

BRIDGIT WATER FOUNDATION

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

INTRODUCTION

BridgIT Water Foundation is a non-profit organisation providing clean, safe water to people in rural villages of developing nations around the world. BridgIT Water Foundation is meeting the daily health and humanitarian needs of these people, and thereby helping to reduce poverty and disease. The aid and assistance are given without regard to the race, creed, gender, religion, or ethnicity of the beneficiaries.

In providing aid and assistance regardless of race, creed, gender, religion, or ethnicity of the beneficiaries, special care will always be given to protect children from any injustice or abuse of any type. These abuses include physical abuse, emotional/mental abuse, neglect, or sexual abuse.

For the avoidance of doubt:

Child: A child is defined as any person under 18 years of age, and also referred to herein as ‘young person’

Physical abuse: This occurs when a person purposefully injures or threatens to injure a child or young person. This may take the form of slapping, punching, shaking, kicking, burning, shoving or grabbing. The injury may take the form of bruises, cuts, burns or fractures.

Emotional/mental abuse: This occurs when a child is repeatedly rejected or frightened by threats. This may involve name-calling, verbal put downs or continual coldness from a parent or caregiver, to the extent that it affects the child’s physical and emotional growth.

Neglect: The persistent failure or the deliberate denial to provide a child with clean water, food, shelter, sanitation, or supervision or care to the extent that the child’s health and development are placed at risk.

Sexual abuse: This occurs when a child or young person is used by an older or bigger child, adolescent or adult for his or her own sexual stimulation or gratification—regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. These can be contact or non-contact acts, including threats and exposure to pornography.

Our policy is aimed at protecting children as well as all our employees and associates who may interact with children during the course of implementing all of our programs.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that every child that BridgIT Water Foundation staff and volunteers, our partners, and other associates including contractors and suppliers, may interact with during the course of our work is treated with the upmost dignity and respect and their rights under the UNCRC Convention are upheld.

BridgIT is committed to operating in a safe and protective environment for children. If properly implemented, this policy will also protect BridgIT Water Foundation's staff, partners and associates from any suspicion of wrongdoing and will thus enable us to carry out our mission.

POLICY

It is BridgIT Water Foundation's responsibility to uphold the rights of children as stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989), as we believe that protecting the most vulnerable should also be the essence of proper conduct for every human being.

- Since children may be at risk from its work, BridgIT Water Foundation will always seek to protect every child that we or our associates or partners interact with, from any harm or abuse that may otherwise be afflicted by our staff, partners or associates.
- We believe that child abuse is unacceptable under any circumstance.
- There should be no higher priority in our day to day activities than to protect the rights of children and the most vulnerable.
- It is BWF's policy to educate its employees, volunteers, partners, and associates about the rights of children, how those right might be abused, and clearly explain that child protection is of the utmost importance in its work. All employees, volunteers, and associates will read, understand, and sign a Child Safeguarding Code of Conduct before they are eligible to work for or with BridgIT Water Foundation.
- The Child Protection Policy will be reviewed every 4 years to ensure its relevance.

RISK ASSESSMENT

BWF recognises that there a number of potential risks to children in the delivery of our programs. In recognising these risks, BWF proactively assesses and manages risks to children in order to reduce the risk of harm. This is achieved by examining each activity and program and its potential impact on children. Activities and programs that involve direct work with children are considered a higher risk, and therefore require more stringent child safeguarding procedures.

Risk management is an ongoing part of all of our work involving and affecting children. BWF conducts a child protection risk assessment on every activity and project involving and affecting children prior to commencement. Mitigation strategies are put in place for any risk identified and these (and any emerging risks) are actively monitored throughout the activity/program cycle. Guidelines on conducting a child protection risk assessment guidelines are located here (https://training.gov.au/TrainingComponentFiles/CHC08/CHCPR0T701A_R1.pdf).

Staff, visitors and associates are trained in child safeguarding and protection, and risk assessment. They are expected to be continually aware of potential risks to children as well as to be actively minimising opportunities and situations where children can be harmed.

BWF uses child friendly methods to involve children in helping us to identify potential risks to their safety when they are participating in or affected by our work.

Child safeguarding is included in our organisational risk register, which is monitored by our Senior Management Team and Board.

RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

- BridgIT Water Foundation is committed to child-safe recruitment of all employees, Board members, and volunteers, irrespective of their role within the organisation. This includes obtaining the following documentation prior to employment:
 - criminal records checks (such as a policy check) or statutory declarations of local legal equivalent before staff appointments are made
 - Verbal referee checks
 - Behavioural-based interview questions

- All employment contracts need to contain provisions for the prevention of a person from working with children if they present an unacceptable risk to children, as determined by the measures described above.

- If an employee breaches the Child Safeguarding Code of Conduct or behaves in a way contrary to the provisions of this Child Protection Policy, they will be subject to dismissal, suspension, or transfer to other duties that have no contact with children.

- This Child Protection Policy and practices will be communicated to all BWF governing Board members, staff, partners, volunteers, and visitors.

- Our Child Protection Policy and practices will be covered in our induction orientation training for all new staff and new Board members. All current employees and Board members will be required to review this training annually to remind them of their responsibilities under this policy, and again specifically each time they travel overseas to developing nations in the discharge of their duties.

- All volunteers, partners and contractors and their employees and associates, will receive training to fully understand and must agree to adhere to BWF's Child Protection Policy and practices when they commence working with BWF. In addition to agreeing to adhere to this policy, volunteers, partners and contractors visiting the villages in which we operate are told to complete a short online training module offered by Unicef to learn more about child protection: <https://agora.unicef.org/course/info.php?id=915>
- All paid and unpaid employees, Board members, volunteers, partners who receive funding, and project visitors will need to read, demonstrate that they understand and agree in writing to comply with the BWF Child Safeguarding Code of Conduct. Any employee, volunteer, partner, or project visitor who is found to be in breach of this code will face dismissal or suspension. Interaction with children in Australia is not ignored but this interaction is *de minimus* as our projects are almost exclusively carried out overseas.

COMMUNICATIONS

- All BridgIT Water Foundation communications will always portray children with dignity and respect, and never in a vulnerable or submissive manner, and will ensure the rights and safety of children are protected. Children should be adequately clothed and not in poses that could be seen as sexually suggestive
- Photographs or film of all children and local people in nations we work in will be used ethically. Informed consent will always be sought and documented for the use of a child's story or image. When asking for consent, details will be given as to how, where, and for how long the story, information, and/or image will be used. BWF will provide examples of how the story/information and/or image will be used. BWF will explain how it cannot control the use of images once they are loaded onto the internet and that they can be viewed by anyone with internet access at any time.
- In obtaining photographs or film, BridgIT Water Foundation will endeavour to be sensitive to local or cultural traditions for reproducing personal images.
- BridgIT Water Foundation will ensure that all photographs and film images are honest and accurate representations of the context and facts.
- BWF will make sure that no identifying information of the child is used in the publication of images. This includes the child's family name, community, or school name.

INVOLVING CHILDREN

- BridgIT Water Foundation is committed to giving a voice to children and people. Where appropriate, we will seek the views and input of children and young people during regular monitoring and evaluation visits conducted by our organisation.

REPORTING/ RESPONSES TO ALLEGATIONS

- BridgIT Water Foundation considers the abuse and exploitation of children to be completely unacceptable. We will take all concerns and reports of child abuse seriously and act on these reports immediately.
- It is mandatory for all BridgIT Water Foundation staff and others to report all allegations of child abuse. These concerns may relate to a child or a staff member involved in the organisation or a concern about a child or person/s outside of the organisation's programs. If BWF staff and/or others do have a concern you should immediately follow BridgIT Water Foundations's child abuse reporting procedures.

CHILD PROTECTION PROCEDURES

RESPONSIBILITIES

This policy applies to all directors, staff, volunteers, guests and contractors in the carrying out of our daily activities.

Our project partners will also be required to adhere to these policies in the carrying out of BridgIT Water Foundation projects.

When taking volunteers, guests or contractors on trips to observe or participate in our work in developing nations, we will ensure that no one without a prior police check will be allowed to be left alone with children without the supervision of one of our staff members.

The scope of this policy also covers the protection of Australian schoolchildren who travel with us to visit overseas projects in developing nations.

PROCEDURES

It is mandatory for all BridgIT Water Foundation staff and others to report any allegations of child abuse. These concerns may relate to a child or a staff member involved in the organisation, or a concern about a child or persons outside of the organisation's programs. If these people do have a concern, they should immediately follow BridgIT Water Foundation's child abuse reporting procedures.

What should be reported?

- Any disclosure or allegation from a child/community member or staff regarding the safety, abuse or exploitation of a child.
- Any observation or concerning behaviour exhibited by a BridgIT Water Foundation staff, volunteer or other relevant stakeholder that breaches the BridgIT Water Foundation Code of Conduct for working with children.
- Inappropriate use of the organisation's photographic equipment or including evidence of child pornography.
- Staff engaging in suspicious behaviour that could be associated with sexual trafficking.

WHO TO REPORT TO?

Overseas: Child abuse reports should be made to BridgIT's Founding Director, who acts in the role of the Child Protection Incident Contact Point #1:

Wendy Tisdell, PH: 011 51 402 638 665, info@bridgitwater.org

In Australia: Child abuse reports can also be made to the Contact Point #1, the Founding Director, at the contact information above.

Child abuse reports can also be made to the Contact Point #2, the Marketing Director:

Graham Howlett, PH: 0404 716 089, graham_howlett@bigpond.com

REPORTING OF CHILD ABUSE IN AUSTRALIA

- Child abuse reports should be made directly to the Founding Director, or to the Contact Point #2.
- Reporting child abuse in Australia is a clearer process compared to responding incidents that occur overseas. In all Australian states and territories, sexual or physical abuse of children is a crime. The age of consent in most Australian states is 16. However, it is important to check in each jurisdiction as the age limit may be different.
- Additionally, in some jurisdictions it is a criminal offence for persons who are positions of power and trust (e.g. teacher, parent, carer) to engage in sexual abuse with children under the age of 18. It is important to research the laws and child protection provisions in each Australian state and territory and ensure that details are included in the child protection policy.

- Reporting child abuse can be made either to the local state police or the state child authorities. If there is an allegation or suspicion of child sexual abuse by a staff member or volunteer in the organisation, these matters will be reported to state police. In most Australian states there are specialised units dealing with child sexual crimes. If there are concerns that a child is being sexually abused by someone external to the organisation, BridgIT Water Foundation will contact the state police and/or child protection authorities.
- Concerns about the welfare of the child in relation to neglect and/or emotional abuse will be reported to the child protection authorities in each state or territory. Contact details of these authorities are:

New South Wales: Department of Community Services, PH: 13 3627

Victoria: Child Protection Line, PH: 13 1278

Queensland: Child Safety Regional Intake Service, see website:

<http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/childsafety/about-us/contact-us/child-safety-service-centres/regional-intake-services>

for phone numbers of local regional intake service centre. After Hours contact Child Safety After Hours Service Centre (CSAHSC) on 800 177 135 or 07 3235 9999.

South Australia: Child Abuse Report Line, PH: 13 1478

Western Australia: Department for Child Protection and Family Support, PH: (08) 9222 2555

Tasmania: Child Protection Services, PH: 1300 737 639

Concerns about people engaging in child sex tourism, child sex trafficking and child pornography should be reported to the Australian Federal Police (Transnational Crimes Squad). Contact details are:

People Trafficking and Child Sex Tourism Department, PH: 131 AFP (131 237)

REPORTING OF CHILD ABUSE ALLEGATIONS OVERSEAS

- Child abuse reports should be made to the Country Technical Director or the Founding Director. If this is not possible, reports can be made directly to the Australian based Founding Director or the Marketing Director. An initial assessment will be made based on the quality and reliability of the information and a decision will be made on what steps to take.
- A local reporting procedure will guide the process based on whether the allegation constitutes a criminal offence in the country, or whether it is a breach of the BridgIT Water Foundation Code of Conduct and will be dealt with as a disciplinary matter.
- The first step will be to gather all the relevant information and address any health and protection needs of the child. The matter may be directly referred to the local police and/or authorities if the allegations are considered to be criminal offences.
- If the incident has occurred outside of the program, the matter will be referred to an external body or agency dealing with child protection matters in the country.

WHEN TO REPORT?

- Child abuse concerns should be raised immediately.

HOW SHOULD IT BE REPORTED?

- Verbally or in writing via email or letter.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT?

- The Country Director and the Australian based Founding Director will discuss the allegations and then decide upon the next step. This will involve either:
 - Interviewing the person/persons who made the allegations or other witnesses to gather more information with which to make a decision;
 - Reporting to local police and/or child protection authority;
 - Report made to the Australian Federal Police;
 - Concern handled internally if it is not a criminal matter; or
 - No further action taken.
- BridgIT Water Foundation will treat all concerns raised seriously and ensure that all parties will be treated fairly and truthfully, and the principles of natural justice will be a prime consideration. All reports will be handled professionally, confidentially and expediently.
- All reports made in good faith will be viewed as being made in the best interests of the child, regardless of the outcomes of any investigation. BridgIT Water Foundation will ensure that the interests of all parties involved in good faith in the complaint or concern are protected.
- Any employee who intentionally makes false and malicious allegations will face disciplinary action.
- The rights and welfare of the child is of prime importance. Every effort must be made to protect the rights and safety of the child throughout the investigation.

RESPONDING TO DISCLOSURE BY A CHILD

- When a child/young person tells you that he or she has been abused, they may be feeling scared, guilty, ashamed, angry and powerless. You, in turn, may feel a sense of outrage, disgust, sadness, anger, and sometimes disbelief.
- If a child discloses abuse, whatever the out-come, the child must be taken seriously.
- It is important for you to remain calm and in control and to reassure the child/young person that something will be done to keep him or her safe.
- When a child or young person discloses that they are being harmed, you can show your care and concern for the child/young person by:
 - Listening carefully;
 - Telling the child/young person you believe him or her;
 - Telling the child/young person it is not their fault and he/she is not responsible for the abuse;
 - Telling the child/young person you are pleased that he/she told you.
- You will not be helping the child/young person if you:
 - Make promises you cannot keep, such as promising that you will not tell anyone;
 - Push the child/young person into giving details of the abuse. Your role is to listen to what the child/young person wants to tell you and not to conduct an investigation (beware of asking any leading questions as this may prejudice any subsequent investigation);
 - Indiscriminately discuss the circumstances of the child/young person with others not directly involved.
- Try and obtain some details, such as where the abuse has taken or is taking place, e.g. at school, home, work etc; is it currently occurring or did it occur in the past; and the name of the perpetrator if possible, but this is not necessary.
- It is possible that some children or young people will make a disclosure and then ask you not to tell anyone. It is important you seek guidance from your In-Country Director or the Senior Staff member in the agency you are working in to discuss how the child or young person can be supported and the disclosure managed.

OTHER ACTIONS TO TAKE

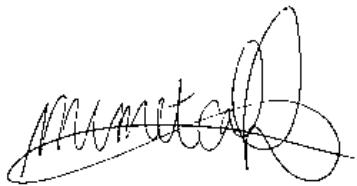
- **Protect the child:** Once an allegation is made, there should be an immediate response that protects the child from further potential abuse or victimisation. The child may require medical assistance or counselling support. Where possible the child should remain in the place of residence or relevant program. Exceptions may be made where the child is deemed to be at risk of victimisation by peers as a result of the allegation or because the alleged abuse has occurred in home-based care. If the child is in immediate danger, you should make arrangements for the child to go to a safe place.

- Distance the alleged perpetrator: The best interests of the child may warrant the standing down of a staff member or volunteer. The manager should recommend the appropriate action in writing to the Founding Director. Any staff member stood down in this manner continues to receive full pay—this measure recognises that the member is entitled to a just process that does not pre-judge guilt or innocence. Any volunteers who are stood down should similarly receive any reasonable reimbursement of costs.
- Confidentiality: All reports, the names of people involved and the details will remain confidential. Only the Country Director, Australian-based Founding Director, Regional Director and the people involved will be informed of the report. Details will be released on a 'need to know' basis or when required by relevant local or Australian law, or a notification to police or child protection authorities is made.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- BWF Child Safeguarding Code of Conduct

AUTHORISATION



Signature of Board Secretary

BridgIT Water Foundation

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