

MEETING POINT INTERNATIONAL'S CHILD PROTECTION POLICY 2017

PREFACE

Meeting Point International (MPI) is a Ugandan Non-Governmental Organization (NGO). It was registered with the Uganda NGO board in 2003 but had been operating since 1992 as an unregistered community-based organisation.

Its area of operation comprises of slums situated in Kampala namely Naguru, Kitintale, Kinawataka and Kireka. Its main activity is to take care of people affected and infected by HIV/AIDs and their families, orphans and abandoned children. Around 2,190 sick patients and 1,027 orphans are registered with MPI. Most of these women, men and children immigrated to Kampala from Northern Uganda due to the war that lasted for 20 years where the Lord Resistance Army looted and abducted children.

The aim of MPI is to educate the awareness of the value and dignity of human life at all its stages of development and level of maturity through cultural and social activities.

MPI provides assistance to the suffering victims of HIV/AIDs, commits in poverty alleviation and promotes education at all levels through a constant companionship that helps people discover their infinite value and dignity that is greater than any disease, poverty or any conditions.

MPI operates as a presence, a companionship, a point of reference that anyone can meet and involve himself/herself with. The methodology adopted by MPI is offering a friendship in which people are not reduced to their problems or sickness, but looked at and embraced for their infinite dignity. The services and activities provided are important means to promote the awareness of one's own value thus enhancing responsibility in facing reality as a protagonist and contribution to recreating a social communication eliminating the stigma of HIV/AIDS.

MPI's Child Protection Policy serves as a reminder that our lives are precious hence living in a better way recognising each other's value.

Motive of Child Protection Policy

To protect children from all sorts of abuse (psychological abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, negligence) which cause harm to their bodies and souls.

Rationale of Meeting Point International Child Protection Policy

The CPP aims at:

- Providing a point of reference where our children, facing or at risk of abuse, can run for help and where they are embraced regardless of their conditions;
- Providing a friendship with our children who have experienced abuse in order to re-affirm their infinite value and dignity;
- Educating the community on the value of their lives so that, as a consequence, they look at the children with the same value and so that the children can live freely in the society knowing that they are loved and protected from all sorts of abuse;

- Helping workers and people who interact with MPI's children, develop a relationship with which the children feel loved and cared for so that they also discover themselves.

STATEMENT OF POLICY

This policy applies to every MPI staff, partner, volunteer and consultant associated with MPI.

This shall also serve to make our children, the community in which they live and MPI's partners, aware of their value and dignity. Even if a child is abused, he/she is not reduced to abuse, but embraced in order to reaffirm his/her infinite value.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the UN in 1989 and ratified in Ireland in 1992. MPI believes that all work with children should, by its very nature, recognise, implement and promote the fundamental values of the Convention.

Children First National Guidelines (WORLDWIDE) for the Protection and Welfare of Children 1999

The Children First Guidelines were issued by the Department of Health and Children in 1999 and it outlined procedures which all organisations dealing with children and young people should put in place. They state that such organisations should put in place a child protection policy tailored to their specific needs.

This policy outlines the procedures and arrangements in place to protect children.

Who is a child?

A child is a human being below the age of 18 years (By the UN Convention on Rights of the Child 02/09/1990). A child is a person who is unique, capable of thinking and judging, who has desires and expresses him/herself through many ways. MPI recognises that children are simple and dependent on adults and that is why adults should offer friendship and love through which children can discover the beauty of life, while growing into adults who have a deep sense of humanity.

MPI believes that children should receive equal protection.

What is child abuse?

Child abuse constitutes all forms of physical, emotional ill-treatment or other exploitation, resulting in harm to a child's mind and body. Under the Child Protection Act 1999, it does not matter how much a child is harmed, but whether a child has suffered harm, is suffering from harm, or is at risk of suffering harm. The categories of child abuse include physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect.

Harm is any unfavourable effect of a significant nature on the physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing of a person. For harm to be significant, the effect on a child's wellbeing must be substantial or serious and must be demonstrable in the child's functioning or behaviour.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse occurs when one suffers, non-accidental, bodily trauma or injury. It can be through hitting, shaking, throwing, burning, biting, poisoning, piercing etc. the act itself causes injury or trauma to the child.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse occurs when one uses their power to involve another in sexual activity. Sexual abuse can be physical, verbal or emotional and can include; exposing private parts, having sexual relation to one below 18 years, exposing one to pornographic content, rape, etc.

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse occurs when a child's social, emotive, mental or intellectual development is impaired or threatened. It includes emotional deprivation due to persistent rejection, hostility, teasing, yelling, criticism, exposure of a child to violence from the family and community and reducing them to the circumstances with they go through.

Neglect

Neglect occurs when a child's basic necessities of life are not met, and their health and development are affected. Basic needs include; food, housing, health care, adequate clothing, hygienic living conditions, timely provision of medical treatment and adequate supervision.

Since most children in Uganda are the first victims of abuse, in response, we set up procedures in order to create a safe haven for our children. Every staff of MPI shall be required to observe the following procedures and place his/ her signature, to acknowledge the willingness to abide by the guidelines.

Codes of conduct: Acceptable minimum standards of behaviour

1. Value each child as an individual, in his/her role as a member of his/her family and the community she/he lives in.
2. Respect the relationship of the children with their parents, siblings, other family members, taking into account his/her natural ties with them.
3. Facilitate the optimal growth and development of each individual child to achieve his or her potential in all aspects of his or her life.
4. Use information appropriately, respecting the privacy of our children, maintain confidentiality where necessary and avoiding the misuse of personal information.
5. Oppose at all times any form of discrimination, oppression or exploitation done against children.

Safe Recruitment of Staff

All personnel working in MPI is employed by the Executive Director having identified that he/she has the love¹ for the children. If the Executive Director and the applicant find a mutual interest to collaborate, a contract agreement is signed.

During the probation period, staff is accessed to verify their attitude towards children. After this period he/she may be contracted for a period of maximum 1 year. The duration of the contract may vary in accordance with the job description or the need of the organisation. The Child Protection Policy has to be signed by the applicant with the offer of contract.

¹ In love, one is recalled to the fact that he belongs to the same origin as the other hence a relationship is developed in which one is helped and helps in understanding the value of life, beauty and meaning of things.

Training of Staff of Meeting Point International

MPI organises trainings periodically in order to help staff become aware of their value and dignity and as a consequence treat MPI's children as well with the same value. All staff of MPI will receive child protection training at the level appropriate to their role.

Safe Working Practices

Staff and collaborators should work in a manner that ensures the safety of children and themselves.

The staff, guided by MPI's Code of Conduct, is expected to behave in manners that maintain appropriate professional boundaries and avoid behaviour which might be harmful for children and misinterpreted by others.

Reporting procedures

The Executive Director is the officer in charge of child protection and in his/her absence a Member of the Board of Director or the Technical Advisor will be in charge.

It is MPI's policy to affirm that all disclosures of abuse of a child must be taken seriously, reported and investigated appropriately, with the safety of child being of the highest concern. It is the responsibility of every staff, volunteer and consultant to protect the children. If a child makes a verbal disclosure to a member of staff, it is important that staff takes what the child says seriously. Under no circumstances should a member of staff attempt to conduct an investigation or deal with concerns regarding child abuse alone.

In case of suspicion or discovery of abuse to our children, all cases should be reported to the Executive Director who will handle the cases sensitively keeping the information confidential. The information of such cases can only be shared with those individuals who are justifiable to know. No staff member shall be penalised if the suspicion is found not to be true.

If MPI's staff, consultants, partners or volunteers are suspected of having taken part in any of the abuses he/she must be brought to the attention of the Executive Director and he/she will be subjected to MPI's disciplinary procedures.

If a family needs to be notified of an abuse, a special attention shall be given on how to prepare the family for the sad news. Counselling and dialogue shall be the preferred means.

All cases whether allegations or actual abuses will be recorded in writing and kept securely in a child protection file with reasons clearly identified and explained.

Stories and photos of our children

When taking photos and videos of the persons whom Meeting Point International serves, especially if children, the following must be observed to ensure that children are treated for the value they are;

1. Always check what photography or filming is appropriate with the Executive Director before taking photos or videos.
2. Always pursue verbal consent from a child and the child's guardians if you wish to take photos or videos that clearly identifies and provides substantial information about the child that places him/her in a situation that could endanger their safety or reputation. For children of the Welcoming House, permission has to be granted by the Executive Director.

3. Be extremely human² to a child’s vulnerability at times of grief, and always assess how a photo, video or story will impact on his/her safety and well-being.
4. Any staff using Photos, videos of Children on their social Media (e.g. WhatsApp or Facebook) should seek consent from the guardians of the child.
5. Do not portray people as helpless victims. Balance human needs with positive language and what people do to help themselves.
6. Photos and stories must not contain actual names of children or real locations when communicating sensitive information (e.g. HIV status or Abuse). Treat with the utmost importance the confidentiality of the information related to children.
7. Efforts must be made to prevent unauthorised access or inappropriate use by copyrighting and watermarking all photos of children on websites. Anyone displaying photos must use all technology available to prevent unauthorised downloading or copying.

SIGNATORIES TO THE MPI CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

I. The MPI Child Protection Policy, signed for and on behalf of MPI:

Name: **Rose Busingye (Executive Director)**

Signature: _____ Date: _____ Stamp:

II. Signed by: MPI staff/consultant/partner/ volunteer

I, _____ hereby append my signature to, irrevocably and unconditionally agree to the terms and conditions set out in the MPI’s Child Protection Policy which I have read and understood.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

² When one is human, he/she together with the child go through the circumstances. This gives the child a sense of being with someone, not being alone.