

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY & CHILD SAFETY POLICY

INTRODUCTION – UMSU’S COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY

Our organisation is committed to child safety.

We want children to be safe, happy and empowered. We support and respect all children, as well as our Student Council members, staff, volunteers and affiliated clubs and societies.

We are committed to the safety, participation and empowerment of all children.

We have zero tolerance of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our robust policies and procedures.

We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety, which we follow rigorously.

Our organisation is committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early, and removing and reducing these risks.

Our organisation has robust human resources and recruitment practices for all staff and volunteers.

Our organisation is committed to regularly training and educating Student Council members, staff, volunteers and affiliated clubs & societies on child abuse risks.

We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to providing a safe environment for children with a disability.

We have specific policies, procedures and training in place that support our leadership team, Student Council members, staff, volunteers and affiliated clubs and societies to achieve these commitments.

If you believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse phone 000.

SCOPE

This policy guides our staff, student representatives, volunteers and affiliated clubs and societies on how to behave with children in our organisation.

All of our Student Council members, staff, volunteers and affiliated clubs and societies must agree to abide by our code of conduct which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children. All Student Council members, Student Office Bearers, staff, Volunteer Program Directors and students, as well as children and their families, are given the opportunity to contribute to the development of the code of conduct.

The code of conduct is attached to this Policy (Appendix A.)

OBJECTIVES

This policy is intended to empower children who are vital and active participants in our organisation. We involve them when making decisions, especially about matters that directly affect them. We listen to their views and respect what they have to say.

We promote diversity and tolerance in our organisation, and people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds are welcome. In particular, we:

- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- ensure that children with a disability are safe and can participate equally.

TRAINING AND SUPERVISION

Training and education is important to ensure that everyone in our organisation understands that child safety is everyone's responsibility.

Our organisational culture aims for all Student Council members, Student Office Bearers, staff, volunteers and affiliated clubs and societies (in addition to parents/carers and children) to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns. We train our Student Office Bearers, staff, volunteers and affiliated clubs and societies to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse.

We also support our all Student Office Bearers, staff, volunteers and affiliated clubs and societies through ongoing supervision to: develop their skills to protect children from abuse; and promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the cultural safety of children from linguistically and/or diverse backgrounds, and the safety of children with a disability.

New Student Office Bearers, employees, volunteers and affiliated clubs and societies will be supervised regularly to ensure they understand our organisation's commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse, as well as checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate (please refer to this organisation's code of conduct to understand appropriate behaviour further). Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including the Department of Health and Human Services and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

RECRUITMENT

We take all reasonable steps to employ skilled people to work with children. We develop selection criteria and advertisements which clearly demonstrate our commitment to child

safety and an awareness of our social and legislative responsibilities. Our organisation understands that when recruiting staff and volunteers we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

We actively encourage applications from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with a disability.

All people engaged in child-related work, including volunteers and affiliated clubs and societies, are required to hold a Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of suitability to the Manager, Human Resources, MU Student Union Ltd (MUSUL).

When UMSU has identified that a staff role to be filled requires a Working with Children Certificate the MUSUL HR will ensure the following recruitment process will ensue:

- I. That the relevant Position Description for the role stipulates as a selection criterion the need for a valid Working with Children Certificate;
- II. That this criterion is specified in the advertisement for the role;
- III. MUSUL will require a copy of the Working with Children Certificate from the preferred candidate and will use the Justice Victoria online process to Check Status of the Certificate prior to confirming any offer for the relevant role; and,
- IV. The copy of the Working with Children Certificate will be filed in the employees HR records and added to a HR database that records the date of expiration of the Certificate, and a reminder mechanism for HR to request renewal of the Certificate.

When UMSU has identified that a Volunteer role to be filled requires a Working with Children Certificate the UMSU Coordinator, Volunteering, will be responsible for the recruitment process.

All Staff, Student Office Bearers and Volunteers will be required to sign a copy of the code of conduct. The signed copy will be managed as part of the recruitment process.

FAIR PROCEDURES FOR PERSONNEL

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern. We are also fair and just to personnel. The decisions we make when recruiting, assessing incidents, and undertaking disciplinary action will always be thorough, transparent, and based on evidence. We record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns using the University of Melbourne's incident reporting form, including investigation updates. All records are securely stored. If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, we provide updates to children and families on progress and any actions we as an organisation take.

PRIVACY

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved, whether they be Student Council members, staff, volunteers, affiliated clubs and societies, parents or children, unless there is a risk to someone's safety. We have safeguards and practices in place to ensure any personal information is protected.

Everyone is entitled to know how this information is recorded, what will be done with it, and who will have access to it.

LEGISLATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

Our organisation takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- Failure to disclose: Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 have an obligation to report that information to the police.
- Failure to protect: People of authority in our organisation will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so.
- Any personnel who are mandatory reporters must comply with their duties.

RISK MANAGEMENT

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified (see information about failure to protect above). In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to our children.

We have risk management strategies in place to identify, assess, and take steps to minimise child abuse risks, which include risks posed by physical environments and online environments.

ALLEGATIONS, CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

Our organisation takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. Our Student Council members, staff, volunteers and affiliated clubs and societies are trained to deal appropriately with allegations.

We work to ensure all children, families, Student Council members, staff, volunteers and affiliated clubs and societies know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse or are a victim, and if they notice inappropriate behaviour.

We all have a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if we have a reasonable belief that an incident took place (see information about failure to disclose above).

If an adult has a **reasonable belief** that an incident has occurred, then they must report the incident. Factors contributing to reasonable belief may be:

- a child states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes the child may in fact be referring to themselves)
- behaviour consistent with that of an abuse victim is observed
- someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
- observing suspicious behaviour.

REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed every three years and following significant incidents if they occur. We will ensure that families and children have the opportunity to contribute. Where possible we do our best to work with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability.

The Operations Sub-Committee in conjunction with the General Manager, UMSU has responsibility for leading the review of this policy. The process for reviewing the policy includes:

- Assessment of policy implementation to date;
- Those covered by the policy are provided with the opportunity to give feedback;
- All feedback and suggestions will be considered by the review of the policy;
- Proposed changes will be presented to UMSU staff to achieve consensus.
- Students' Council will endorse the finalised policy and UMSU Management will make copies available on the website.

APPENDIX A

CHILD SAFE – CODE OF CONDUCT

All members of Student Council, Student Office Bearers, staff, volunteers and affiliated clubs & societies of the University of Melbourne Student Union (UMSU) are required to observe child safe principles and expectations for appropriate behaviour towards and in the company of children, as noted below.

All personnel of UMSU are responsible for supporting the safety, participation, wellbeing and empowerment of children by:

- adhering to the UMSU child safe policy at all times
- upholding the UMSU statement of commitment to child safety at all times
- taking all reasonable steps to protect children from abuse
- treating everyone with respect
- listening and responding to the views and concerns of children, particularly if they are telling you that they or another child has been abused and/or are worried about their safety or the safety of another child
- promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (for example, by never questioning an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child's self-identification)
- promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children with culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds (for example, by having a zero tolerance of discrimination)
- promoting the safety, participation and empowerment of children with a disability (for example, during personal care activities)
- ensuring as far as practicable that adults are not left alone with a child
- reporting any allegations of child abuse to the UMSU Child Safety Officer, Stephanie DiBattista, or the UMSU leadership group, and ensure any allegation is reported to the police or child protection
- reporting any child safety concerns to the UMSU Child Safety Officer Stephanie DiBattista, or the UMSU leadership group;
- if an allegation of child abuse is made, ensure as quickly as possible that the child or children are safe

- encouraging children to 'have a say' and participate in all relevant organisational activities where possible, especially on issues that are important to them.

Staff and volunteers must not:

- develop any 'special' relationships with children that could be seen as favouritism (for example, the offering of gifts or special treatment for specific children)
- exhibit behaviours with children which may be construed as unnecessarily physical
- put children at risk of abuse (for example, by locking doors unnecessarily)
- do things of a personal nature that a child can do for themselves, such as toileting or changing clothes
- engage in open discussions of a mature or adult nature in the presence of children (for example, personal social activities)
- use inappropriate language in the presence of children
- discriminate against any child, including on the basis of culture, race, ethnicity or disability
- have contact with a child or their family outside of the organisation without the knowledge and/or consent of the child safety officer (for example, no home tutoring of VCESS students). Accidental contact, such as seeing people in the street, is appropriate
- ignore or disregard any suspected or disclosed child abuse.

By observing these standards you acknowledge your responsibility to immediately report any breach of this code to the UMSU Child Safety Officer, Stephanie DiBattista, or the UMSU leadership group.

If you believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse phone 000.

I agree to adhere to this Code of Conduct:

Name:

Signature: