



## Safeguarding and Protection of Young People and Adults at Risk Policy

### 1 Stepping Stones NI Commitment to Safeguarding

Stepping Stones NI exists to change how the world and importantly the world of work, values and engages those with learning difficulties. For us, well, we see each individual, their potential. We see the pride that comes from taking those, often small steps, towards a life more fulfilled. And the world sees the smiles. Stepping Stones NI is committed to ensuring that young people and adults with learning disability and/ or Autistic Spectrum Disorder have the opportunity to gain new skills and develop their independence in a safe and supportive environment.

**Our Vision** is “A socially enriched world where every individual can take proud steps towards a life fulfilled.”

**Our Mission** is “To nurture the potential of people with a disability to thrive in a socially inclusive society.”

#### Our Values

- We Respect
- We Inspire
- We Nurture
- We Empower
- We are Driven
- We are Honest
- We are Positively Charged
- We are Quality Focused

Abuse is a violation of an individual’s human and civil rights; it can take many forms. The staff and volunteers at Stepping Stones NI are committed to practice which promotes the welfare of young people and adults at risk and safeguards them from harm.

Staff and volunteers in our organisation accept and recognise our responsibilities to develop awareness of the issues that cause adults at risk harm, and to establish and maintain a safe environment for them. We will not tolerate any form of abuse wherever it occurs or whoever is responsible. We are committed to promoting an atmosphere of inclusion, transparency and openness and are open to feedback from the people who use our services, carers, advocates, our staff and our volunteers with a view to how we may continuously improve our services/activities.



We will endeavour to safeguard adults and young people at risk by:

- Adhering to this Safeguarding policy and ensuring that it is supported by robust procedures; that support: Partnership, Prevention and Protection
- Carefully following the procedures laid down for the recruitment and selection of staff and volunteers.
- Providing effective management for staff and volunteers through supervision, support and training.
- Implementing clear procedures for raising awareness of and responding to abuse within the organisation and for reporting concerns to statutory agencies that need to know, while involving carers and adults at risk appropriately.
- Ensuring general safety and risk management procedures are adhered to;
- Promoting full participation and having clear procedures for dealing with concerns and complaints;
- Managing personal information, confidentiality, and information sharing; and
- Safeguarding adults at risk by implementing a code of behaviour for all involved with the organisation, including visitors.

We will review our policy, procedures, code of behaviour and practice at regular intervals, at least once every three years.

## 1.1 Purpose

Stepping Stones NI is committed to practice which promotes the welfare young people and adults at risk and safeguards them from harm.

We aim to prevent and reduce the risk of harm to adults at risk and young people up to the age of 18 years while supporting people's right to maintain control over their lives and make informed choices free from coercion and establish clear guidance for reporting concerns that an adult is, or may be, at risk of being harmed or in need of protection and how these will be responded to.

The purpose of this policy and related procedures is to:

- Promote the welfare of young people and adults at risk and protect them from harm
- Prevent harm occurring through early identification of risk and appropriate timely intervention
- Identify staff responsibilities in dealing with reports or suspicions of abuse
- Provide clear and robust guidance on how to handle concerns
- Encourage good practice in all aspects of promotion and protection of young people and adults at risk

## 1.2 Safeguarding Principles

We will safeguard those who may be at Risk by:

- recognising that adult harm is wrong and that it should not be tolerated;
- being aware of the signs of harm from abuse, exploitation and neglect;
- reducing opportunities for harm from abuse, exploitation and neglect to occur; and
- knowing how and when to report safeguarding concerns to HSC Trusts or the PSNI.

### 1.3 Scope

Stepping Stones aims to ensure that all trainees and clients of the service experience an inclusive, enjoyable and safe environment, in which they feel respected and valued. Stepping Stones is a targeted service provider which is zero-tolerant of harm to young people and adults at risk in the workplace and training.

This policy and related procedure deals with the safe guarding and protection of young people and adults at risk as defined as:

**A young person:** a person under the age of 18, as defined in the Children Northern Ireland Order 1995

**An adult at risk:** a person aged 18 or over, who is or may be in need of community services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness and who is, or may be unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation. (See appendix 1 for more detail).

- Abuse
- Neglect or acts of omission
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Psychological/emotional abuse
- Financial or material abuse
- Discriminatory abuse
- Institutional abuse

### 1.4 Context

Stepping Stones NI will carry out its responsibilities under all relevant legislation, regulations and professional guidelines which include the following:

- The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) the Adult Safeguarding Policy for Northern Ireland “Adult Safeguarding: Prevention and Protection in Partnership” July 2015

[Adult Safeguarding: Prevention and Protection in Partnership key documents \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](http://health-ni.gov.uk)

- Children’s Northern Ireland Order 1995
- Children’s Services Cooperation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015
- Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young people in Northern Ireland (HSSPS- March 2016)
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007
- United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child

## **2 Recruitment and Selection of Staff and Volunteers**

The following procedures will help Stepping Stones NI to apply a thorough and clear method of recruiting staff and volunteers in line with legislative requirements and best practice.

### **2.1 Defining the role:**

We will be clear about the kind of person we require to fill the post.

### **2.2 Recruitment Publicity:**

Accurate and detailed recruitment material will be drawn up outlining the role, responsibilities and requirements expected of staff and volunteers and advertised internally and externally when necessary to ensure equality of opportunity within the local community.

### **2.3 Application Form:**

The applicant will be supplied with a clear job description and a personnel/volunteer specification outlining the key skills and abilities and qualifications required. The job and role descriptions should indicate whether the post constitutes regulated activity under The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007, as amended by the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012. If a post does fall within the scope of regulated activity, an individual barred from working with vulnerable adults by the Disclosure and Barring Service, is prohibited by law from applying for the post. Organisations are also prohibited from employing/involving the barred individual in the work.

### **2.4 Declaration:**

All applicants will be asked to sign a declaration stating:

- Unspent criminal convictions and cautions and cases pending against them
- Agreement to Access NI check when required

### **2.5 Interview:**

At least two representatives of Stepping Stones NI/HR will conduct an interview.

### **2.6 References:**

Stepping Stones NI requires at least two references from all applicants who are not family members and one of who should have first-hand knowledge of the applicant's previous work.

### **2.7 Access NI:**

Anyone working within Stepping Stones (paid, unpaid, on work placement or volunteer) will have their suitability checked through Access NI Enhanced check prior to employment, and Adult Barred List check.

The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) is responsible for maintaining the list of individuals barred from engaging in Regulated Activity with children and vulnerable adults across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

As a regulated activity provider we will refer anyone to the DBS who has harmed or poses a risk of harm to a child or a 'adults at risk' and who has been removed from working (paid or unpaid) in regulated activity, or would have been removed had they not left. It is an offence to knowingly engage a barred person in regulated activity.

The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007 (SVG Order 2007) places a requirement on organisations to prevent barred people from engaging in regulated activity with children and/or vulnerable adults.

### **3 Effective Management of Staff and Volunteers**

Stepping Stones NI is committed to high-quality management of staff and volunteers will ensure that everyone in the organisation is clear its mission and objectives.

A thorough induction process is integral to good organisational practice. It ensures that staff/volunteers are properly prepared for their work and reduces anxieties associated with starting a new post/role.

For all new employees/volunteers, there will be a probationary period of six months dependant on the position within the organisation.

Support and Supervision will be carried out monthly with a line manager.

Training needs of each member of staff will be identified and will include safeguarding training. Training will be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure that knowledge is up to date. Records of training needs, training taken and evaluations of training will be kept.

Annual appraisals will be held and personal development plans will be maintained.

### **4 Recognising and Reporting Concerns**

#### **4.1 Responsibility**

It is the responsibility of all staff (paid or unpaid) and volunteers at Stepping Stones and/or work placements to report abuse and incidents of concern. This responsibility extends to all staff, not just those working with young people and adults at risk.

- Anyone with an immediate concern in an emergency about the safety or welfare of a young person or adult at risk should contact the police via a 999 call
- Anyone with a concern or incident about the abuse of a young person or adult at risk should in circumstances other than an emergency should fill in the safeguarding incident form and forward it on immediately to their designated safeguarding officer.
- Adopt the young person and adult at risk guidelines commitment to safeguarding and code of behaviour for staff
- Act upon any safeguarding disclosure in accordance with Stepping Stones procedures
- Promote safe practice and challenge poor and unsafe behaviour
- Ensure that all health and safety procedures are adhered to

#### **4.2 The Designated Safeguarding Governor (DSG)**

The Designated Safeguarding Governor is responsible for liaising with the Chief Officer and the Designated Safeguarding Manager over matters including:

- Ensuring that Stepping Stones Ni has procedures and policies which are consistent with the requirements for the safeguarding of young people and adults at risk.
- Ensuring that the policy is reviewed at least every 3 years
- Ensuring that each year the Board is informed, by way of a report, of how Stepping Stones have complied with the policy.

The Designated Governor is responsible for overseeing the liaison on behalf of Stepping Stones between Social Services and the PSNI in connection with any allegations against the Chief Officer. This will not involve undertaking any form of investigation, but only to ensure good communications between the parties and to provide information to assist enquires.

### **4.3 Adult Safeguarding Champion (ASC)**

#### **Key Responsibilities**

- to provide information and support for staff on adult safeguarding within the organisation;
- to ensure that the organisation's adult safeguarding policy is disseminated and support implementation throughout the organisation;
- to advise within the organisation regarding adult safeguarding training needs;
- to provide advice to staff or volunteers who have concerns about the signs of harm, and ensure a report is made to HSC Trusts where there is a safeguarding concern;
- to support staff to ensure that any actions take account of what the adult wishes to achieve – this should not prevent information about any risk of serious harm being passed to the relevant HSC Trust Adult Protection Gateway Service for assessment and decision-making;
- to establish contact with the HSC Trust Designated Adult Protection Officer (DAPO), PSNI and other agencies as appropriate;
- to ensure accurate and up to date records are maintained detailing all decisions made, the reasons for those decisions and any actions taken;
- to compile and analyse records of reported concerns to determine whether a number of low level concerns are accumulating to become significant; and make records available for inspection.

### **4.4 Designated Safeguarding Manager (DSM)**

Stepping Stones has a designated member of staff, who is assigned to act upon young people and adult at risk concerns. The Designated Safeguarding Manager is to oversee and co-ordinate all strategic and operational protection matters. To support this role we also have a number of Designated Safeguarding Officers across Stepping Stones sites to deal with the day to day operations of young people and vulnerable adult protection. The Designated Safeguarding Manager is the Operations Manager of Stepping Stones NI.

The Designated Safeguarding Manager's role is to:

- Liaise with SMT regarding safeguarding policy, procedures and any reported incidents of concern.
- Liaise with the local Gateway Team regarding safeguarding procedures and any reported incidents of concern.
- Liaise with and understand the roles and responsibilities of all the appropriate investigating agencies.
- Liaise with the Designated Safeguarding Governor on all protection matters relevant to College governance.
- Review this policy and related procedures annually.
- Oversee and monitor the security of record keeping.
- Develop and monitor a Safeguarding Action Plan.
- Ensure that safeguarding measures are implemented at all college events that may involve children, young people or vulnerable adults.



- Manage and support all Designated Safeguarding Officers

#### 4.5 Designated Deputy Safeguarding Manager (DDSM)

The Designated Deputy Safeguarding Manager will deputise in the absence of the DSM.

#### 4.6 Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO)

We have designated Safeguarding Officers with responsibilities for all our college sites. They should be contacted for information, advice and reporting of concerns, disclosures or allegations of abuse.

The role of the Designated Safeguarding Officer is to:

- Receive information from any staff, volunteers, parents or carers who have safeguarding concerns and record it.
- Advise staff on protection policy, procedures and record keeping.
- Assess the information promptly and carefully, clarifying and obtaining more information about the matter as appropriate.
- Record statements and information relating to any safeguarding issues.
- Store all information and recording in a secure manner and in accordance with Data Protection Act 1998.
- Advise the Designated Safeguarding Manager of identified cases.
- To report concerns to PSNI/Social Services in the absence/unavailability of the DSM (or if the allegation is against the DSM) or in the instance of an immediate threat to a person(s) safety or welfare

The Adult Safeguarding Gateway teams can be contacted at the following numbers:

Northern Trust	028 256 35512
Western Trust	028 716 11366
South Eastern Trust	028 925 01227
Belfast Trust	028 950 41744
Southern Trust	028 374 12015
Emergency (Out of Hours) Social Work	028 9504 9999

#### 4.7 Responsibility to report harm and abuse

As providers of services who are in a position of trust, Stepping Stones NI may gain access to information regarding adults which may suggest they are at risk of harm. Staff (paid or unpaid) and volunteers have a duty to report any suspicion, allegation or complaints related to harm or/and abuse.

All those working within Stepping Stones NI to provide services to adults at risk have a responsibility to refer concerns to the Designated Safeguarding Officer in the first instance.

- If a disclosure is made to a member of staff which gives rise to concerns about possible abuse, or if a member of staff has a concern regarding the physical, emotional or mental wellbeing of a young person or adults at risk, the member of staff must act promptly.

- The member of staff should report these concerns immediately to the Safeguarding Officer on site. The member of staff should not investigate this matter.
- The Safeguarding Officer will decide if the matter is a cause for concern and complete an incident report form.
- If the Safeguarding Officer decides the matter is not a cause for concern, the matter will be referred to the appropriate Head of Dept. for further action.

If the Safeguarding Officer decides the matter is a cause for concern, and the Designated Safeguarding Officer agrees that the matter is a safeguarding issue, he/she will progress the cause for concern /incident to the Designated Safeguarding Manager using an incident report form.

The Designated Safeguarding Manager will liaise with the appropriate external agency which is the Duty Social Work Team at South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in Lisburn, Downpatrick or Newtownards depending on the location of the client or trainee involved.

#### **4.8 Reporting Structure: Nominated Staff**

All concerns, suspicions, disclosures, incidents and complaints related to abuse/harm need must be reported immediately to the appropriate staff (Appendix 2 ):

- Staff located in Head office report directly to the Safeguarding Officer in each department
- Staff located on other sites report to their appointed Safeguarding Officer
- The Safeguarding Officer must report directly to the Designated Safeguarding Manager upon receiving a report using incident report form.
- The Designated Safeguarding Manager must provide a copy of the safeguarding incident to the CEO.
- The persons responsible for reporting directly to the SEHSC Trust or other relevant agencies are the Designated Safeguarding Manager or Deputy Designated Safeguarding Manager

If there is a clear and immediate risk of harm or a crime is alleged or suspected, the matter should be referred directly to the PSNI by telephoning 101, or in an emergency, 999. Both numbers are accessible on a 24 hour, 7 days per week basis.

However in most circumstances there will be an emerging safeguarding concern which should normally be referred to the SEHSC Trust, for a professional assessment.

It will be a matter for SEHSC professionals to judge whether the threshold for an adult protection intervention has been met, or whether alternative responses are more appropriate.

#### **Safeguarding Staff**

- Safeguarding Champion: CEO
- Designated Safeguarding Manager – Director of Operations and Social Enterprises
- Deputy Designated Safeguarding Manager – Services Manager



### **Safeguarding Officer Nominated Multi Site:**

- The Gatelodge Newtownards – Catering Operations Manager
- Seymour Street Building – Pink Elephant HOD
- Antrim Street Building – Training Services Coordinator

## **4.9 Disclosures**

### **4.9.1 Disclosures involving members of staff**

If a disclosure is made against a member of staff which gives rise to concerns about possible abuse, the member of staff must act promptly;

- The member of staff should report these concerns immediately to the Safeguarding Officer on site. The member of staff should not investigate this matter.
- The Safeguarding Officer will decide if the matter is a cause for concern and if so, will complete the Incident Report Form and forward to the DSM.
- If the DSM agrees that the matter is a safeguarding issue, he will progress the incident through the CEO and Human Resource Department for investigation under staff discipline policy.
- In addition, the CEO will be informed and may ask for the matter to be passed to the PSNI.

### **4.9.2 Disclosure against the CEO**

If a complaint or suspicion about possible abuse of children or adults at risk is made against the Chief Executive, the Designated Safeguarding Governor must be informed immediately. The Designated Safeguarding Governor will ensure that the necessary action is taken by contacting SEHSCT.

### **4.9.3 What to do when a disclosure is made:**

In cases where a disclosure is made of abuse of young person or adult at risk to a staff member or volunteer, it is important that staff/volunteers know how to react appropriately, according to the following guidelines:

#### **Do**

- Stay calm;
- Listen and hear;
- Express concern and sympathy about what has happened;
- Reassure the person – tell the person that s/he did the right thing in telling you;
- Let the person know the information will be taken seriously and give information about what will happen next;
- If urgent medical/police help is required, call the emergency services;
- Ensure the safety of the person;
- Be aware that medical and forensic evidence might be needed;
- Let the person know that they will be kept involved at every stage;
- Record in writing (date and sign your report) and report to the Line Manager/Nominated Manager at the earliest possible time;
- • Act without delay.

**Do not**

- Stop someone disclosing to you;
- Promise to keep secrets;
- Press the person for more details or make them repeat the story;
- Pass on the information to anyone who does not have a legitimate need to know;
- Contact the alleged abuser;
- Attempt to investigate yourself;
- Leave details of your concerns on a voicemail or by email;

#### **4.9.4 Bullying**

Any complaint stating that a young person or adults at risk is, may be, being bullied will be fully investigated in line with Stepping Stones Bullying and Harassment Policy.

#### **4.9.5 Reporting and recording to Emergency Services**

There may be emergency situations where it is appropriate to contact the police immediately. Regardless of the circumstances of the concern, disclosure, allegation or suspicion, all staff members/volunteers must record the details and reports to their Safeguarding Officer and/or Designated Safeguarding Manager in the organisation without delay. All concerns, disclosures, allegations and suspicions must be recorded using an Incident Report Form provided by Stepping Stones NI.

When the Safeguarding Officer is alerted to concerns about a young person or adult at risk, she/he should act promptly and in accordance with the agreed reporting procedure:

- Ensure that the adults at risk is in no immediate danger and that any medical or police assistance required has been sought;
- Consider whether the concern is a safeguarding issue or not.
- If it is not considered a safeguarding issue, and it is decided that there should be no referral made to a statutory authority, a record should be made of the concern; details kept on file, including any action taken; the reasons for not referring

#### **4.9.6 Handling an Allegation of Abuse against a Staff Member/Volunteer**

- All details of the incident should be recorded fully and passed on to the nominated Safeguarding Officer who will pass it on to the Safeguarding Manager.
- He/she will consult with the SEHSCT Trust Adult Safeguarding Team/Gateway Team and/or PSNI to ensure that any subsequent action taken does not prejudice the HSC Trust or PSNI investigation; Adult Safeguarding Champion will be informed.
- Following the above consultation staff member/volunteer will be informed that an allegation has been made against him/her and provide them with an opportunity to respond to the allegation.
- His/her response should be recorded fully.
- All actions taken will be taken in accordance with the disciplinary procedure, and will include due regard to guidance from the HSC Trust or PSNI so as not to prejudice any HSC Trust or PSNI investigation.

- Protective measures will be taken, which may include suspending the staff member/volunteer or moving him or her to alternative duties.
- Suspension is a neutral act to allow the investigation to proceed and to remove the employee/volunteer from the possibility of any further allegation.
- Where suspension is considered necessary, it should be dealt with as quickly and sensitively as possible.

#### **4.9.7 Consent and Capacity**

All adults, including those at risk will always be assumed to have capacity to make decisions unless it has been determined otherwise and ideally a referral to the HSC Trust should be made with the adult's agreement and full participation.

However, there may be circumstances in which the person concerned about an adult at risk may not be best placed to seek their consent to a referral being made, or the adult at risk is clearly stating that they do not want a referral to be made.

The inability to obtain an adult's consent in these circumstances should not prevent or delay concerns about that adult being reported to adult protection services. Consideration should be given to the vulnerability of the alleged perpetrator. It is possible that a risk assessment may also be required for the perpetrator.

#### **4.9.8 Consent**

Consideration of consent is central to adult safeguarding. Consent is a clear indication of a willingness to participate in an activity or to accept a service, including a protection service. It may be signalled verbally, by gesture, by willing participation or in writing. No one can give, or withhold, consent on behalf of another adult unless special legal provision for particular purposes has been made for this. For consent to be valid, it must be given voluntarily by an appropriately informed person who is able to consent to the intervention being proposed. In cases where the individual lacks capacity, decisions will usually be made on behalf of the individual in accordance with current legal provisions.

#### **4.9.9 Capacity**

An adult will always be assumed to have capacity to make a decision unless it is suspected otherwise. Capacity can fluctuate, and is both issue and time specific, therefore should be kept under regular review in connection with any safeguarding intervention, in particular a protection intervention.

Where there is a reasonable doubt regarding the capacity of an adult to make a specific decision or series of decisions, a referral must be made to the SEHSC Trust.

The organisation or individual making the referral may need to consider any reasonable and proportionate interim steps necessary to protect the adult pending further enquiries by the SEHSC Trust.

#### **4.9.10 Lack of capacity**

Where an adult lacks capacity to make a certain decision, they should be supported so they can be involved to the fullest extent in the decision that affects their life.

SEHSC Trusts should, where appropriate, consult relevant family members or carers when considering action to be taken regarding an adult who lacks capacity to make a decision.

#### **4.9.11 Lack of Consent**

In some circumstances it may be necessary for the withholding of consent to be overridden. Where consent to intervene is not provided by the adult at risk, action to progress a case may still be taken in circumstances where there is a strong overriding public interest, or where a crime is alleged or suspected. This may happen when:

- the person causing the harm is a member of staff, a volunteer or someone who only has contact with the adult at risk because they both use the service; or
- consent has been provided under undue influence, coercion or duress;
- other people are at risk from the person causing harm; or
- a crime is alleged or suspected.

In these circumstances, the adult should be informed of that decision, the reason for the decision, and reassured that as far as possible no actions will be taken which affect them personally without their involvement. Consideration should be given to any support the adult may need at this time, as they may be distressed by the prospect of their information being shared without their consent.

## **5 Risk Assessment and Management**

Stepping Stones NI has a procedure in place for reporting, recording and reviewing accidents, incidents and near misses, which should in turn inform practice and the risk assessment and management procedure.

### **5.1 Assessment of Risk**

Assessment of risk is the process of examining what could possibly cause harm to adults at risk, staff, volunteers or others in the context of the activities and services your organisation provides; in the interactions with and between adults at risk; and with the wider community.

### **5.2 Principles of working with risk**

A number of important issues need to be considered by staff and volunteers who carry out risk assessments and risk management in relation to adults at risk:

The assessment and management of risk should promote the independence, real choices and social inclusion of adults at risk;

- Risks change as circumstances change;
- Risk can be minimised, but not eliminated; Information relating to adults at risk, activities, relationships and circumstances will sometimes be incomplete and possibly inaccurate;
- Identification of risk carries a duty to do something about it, i.e. risk management; Involvement of adults at risk, their families, advocates and practitioners from a range of services and organisations helps to improve the quality of risk assessments and decision making;
- 'Defensible' decisions are those based on clear reasoning;

- Risk-taking can involve everybody working together to achieve positive outcomes;
- Confidentiality is a right, but not an absolute right and may be breached in exceptional circumstances when people are deemed to be at serious risk of harm or it is in the public interest;
- The standards of practice expected of staff/volunteers must be made clear by their team manager/supervisor to give them the confidence to support decisions to take risk;
- Sensitivity should be shown to the experience of people affected by any risks that have been taken and where an event has occurred.

### **5.3 Risk Planning Process: Overview of General Risk Planning**

Risk assessments identify potential hazards and risks to the participants of Stepping Stones NI Services. All referrals to Stepping Stones from SEHSCT should have a risk assessment from the social worker highlighting known risks and no heightened risks.

In the event of any of the participants requiring an individual risk assessment due to medical or behavioural issues, controls must be read in conjunction with this assessment and action plan. We appreciate that risk can never be totally removed and this assessment is therefore a tool to minimize risks by identifying appropriate controls and an action plan based on the information available.

A copy of this risk assessment must be made available to:

- Key Staff/Volunteers working directly with the group.
- SMT

This document should be under constant review by all staff involved in the services. In the event of a new hazard being identified by any of the above parties, a review should be conducted and recorded.

Any review of risk assessments or new controls introduced as result of practical experience or gained knowledge should be made known to all staff to ensure the controls or actions will be acted upon if an incident arises.

### **5.4 Organisational Risk Register**

Safeguarding as a risk is identified on the Organisational Risk Register which is managed by the Board of Directors through the Board's HRGN committee. The Adult Safeguarding Champion has responsibility for reviewing the organisational risk in conjunction with the Designated Governor and any changes will be notified to the HRGN committee and Board.

## **6 Receiving Feedback and Dealing with Complaints**

Stepping Stones NI has clear policy for dealing with complaints about the organisation with a link on Stepping Stones NI website for both complaints and for leaving comments. We have a Bullying and Harassment Policy in place. (See appendix 3: Complaints Policy and procedure) and (see appendix 4: Bullying and Harassment Policy)

We are committed to providing quality service to all our trainees and clients.

### 7.7.1 **Confidentiality**

Information associated with adult and children safeguarding is of a personal and sensitive nature and its use is governed by the common law duty of confidentiality.

It is important that staff and volunteers in Stepping Stones NI know that personal and sensitive details about the lives of adults at risk with whom they work or who are in their care and their families should not be the subject of gossip, or passed on to others without good cause or reason. Care should be taken to ensure that when cases do have to be discussed with colleagues, the details cannot be overheard by others.

All staff receive Stepping Stones NI Data Protection Policy which includes stipulation of practice to protect client information.

## 7.2 **Information Management and information sharing**

- At all times 'personal data' and 'sensitive personal data' must be managed in accordance with the law, primarily the Data Protection Act 2018 (GDPR), and the Human Rights Act 1998 which, among other things, gives individuals the right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence.

### **Information Sharing for Safeguarding Purposes**

- When sharing information, Stepping Stones will explain in advance to the data subject how their information will be used, including under what circumstances the information might be shared.
- It is important to not give assurances of absolute confidentiality in adult safeguarding where there are concerns about risk of harm to one or more adults, nor should it be assumed that someone else will pass on information which may be critical to the prevention of harm to an adult.
- The information will be shared by the designated staff, in accordance with the DPA 2018/GDPR and the ICO Code of Practice.
- Decisions about what information should be shared and with whom should be taken on a case-by-case basis.

### **Personal data may be shared when:**

- the adult has given his or her valid consent (which in the case of sensitive personal data must be explicit); or
- where information sharing is necessary for matters of life or death or for the prevention of serious harm to the individual; or
- where sharing is necessary for the purposes of the administration of justice;
- where sharing information is for public or statutory duties.
- where the decision is made to share information without consent, the organisation must ensure that the adult is clearly informed of what information will be shared, why it will be shared, and who it will be shared with, providing this does not increase the risk to the adult.



Staff should maintain records of the information gathered which explains and justifies their decisions.

### **7.3 Sharing Information Between Agencies**

As a service provider Stepping Stones NI is required to share information on a regular basis to safeguard adults at risk and young people and will do so following the Data Protection Act 2018/GDPR provisions. All participants and their parents/carers are informed of the information sharing process during the Induction Procedure.

### **7.4 File Processing Guidance**

It is essential for Stepping Stones NI to recognise the importance of storing of information under a central database. Records on the Client Database must be kept up to date and relevant to as per the guidance provided under the Data Protection Act 2018 and also the Code of Practice of the DHSSPS.

Hard Copy files should be held if forms necessitate a signature and detail for funding to include:

- Referral forms
- Vocational Profiling
- Risk Plans
- Consent Forms Exit and Progression Forms

## **8 Code of Behaviour**

The duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of the trainees and clients in their charge rests with all members of staff. Implicit in it is the assumption that the conduct of all staff towards trainees and clients must be above reproach. It is expected that everyone in the organisation and everyone who uses its services, participates in its activities or visits, should relate to each other in a mutually respectful way. This will minimise the opportunity for adults at risk to suffer harm and help to protect staff/volunteers.

You can reduce likely situations for abuse of young people and adults at risk and help protect yourself from false accusations by making sure that you are aware that, as a general rule, it doesn't make sense to..

- spend excessive amounts of time alone with young people or adults at risk away from others;
- take young people or adults at risk alone in a car on journeys, however short were possible;
- take young people or adults to your home.

When it is unavoidable that these things do happen, they should only occur with the full knowledge and consent of the Line Manager and the young person's parent /person with parental responsibility where appropriate.

#### **Staff should never:**

- engage in sexually provocative games;
- allow or engage in inappropriate touching of any form;
- allow young people to use inappropriate language unchallenged;

- make sexually suggestive comments about or to a young person even in fun;
- let allegations in respect of a young person go unchallenged or unrecorded;
- do things of a personal nature for young people that the young person can do themselves.
- abuse, neglect or harm or place at risk of harm adults at risk whether by omission or commission;
- engage in rough physical games, including horseplay;
- form inappropriate relationships
- gossip about personal details of adults at risk and their families;
- make/accept loans or gifts of money from adults at risk.

Staff should be particularly careful when supervising trainees or clients, in approved out-of-hours activities, where more informal relationships tend to be usual.

Training staff should avoid teaching materials, the choice of which might be misinterpreted and reflect upon the motives for the choice. If in doubt about the appropriateness of a particular teaching method, the trainer should consult with their line manager before using it.

In all circumstances, employees' professional judgement will be exercised and for most this code of conduct will only serve to confirm what they have always done. However, inappropriate actions in relation to any of the above may lead to staff disciplinary procedures being implemented.

### **8.1 Diversity and additional care and support needs.**

#### **Staff and volunteers should:**

- Be open to and aware of diversity in the beliefs and practices of adults at risk and their families;
- Be aware of the difficulties posed by language barriers and other communication difficulties;
- Not discriminate against adults at risk and their families who have different cultural backgrounds and beliefs from their own;
- Use the procedures outlined in this Guidance to report any discrimination against adults at risk and their families by other staff members/volunteers.

### **8.2 Handling of money**

#### **Staff and volunteers should:**

- Never gain in any way when using the adult at risk's money on his/her behalf or guiding the adult at risk in the use of his/her own money;
- Never borrow money from, or lend money to, an adult at risk;
- Report any suspicions of financial abuse.

### **8.3 Photography/Video**

#### **Staff and volunteers should:**

- Not photograph/video an adult at risk, even by mobile phone, without consent;
- Ensure that any photographs/videos taken of adults at risk are appropriate;
- Report any inappropriate use of images of an adult at risk;

- Report any inappropriate or dangerous behaviour on the internet that involves an adult at risk or child

#### **8.4 Personal Care**

- It may sometimes be necessary for staff to do things of a personal nature for young people or adults at risk.
- These tasks should be clearly described in an Incident form and should only be carried out with the full understanding and written consent of the parent / person with parental responsibility.
- In an emergency situation which requires this type of help, parents / those with parental responsibility should be fully informed, as soon as reasonably possible that it was necessary to provide such assistance.
- In such situations, it is important that all staff are sensitive to the individual and undertake personal care tasks with the utmost discretion.
- Whenever possible a second member of staff should be informed in advance of, or as soon as practically possible thereafter, of the need to perform an assisting task of a personal nature. A record should be maintained to this effect.

Young people and adults at risk must be treated with respect at all times. Young people and adults at risk have a right not to partake in an activity which they feel uncomfortable with.

#### **8.5 Physical Touch**

The use of physical touch will depend on the context of the activities and the physical needs of the children and young people. There are however a number of fundamental principles on the use of touch which should always be adhered to.

These are:

- Touching should always be with the permission. If a young person or adult at risk shows any resistance to touch, i.e. if you put your hand on their arm and they pull away, it is important that this is respected.
- Touch should always be conducted in an open manner. It should never be carried out in 'secret'
- Young people and adults at risk should be told in advance what, if any, physical touch will be involved in any activities developed within the programme
- Consent from the adults at risk should be received before any physical touch is carried out.

## 1 APPENDICES

**Appendix 1:** What is Abuse?

**Appendix 2:** Reporting Procedure Flow chart

**Appendix 3:** Complaints Policy

**Appendix 4:** Bullying and Harassment Policy

## 2 RELATED DOCUMENTS

### Appendix 1

#### WHAT IS ABUSE?

##### 1. KEY DEFINITIONS

##### 1.1 HARM

**Harm** is the impact on the victim of abuse, exploitation or neglect. It is the result of any action whether by commission or omission, deliberate, or as the result of a lack of knowledge or awareness which may result in the impairment of physical, intellectual, emotional, or mental health or well-being.

An 'adult at risk of harm' is a person aged 18 or over, whose exposure to harm through abuse, exploitation or neglect may be increased by their:

- a) personal characteristics AND/OR
- b) life circumstances

Personal characteristics may include, but are not limited to, age, disability, special educational needs, illness, mental or physical frailty or impairment of, or disturbance in, the functioning of the mind or brain.

Life circumstances may include, but are not limited to, isolation, socio-economic factors and environmental living conditions.

An 'Adult in need of protection' is a person aged 18 or over, whose exposure to harm through abuse, exploitation or neglect may be increased by their:

- a) personal characteristics AND/OR
- b) life circumstances AND
- c) is unable to protect their own well-being, property, assets, rights or other interests;
- d) AND d) where the action or inaction of another person or persons is causing, or is likely to cause, him/her to be harmed.

In order to meet the definition of an 'adult in need of protection' either (a) or (b) must be present, in addition to both elements (c), and (d).

Harmful conduct may constitute a criminal offence or professional misconduct.

## **1.2 ABUSE**

Abuse is 'a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to another individual or violates their human or civil rights'.

Abuse is the misuse of power and control that one person has over another. Abuse may be perpetrated by a wide range of people, including those who are usually physically and/or emotionally close to the individual and on whom the individual may depend and trust. This may include, but is not limited to, a partner, relative or other family member, a person entrusted to act on behalf of the adult in some aspect of their affairs, a service or care provider, a neighbour, a health or social care worker or professional, an employer, a volunteer or another service user. It may also be perpetrated by those who have no previous connection to the victim.

## **1.3 FORMS OF ABUSE**

The main forms of abuse are:

### **Physical abuse**

Physical abuse is the use of physical force or mistreatment of one person by another which may or may not result in actual physical injury. This may include hitting, pushing, rough handling, exposure to heat or cold, force feeding, improper administration of medication, denial of treatment, misuse or illegal use of restraint and deprivation of liberty.

Some young people and young adults can be particularly vulnerable i.e. children with a disability, children from ethnic minorities, children living away from home and consideration needs to be given to this.

### **Sexual violence and abuse**

Sexual abuse is any behaviour perceived to be of a sexual nature which is unwanted or takes place without consent or understanding. Sexual violence and abuse can take many forms and may include non-contact sexual activities, such as indecent exposure, stalking, grooming, being made to look at or be involved in the production of sexually abusive material, or being made to watch sexual activities. It may involve physical contact, including but not limited to non-consensual penetrative sexual activities or non-penetrative sexual activities, such as intentional touching (known as groping). Sexual violence can be found across all sections of society, irrelevant of gender, age, ability, religion, race, ethnicity, personal circumstances, financial background or sexual orientation.

### **Psychological / emotional abuse**

Psychological / emotional abuse is behaviour that is psychologically harmful or inflicts mental distress by threat, humiliation or other verbal/non-verbal conduct. This may include threats, humiliation or ridicule, provoking fear of violence, shouting, yelling and swearing, blaming, controlling, intimidation and coercion.

### **Financial abuse**

Financial abuse is actual or attempted theft, fraud or burglary. It is the misappropriation or misuse of money, property, benefits, material goods or other asset transactions which the person did not or could not consent to, or which were invalidated by intimidation, coercion or deception. This may include exploitation, embezzlement, withholding pension or benefits or pressure exerted around wills, property or inheritance.

**Institutional abuse** Institutional abuse is the mistreatment or neglect of an adult by a regime or individuals in settings which adults who may be at risk reside in or use. This can occur in any organisation, within and outside the HSC sector. Institutional abuse may occur when the routines, systems and regimes result in poor standards of care, poor practice and behaviours, inflexible regimes and rigid routines which violate the dignity and human rights of the adults and place them at risk of harm. Institutional abuse may occur within a culture that denies, restricts or curtails privacy, dignity, choice and independence. It involves the collective failure of a service provider or an organisation to provide safe and appropriate services and includes a failure to ensure that the necessary preventative and/or protective measures are in place.

**Neglect** occurs when a person deliberately withholds, or fails to provide, appropriate and adequate care and support which is required by another adult. It may be through a lack of knowledge or awareness, or through a failure to take reasonable action given the information and facts available to them at the time. It may include physical neglect to the extent that health or well-being is impaired, administering too much or too little medication, failure to provide access to appropriate health or social care, withholding the necessities of life, such as adequate nutrition, heating or clothing, or failure to intervene in situations that are dangerous to the person concerned or to others particularly when the person lacks the capacity to assess risk.

**Exploitation** is the deliberate maltreatment, manipulation or abuse of power and control over another person; to take advantage of another person or situation usually, but not always, for personal gain from using them as a commodity. It may manifest itself in many forms including slavery, servitude, forced or compulsory labour, domestic violence and abuse, sexual violence and abuse, or human trafficking.

is list of types of harmful conduct is not exhaustive, nor listed here in any order of priority. There are other indicators which should not be ignored. It is also possible that if a person is being harmed in one way, he/ she may very well be experiencing harm in other ways.

## 2. RELATED DEFINITIONS

There are related definitions which interface with Adult Safeguarding, each of which have their own associated adult protection processes in place.

### 2.1 Domestic violence and abuse

Domestic violence and abuse is threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, verbal, sexual, financial or emotional) inflicted on one person by another where they are or have been intimate partners or family members, irrespective of gender or sexual orientation.

Domestic violence and abuse is essentially a pattern of behaviour which is characterised by the exercise of control and the misuse of power by one person over another. It is usually frequent and persistent. It can include violence by a son, daughter, mother, father, husband, wife, life partner or any other person who has a close relationship with the victim. It occurs right across society, regardless of age, gender, race, ethnic or religious group, sexual orientation, wealth, disability or geography.

### 2.2 Human trafficking

Human trafficking involves the acquisition and movement of people by improper means, such as force, threat or deception, for the purposes of exploiting them. It can take many forms, such as domestic servitude, forced criminality, forced labour, sexual exploitation and organ harvesting. Victims of human trafficking can come from all walks of life; they can be male or female, children or adults, and they may come from migrant or indigenous communities.

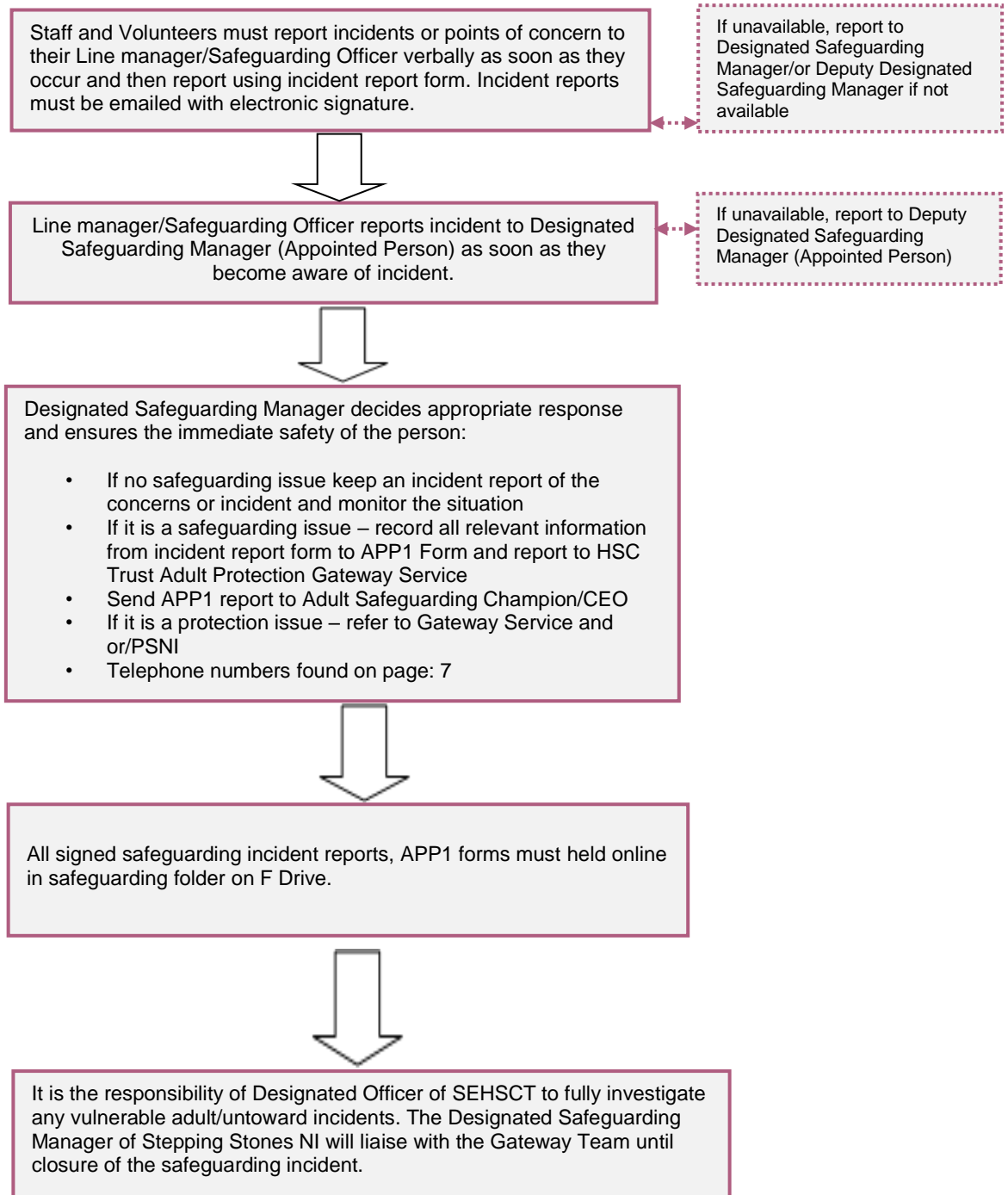


### **2.3 Hate crime**

Hate crime is any incident which constitutes a criminal offence perceived by the victim or any other person as being motivated by prejudice, discrimination or hate towards a person's actual or perceived race, religious belief, sexual orientation, disability, political opinion or gender identity.

## Appendix 2

### Reporting Flowchart



**Adult Safeguarding Champion:** Paula Jennings: CEO

**Appointed Persons:**

- Designated Safeguarding Manager: Emmett Mullally Director of Operations and Social Enterprises

- Designated Deputy Safeguarding Manager: Jenna Pike Services Manager

## **Appendix 3**

### **Complaints Policy**

#### **Objectives and Scope of the Complaints Policy**

The objectives of this policy are:

- To provide an effective means of allowing stakeholders (A person, group, or business that has a share or an interest in a particular activity or set of activities) to complain about the quality or nature of services; Examples of Stakeholders relevant to Stepping Stones are: funders, trainees, staff, parents/carers, volunteers, Health and Social Services, Health Trusts.
- To ensure those complaints are acted upon and recorded;
- To seek to resolve complaints quickly and as close to the point of service as is acceptable and appropriate;
- To ensure that responses to complaints are informative and comprehensive;
- To give management an additional tool to monitor the overall performance of Stepping Stones NI and the extent to which its service objectives are being met;

All staff will receive a copy of the policy and it will be included in the staff handbook and be covered at induction for new staff.

#### **Formal and Informal Complaints**

Complaints will be classified as informal or formal. A formal complaint is defined primarily as one received in writing although in some circumstances it may be appropriate to treat a verbal complaint as formal, e.g. where the person responding to or investigating an informal complaint considers that the complaint is of sufficient seriousness to warrant a written reply.

#### **Type of Complaints**

Generally complaints received by Stepping Stones NI fall into 1 of 2 categories:

1. A complaint from a stakeholder about a service or lack of service, e.g. trainee, customer
2. A complaint from a statutory or non-statutory body about a Stepping Stones NI employee.

As each type of complaint may require slightly different procedures this complaints policy addresses each category of complaint in turn.

#### **Complaints about a Service or Lack of Service**

### **Stage 1 – Informal Complaint**

The majority of complaints about a service will be handled by the department concerned. For example, a complaint about the time it is between ordering food to its arrival, missing envelopes with cards etc..

- If the problem is not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant he/she may put his/her complaint in writing to the Operations Manager who will decide who is the most appropriate person to deal with the complaint.
- The person directed to investigate the complaint should file a copy in the complaints file.
- On receipt of a written complaint an acknowledgement will be forwarded to the complainant within 1 calendar week, giving an indication of how long the investigation will take and when they can expect a response.
- The investigation of the complaint should be completed within 28 calendar days of the written complaint being received unless there are extenuating circumstances.
- When the person delegated to investigate the complaint has discussed the matter with all relevant parties, he/she will write to the complainant informing him/her of any action to be taken as a result of the investigation. This letter should be approved by the Chief Officer before issue. A copy of approved this letter should be in the complaints file.

### **A Complaint from a Statutory or Non-Statutory Organisation about a Stepping Stones Employee**

#### **Stage 1 – Informal Complaint**

1. A complaint received by telephone about a member of staff will be transferred at the earliest opportunity to the staff member's line manager or Operations Manager.
2. The line manager will listen to the complaint and attempt to bring about a resolution through discussion and negotiation.
3. A complaint received initially in writing will be treated as formal.

#### **Stage 2 – Formal Complaints**

1. If discussion and negotiation do not bring about a resolution, the complainant may put his complaint in writing.
2. The member of staff about whom the complaint has been made should be given details of the complaint and careful attention paid to his/her support needs.
4. On receipt of a written complaint, an acknowledgement will be forwarded to the complainant within 1 calendar week.
5. The investigation of the complaint should be completed within 28 calendar days of the written complaint being received unless there are extenuating circumstances.

6. The complaint will be handled by the relevant line manager in conjunction with the Operations Manager and a representative from Personnel Training Services if necessary or appropriate.
7. The line manager /Operations Manager (with support from Personnel and Training Services if appropriate) will investigate the complaint by interviewing all the relevant persons and by collecting any written information relevant to the complaint.
8. The member of staff who is the subject of the complaint may be accompanied by a colleague when she is being interviewed about the complaint.
9. When the line manager has completed his/her investigation he/she will write to the complainant informing him/her of the outcome of the investigation. This letter should be approved by the Chief Officer before issue. A copy of this approved letter will be filed in the complaints file, and a copy given to the line manager of the staff member undertaking the investigation.
10. The staff member concerned will also be informed of the outcome of the investigation.
11. The Board of Stepping Stones NI will be informed by way of a complaints report by the Chief Officer when they arise.

## Appendix 4

### **Bullying and Harassment Policy**

As part of its overall commitment to equality of opportunity, Stepping Stones recognises that bullying and harassment detracts from a productive working environment and can affect the health, confidence, morale and performance of those affected by it, including anyone who witnesses or knows about the unwanted behaviour. Stepping Stones therefore undertakes to investigate complaints, quickly, seriously and confidentially.

This policy is intended to define Stepping Stones NI' commitment to create a harmonious working environment where every worker is treated with respect and dignity and in which no worker feels threatened or intimidated within their workplace.

The policy and its associated procedures are necessary to ensure an organisational environment where bullying and harassment will be recognised as totally unacceptable behaviour which may constitute gross misconduct necessitating disciplinary action and which may warrant dismissal.

Individual members of staff who feel they are being subjected to harassment or bullying are advised to progress complaints in accordance with this policy and it's associated procedures as they have been specifically devised to ensure sensitive and prompt handling of such issues.

#### **1.1. HARASSMENT**

Harassment is defined as: *“Unwanted conduct, based on a sexual, sectarian; racial; disability; age; sexual orientation nature; or other conduct based on sex, religious belief, political opinion, race, age, sexual orientation or disability which has the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment”.*

Harassment as defined in the legislation will amount to unlawful discrimination. This Company is committed, however, to discouraging all forms of harassment and discrimination, whether unlawful or not.

- i. Many forms of behaviour can constitute harassment; these are just some examples:
  - Physical conduct ranging from touching to serious assault
  - Verbal or written harassment through social media, online, jokes, racist, sexist or sectarian remarks, homophobic comments, comments about a person's disability, offensive language, gossip and slander, sectarian songs, mobile phone ring tones, threats, letters, emails
  - Visual displays of posters, computer screen savers, downloaded images, graffiti, obscene gestures, flags, bunting or emblems, or any other offensive material
  - Coercion, including pressure for sexual favours, pressure to participate in political or religious groups
- ii. Associated legislation that governs harassment includes the following:
  - Fair Employment & Treatment (NI) Order 1998 (as amended)
  - Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended)



- Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 (as amended)
- Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976 (as amended)
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2003
- Employment Equality Age Regulations (NI) 2006
- Protection from Harassment (NI) Order 1997 (This legislation makes harassment both a civil tort and criminal offence).

If any of the above behaviour is not related to an equality ground covered by anti-discrimination legislation, this could amount to bullying.

Other Acts or Orders where bullying or harassment may have an application could include the following:

- Health and Safety at Work (NI) Order 1978
- Malicious Communications (NI) Order 1988
- Public Interest Disclosure (NI) Order 1998

## 1.2. **BULLYING**

Bullying is defined as: *“The unwanted conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment”*.

The above shall be regarded as having that effect if having regard to all the circumstances, including in particular the complainant’s perception, it should reasonably be considered as having the effect.

Bullying is social identity neutral. Everyone has the potential to bully and it can occur at all levels. Many forms of behaviour can constitute bullying and the following are just some examples which may constitute bullying:

- Abusive behaviour/ intimidation/ threats
- Being belittled/ ridiculed/ insulted both face to face and online including social media
- Shouting/ cursing at an individual/ public humiliation
- Different treatment
- Abuse of power or personality
- Isolation or non-co-operation at work, exclusion from social activities
- Intrusion by pestering, spying, following, etc.

## 1.3. **COMPLAINANTS’ RIGHTS**

1.3.1 Stepping Stones fully recognise the right of employees to complain about bullying or harassment should it occur. It has developed a procedure through which employees can confidentially raise complaints relating to bullying or harassment.

1.3.2 A complaint under the formal procedure must be made within 3 months of the date when the Complainant first knew of the act which is being complained of or within 6 months of the date when the act occurred, whichever is the sooner.

1.3.3 The procedure does not replace or detract from the rights of employees to pursue a complaint of harassment under the sex/ race relations/ disability/ sexual orientation/ age discrimination or Protection from Harassment legislation to an Industrial Tribunal and, under the fair employment legislation, for example, to the Fair Employment Tribunal, in the case of

sectarian harassment. However, there are strict time limits for making complaints to a tribunal and complainants will be expected to have raised their complaint under an employer's grievance procedures first.

1.3.4 Every effort will be made to ensure that employees making complaints of harassment or bullying and others who give evidence or information in connection with a complaint will not be victimised. Victimisation constitutes discrimination contrary to following anti-discrimination legislation: Fair Employment & Treatment (NI) Order 1998 (as amended), Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended), Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 (as amended), Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976 (as amended), Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2003 and Employment Equality Age Regulations (NI) 2006. Any complaint of victimisation will be dealt with promptly, seriously and in complete confidence. Victimisation will result in disciplinary action and may warrant dismissal.

#### **1.4. ROLE OF EMPLOYEES**

1.4.1 All those who work for Stepping Stones have a responsibility to help ensure a working environment in which the dignity of all employees, clients and contractors is respected. Everyone must comply with

this policy and employees should ensure that their behaviour could not be considered in any way to be bullying or harassment.

1.4.2 All employees must alert management to any incident of harassment/ bullying to enable Stepping Stones to deal with the matter in line with the policy and procedure. They should discourage bullying and harassment by making it clear that they find such behaviour unacceptable and they should provide support to colleagues who are being bullied or harassed, by encouraging them to follow the agreed complaints procedure.

1.4.3 Employees have the right not to be bullied or harassed and should not feel, or be made to feel, guilty or embarrassed about exercising these rights. The test for an employee in deciding whether or not to raise particular behaviour as an issue of concern is whether or not the particular behaviour meets any of the criteria set out earlier in this policy and procedure.

1.4.4 Employees are entitled to raise their concerns or issues of this type secure in the knowledge that Stepping Stones takes allegations of harassment/ bullying seriously and will deal with them quickly and sympathetically.

#### **1.5. ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF MANAGERS**

1.5.1 Managers and Supervisors, as do all employees, have a responsibility to ensure that they comply with this policy at all times.

1.5.2 Managers and Supervisors have a duty to implement and maintain this policy and to make every effort to ensure that bullying/ harassment does not occur, particularly in work areas for which they are responsible.

1.5.3 Managers and Supervisors have the responsibility for dealing appropriately with any incident of bullying or harassment that they are aware of. If harassment or bullying does occur, they must deal effectively with the situation and inform senior management immediately of the incident/s.

1.5.4 Managers and Supervisors must be responsive and supportive to any member of staff who makes an allegation of harassment or bullying, provide clear advice on the procedure to be adopted, maintain confidentiality and seek to ensure that there is no further problem of harassment, bullying or victimisation while a complaint is being dealt with or after it has been resolved.

1.5.5 Managers and Supervisors must be alert and proactive to unacceptable behaviour and take appropriate action in accordance with company policy and procedures. They must ensure that potentially offensive material of a discriminatory nature is not displayed or circulated.

## **1.6. THE ROLE OF STEPPING STONES**

1.6.1 Stepping Stones will ensure that adequate resources are made available to promote respect and dignity in the workplace and to deal effectively with complaints of harassment or bullying.

1.6.2 Stepping Stones will ensure that the policy and the procedures for dealing with complaints will be communicated effectively to all employees and ensure that they are aware of what their responsibilities are in relation to bullying or harassment within the workplace and what the procedure is for dealing with harassment or bullying in the workplace.

1.6.3 Where necessary, Managers and Supervisors will receive appropriate training in the implementation of this policy and associated procedures in order for them to perform their role effectively.

1.6.4 Stepping Stones have designated staff from Personnel & Training Services to provide advice and assistance to employees subjected to harassment or bullying. The names of individuals who have been designated as advisors will be made known to all employees.

1.6.5 Employees wishing to use the services of a designated advisor may contact members of staff at Personnel & Training Services Tel. (028 2564 4110).

## **1.7. PROCEDURE FOR MAKING COMPLAINTS**

### **1.7.1 THE INFORMAL STAGE**

There are several steps employees can take to deal with bullying or harassment when they are subject to it. For example: -

- i. Employees may wish to try and deal with the situation in the first instance by making it clear to the perpetrator that the behaviour is unacceptable. In this approach they are entitled to draw on the confidential advice, assistance and support of a work colleague, Manager, Supervisor, or a designated advisor from Personnel & Training Services who will help with any attempt to solve the problem without resort to formal procedure.
- ii. Employees who are being bullied or harassed are entitled to:
  - Approach the alleged perpetrator directly, making it clear to the person(s) harassing or bullying him/ her that the behaviour in question is offensive and should be stopped. This can be done either verbally or in writing.
  - Approach the alleged perpetrator with the support of a work colleague.
  - Approach the alleged perpetrator with the support of a Manager, Supervisor, or a designated advisor.

- iii. Where an employee seeks support of a work colleague the following is recommended:
  - Where a work colleague is approached to support an employee who is being harassed it is strongly recommended that a record is maintained of any approaches under the informal procedure and of all actions taken and why.
- iv. Where an employee seeks support of a Manager, Supervisor, or a designated advisor he/she will be informed that their role at the informal stage can only be one of support and assistance. The employee will also be advised of his/ her statutory rights and that:
  - A formal investigation and possible disciplinary action can only take place if the complaint is investigated under the formal procedure.
  - All reported incidents of harassment/ bullying will be monitored and, in the event of any patterns emerging, management may wish to initiate its own formal investigation
  - A written record of the action taken will be made to assist with any formal proceedings that may arise if the behaviour does not stop. Failure to maintain such a record will not invalidate proceedings at the formal stage.

### **1.7.2 THE FORMAL STAGE**

- i. Stepping Stones recognises that in some instances employees who are the victims of harassment or bullying may not be self – confident enough to tell the perpetrator that the behaviour is unacceptable. It would emphasise that employees are not required to approach the perpetrator in an attempt to get the behaviour corrected and are entitled to progress the complaint through the formal procedure if they so wish.
- ii. The formal complaints procedure may also be used if the harassment or bullying continues after the informal procedures have been unsuccessful in reaching a satisfactory resolution.
- iii. An advisor from Personnel & Training Services will undertake investigations at the formal stage on behalf of Stepping Stones. Individuals may raise complaints directly with any of Personnel & Training Services staff (ref Section 13.6.5) or with management.
- iv. Any member of management that may be involved in the carrying out of investigations at the formal stage will be in no way connected with the allegation that has been made.
- v. Personnel & Training Services will provide a staff member to investigate allegations throughout the procedure. He/she will attend all meetings to act as an external advisor and a written record of all proceedings will be maintained.
- vi. While it is preferable that a complaint should be made in writing (in accordance with step 1 of the Statutory Grievance Procedure) to any of the Personnel & Training Services staff (ref Section 13.6.5), this will not preclude the investigation of a complaint made verbally at first and then confirmed in a written form.
- vii. The advisor from Personnel & Training Services will acknowledge receipt of the complaint and arrange to meet the Complainant within 3 working days.

- viii. During all initial meetings both the Complainant and alleged perpetrator have the right to be accompanied by a work colleague or a trade union representative.
- ix. The following procedure details time limits for the completion of each stage of the procedure. If any of these time limits are not possible then both parties will be informed of the revised timescale.

## **1.8. PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING COMPLAINTS**

### INITIAL STEPS

#### i. Initial meeting with the Complainant

On receipt of a complaint, the representative from Personnel and Training Services shall meet with the Complainant and carry out the following actions:

Clarify and formally record the nature of the complaint and informing the Complainant that it is being handled under the formal procedure.

Advise the Complainant of his/her statutory rights and the time limits under appropriate legislation, ensuring that the Complainant is aware of the next stage of the formal procedure.

#### i. Avoiding contact between Complainant and Alleged Perpetrator

Stepping Stones will ensure that the issue of avoiding contact between the Complainant and the alleged perpetrator is resolved before action is taken to inform the alleged perpetrator of the complaint.

In the case of serious harassment Stepping Stones will give consideration to the use of precautionary suspension, on full pay, of the alleged perpetrator to enable investigations to proceed smoothly.

Where such a decision is reached, the individual will be formally advised during the initial meeting with the representative from Personnel & Training Services.

In other cases of alleged harassment or bullying Stepping Stones will take appropriate action to avoid contact between the Complainant and the alleged perpetrator, after the initial meeting with the Complainant.

#### iii. Informing the Alleged Perpetrator

Personnel & Training Services' representative will meet with the alleged perpetrator and will carry out the following actions:

- 1) Detail the nature of the complaint
- 2) Confirm that the complaint is being handled under the formal procedure
- 3) Ensure that the individual is aware of the next stage of the procedure
- 4) Inform the alleged perpetrator if precautionary suspension on full pay is to be invoked to enable investigations to proceed.

## **1.9. INVESTIGATION**

### **1.9.1 GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

- a. Stepping Stones, through their appointed advisors, undertakes to carry out a rigorous investigation into any allegations in order to establish all of the facts necessary to enable a balanced decision regarding any use of the Disciplinary Procedure to be reached.
- b. Employees shall have been made fully aware, in writing, of any allegation of harassment or bullying and shall be given every opportunity to answer any questions during the investigation.
- c. During all meetings/interviews both the Complainant and alleged perpetrator have the right to be accompanied by another employee, or a Trade Union representative.
- d. Employees who have been disciplined as an outcome of a complaint of harassment have the right to appeal the disciplinary decision in accordance with Stepping Stones' appeals procedure.
- e. Any investigation will be carried out as quickly as possible; however the meetings may not necessarily follow immediately after each other. Every effort will be made to hold all necessary meetings within 10 working days of the date of receipt of the complaint. Where this proves to be impracticable both the Complainant and alleged perpetrator will be advised.
- f. Stepping Stones recognises the fact that employees have the right to complain to the Office of Industrial Tribunals and the Fair Employment Tribunals about alleged incident/s.
- g. All information or evidence provided will be treated as confidential to the investigation, subject to any statutory requirements.
- h. It is hoped Stepping Stones NI will be able to resolve any complaint through the complaints procedure. If however a customer remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they have the right to raise the matter with the Northern Ireland Charities Commission. <https://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk/about-us/making-a-complaint/>

#### 1.9.2 MEETING WITH THE COMPLAINANT

Stepping Stones' appointed advisors will meet with the Complainant and consider what he/she has to say about the alleged incident/s. Where possible, dates, times and names of any witnesses or other employees who may be able to assist with the investigation, will be gathered. Stepping Stones' appointed advisors will also consider any written information that the Complainant wishes to provide in support of their allegation.

#### 1.9.3 MEETING WITH THE ALLEGED PERPETRATOR

Stepping Stones' appointed advisors will meet with the alleged perpetrator and consider what he/she has to say about the allegations. Where possible, names of witnesses or other employees who may be able to assist the investigation will be gathered. Stepping Stones' appointed advisors will also consider any written information that the alleged perpetrator wishes to provide in support of their position.

#### 1.9.4 MEETING WITH OTHERS WHO CAN ASSIST THE INVESTIGATION

Stepping Stones' appointed advisors will meet with any other person/s where it is believed that such individuals can assist with the investigation. Separate interviews will be conducted and individuals asked to outline their observations and/ or give a description of any events that may be relevant.

All those who give information will do so privately and will not be in the presence of anyone involved in or present during the alleged incident/s.

#### 1.9.5 MEETING WITH MANAGERS

Stepping Stones' appointed advisors will meet with the manager of both the Complainant and the alleged perpetrator to establish if there has been any history of previous conflict between them and/ or with other parties.



## **1.10. CONSIDERATIONS AND REPORTING**

Having collected all the relevant information from the meetings, Stepping Stones' appointed advisors will then prepare a written report outlining the facts, indicating their findings, and whether a case of harassment or bullying is substantiated. This report will be forwarded to the Chief Officer and to any other relevant member/s of Management for a decision on any appropriate management action and/or the possible use of Stepping Stones' Disciplinary Procedure.

## **1.11. DISCIPLINARY ACTION**

1.11.1 The Chief Officer and any other relevant member/s of Management will consider the facts contained in the report and will decide either to:

- a. Initiate Stepping Stones' Disciplinary Procedure against any party as appropriate; and or
- b. Take any other appropriate management action e.g. the provision of training.

1.11.2 Following Stepping Stones' decision on any action to be taken, Stepping Stones' appointed advisor will write to both the person who has complained of bullying/harassment and the person against whom the complaint was made informing them of the decision and of any action which Stepping Stones propose to take. Every effort will be made to have completed the procedure within 15 working days of the complaint being received. Where this proves impracticable both parties will be informed of any revised timescale.

1.11.3 If there is a finding of harassment/ bullying and disciplinary action against the perpetrator is warranted under the organisation's disciplinary policy, the statutory disciplinary and dismissal procedures need to be put into effect along with the statutory appeal steps if necessary.

1.11.4 If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation and subsequent action taken, they have the right to appeal the decision made.

## **1.12. OTHER ACTION**

### **1.12.1 Redeployment where Disciplinary Action is Taken**

Where a complaint has been upheld Stepping Stones NI recognise that the Complainant may wish to avoid further contact with the perpetrator. Where the perpetrator remains in employment with Stepping Stones, and where it is evident that further contact between the individuals concerned would be unacceptable, every effort will be made to facilitate redeployment. In the first instance consideration will be given to redeployment of the perpetrator and where a transfer of the Complainant occurs it will not lead to any disadvantages to him/ her.

### **1.12.2 Redeployment where Disciplinary Action is Not Taken**

In such cases consideration may still be given, where practicable, to the voluntary transfer of one of the employees concerned.

### **1.12.3 Equal Opportunities Awareness Training**

Stepping Stones NI will ensure that the perpetrator is made aware of Stepping Stones' policies on equal opportunities, harassment and bullying and of the law relating to these matters.

## 2 Related Documents

REF (if applic.)	TITLE
	Incident Report form
	Incident log
	Incident Alert form
External	The Information Commission's Office (ICO) Data Sharing Code of Practice Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007
Review date	June 2020
Reviewed	June 2021
Reviewed	
Reviewed	

### 1. Related Quality Procedures

QP NO.	TITLE
QP2	Control of Documents
QP3	Control of Records
QP4	Control of Nonconformities, Corrective and Preventive Action
QP10	Customer/Stakeholder Feedback
QP11	Monitoring and Measurement