

Children in Crossfire Whistleblowing Policy

What is Whistleblowing?

Describes a disclosure made by someone within or outside the organisation alleging serious malpractices by the organisation or for which the organisation is accountable (for example serious malpractices by a staff member, volunteer, partner or supplier).

Guiding Principles:

Children in Crossfire shall apply the below principles in the cause of handling complaints:

- Fairness:** In terms of how those representing Children in Crossfire treat one another and in the process of reporting and investigating a suspected Whistleblowing case;
- Accountability:** Children in Crossfire will hold its staff, volunteers, suppliers and partners accountable for their actions;
- Openness and transparency:** Children in Crossfire is committed to being open and transparent;
- Protection:** for the Whistle-blower, from dismissal or victimisation following a disclosure;
- Confidentiality:** the identity of anyone who raises concerns will be kept confidential as far as possible;
- Apply a survivor centred approach:** Children in Crossfire will ensure a duty of care by aiming to improve the quality and availability of whistleblowing, referral services and protection mechanisms to minimise the risks of survivor and victim stigmatisation; and taking into consideration the safety, wants, needs, and rights of survivors and victims with regard to information-sharing, confidentiality, consent, and risk assessment, for the protection of the survivor and victim and with the aim of preventing future incidents.

1. Policy Statement

1.1 Children in Crossfire will ensure that those who raise concerns of suspected serious malpractice are protected from dismissal, victimisation or any other detrimental treatment by Children in Crossfire provided that they follow the procedures set out below;

1.2 Children in Crossfire is committed to protecting children and vulnerable adults in our areas of operation from exploitation, neglect or negligent treatment, sexual, emotional and physical abuse, and to reduce their risk and vulnerability. This policy sets out what we expect from staff, board members, volunteers, interns, partners, associates, independent contractors and all who work with Children in Crossfire;

1.3 Children in Crossfire is committed to being open and accountable, practicing honesty and integrity in fulfilling our responsibilities and complying with all applicable laws and regulations;

1.4 Should a person or persons working with or for Children in Crossfire appear to be acting improperly, negligently or criminally in the past, present or showing likely future wrongdoing, Children in Crossfire encourages individuals, and organisations with whom it works in partnership, (who act in good faith) to report serious malpractice in accordance with the procedures set out below;

1.5 People to whom a disclosure of serious malpractice (see Section 3.4) is made should ensure that this policy and procedure is the correct one to follow in the circumstances (see Section 3.5).

2. Scope

This policy and procedure covers everybody working with Children in Crossfire to deliver on its mission including all staff, volunteers and others with whom Children in Crossfire is working, such as partners and external contractors or consultants.

2.1 The Whistleblowing policy is based on the Public Interest Disclosure (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 and the Irish Protected Disclosure Act 2014. The Act is intended to protect whistle-blowers from dismissal or victimisation in the event that they disclose specific matters to their employer or another body in good faith. This policy covers all staff in Children in Crossfire. Amongst the laws supporting the Public Interest Disclosure Order and the Irish Protected Disclosure Act is the National Security Act 3 of 1970 and the Anti-Money Laundering Act to mention the few.

2.2 All staff, volunteers and external bodies i.e. partners, contractors or consultants working jointly with Children in Crossfire are protected by this policy and procedure to ensure consistency and transparency for all those working towards the Vision, Mission and Values of Children in Crossfire.

3. Objectives

3.1 The purpose of this policy is to provide an effective procedure for people to raise their concerns when they believe that abuse, serious malpractice or professional misconduct has taken place, is taking place or is likely to take place.

3.2 It is essential that anyone connected with Children in Crossfire who suspects or knows that serious malpractice has taken place, is taking place, or is likely to take place raises their concerns in line with the procedure described in this document.

3.3 The term "serious malpractice" covers instances where someone working with or for Children in Crossfire appears to be acting improperly, negligently or criminally. It includes:

- criminal activity (e.g. abuse of vulnerable child and adults, fraud, theft, corruption etc.);
- assault or attempted assault;
- harassment, discrimination or threatening behaviour (whether of a sexual, abusive, racial or religious nature);
- illegality (inc. negligence, breach of contract, breach of administrative law);
- miscarriage of justice;
- danger to health and safety or the environment;
- victimisation;
- the cover up of any of the above.

THIS LIST IS NOT EXHAUSTIVE

3.4 It is important for the person to whom malpractice is reported to ascertain at the outset whether this policy is the best one to use in the circumstances, or whether another policy, e.g. the Child Protection Policy, the Bullying & Harassment Policy or the Grievance Policy and Procedure, might be more appropriate.

4. The procedure

The procedure for people with concerns about serious malpractice depends upon the nature of their relationship with Children in Crossfire - that is, whether they are staff, volunteers or otherwise associated with Children in Crossfire.

4.1 Staff

In most cases, staff should raise any concerns with their line manager. This may be done orally or in writing and should include full details and, if possible, supporting evidence. If for some reason this is not possible (e.g. the manager may be implicated), they should speak to the Head of Human Resources.

4.2 Volunteers

Volunteers who want to raise concerns of alleged serious malpractice should raise their concerns with the Head of Human Resources based at Head Office.

4.3 Partners, external contractors, consultants and others working with Children in Crossfire

Partners, external contractors, consultants and others working jointly with Children in Crossfire who want to raise concerns of alleged serious malpractice should in the first instance raise their concerns with the Country Director in the country of operation or the Executive Director or Head of Human Resources.

4.4 Taking an issue forward

- There may be circumstances when the person raising the concern feels unable to do so with line manager, for example when line manager is involved, or that he/she has previously raised this concern and feels that no action has been taken about his/her concern.
- In these circumstances, he/she should contact the Head of HR, the Executive Director, or if he/she believes that the matter cannot be dealt with within the management structure of Children in Crossfire, the named Trustee (see Section 5).
- Anyone who raises concerns of serious malpractice will be protected from victimisation or any other detrimental treatment if they come forward with serious concerns, provided that they have followed the procedure.

5. Management responsibility

- Managers have a responsibility to treat all concerns raised seriously and will investigate them thoroughly in accordance with Children in Crossfire's values and policies.
- Managers must understand and familiarise themselves with other appropriate in-house policies and procedures, such as, the Child Protection Policy, Policy on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, Bullying & Harassment Policy or the Discipline and Grievance policies and procedures, and in each case decide on a more appropriate mechanism to apply.
- Where an allegation of serious malpractice has been made, the Executive Director & complaints committee (see point 6) must be informed both verbally and in writing immediately (or within 24 hours of the allegation being made) in order for a full investigation to be conducted.

6. Investigation Process

- Regardless of who the complaint is made to, all complaints must be forwarded to the complaints committee verbally and in writing via the Head of HR on the day the complaint is made (or within 24 hours of the allegation being made). The complaints committee will be reviewed annually by the board of trustees.
- The complaints committee is made up of The Executive Director, Head of HR and the named trustees and they will investigate all allegations made.
- There may be circumstances when the person raising the concern feels unable to do so with the Head of HR or the Executive Director, for example when he/she feels that either of them is involved, or that he/she has previously raised this concern and feels that no action has been taken about his/her concern.
- In these circumstances, he/she should contact the named trustee where they would then investigate this as part of a separate complaints committee consisting of 3 trustees (including the named trustee).
- The relevant complaints committee will carry out an urgent and confidential investigation within 3 days upon receipt of the allegation.
- The relevant complaints committee will endeavour to ensure that feedback is given to those who raise concerns on what action/s have been taken to address them within 1 week of the allegation and a definitive response/report will be provided within 4 weeks of the allegation being made. However, there may be circumstances where, given the confidential nature of the allegations or the material covered, it will not always be possible to give feedback on actions taken.
- Some situations may be resolved promptly; others may take longer because they require formal investigation or hearings. However, it is aimed that a response will be issued within 2 weeks upon receipt of an allegation.

7. Protection

- All staff, volunteers and external bodies i.e. partners, contractors or consultants and all working with Children in Crossfire are protected by this policy to ensure consistency and transparency for all those working towards Children in Crossfire's vision, mission and values.
- Any concerns raised will be investigated carefully and thoroughly by our complaints committee. Children in Crossfire will ensure that fair treatment and follow up will be done at all times. Any person accused of alleged malpractice will have the right to put their account of events forward at the earliest opportunity.
- All those who raise concerns will be treated fairly and have the right to be represented at any time by a Trade union representative or a colleague not acting in an official capacity.

- In the event of child abuse, where a family member whistleblows, they may also need representative support e.g. Social Welfare department or selected community representative.
- If someone tries to prevent an individual from making a confidential report or victimises that person for raising their concerns, Children in Crossfire will treat this as a serious disciplinary offence which will be investigated in accordance with Children in Crossfire's disciplinary policy and procedure.
- Where allegations by staff are found to be false or malicious, this will be treated as a serious disciplinary offence and will be investigated in accordance with Children in Crossfire's disciplinary policy and procedure.
- Likewise, allegations of this type made by volunteers will be treated as a serious matter, and dealt with in accordance with the Volunteer Policy.

8. Confidentiality

- The identity of the person/s who raise concerns will be kept confidential as far as possible. If the person concerned has a personal interest in the matter they must disclose this at the outset.
- However, due to the nature of some investigation processes it may not be possible to retain complete confidentiality. This includes situations where the police are involved, where statutory child protection procedures need to be adhered to, or when disciplinary investigations are held and individuals need to make a statement, which may be seen by third parties.

9. Anonymous Reporting

- Anonymous reporting can come in three forms. The first is where an individual completes an anonymous reporting form (see annex 1). The second is where the individual sends a letter or makes a phone call to the Head of Human Resources or the Executive Director and makes an allegation or statement without leaving their name. The third form is where an individual makes an allegation or statement to the Head of Human Resources or the Executive Director, but wants their identity kept secret from those that they have accused of malpractice/misconduct.
- The former is very difficult to act upon as there may be no or little corroborated evidence to substantiate the allegations. However, this does not mean that there is no malpractice or misconduct taking place. All anonymous reports will be investigated.
- Children in Crossfire understands that some people may wish to report their concerns anonymously and accepts that this may occur from time to time. However, Children in Crossfire feels that it is more appropriate for individuals to come forward with their concerns rather than raising them anonymously. Anonymous reporting can make it difficult to clarify the issues, substantiate claims and investigate concerns properly.

10. Feedback and outcome of the investigation

Feedback and the progress of any concerns raised will be given as soon as possible (see point 6). Some situations may be resolved promptly, whilst others may take longer because they require formal investigation or hearings. If the individual is not satisfied with the response they have received they can raise the matter with the Executive Director or listed trustee at the end of this policy. Once the investigation is complete, appropriate action will be taken to resolve the issue. This may involve taking disciplinary action if a clear case of malpractice can be proved and reporting to the police if a criminal offence such as fraud or theft has been committed. Cases of serious malpractice may result in dismissal.

11. Nominated person/s

If there are concerns that staff or other individuals feel cannot be raised through line management and they wish to contact the Head of Human Resources, the Executive Director, or a Trustee, then they should use the following contact channels:

- Head of Human Resources- Ursula Moore, Children in Crossfire, 2 St. Joseph's Avenue, Derry/Londonderry, BT48 6 TH, Phone +44(0) 2871278942, E: Ursula.moore@childrenincrossfire.org
- Executive Director- Richard Moore, Children in Crossfire, 2 St. Joseph's Avenue, Derry/Londonderry, BT48 6 TH, Phone +44(0) 2871278942, E: richard.moore@childrenincrossfire.org
- Chairperson & Vice Chairperson of the Children in Crossfire Board of Directors, 2 St. Joseph's Avenue, Derry/Londonderry, BT48 6 TH
E: chair@childrenincrossfire.org

The above Nominated person/s details will be displayed clearly at each Children in Crossfire office.