

This policy forms part of the Terms and Conditions of service and applies to all activities of the Project when supporting vulnerable adults (vulnerable by reason of ageing, infirmity or disability, which includes mental health) and all working in such activities, whether an employee, volunteer, management committee representative, work experience students or otherwise.

Voluntary Services Lewisham (VSL) recognises that individual agencies cannot deal alone with adult abuse; in the best interests of vulnerable adults an inter-agency approach is required. We believe that the general well-being and welfare of all vulnerable adults who are registered with our organisation is of paramount importance. We are committed to ensuring good outcomes in terms of taking proper account of vulnerable adults' issues and providing appropriate support.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The objective of the project's policy and guidelines is to contribute to the personal safety of all vulnerable adults using the project's facilities and resources through actively promoting awareness, good practice and sound procedures, ensuring community involvement and inclusion, and also by providing a comfortable and safe environment.

## **DEFINITION OF VULNERABLE ADULTS**

An adult (over the age of 18yrs) is vulnerable by reason of old age, infirmity or disability, which includes mental health difficulties. The main people assessed as vulnerable adults tend to be elderly, those who suffer from mental health illness (including dementia), have a physical or sensory disability, have a learning disability or suffer from incapacitating illness.

## **DEFINITION OF ABUSE**

Abuse of vulnerable adults is behaviour which causes harm or distress to the vulnerable person. Abuse can be physical, psychological, financial, sexual or social, it is not always intentional. Carers can be pushed beyond reasonable limits, abuse may occur inside or outside of a persons' home, i.e. day centre.

## **PRINCIPLES OF INTERVENTION**

- All allegations of abuse must be taken seriously.
- Primarily, there is a duty to act in the best interests of the allegedly abused person.
- Intervention must be used that takes into account the least disruption to the allegedly abused person's life.
- Intervention must take into account the allegedly abused person's wishes and the person must be enabled to participate.

## **ISSUES OF CAPACITY**

The law presumes that a person has the mental capacity to understand an act, decision or transaction and its consequences unless demonstrated otherwise. The exceptions are:

- Vulnerable adults with severe learning difficulties who are deemed unable to give consent to sexual acts.
- Vulnerable adults who have already been assessed as incapable of managing their own finances.
- Vulnerable adults who are subject to certain orders under the Mental Health Act 1983 i.e., who may be placed under, for example, a Guardianship Order.

## **PRINCIPLES OF CONFIDENTIALITY**

Vulnerable Adults must give their written consent for information to be shared with other agencies, except where there is a wider public interest or the safety of other vulnerable adults or children are at risk.

Where there is doubt as to a person's capacity to give consent this must be discussed with the staff/volunteers line manager. The decision to share information will be made jointly with the line manager (who may, or may not consult more widely) and will not rest with individuals.

Where consent is given verbally this needs to be recorded, as do any discussions at the earliest opportunity.

## **IMMEDIATE RESPONSE TO SUSPECTED ABUSE**

- Establish the persons consent to intervention, or establish if the person concerned has the capacity to give consent as necessary.
- Upon suspicion of abuse establish the need for emergency services i.e. medical, or police if there is evidence that the vulnerable adult may be in immediate danger.
- Immediately record reason for concern, relevant conversations i.e. dialogue with suspected abused person, date, time and any actions taken.
- Explain to the allegedly abused person that you will have to inform your line manager.
- Use attached checklist as a guideline to issues of consent.
- Consult with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) at the earliest opportunity, in order to establish the facts, discuss any issues of capacity arising and assess the need for advice i.e. Social Services involvement.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

The Management Committee delegates to the CEO the responsibility to ensure the implementation of this policy and its guidelines, this includes:

- Liaising with staff members to ensure implementation of the policy and guidelines by all staff and volunteers.
- To liaise on matters concerning vulnerable adults, formally and informally with social services, police and any other healthcare professional as part of a responsible and compassionate service.
- Reporting of allegations of abuse to the appropriate authorities (with consent where appropriate).
- Ensuring that there is adequate induction and training for staff and volunteers on good practice and policy relating to vulnerable adults.

## **SAFE RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES**

The VSL has a full Recruitment Policy which is available on request and can be found on our website [www.vslonline.org.uk](http://www.vslonline.org.uk).

All staff and volunteers who have regular contact with vulnerable adults in their course of their duties will undergo a recruitment process, consisting of application forms an interview; where references are taken up in accordance with our recruitment policy; as well as Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS).

- The application form will state that references and DBS disclosures will be required for those people who's work that may create a situation of substantial access to vulnerable adults.
- At interview stage the applicant will be given a written notice stating that a DBS disclosure is required as part of the conditions of working in VSL's Projects and services for vulnerable adults and they will be asked to sign and confirm that they have been informed and understand.
- No applicant may start sessions/visit unsupervised without the return of the DBS disclosure, but the coordinator may, in consultation with VSL's Manager, authorise an applicant to commence supervised work until other checks and references arrive.
- At all times the onus is on the applicant/employee/volunteer to reveal any convictions, cautions, bind over, probation order, pending prosecutions or other reason for concern whether imposed prior to or within the period the applicant works on the Project's activities/services.

- The applicant shall produce proof of identity and residence; these checks shall be noted as having been undertaken in the applicant's records.
- The CEO may accept any previous DBS disclosure, references, Social Service endorsements etc. provided by the applicant, providing that the information/checks are within one month of the recruitment/interview process.
- The initiative to make completely independent enquiries is at all times at the discretion of the CEO.

## **TRAINING AND SUPPORTING STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS**

All staff and volunteers are required to participate in training that relates to working with vulnerable adults. They will also have Health & Safety procedures detailed to them as part of their induction.

- Staff and volunteers shall be given a copy of this policy in their staff handbook/Volunteer Pack.
- Volunteers who suspect abuse of vulnerable adults should immediately report this to the Volunteer Coordinator, who will follow the above immediate response procedure, thereby relieving the burden of decision making from the volunteer.
- Volunteers who suspect abuse need to be listened to very carefully and a written record of conversation with the volunteer needs to be completed by the staff member who deals with their concern.
- Managers of volunteers will recognise that volunteers may find the possibility of abuse traumatic and give appropriate and ensure they have the detail of our confidential counselling line.
- The CEO in collaboration with senior staff members will take responsibility for developing and maintaining a culture where abuse can be discussed and addressed.
- Staff and volunteers do not have to prove an allegation – as long as they are not acting maliciously.
- Staff training in the Protection of Vulnerable Adults will be part of induction processes for new employees who may have contact with service user or who line manage volunteers in contact with service users.

## **POLICY REVIEW**

The Management Committee shall review this policy and its effectiveness regarding implementation annually and the CEO shall ensure with the aid of senior staff members that the views of all staff members and volunteers are sought and reflected in the review process, and that statutory authority input is sought as/when appropriate.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_