

3.12 Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

SCOPE

This policy applies to all staff, volunteers, Board members and contractors working on behalf of **the Bridge Youth Service**. It aligns with the Victorian Child Safe Standards.

All staff and volunteers must consider the safety and wellbeing of all children and recognise the importance of cultural safety for Aboriginal children, cultural safety for children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, the safety of LGBTQIA+ children and the safety of children with a disability.

POLICY OBJECTIVE

To provide a clear outline of the Bridge Youth Service's expectations about child safety and wellbeing systems and practices, and how **the Bridge Youth Service** will meet the Standards.

DEFINITIONS

Child: The term child or children includes both children and young people under the age of 18 years.

Child abuse: Child abuse is defined in the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic) as including:

- a sexual offence committed against a child.
- an offence committed against a child under section 49M(1) of the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic), such as grooming.
- physical violence against a child.
- causing serious emotional or psychological harm.
- to a child.
- serious neglect of a child.

Harm: Harm is damage to the health, safety or wellbeing of a child, including as a result of child abuse by adults or the conduct of other children. It includes physical, emotional, sexual and psychological harm. Harm can arise from a single act or event and can also be cumulative, that is, arising because of a series of acts or events over a period of time.

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY

The Bridge Youth Service commits to protecting the safety and security of children and young people and has zero tolerance for child abuse or discrimination.

We are committed to promoting the cultural safety of Aboriginal children and young people, cultural safety of children from diverse culturally and/or linguistically backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children and young people with a disability or who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

The Bridge Youth Service actively works to listen and empower children and young people and has systems to protect them from abuse.

The Bridge Youth Service will take all allegations seriously and will respond to them in line with the Victorian Child Safe Standards, DFFH Human Service Standards mandatory reporting and our organisation's internal policies and procedures.

RESPONSIBILITY

The CEO is responsible for ensuring that all persons working (employees, volunteers, Board of Management, and contractors) on behalf of **the Bridge Youth Service** are aware of the Child and Safety Wellbeing Policy as well as the Child Safe Standards.

Breaches of the policy will be dealt with through performance management, disciplinary procedures, and reporting requirements.

Reportable Conduct will be acted on according to the External Reporting Obligations Policy by the CEO.

It is the responsibility of all staff and volunteers to identify and manage risks relating to child abuse and harm. Members of the leadership team will support service staff to ensure risk management practices are adhered to.

Corporate Services will monitor the completion of appropriate training of the Child Safe Standards and Mandatory Reporting practices with staff.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW

This policy be reviewed in consultation with employees and service users where needed and as per the policy review schedule.

The review may be informed by an examination of complaints, critical incidents and disciplinary action that relate to the conduct of persons working on behalf of the organisation.

This policy is linked to the Victorian Child Safe Standards so any reviews, recommendations or changes to these will trigger a review.

COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFE STANDARDS

Standard 1: Organisations establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued.

The Bridge Youth Service is committed to being a culturally safe organisation for Aboriginal children and young people. We respect and value the diversity and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people and their cultural rights to embrace and celebrate their identity and culture. We recognise that racism is harmful for Aboriginal children and young people, and we take complaints of racism seriously. We acknowledge that connection to culture is a protective factor for Aboriginal children and young people and is central to their social, physical, and emotional wellbeing.

We demonstrate this commitment by:

- Using an intersectional approach when case planning and coordinating.
- Asking whether young people would like to be connected to a cultural organisation during the intake process.
- Asking young people if they have any cultural needs that we can support or should be aware of.
- Displaying our public commitment to cultural safety on our website and on our social media.
- Responding to disclosures of racism through our complaints handling policy and procedure.
- Undertaking annual Aboriginal Cultural Safety Training with a local Aboriginal trainer and seeking out other relevant immersive opportunities for learning.
- Participating in Reconciliation Week, NAIDOC Week and other days of significance for Aboriginal children and young people.

- Developing a Reconciliation Action Plan for our organisation. Ensuring children's and young people's rights to cultural expression and our support for that is included in important documents such as the Client Information Document and our Code of Conduct.

Standard 2: Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance, and culture.

The Bridge Youth Service has a culture where child safety and wellbeing come first. This is embedded into the practices and policies that guide our organisation. We are publicly committed to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in our community, paying particular attention to the safety needs of Aboriginal young people, young people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, those in the LGBTQIA+ community and those living with a disability.

We demonstrate this commitment by:

- Setting out expectations regarding staff and volunteer behaviours in our Code of Conduct.
- Making sure information sharing, mandatory reporting and record keeping obligations are clearly stated in policies.
- The Board and CEO champion a child-safe culture.
- Ensuring mandatory reporting policy and processes are in place and that reports are made promptly. Reports are forwarded to the Executive Manager or CEO to ensure accountability and oversight.
- Holding fortnightly supervision for staff where conversations around reporting are had with managers and any concerns can be raised.
- Including cultural safety within the Board of Management's policies such as reports and agenda items for meetings.
- Audits and policy reviews are undertaken by the Continuous Quality Improvement Committee.
- Introducing staff to our key documents that cover the Child Safe Standards early in orientation.
- Reporting instances of harm or abuse as part of the organisation's duty of care and reporting obligations.
- Completing a risk assessment with all young people supported through the organisation.
- Outlining best practice for information sharing in privacy and confidentiality policies and procedures and inducting staff to this process during orientation.

Standard 3: Children and young people are empowered about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.

The Bridge Youth Service is committed to empowering children and young people to participate in decisions that are made that affect them.

We demonstrate this commitment by:

- Informing young people about their rights and responsibilities during their initial assessment
- Providing young people with opportunities to give feedback and informing them about the different available channels to do so throughout their support period.
- Supporting staff through supervision and team meetings to develop their knowledge and skills on helping young people to participate and express their views.
- Utilizing surveys to capture feedback from young people. This feedback is taken to the Continuous Quality Improvement committee for review.

- Surveys are designed by CQI Committee with input from staff.
- Utilizing community engagement strategies such as surveys and focus groups to capture young people's feedback.
- Recording feedback and actions taken in response by the organisation in the Feedback Register.

Standard 4: Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.

The Bridge Youth Service welcomes families and provides families opportunities to be involved in decisions made by TBYS. This is facilitated by the following:

- Where appropriate and young person is consenting, involving families in decisions about the young person's support.
- Displaying the organisation's child safe commitment publicly on its website and through social media.
- Clear policies and procedures around the involvement of families while ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of children and young people.
- Ongoing conversation in supervision around the involvement of families in a young person's support.
- Documenting complaints, compliments, and feedback from families along with actions taken in response to these through the feedback register.
- Considering families in community engagement process and feedback collection processes
- Ensuring families are aware of the right and responsibilities of their child, and us as a service provider according to legislative requirements.

Standard 5: Equity is upheld, and diverse needs respected in policy and practice.

The organisation is committed to ensuring the diverse needs of young people are respected and valued. Varied factors that may make certain young people more vulnerable to abuse or harm are considered to ensure equity for all young people.

We demonstrate this commitment by:

- Providing the opportunity for the young person to provide information around their gender identity, Aboriginality, disability and reading comprehension during the intake process and throughout the support period to ensure we can apply an intersectional lens to meet the support needs of the young person/family.
- Walking young people through the Declaration and Information for Young People document to ensure they understand their rights and responsibilities, the complaint process and information relating to their support.
- Clearly stating the expectations of staff in the Service Access and Inclusivity Policy, Conduct and Ethics policy, Codes of Conduct.
- Celebrating days of significance such as Refugee Week, Harmony Day, IDAHOBIT day, Wear It Purple Day, Reconciliation Week, NAIDOC Week.

Standard 6: People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.

The Bridge Youth Service is committed to good screening processes and recruitment practices to ensure child safety and wellbeing.

We demonstrate this commitment by:

- Displaying Child Safety commitment of the organisation in position descriptions.
- Ensuring all staff and volunteers have an up to date Working with Children Check.
- Ensuring key selection criteria highlight requirements of role in relation to child safety.
- A question regarding any history of allegations of child abuse is asked within the interview process.
- Completing a Police Check for all staff and employees upon their employment and then every three years.
- Ensuring Child Safe Standards are reviewed and understood as part of an employee or volunteers' induction process.
- Completing comprehensive reference checks for prospective employees and volunteers.
- Demonstrating our commitment to child safety and wellbeing to prospective employees.
- Embedding Child safe standards information, the Child Safety & Wellbeing policy, and the Code of Conduct into our comprehensive induction process.
- Fortnightly supervision allows managers to have conversations about child safety and monitor staff performance.

Standard 7: Processes for complaints and concerns are child-focused.

The Bridge Youth Service is committed to promptly and appropriately responding to and acting on any complaints or safety concerns.

We demonstrate this commitment by:

- Having an accessible and child-focused complaint handling policy and associated processes that are understood by young people, families and staff and volunteers.
- Having an External Reporting policy that clearly set out expectations for staff around reporting to authorities, such as Victoria Police, Child Protection and the Commission for Children and Young People.
- Clearly stating responsibilities of staff, volunteers and the Board in the Conduct and Ethics policy.
- Taking complaints seriously and keeping clear records of feedback and how that has been addressed.
- Having a Whistleblower Policy to protect young people as well as staff.
- Reporting any instances of child-to-child abuse through the mandatory reporting process.

Standard 8: Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training.

The Bridge Youth Service ensures that young people are supported by staff who are aware of how to keep them safe and who advocate strongly for their safety. This is facilitated by:

- All staff and volunteers completing a comprehensive induction which includes information on Child Safety and the Child Safe Standards, Aboriginal Cultural Competency Training and LGBTQIA+ Education and Inclusivity training.
- All staff participate in fortnightly supervision with their manager to discuss any safety concerns they have for young people they are working with and identify any training or education needs.
- Ongoing training for all staff in the process of making an immediate report of suspected or confirmed child abuse.
- All staff and volunteers having access to relevant policies and procedures, such as External Reporting Obligations policy, Privacy and Confidentiality policy, Conduct and Ethics policy.

- Having open forum discussions at service delivery meetings, team meetings, staff surveys.

Standard 9: Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.

The Bridge Youth Service promotes safety of young people in all its environments through:

- Monitoring and assessing the brochures and posters that we display in reception.
- Utilising Telehealth due to its security measure when using online outreach.
- Ensuring appropriate setting for one-on-one sessions and group work.
- Having policies and review of direct communication channels with staff e.g. use of emails, mobile phones.
- Minimising the use of direct communication with young people through social media platforms.
- Celebrating diverse communities through our social media channels.
- Acknowledging diversity through visual prompts in our offices.
- Considering safety of participants in initial program design through risk management lens.

Standard 10: Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is regularly reviewed and improved.

The Bridge Youth Service has a strong culture of review and continuous improvement, and regularly reviews and seeks feedback on all policies and procedures, including child safe practices. This is facilitated by:

- Logging all feedback/complaints and actions taken on these in a Feedback Register.
- Reviewing any improvement ideas or suggestions that are taken to the Executive or Continuous Quality Improvement Committee, with changes made as determined by Executive.
- Reviewing Child Safety & Wellbeing policy as per TBYS policy review schedule every two years.
- TBYS Audit Committee conducting audits on organisation's procedures and policies as required.
- Providing young people opportunities to give feedback on organisation and safety through surveys, conversations with staff, and through complaints and feedback processes.
- Informing staff on any changes and updates to policies, and actions taking in response to community feedback via Service Delivery Meetings, email communications and access to SharePoint.

Standard 11: Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people.

The Bridge Youth Service clearly utilises documents, including policies and procedures, to implement the standards. The following documents support this:

RELATED POLICIES

- 1.4 Conflict of Interest Policy
- 1.5 Risk Management Policy
- 2.2 Recruitment and Selection Policy
- 2.4 Conduct and Ethics Policy
- 2.5 Performance and Conduct Management Policy

- 3.2 Privacy and Confidentiality Policy
- 3.5 Service Management and Records Policy
- 3.9 Compliments and Complaints Policy
- 3.10 External Reporting Obligations Policy
- 5.1 Communications and Publications Policy

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- TBYS CPU & Police Report Form

References

- Victorian Child Safe Standards <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards/>
- [Victorian Code of Ethical Practice \(Youth Work\) 2007](#)
- [How have you used the Code Today worksheets 2016](#)

Legislation

- Children, Youth and Family Act 2005
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
- Reportable Conduct Scheme Vic 2017
- Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014
- Fair Work Act 2009
- Occupational Health & Safety Act 2004
- Equal Opportunity Act 2010
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
- Health Records Act 2001

	CQI	Leadership	Exec	R & C	BOM	Date
Reviewed by		X				July 2022
Approved by					X	September 2022
Next Review Due	September 2025					

PROCEDURES

- Follow Mandatory reporting procedures as set out in the [3.10 External Reporting Obligations Policy.docx](#)