

## **CHILD PROTECTION POLICY** **Version 1.1 – June 2005**

### **SECTION 1 - Background**

#### **Why does People & Planet need a Child Protection Policy?**

This policy and its attached code of conduct is designed to protect:

- The welfare of children and young people with whom People & Planet works. Their health, safety and well-being and their best interests are considered paramount.
- People & Planet staff and volunteers who may make themselves vulnerable by inadvertently behaving in ways that are inappropriate when working with under 18s.

It aims to provide a clear understanding of staff and volunteer responsibilities and of what is and is not acceptable behaviour for staff and volunteers. We do not expect many of these issues to be common problems, but hope this policy will help to avoid extreme and rare circumstances. It is written to ensure that working with People & Planet in whatever capacity will be a safe and enjoyable experience for all involved.

#### **Core principles:**

*“People & Planet exists to help create a just and sustainable world. We do this by involving students in campaigns on issues of poverty, **human rights** and the environment ...”* **People & Planet Mission Statement (Strategic Review, June 2003)**

The United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child is a core pillar of International Human Rights Law. Ratified by the UK government in 1991, its principles also underpin much of the legislation and practice relating to Child Protection under both the law of England and Wales and Scottish law. These principles include:

- A child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier (Article 1)
- Each child has right to freedom of expression (Article 13) and the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 14)
- Each child who can form a view on matters affecting him or her has the right to express those views if he or she so wishes (Article 12)
- Each child has the right to protection from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation including sexual abuse (Article 19)

In line with the UN convention, and for the purposes of this policy, People & Planet uses the terms ‘child’ or ‘children’ to refer to those who are under the age of 18. **However, for reasons of clarity, in practice this should be taken to include all students in secondary and sixth form education with whom we work (henceforth referred to in this policy as ‘young people’)**<sup>1</sup>.

People & Planet’s policy applies to all children and young people with whom People & Planet has contact regardless of gender, religion, ethnicity etc. It is the policy of People & Planet to do everything in its power to safeguard and promote the welfare of young people and to protect them from physical, sexual or emotional abuse within a relationship of trust. These guidelines are designed to prevent abuse of trust occurring between People & Planet staff and volunteers and the young people they come into contact with.

We will do this by:

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<sup>1</sup> NB: First year students in Scottish Universities are also likely to be under 18. This Policy and Code of Conduct should also be taken to apply to People & Planet staff and volunteers working with this group.

- Setting in place recruitment, induction and management procedures to protect children and young people. This will include maintaining links with and, where necessary, obtaining information from the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB);
- Adopting a code of good practice (below) in relation to children and young people for all staff and volunteers;
- Ensuring that any allegations of abuse are promptly and properly dealt with and that victims are supported and perpetrators held to account;

## **SECTION 2 – Awareness and Prevention**

### **Recruitment of staff and volunteers:**

People & Planet will use the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) to enable checks to be made when needed, either directly or via a reputable agency.

People & Planet will identify posts in which regular direct and un-supervised contact with children and young people is possible or likely and ensure that extra care is taken in dealing with applications for such posts. This will happen with both internal and external candidates.

Candidates for identified posts will be asked to describe their previous experience of working with children or young people, to provide two referees, and to complete a CRB disclosure form.

Job offers made in relation to identified posts will be subject to satisfactory clearance from checking of statutory records as well as satisfactory verification of identity and qualifications<sup>2</sup>.

All volunteers recruited or designated to work within schools or with children and young people will be asked to complete a CRB disclosure form and will be asked to provide two referees.

### **Ensuring Awareness:**

People & Planet will ensure that all staff and volunteers are aware of the Child Protection Policy and have access to a copy.

People & Planet will expect all staff and volunteers to follow the code of conduct. All managers have the responsibility for ensuring that the staff they manage are aware of the policy, for reminding them of its provisions where the need arises, and for taking action.

The People & Planet senior manager designated as child protection co-ordinator is the **Outreach Manager. Any information about suspected abuse should be reported to them and they are responsible for ensuring appropriate action is taken.**

People & Planet will ensure that a contact teacher and contact young person at the schools we work with are aware of this Child Protection policy and will provide copies on request.

Where concerns are raised we will deal with them promptly and on a case by case basis, and provide all the support and information possible to staff, volunteers and all other parties.

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<sup>2</sup> Various kinds of employment, including work with children, vulnerable adults and employment involving the administration of justice, national security and financial services are excepted from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (2003). **This does not necessarily debar ex-offenders from such jobs.** It is for an employer to make an assessment of the relevance of the conviction and make a decision on that basis. **However, if the person is seeking work in such a position and their previous convictions are such that they have been included on the list that is provided for in the Protection of Children Act (2003), it is unlawful for an employer to knowingly employ that person in such a position.**

### **SECTION 3 – Code of Good practice when working with young people**

As a People & Planet staff member or volunteer, it is important to understand that you are in a position of trust, with respect to the young people you may work with or come into contact with in the course of People & Planet related activities. A relationship of trust arises where one party, through their work or activity, has a responsibility of care of a young person in a way which gives them power or influence over him/ her.

As a People & Planet staff member or volunteer, you should **NEVER**:

- allow a sexual relationship to develop between yourself and any young person with whom you have a relationship of trust. This applies irrespective of sexual orientation, gender, race, religion, or disability. It should be understood that abusing your position of trust in this way could lead to People & Planet taking disciplinary action and/or any other action that may be appropriate.
- encourage or allow inappropriate attention seeking behaviour - such as crushes - or engage in suggestive remarks, gestures or touching which could be misunderstood. If you are concerned that a young person is developing a crush on you, inform your manager/supervisor at People & Planet immediately. If you are concerned that you are developing a relationship that could represent an abuse of trust, contact your manager/supervisor at People & Planet immediately.
- take young people to your home or meet with them outside of organised activities – this reduces the opportunities for abuse to occur and of you having your privacy invaded when you are not engaged in People & Planet activities.
- engage with young people in any activities that would be unsuitable or illegal for this or any age group (e.g. drinking alcohol in the pub). By joining in, you could be held responsible and face criminal charges. See below for guidance if young people suggest illegal activities.
- allow or engage in insulting or abusive behaviour e.g. bullying or taunting.

You should where possible **AVOID**

- being alone or in a compromising situation with a young person. For example, do not give young people lifts home alone in your car unless this is unavoidable for safety reasons. This will protect you from having allegations made against you and reduce the opportunities for abuse to occur.
- meeting with young people in an isolated place e.g. right at the back of the school, or in an out-building where access is not well lit.
- giving your home address to a young person. If you wish to give your home or mobile phone number to young people, please be aware that you may be contacted at any time.

Furthermore, you should **ALWAYS**

- Contact us immediately if anything happens that worries you or if there is a specific incident with a young person. Inform People & Planet if you think any of your words or actions may have been misunderstood in a way that may cause offence or be misinterpreted as an abuse of trust. It is important that any incidents are recorded as soon as possible, so that we can support you.
- Respect all young people as individuals. Treat everyone with respect, recognising their right to personal privacy
- Remember you could be considered a role model by some young people.
- Remember you are representing People & Planet and are accountable to us.

→ Remember that some actions, no matter how well intentioned, may be misinterpreted.

### **Illegal Activities**

If you or young persons are unsure if an activity you is legal or not, contact the People & Planet office to find out before any further plans are made. Please be aware that some peaceful protest activities may be illegal (e.g. if you are obstructing a road or pavement with a stall).

If you are aware of planned illegal activities and choose not to report them to the police, People & Planet cannot accept responsibility for any consequences.

## **SECTION 4 - Dealing with disclosure, suspicion and accusation**

People & Planet recognises that disclosures (i.e. when a specific allegation of abuse is made against a named individual) and suspicion (i.e. when concern is expressed about abuse that may have taken place or be in prospect) should always be investigated and acted upon swiftly. In this, the welfare of children and young people is the paramount consideration.

Any information offered in confidence to a People & Planet member of staff or volunteer should be received on the basis that it will be shared with the relevant person in authority: this will in the first instance be People & Planet's designated Child Protection Coordinator, but may include child protection personnel in statutory agencies (e.g. social services or the police).

### **If you suspect a child is being abused physically, sexually or emotionally:**

1. Keep calm. Do not be shocked and try to act normally.
2. Do not investigate and do not question the student.
3. Do not challenge parents, carers or teachers about your concerns.
4. Record all the details that support your suspicion. Sign, date and keep, sending a copy to P&P.
5. Report as soon as possible to the Child Protection Co-ordinator at People & Planet and tell her/him your concerns.
6. Agree with People & Planet what action should be taken.

**NEVER** agree to keep a secret. You must inform others.

### **If a student talks to you about abuse by someone else.**

1. Listen carefully to what the student tells you accepting everything that is said.
2. Offer immediate support, understanding and reassurance, explaining that you cannot keep it a secret. Tell them "I believe you", "it's not your fault" and "I am going to help you". Inform the student of the action you take.
3. Report as soon as possible to the Child Protection Co-ordinator at People & Planet with your concerns. We will agree with you what action should be taken and can call the NSPCC, social services or police on your behalf.
4. Record the details of when and what you were told and anything else that supports your concerns. Sign, date and keep and send a copy to P&P.
5. If the situation merits immediate action and you can not contact the office, then contact either the police, social services (you can find contact details for your local department at [www.upmystreet.com](http://www.upmystreet.com) or at <http://www.tagish.co.uk/tagish/links/localgov.htm>) or the NSPCC Helpline (0808 800 5000).
6. Inform People & Planet of any action you have taken.

If a student confides in you about any other sensitive issues, (i.e. a pregnancy, drug problems), then you can contact People & Planet for advice or look at [www.youthinformation.com](http://www.youthinformation.com) for information about voluntary and statutory organisations that provide advice and support for young people.

Always refer students to a qualified person or organisation. Never try to deal with the issue yourself.

### **If there is an allegation of abuse made against you.**

1. Inform People & Planet immediately.
2. Record all the details as you know them. Sign, date and keep and send a copy to P&P.

If a staff member is the subject of an allegation of child abuse, that staff member will be asked to take leave from their duties on full pay until an investigation has been completed. If a People & Planet volunteer is the subject of an allegation of child abuse, that volunteer is will be asked to withdraw from their work until an investigation has been completed. **In both cases, it should be made clear that suspension does not imply guilt but rather protects all parties while an investigation is undertaken.**

If a member of People & Planet staff is found to have committed acts in relation to children and young people which are criminal or which contravene the principles and standards set out in this policy, People & Planet will take disciplinary action and or any other action that may be appropriate to the circumstances. If volunteers are found to have committed such acts, the volunteering relationship will be ended.

## **SECTION 5 - Sources consulted for this policy**

“Child Protection Policy and Procedures” CAFOD

“Protecting Children, Preventing Abuse” Save the Children’s Child Protection Policy

“Caring for young people and the vulnerable” – Home Office Guidance for preventing abuse of trust. 1999

“Volunteering to Work with vulnerable adults and children” - Wales Council for Voluntary Action information sheet.

Jenny Myers - NSPCC

“Safeguarding Children from Harm – an organisational health check.” – NSPCC

“First Check: Putting safeguards in place – Code of conduct and good practice” - NSPCC

“Safe from Harm. Good Practice for adults in Guiding” - The Guide Association. 1998

“Safe from Harm. Guidelines and support for commissioners.” – The Guide Association. 1998

“Safe from Harm: A code of practice for safeguarding the welfare of children in voluntary organisations in England and Wales” – Home Office. 1993

“Our duty to care – principles of good practice for the protection of children and young people” – The Volunteer Development Agency, 2000



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