

Clonard Monastery Youth Centre

Child Protection Policy

The welfare of children is the most important consideration in all our youth work.

Unfortunately we are aware that children are not always given the protection to which they are entitled, and are subject to neglect and abuse that can live with them throughout their lives.

Youth workers are in the privileged position of being able to enter into and build up strong relationships with young people. Due to the confidence and trust that young people often have with the youth worker, there may be times when the young person chooses to disclose information regarding incidents of abuse to them. At other times the youth worker will, through their own experience, expertise and sensitivity to young people, have suspicions about the welfare of a young person. This puts the youth worker in what is both a very difficult as well as very honourable position. It is therefore essential the youth worker has clear and relevant guidelines to follow.

Child Protection Policy Statement:

Clonard Monastery Youth Centre is fully committed to ensure the care, welfare and safety of the young people who come to our centre. We will seek to carry out this responsibility in a caring, supportive and safe environment. We will value young people as individuals, with unique gifts and talents, and we aim to “foster the personal, social and spiritual development of each young person” in our care. We therefore dedicate ourselves to take all necessary and reasonable measures to protect the young people in our care from the risk of physical, sexual and emotional abuse.

We will endeavour to safeguard the young people in our care by:

- Adopting child protection guidelines through a code of behaviour for staff and volunteers;
- Sharing information about child protection and good practice with children, parents, staff and volunteers;
- Sharing information about concerns with agencies who need to know, and involving parents and children appropriately;
- Following carefully the procedures for recruitment of staff and volunteers; and
- Providing effective management for staff and volunteers through supervision, support and training.

Our policy and practice will be reviewed at regular intervals.

Principles underlying our policy and procedures:

Clonard Monastery Youth Centre is committed to the personal, social and spiritual development of young people. The following principles will underpin our child protection policy.

- The child's welfare must always be paramount; this overrides all other consideration.
- A proper balance must be maintained between protecting children and respecting the rights and needs of parents and families; but where there is conflict, the child's interests must remain paramount.
- Children must be listened to. It is important that when children speak we listen, especially in relation to disclosure of abuse. Youth workers should always ensure that the young person has opportunities to express their concern about what has happened to them. Children have a right to be heard, to be listened to and to be taken seriously. Taking account of their age and understanding, they must be consulted and involved in all matters and decisions which may affect their lives.
- Parents and carers have a right to respect, and must be consulted and involved in, matters which concern their family.
- Actions taken to protect a child must not in themselves be abusive by causing the child unnecessary distress or adding to any damage already suffered.
- Intervention must not deal with the child in isolation: the child must be seen in a family setting.
- The criminal dimension of any action cannot be ignored.
- Actions taken by agencies must be considered and well informed so that they are sensitive to, and take account of, the needs of the child's gender, age, stage of development, religion, culture and race.
- All agencies concerned with the protection of children must work together on an interagency basis in the best interests of children and their families.

Definition of Child Abuse:

Child abuse occurs when the behaviour of someone in a position of greater power causes harm. The abuse may be the result of a deliberate act or of a failure to act or to provide proper care (or both) on the part of the carer: e.g., a person who has actual custody of a child, (such as a foster parent, those who are in loco parentis), or e.g. a staff member in a youth setting etc; an acquaintance or a stranger, who may be an adult or a young person.

Abuse may take a number of forms, including:

- **Neglect** - the actual or likely persistent or significant neglect of a child, or the failure to protect a child from exposure to any kind of danger, including cold or starvation, or persistent failure to carry out important aspects of care, resulting in the significant impairment of the child's health or development, including non-organic failure to thrive.
- **Physical injury** – actual or likely deliberate physical injury to a child, or wilful or neglectful failure to prevent physical injury or suffering to a child.
- **Sexual abuse** – actual or likely sexual exploitation of a child. The involvement of children and adolescents in sexual activities they do not truly comprehend, to which they are unable to give informed consent, or that violate the social taboos of family roles.
- **Emotional abuse** – actual or likely persistent or significant emotional ill-treatment or rejection resulting in severe adverse effects on the emotional, physical and/or behavioural development of a child. All abuse involves some emotional ill-treatment. This is where it is the main or only form of abuse.

The term 'child abuse' in these procedures is intended to cover all these categories. The categories of abuse are not necessarily exhaustive or mutually exclusive. Any of them may result in a failure of the child to thrive.

Child Protection Procedures

Preventing Abuse:

Two designated persons will be appointed by the management committee of Clonard Monastery Youth Centre.

The persons presently holding these positions are Barry Fegan, Danielle Murray and Brendan Dineen.

The designated officers have specific responsibility for co-ordinating action within the youth centre and for liaising with HSSPS trusts and other agencies about suspected or actual cases of child abuse. This designated officer's role is to ensure that locally established procedures are followed. The designated persons will ensure training is provided in child protection issues, and this training will be reviewed on an annual basis.

The management committee will ensure that the worker-in-charge is fully conversant with the child protection policy and procedures and ensure that the worker-in-charge receives regular and updated training in this area.

The worker-in-charge will ensure that all staff and volunteers are fully conversant with the child protection policy and procedures and that they receive relevant and updated training in child protection issues.

Recruitment and Selection:

The management committee will ensure that procedures for recruitment and selection of staff are fully implemented

This procedure will ensure:

- All vacancies are openly available to interested applicants and are advertised as appropriate;
- All applicants will supply information regarding personal details, past and current work/volunteering experience and any qualifications or skills relevant to the post;
- A declaration of any, or no, past criminal record;
- At least two written references for both professional qualifications and character witness;
- Anyone taking up a post in this youth centre, paid or voluntary will complete an application form and be subject to interview;
- Where posts are eligible for Access NI Checks, either paid or voluntary, a person will not be allowed to take up position in this youth centre until clearance has been received;
- All recommendations for appointment will be ratified by the management committee; and

- The management committee will do its utmost to ensure that ongoing training and supervision is provided for, and taken up by, those in a position of trust with young people in its youth centre.

Once recruited, all staff and volunteers will undertake training and supervision so that they are less likely to become involved in actions which can lead to harm, or can be misunderstood. This training and supervision will include:

- Induction – this will familiarise staff and volunteers with the youth centre’s child protection policy and code of behaviour, as well as other policies such as health and safety.
- A probation period – which will normally be of six months duration, during which the development and suitability of the staff or volunteers will be reviewed.
- Supervision and support – a member of the management committee or other mutually agreed person will act as line manager/supervisor for the worker-in-charge. The worker-in-charge or again, another mutually agreed person, will fulfil this role for other staff and volunteers.
- Training – This will begin at induction and will be a continual process. It will include awareness in child protection; health and safety and particular skills training.

Sharing Information about Child Protection:

The management committee will ensure that information on child protection issues is available to all those involved in the youth centre and its activities. Some information is confidential however, and will only be shared on a need to know basis.

Information regarding how, and with whom young people can share their concerns, complaints and anxieties regarding child protection issues will be openly displayed in the youth centre.

We will seek to ensure that parents, legal guardians and other appropriate adults will have access to our child protection policy. Information about the activities of the youth centre will be openly displayed in the centre and in relevant public areas.

The name of the designated officers to whom they refer in the event of concerns or complaints will be circulated to parents and legal guardians.

Where a worker has concern about the behaviour of a young person or a colleague, they will consult a designated officer about this concern.

The management committee, in consultation with the worker-in-charge will decide upon the most appropriate manner for the distribution of such policies and information.

Reporting of Suspected Abuse:

When a young person discloses to a youth worker that they have been abused, or the youth worker suspects an incident of abuse, the worker must not initiate an investigation. Investigations of cases of abuse must be left to social services.

An incident book will be kept for recording matters of concern. A worker will verbally inform the worker-in-charge of suspicions. The worker-in-charge will immediately notify the designated officer on the management committee and will record such concern. A strict written record will be kept in all cases. (See form later in this section for recording allegations or suspicions of abuse). This written record will be kept by a designated officer and will not be available to any other worker or member of the management committee. Information from records must only be given on request to those who have statutory responsibility (HSS trust, the police or the NSPCC) for the protection of children.

The designated officer will contact the Gateway team and follow their instructions.

Where the management committee suspect a member of staff or volunteer of abuse they must, through the designated officer inform Social Services, who will instigate child protection procedures. The management committee will also consider the instigation of disciplinary procedures.

Indemnity:

The youth centre will secure appropriate indemnity cover to protect themselves against the outcomes of any legal action taken against them. This is particularly relevant with the introduction of the Children's (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 (Part 5; Section 66; Clause 11) which highlights the responsibility of voluntary agencies working in such settings.

Code of Behaviour for Staff and Volunteers:

Children and young people will at all times be treated with courtesy, respect and dignity.

Staff and volunteers will not spend excessive amounts of time alone with children and young people, away from others. Meetings with children and young people will take place as openly as possible. If privacy is needed, the door will be left open and other staff or volunteers will be informed of the meeting. Care will be taken not to show favouritism.

Staff and volunteers are advised not to make unnecessary physical contact with children and young people. However, there may be occasions when physical contact is unavoidable, such as providing comfort or reassurance for a distressed child, or physical support, for example, in contact sports such as gymnastics. In all cases, physical contact should only take place with the consent of the child or young person.

It is normally not permissible to take children alone in a car or journey, however short. Where this is unavoidable, it will be undertaken with the full knowledge and consent of the parents, and either the worker-in-charge or a member of the management committee.

Staff and volunteers will not meet with children outside organised activities, unless it is with the full knowledge and consent of parents, and the chairperson of the management committee.

There will be an adequate ratio of staff to young people at all times. Staff and volunteers will not work alone with children and young people.

Inappropriate language or sexually suggestive comments will not be permitted at any time by staff, volunteers or young people.

Workers who are involved in relationships with other workers should ensure that their personal relationships do not affect their leadership role in the youth centre.

Staff and volunteers should never engage in sexually provocative or rough physical games, including horseplay – apart from structured sports activities.

Staff and volunteers will not undertake tasks of a personal nature with or for children and young people except in cases of medical emergency when the welfare of the child or young person depends upon it.

All allegations, concerns or complaints will be followed through on in a timely and efficient manner.

There will be a clearly designated person within the youth centre with whom children and young people can speak about their experience and raise any concerns should they arise.

Staff and volunteers will not consume alcohol or smoke while having responsibility for or in the presence of children and young people.

When young people are being transported to other venues using taxis a staff member must leave in the first taxi with young people and the last taxi, if only 1 member of staff is going with the group, they must leave in the first taxi. On the return journey a staff member must leave in the first and last taxi, if only 1 member of staff they must leave in the last taxi and contact the youth centre to say that young people are on their way back.

Good Practice in Listening to Children Disclosing Abuse:

Always listen to the child rather than question them directly.

Offer reassurance without making promises, and take what the child says seriously.

Children may be frightened by the threat of violence to themselves or other members of their family, or of being taken away from, or of breaking up their family. Youth workers should reassure young people who disclose in these situations that by doing so they are protecting themselves and possibly other children and young people from further abuse.

Never stop a child who is freely recalling significant events. Do not overreact.

Explain what you have to do and whom you have to tell.

Do not question or interrogate the child.

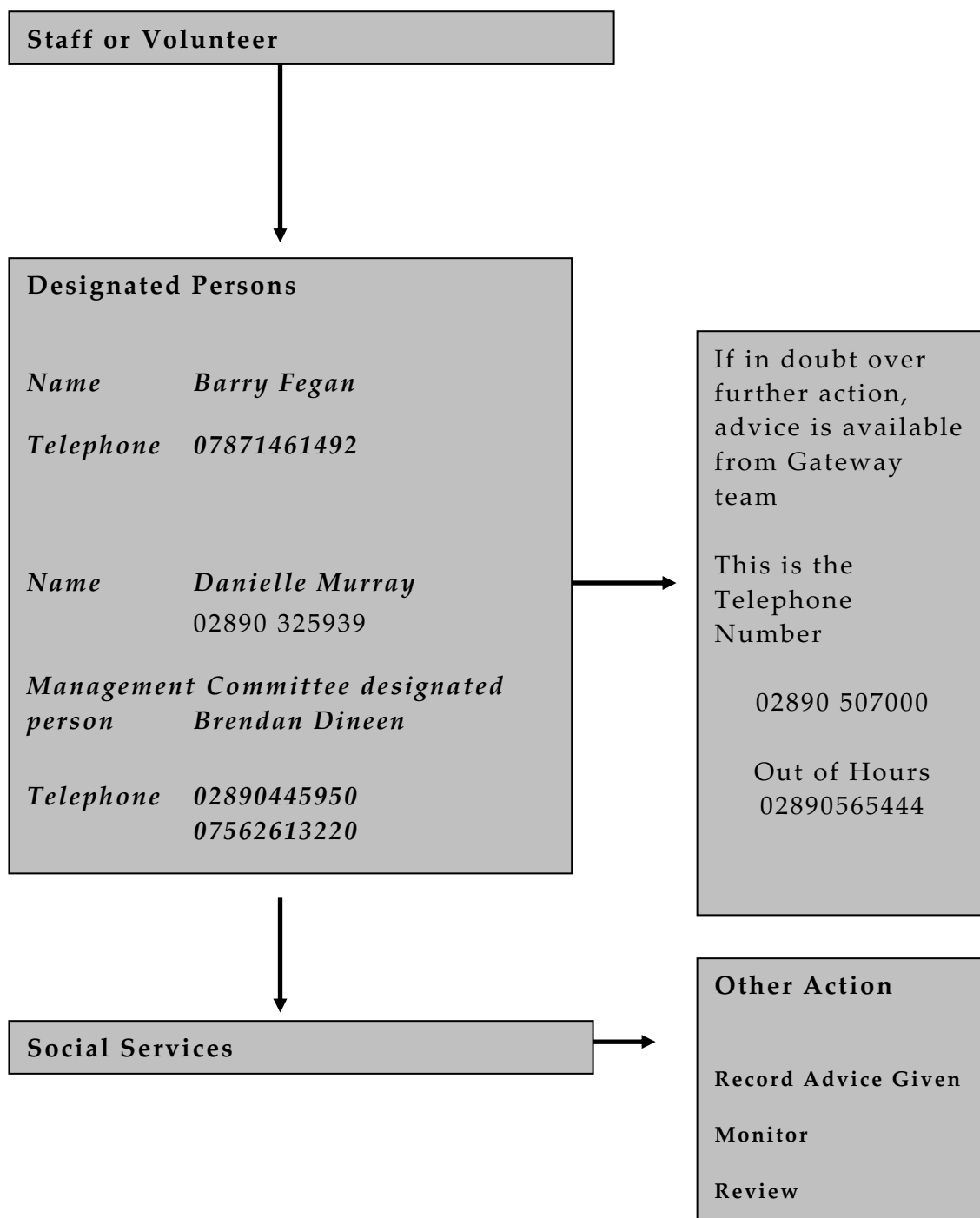
Record the discussion accurately, as soon as possible after the event, even if it is information you do not understand fully, or like writing down. This is of vital importance.

Contact the designated person within the staff team/management committee. The designated person may then discuss the concern/suspicion with Social Services, and, if appropriate, make a direct contact.

Make direct contact with Social Services if the designated person is not available, or it is inappropriate to approach them.

Record any discussions or actions within 24 hours.

Action to be taken in cases of suspected child abuse:



Record of Allegations or Suspicion of Abuse Form

Recording Allegations or Suspicion of Abuse

In any case where an allegation is made or concerns are present a record must be taken. This will only be kept by the designated officer. Copies will not be kept by any other worker or committee member. The following issues must be addressed in the keeping of such a record, either on this form or other written record.

Name of Child of Young Person: Age:	
Parent's Name: Home Address: Telephone:	
Is the person making this record expressing their own concerns, or passing on those of somebody else?	
What has prompted these concerns? Include dates and times of specific incidents if possible	
Any physical signs? Behaviour signs? Indirect signs?	
Has the young person been spoken to? If so, what was said?	
Have the parents been contacted? If so, what was said?	
Has anyone been alleged to be the abuser? If so, record details.	
Has anyone else been consulted? If so, record details.	

Designated Officers

Any concerns regarding the abuse of a child should be reported to one of the designated officers of the management committee as named below.

Brendan Dineen
Clonard Monastery
Clonard Gardens
BELFAST
BT13 2RL
Telephone: 02890 445950

Barry Fegan
Senior Youth Worker

Danielle Murray
Youth Worker

Clonard Monastery Youth Centre
1a Clonard Gardens
BELFAST
BT13 2RL
Telephone: 02890 325939