

YOUTH HARVEST FOUNDATION GHANA

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY



June, 2017

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Child Protection Policy of Youth Harvest Foundation Ghana (YHFG) is applicable to all management and staff (paid, voluntary, permanent or casual) of YHFG, consultants, contractors and partner organizations. The issue of child abuse is a complex problem that has an impact on all areas of society, more so for rural children. The Youth Harvest Foundation Ghana has therefore taken a pro-active role in relation to child protection and is committed to ensuring that the safety, welfare and wellbeing of all children irrespective of their religion, race, ethnic or education background are protected and maintained at all times during their participation in activities run by YHFG and its partner organizations. The Youth Harvest Foundation Ghana aims to foster a safe and positive environment for all children.

Information contained in this document will create a framework and provide direction for staff, consultants, contractors, volunteers and partner organizations. It will also help deliver a consistent approach to child abuse prevention at all levels of working with children.

The Youth Harvest Foundation Ghana and its partners working with and for children and young people must ensure that:

The welfare of the child is paramount:

1. All children, whatever their age, culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin, religious beliefs and/or sexual identity have the right to protection from abuse
2. All suspicions and allegations of abuse and poor practice will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately
3. Staff (paid/unpaid) working for YHFG have a responsibility to report concerns to the appropriate officer. Staff or volunteers are not trained to deal with situations of abuse or to decide if abuse has occurred.

2.0 BACKGROUND OF YOUTH HARVEST FOUNDATION

The YHFG is a youth focused Non-Governmental Organization which is also non-partisan and with no religious affiliation. The Foundation was founded in 2002 with head office based in Bolgatanga in the Upper East region, Ghana. It is registered as an NGO with the Registrar General Department, Department of Social Welfare and the National Youth Authority. The guiding believe is that helping the deprived youth of Ghana to conserve and develop their physical and mental strength through education, entrepreneurial training and improved living conditions is the right way to ensure their viability to society and fight poverty.

2.1 MISSION & VISION

Vision: Enable self-reliant and self-sufficient youth living in healthy society

Mission: Support and empower young people to achieve their full potential:

1. In their personal life,
2. Professional development,
3. As active advocates of the rights of young people
4. And contribute to a sustainable environment

2.2 YHFG MAIN STRATEGIC AREAS

1. To support and promote the sexual and reproductive health of young people by providing appropriate education and supporting rights-based advocacy activities
2. To support and promote skills development in young people, with a focus on entrepreneurship, employable and social skills
3. To support young people to chart their career paths through formal education
4. To strengthen young farmers' forces in the production and marketing of farm produce in an environmentally sustainable manner.

3.0 POLICY STATEMENT/AIMS

The Youth Harvest Foundation Ghana has a duty of care to safeguard all children involved in YHFG from harm. All children have a right to protection, and the needs of rural children, disabled children and others who may be particularly vulnerable must be taken into account. The

Youth Harvest Foundation Ghana will ensure the safety and protection of all children involved in YHFG through adherence to this Child Protection guidelines adopted by YHFG. The aim of this Child Protection Policy is to promote good practice such as:

1. Providing children and young people with appropriate safety and protection whilst working for and with them.
2. Allow all staff or volunteers to make informed and confident responses to specific child protection issues.
3. Create an environment to encourage children to develop a positive self-image
4. Encourage children to develop sense of independence and autonomy in a way that is appropriate to their age and stage of development

4.0 PRINCIPLES

This policy is informed by a set of principles that are derived from the UNCRC and include:

1. All children have equal rights to protection from abuse and exploitation.
2. Each child has a fundamental right to life, survival and development. YHFG's childcentred development approach provides a basis for ensuring the realization of children's rights to be protected from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation.
3. All children should be encouraged to fulfil their potential, and inequality and discrimination should be challenged.
4. Children will be assured the right to express their views freely and this will be given 'due weight' in accordance with their age and level of maturity. We will not discriminate against the child. The child will be treated with respect irrespective of gender, nationality or ethnic origin, religious or political beliefs, age, physical or mental health, sexual preference and gender identity, family, socio-economic and cultural background, or any history of conflict with the law.
5. Everybody has a responsibility to support the care and protection of children.
6. YHFG has particular responsibilities to children who come into contact with us. No child must come to harm as a result of their engagement with YHFG, a participant in YHFG program or as part of any YHFG advocacy campaign.

7. These particular responsibilities extend to those individuals or organizations who are associated with YHFG. Therefore, everyone working for or associated with YHFG's work must be aware of and adhere to the provisions of this policy

5.0 DEFINITION OF TERMS UNDER THIS POLICY

In line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and for the purposes of this policy, a Child is defined as any person under the age of 18 years (UNCRC Article 1).

1. Child abuse: is defined as all forms of physical abuse, emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse and exploitation, neglect or negligent treatment, commercial or other exploitation of a child and includes any actions that result in actual or potential harm to a child. Child abuse may be a deliberate act or it may be failing to act to prevent harm. Child abuse consists of anything which individuals, institutions or processes do or fail to do, intentionally or unintentionally, which harms a child or damages their wellbeing, dignity and prospect of safe and healthy development into adulthood.

2. Child protection: is defined in this policy as the responsibilities, preventative and responsive measures and activities that YHFG undertakes to protect children ensuring that no Child is subject to Child abuse as a result of their association with us, their contact with YHFG Staff, YHFG Associates and Visitors and/or their participation in any YHFG activity, including our projects and programs.

In addition, it incorporates our responsibility to ensure that where there are concerns over a Child's welfare or where a Child has been subjected to Child abuse, actions are taken to address this; concerns are reported and responded to appropriately and in line with the relevant national and local procedures; and incidents are analyzed so as to ensure continued learning and growth in the field of organizational child protection.

3. YHFG Staff: refers to individuals who receive regular salary for work in any of our Projects at the Head office or District offices.

4. YHFG Associates: refers to a range of paid and non-paid individuals who have committed to work with or support YHFG. It includes, among others, members of boards, volunteers,

including community volunteers, interns, sponsors, researchers, donors, consultants and contractors, staff and/or representatives of partner Institutions and local government authorities.

5. YHFG Visitors: refers to a range of persons who are visiting our programs and may come into contact with children through YHFG, including journalists, media and researchers.

6. YHFG Managers refers to YHFG's Staff who have responsibility for line managing or supervising the work of YHFG Staff or YHFG Associates.

6.0 PROMOTING GOOD PRACTICE

Child abuse, particularly sexual abuse, can arouse strong emotions in those facing such a situation. It is important to understand these feelings and not allow them to interfere with your judgment about the appropriate action to take.

Abuse can occur within many situations including the home, school and social environment. Some individuals will actively seek employment or voluntary work with young people or children in order to harm them. An instructor, teacher, staff or volunteer will have regular contact with children and young people and be an important link in identifying cases where they need protection. All suspicious cases of poor practice should be reported following the guidelines in this document.

6.1 Good Practice Guidelines

All personnel should be encouraged to demonstrate exemplary behaviour in order to promote children's welfare and reduce the likelihood of abuses. The following are common sense examples of how to create a positive culture and climate.

6.1 a Good practice means:

1. Always work in an open environment (eg avoiding private or unobserved situations and encouraging open communication with no secrets).
2. Treating all young people or disabled equally, and with respect and dignity.
3. Always putting the welfare of each young person first, before achieving goals

4. Maintaining a safe and appropriate distance with players (eg it is not appropriate for staff or volunteers to have an intimate relationship with a child or to share a room with them).
5. Building balanced relationships based on mutual trust which empowers children to share in the decision making process.

6.1 b Practices never to be sanctioned

The following should never be sanctioned. You should never:

1. allow or engage in any form of inappropriate touching
2. allow children to use inappropriate language unchallenged
3. make sexually suggestive comments to a child, even in fun
4. reduce a child to tears as a form of control
5. fail to act upon and record any allegations made by a child
6. do things of a personal nature for children or adults with intellectual disabilities, that they can do for themselves
7. Invite or allow children to stay with you at your home unsupervised.

7.0 USE OF PHOTOGRAPHIC/FILMING EQUIPMENT

Photography/filming can be an effective aid in the work of YHFG but this must not be mis-used or used for other purposes. The performers and their parents or guardians should be made aware that this is part of the YHFG's work and their consent obtained. Such films should be stored safely.

8.0 SAFE RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES

YHFG recognizes that anyone may have the potential to abuse children in some way and that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure unsuitable people are prevented from working with children.

Pre-selection checks must include the following:

1. All potential volunteers, paid staff, independent contractors or consultants should complete an application form.
2. The application form will elicit information about an applicant's past and a self-disclosure about any criminal record.

3. Consent should be obtained from an applicant to seek information from the Criminal Investigation Department of the Ghana Police Service.
4. Two confidential references, including one regarding previous work with children. These references must be taken up and confirmed through telephone or email contact.

8.1 Interview and Induction

All potential employees, volunteers and independent contractors or consultants will be required to undergo an interview carried out to acceptable protocol and recommendations. Only on receipt of satisfactory references will a formal offer of employment or contract be made. Copies of all returned criminal record checks and documentation pertaining to any child protection issues will be kept confidentially and securely locked within YHFG's secretariat.

All employees and volunteers should receive an induction, during which:

1. The job requirements and responsibilities should be clarified.
2. Child protection procedures are explained and training needs are identified.

9.0 RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OR SUSPICIONS

It is not the responsibility of anyone working in YHFG or partner organization, in a paid or unpaid capacity to decide whether or not child abuse has taken place. However there is a responsibility to act on any concerns by reporting these to the appropriate officer or the appropriate authorities.

YHFG assures all staff, volunteers, independent contractors or consultants and the general public that it will fully support and protect anyone, who in good faith reports his or her concern that a person is, or may be abusing a child. Where there is a complaint against a member of staff or a member of the public there may be three types of investigation:

1. a criminal investigation
2. a child protection investigation
3. a disciplinary or misconduct investigation

9.1 Reporting concerns about poor practice

If following consideration, the allegation is clearly about poor internal practice, YHFG will deal with it as a misconduct issue. If the allegation is about poor practice by YHFG, or if the matter has been handled inadequately and concerns remain, it should be reported to the relevant authority who will decide how to deal with the allegation and whether or not to initiate disciplinary proceedings.

9.2 Reporting concerns about suspected abuse

All employees and volunteers should receive an induction, during which:

1. Any suspicion that a child has been abused by a member of staff, a volunteer, an independent contractor, consultant or a member of the general public, the issue should be reported to the YHFG, who will take such steps as considered necessary to ensure the safety of the child in question and any other child who may be at risk.
2. The YHFG will refer the allegation to the social welfare department who may involve the police.
3. The parents or guardians of the child will be contacted as soon as possible following advice from the social welfare department.

10. CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort should be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned. Information should be handled and disseminated on a need to know basis only. This includes the following people:

The Executive Director, the parents of the person who is alleged to have been abused, the person making the allegation, the designated staff for child related issues, social welfare department or the police

Information should be stored in a secure place with limited access to designated people (eg. that information is accurate, regularly updated, relevant and secure).

11 ENQUIRIES AND FURTHER ACTION

11.1 Internal enquiries and possible suspension

The YHFG Management team will make an immediate decision about whether any individual accused of abuse should be temporarily suspended pending further police and social welfare inquiries. Irrespective of the findings of the social welfare or police inquiries, the YHFG Management Team will assess all individual cases to decide whether a member of staff, volunteer, contractor or consultant can be reinstated and how this can be sensitively handled. This may be a difficult decision; particularly where there is insufficient evidence to uphold any action by the police. In such cases, the YHFG Management Team must reach a decision based upon the available information which could suggest that on a balance of probability; it is more likely than not that the allegation is true. The welfare of the child should remain of paramount importance throughout.

11.2 Allegations of previous abuse

Allegations of abuse may be made some time after the event (eg by an adult who has abused a child or by a member of staff, volunteer, contractor or consultant who is still currently working with children). Where such an allegation is made, YHFG should follow the procedures as detailed above and report the matter to the social welfare department or the police. This is because other children may be at risk from this person. Anyone who has a previous criminal conviction for offences related to abuse should be automatically excluded from working with children.

12. PROVIDING INFORMATION TO POLICE AND SOCIAL WELFARE DEPARTMENT

Information about suspected abuse must be accurate and a detailed record should always be made at the time of the disclosure or concern. It should include the following:

1. The child's name, age and date of birth.
2. The child's home address and telephone number.
3. Whether or not the person making the report is expressing their own concerns or those of someone else.

4. The nature of the allegation. Include dates, times, any special factors and other relevant information.
5. Make a clear distinction between what is fact, opinion or hearsay.
6. A description of any visible bruising or other injuries. Also any indirect signs, such as behavioral changes.
7. Details of witnesses to the incidents.
8. The child's account, if it can be given, of what has happened and how any bruising or other injuries occurred.
9. Have the parents been contacted? If so what has been said?
10. Has anyone else been consulted? If so record details.
11. If the child was not the person who reported the incident, has the child been spoken to? If so what was said?
12. Has anyone been alleged to be the abuser? Record details.
13. Where possible referral to the police or social services should be confirmed in writing within 24 hours and the name of the contact who took the referral should be recorded.

13. RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THOSE COVERED BY THE SCOPE OF THE CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Everyone who works with and engages with YHFG has a responsibility to ensure that children are protected. The responsibilities detailed below are mandatory for those who fall within the scope of this policy. YHFG Staff, YHFG Associates, YHFG Visitors and YHFG Managers must:

1. Never abuse, exploit a Child, act or behave in any way that places a child at risk of harm.
2. Report any Child abuse and Child protection concerns they have in accordance with applicable local office procedures and this policy.
3. Respond to a Child who may have been abused or exploited in accordance with applicable local office procedures and this policy.
4. Cooperate fully and confidentially in any investigation of concerns or allegations of Child abuse.

5. Contribute to building an environment where children are respected and encouraged to discuss their concerns and rights.

6. Always treat children in a manner which is respectful of their rights, integrity and dignity, considers their best interests and does not expose them to, or place them at risk of, harm. For example: when taking images or pictures during visits, interacting with children or generating stories of children, ensure that this is done in a manner consistent with the appropriate procedures.

14. PERSONAL CONDUCT OUTSIDE WORK OR ASSOCIATION WITH YHFG

YHFG does not dictate the belief and value systems by which YHFG Staff, YHFG Associates, YHFG Visitors and YHFG Managers conduct their personal lives. However, actions taken by them out of working hours that are seen to contradict this policy will be considered a violation of this policy

Signed

Executive Director

Youth Harvest Foundation Ghana