involve a child in sexual activity, and can be physical, verbal or emotional.

¹ World Health Organization (2016), *Child abuse and neglect by parents and other caregivers*.

² Our Community (2018) *Child Protection Policy*

<https://www.communitydirectors.com.au/files/policybank/ChildProtectionPolicy2018-02.doc>

Procedures

Roles and Responsibilities of Governing Body, Management and Workers:

All members of the governing body, management, staff and volunteers must sign and act in accordance with the Wilsonton Heights Neighbourhood Centre's Code of Conduct as part of their induction into the organisation and commit to always keeping children safe within the organisation and acting in their best interests.

Governing body:

The Heights Management Committee has ultimate responsibility to foster an organisational culture which promotes child safety and protects the wellbeing of children. The governing body will establish policies and procedures which reflect the requirements of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations and relevant state child safe standards. Policies and procedures must be appropriate for the size and type of services provided, and effective in enabling all workers to understand their obligation to act to safeguard children and prevent and respond to child abuse. The governing body must be aware of their legal liability for failure to disclose abuse or failure to reasonably protect based on known risks.

Management:

Management should be aware of all mandatory and voluntary reporting obligations which apply in the jurisdiction in which Wilsonton Heights Neighbourhood Centre operates and ensure that all workers are made aware of the obligations that apply to them. Management is also responsible for being aware of and managing any risks to children, and to facilitate internal and/or external reporting by workers.

Child Safe Contact Officer:

The Wilsonton Heights Neighbourhood Centre's Contact Officer for all child safety related matters is the Centre Coordinator, or in their absence the Chair of the Heights Management Committee. The responsibilities of the Contact Officer are outlined in the Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy.

Workers:

All workers, including employees, volunteers and contractors have a responsibility to act in accordance with the Code of Conduct, and be aware of and comply with their obligations relating to reporting concerns, allegations and incidents of child abuse, including internal and external reporting.

Staff/Volunteer Recruitment, Supervision and Training

Wilsonton Heights Neighbourhood Centre will ensure that the safety of children, and risk of harm by workers is considered comprehensively throughout recruitment and employment to minimise the risk of child abuse. All persons considered for employment must be suitable to work with children and have a demonstrated commitment to the safety of children.

Advertising and Worker Screening

When advertising a position Wilsonton Heights Neighbourhood Centre's Statement of Commitment to child safety will be included in the advertisement. Advertisements for roles that involve contact with children or other child-related work will ensure the position description includes the duty of care and reporting obligations of prospective workers, Wilsonton Heights Neighbourhood Centre's zero tolerance policy to child abuse, and the requirement to undergo police, reference and Working with Children Checks during the recruitment process.

Interview processes will include questions that are designed to elicit information about the applicant's values, attitudes, aptitudes and work history, and their experience and knowledge of child safe practices.

Wilsonton Heights Neighbourhood Centre will require that all selected applicants for paid and volunteer positions, including those on the Heights Management Committee, undergo a recruitment screening process prior to beginning work.

- Potential staff/volunteers require a minimum of two verbal reference checks. Verbal reference checks should be with direct supervisors or managers who can attest to the applicant's behaviour and attitudes around children.
- All volunteers and staff will be required to meet all legal requirements, including holding a Blue Card prior to their commencement at the Centre.
- Criminal history assessments are required for anyone within the organisation that:
 - has regular contact with children and is not directly supervised at all times;
 - works in close proximity to children on a regular basis and is not directly supervised at all times; or
 - supervises or manages persons who:
 - have regular contact with children or
 - work in close proximity to children on a regular basis; or
 - has access to sensitive records relating to children or young people.

Worker Training and Development

The organisation will foster a culture where all workers are committed to child safety. All workers will undertake training on the rights of children, and the prevention, identification and response to abuse and harm against children.

All new employees, volunteers and Management Committee members will receive copies of organisational policies and be guided through the application of these policies and procedures throughout the induction process, as per the Staff Induction, Training, Supervision and Support Policy and Procedure and Induction Checklist.

Continuous development and training, and refresher training, should occur every twelve months. Worker training should include:

- The importance of child safety in minimising risks of child abuse and harm in all organisational contexts;
- Organisational policies and procedures relating to child safe environments both online and offline;

- How to respect and protect the rights of diverse children, including children with disability, children who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex;
- Promoting the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from CALD backgrounds;
- How to identify and respond to indicators of child abuse;
- Their mandatory and voluntary reporting and duty of care obligations; and
- How to report concerns that an incident of abuse has occurred.

Ongoing supervision

All workers will receive regular supervision to ensure that they are appropriately carrying out their role and complying with all obligations and expectations regarding adherence to child safe practices, policies and procedures.

Supervision processes will include:

- Regular team meetings for all staff
- Regular, informal catch ups between staff/volunteers and the Centre Manager
- Annual reviews throughout their employment

Respect for Diversity

Wilsonton Heights Neighbourhood Centre is committed to creating an organisational environment which is accepting and supportive of all children and young people. The organisation will seek to protect the rights of all children and ensure that services are delivered in a safe and inclusive manner.

The organisation respects the diverse needs of children and young people and seeks to provide services which are accessible to all children, and responsive to the safety needs of children with disability, children who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex, children from economic or socially disadvantaged backgrounds, and the cultural safety of children from CALD backgrounds, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Wilsonton Heights Neighbourhood Centre does not tolerate discrimination. It is the responsibility of the governing body, managers and workers to adhere to adopt proactive approaches to reduce the risk of discrimination, and to adhere to the organisation's policies and procedures for the protection of the human rights of children and young people.

Cultural Safety

Wilsonton Heights Neighbourhood Centre is committed to creating a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment for all children, volunteers, and staff. This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Cultural safety is embedded in our policies, programs, and everyday practices.

Refer to Cultural Safety Policy.

Involving Families and Communities

Wilsonton Heights Neighbourhood Centre recognises the important roles that families play and involves parents and carers when significant decisions are made about their child. The organisation will encourage feedback from families and communities and will incorporate feedback into the design and review of services.

The organisation will proactively communicate with families and communities and inform them of its policies and practices to protect child safety. Wilsonton Heights Neighbourhood Centre will provide information to families and communities through accessible means to ensure that they are involved in decisions about their child.

We distribute this information by:

- Making our child safe policy and other relevant policies publicly available on our website;
- Publicly displaying our commitment to the safety and wellbeing of children and information about our complaints and feedback processes in physical formats at the Centre and electronically on our website
- Providing a copy of our service charter to families
- Providing copies of our newsletter which updates families on our latest news

Wilsonton Heights Neighbourhood Centre involves families and communities by:

- Creating an inclusive environment for all families;
- Ensuring information is easy to understand and accessible;
- Seeking input on decisions affecting children and young people;
- Providing opportunities to provide feedback on your policies and procedures; and
- Ensuring transparent complaints handling and discipline processes.

Taking Child Participation and Empowerment Seriously

Wilsonton Heights Neighbourhood Centre is a child-centred organisation that actively seeks to include children's views and ideas in organisational planning and delivery of services. Wilsonton Heights Neighbourhood Centre provides opportunity for children to learn what they should do if they feel unsafe. Wilsonton Heights Neighbourhood Centre engages with children in the following ways:

- Creating a safe and welcoming environment for children and families;
- Involving children in ongoing informal discussions;
- Publicly displaying child friendly information about their rights, who they can talk to if they feel unsafe, and complaints and feedback processes (in child friendly language);
- When available and appropriate, providing access to programs to learn about respectful relationships and rights.

Assessing and Managing Child Abuse Risk

Child safety risks are included in the organisation's risk management policy and processes. This includes risks in physical and online environments relevant to the service type/s provided by the organisation, people in contact with children, and any specific vulnerabilities of the children.

All workers will be trained in identifying, assessing and managing these risks, and detecting signs of abuse. Training should also include protective factors that reduce the risk of abuse, and ways to promote these protective factors in the context of the organisation. Wilsonton Heights Neighbourhood Centre has a commitment to cultural safety, recognising that a strong connection to culture is a protective factor for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and therefore is an important way to ensure their safety and wellbeing.

Where a risk is identified and not appropriately managed, management and the governing body may be held legally liable, as this may constitute a ‘failure to protect’.

Wilsonton Heights Neighbourhood Centre will consider child safety as a part of its risk management approach. Risks of abuse to children will be identified and managed in all services and activities.

Wilsonton Heights Neighbourhood Centre will manage risks to children by:

- Including child safety risk assessment as a regular consideration of the risk management process;
- Monitoring and recording all legal requirements for the protection of children by workers and other stakeholders for all jurisdictions of operation;
- Establishing policies, procedures and action plans that seek to minimise the likelihood of incidents of child abuse and monitoring their effectiveness;
- Implementing, maintaining and reviewing the effectiveness of incident reporting and complaints management systems;
- Training workers and stakeholders to understand their obligations towards child safety and encouraging the reporting of incidents; and
- Engaging all stakeholders to take measures to reduce risks and prevent instances of child abuse.

Refer to Child and Youth Risk Management Policy for further detail.

Reporting, Investigating and Responding to Child Abuse Concerns

Wilsonton Heights Neighbourhood Centre takes seriously all concerns, complaints and allegations of abuse or suspected abuse against any child or young person in the service. They will be handled sensitively, investigated in a timely manner, and with the safety of the child as the primary consideration.

Refer to the Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy for specific detail.

Procedures for review of this policy

This policy will be reviewed annually and updated if necessary by the Centre Manager and any changes made will be approved by the Heights Management Committee.

The policy will also be reviewed after any reportable incident, to ensure that it is up-to-date with current best practice in preventing and responding to child abuse incidents and allegations.

The safety of children, cultural safety and risk management is a standing agenda item on the Heights Management Committee Meeting Agenda.

This policy will be communicated via regular information sessions with staff and volunteers and be available to staff/volunteers in hard copy, electronically on One Drive, or on the website. All children and their families will have access to a copy of the policy, the Client Service Charter (including feedback and complaints processes), and the Code of Conduct on commencement of service, and after it is updated.

Contact information for reports and supports

- **Internal contact information** for raising concerns:
 - Centre Manager: 07 4634 7672
 - Chair of the Heights Management Committee
- If a child is believed to be in **immediate danger**, contact the police: 000
- If there is **reasonable suspicion that a child is experiencing harm or is at risk of experiencing harm**, contact Child Safety's South West (Darling Downs) Regional Intake Service on 1300 683 390 or, if after hours, the Child Safety After Hours Service Centre on 1800 177 135.
- Employees and volunteers with any concerns for a child that do not amount to a reasonable suspicion of harm should consider what support services could be offered to the family.
 - A Family and Child Connect service can provide information and advice about connecting families with support services to help with a range of family and parenting challenges.
Family and Child Connect: 13 32 64
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services are a free and confidential place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to access support to improve social, emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing, and help families to safely care for and protect their children. **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services:** 1300 117 095

Related Policies and Procedures

- Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy
- Workplace Health and Safety Policy and Procedure
- Privacy and Confidentiality Policy and Procedure
- Feedback, Complaints and Appeals Policy and Procedure
- Staff Induction, Training, Supervision and Support Policy and Procedure
- Incident Management Policy and Procedure
- Code of Conduct