



## Safeguarding vulnerable adults policy

This policy applies to all staff working for the Cotton Tree Trust ('the Trust'). The word 'staff' includes trustees, employees, sessional workers and volunteers.

### 1. Aims

The aims of this policy are:

- To protect vulnerable adults who receive the Trust's services
- To provide staff with the overarching principles for safeguarding vulnerable adults
- To articulate a framework of duties and responsibilities that will protect staff in their work with vulnerable adults

### 2. Responsibilities of the Trust

1. The Trust recognises that it has a duty of care towards vulnerable adults. Unless there is clear evidence to the contrary, we regard our clients as vulnerable by virtue of being displaced, lacking significant rights (e.g. the right to work), having uncertain futures and having to contend with the 'hostile environment' in the UK.
2. The trust understands 'duty of care' in much the same way as the General Medical Council in the UK. In working and social encounters with clients, the duty of care requires staff to:
  - make the care of the client their first concern
  - act competently and safely
  - take prompt action if one thinks safety is being compromised
  - establish and maintain good relationships with clients and colleagues
  - maintain trust by being open, honest and acting with integrity
3. In addition to these basic duties, the Trust recognises its responsibility to:
  - act in the best interest of vulnerable adults, as far as possible
  - confront and record abusive behaviour (behaviour that is abusive by act or negligent omission – see below) by staff towards clients
  - encourage all staff to act within their competence, except in rare cases (e.g. when a life is at stake)
4. The Trust is responsible for ensuring that all staff:
  - know what to do if they believe or suspect that a vulnerable adult has experienced or is experiencing abuse

- are familiar with this policy
- receive appropriate support (this may mean supervision or training)
- have been responsibly selected for the work they do
- act in line with procedures outlined in this policy
- maintain a safe physical environment.

### 3. This policy

This policy and the definitions below are to be understood in conjunction with the Trust's policies on:

- Equality and Diversity
- Data Protection and confidentiality
- Child Safeguarding
- Safer recruitment policy and procedures
- Complaints
- Grievance policy and procedure
- Volunteers

### 4. Definitions

1. **Vulnerable adult:** a person aged 18 years or over who needs care and support as a result of disability, age, illness, displacement, persecution or other circumstances.
2. **Abuse:**  
Abuse, as we understand the term, is the causation of significant harm by act or negligent omission. Negligent omission is the neglect of a duty of care. It includes ignoring a person's obvious distress, casually renegeing on a significant promise, and alienating an individual by failing to respect him or her as an equal member of a group.
3. **Harm:**
  - Harms are setbacks or obstacles to a person's interests or well-being. Some harms occur naturally or accidentally, and no organisation, person or policy can protect members from all possible harms. However, the duty of care requires that we do all we can to protect vulnerable adults from harms that are likely to come about through the Trust.
  - Harm may be self-induced, and the duty of care requires us to take self-harming tendencies seriously when we are aware of them. In such cases, collaboration with colleagues is essential, as is referral to outside agencies as appropriate. Protecting people from themselves may push us to the boundaries of what we see as our duty of care. In such cases, it is important to seek advice from professionals (e.g. a psychotherapist) and colleagues who can help us to think clearly about the nature and limits of our responsibilities.
  - Harms take many forms. The following is an indicative rather than exhaustive list:
    - physical – bodily injury, chronic pain, impairment
    - inappropriate sexual involvement (including consensual sexual involvement)

- o between a staff member and a client)
- o emotional trauma and long-term distress
- o loss of dignity or self-respect through disrespectful or discriminatory behaviour
- o loss of property, money or other material resources
- Harm may be subtle and hard to detect. For example, one person may seriously undermine another through condescending remarks or glances.

## 5. Summary and general comments about harm and abuse

- abuse is the causation of harm by act or negligent omission
- negligent omission presupposes a duty of care
- harms take many forms, physical, emotional, spiritual etc.
- harms (e.g. subtle exclusions) may be hard to recognise
- abuse may take place in any setting
- abuse may involve a single act/omission or repeated acts/omissions
- people who behave abusively come from all backgrounds and all walks of life; they include people in positions of trust and authority, as well as relatives, friends, neighbours etc.

## 6. Basic principles governing this policy

### *All principles fall within the generic principle of person-centredness:*

*All members have an unconditional right to be treated with respect. Respect may be subtly withheld (e.g. by casually excluding people from conversations or avoiding eye contact); it is important to detect and confront disrespect in both its obvious and subtle forms. It is also important to respect other people's decisions regarding their own welfare and futures, even if we disagree with them. 'Vulnerable' does not mean 'incompetent'. If and when a vulnerable person makes a competent decision (i.e. a decision based on understanding and the careful balancing of risks), that decision must be respected. Labelling adults 'vulnerable' can be stigmatising; it can lead to paternalistic interventions and result in the kinds of disempowerment that this guidance is designed to avoid. Alternatively, too narrow a definition of vulnerability can mean that opportunities to offer focused support may be lost. The basic meaning of person-centredness is respect for the needs and judgements of individuals. This is rooted in good communication in which every effort is made to listen sympathetically and understand the person's concerns. Person-centredness sometimes requires a willingness to make difficult, complex judgements on behalf of another, for example, when he or she is confused or afraid. This is not necessarily the same as a paternalistic intervention, but protections must be maintained through collaboration and openness with colleagues.*

1. **Empowerment:** There is a strong presumption that adults should be in charge of their care and of any decisions that affect their lives. Safeguarding must involve the promotion of independence and ability to control one's own life. Where adults cannot make decisions because they lack capacity, they should still be involved in the decision as far as possible.

2. **Prevention:** Prevention of harm or abuse is the primary goal. It involves the delivery of high quality person-centred services in safe environments.
3. **Proportionality:** In addition to respecting the informed choices of competent adults, safeguarding responses should be proportional to the nature and seriousness of the concern. Options should be presented that are the least restrictive of individual rights and choices while remaining commensurate with the desired goals.
4. **Partnership:** Safeguarding adults is most effective where individuals, professionals and communities work together to prevent, detect and respond to harm and abuse.
5. **Transparency and accountability:** Responsibilities for safeguarding should form part of an ongoing assessment to identify areas of concern and to improve delivery. Good safeguarding often requires collaboration and transparency with partner agencies.

## 7. Procedures:

### How to respond if you receive an allegation of abuse or harm:

- Take the allegation seriously and listen carefully
- Offer support and reassurance, but do not make promises you may be unable to keep
- Remain calm and do not show shock or disbelief
- Attempt to establish the basic facts, avoiding leading questions
- Take accurate notes and ensure that these are agreed upon by relevant parties
- Do not promise confidentiality if this cannot be maintained (see confidentiality policy)
- In situations of danger, do not confront the alleged perpetrator unless it is necessary to prevent significant harm
- Explain the procedure to the person making the allegation
- Inform the designated safeguarding lead

### How to respond if you witness abuse or harm:

- Call an ambulance if required
- Call the police if required
- Inform the designated safeguarding lead
- Inform anyone who may have witnessed the situation and seek their views or impressions
- Preserve evidence
- Keep yourself and other staff and service users safe
- Record the incident and file with the designated safeguarding lead

### Vulnerable adults have a right:

- To have allegations taken seriously
- To be treated fairly and with respect
- To be involved in any investigatory processes as appropriate
- To receive information on the outcome of allegations
- To have access to this policy

## **8. Duties of the designated safeguarding lead and the Trustees**

1. The designated safeguarding lead will record the date and time of the report, as well as the name and position of the person to whom the report is made. He/she will follow up as appropriate. The details will be stored in a secure place.
2. The designated safeguarding lead must report serious incidents to the trustees and where required by the Charity Commission's guidance, the trustees must report such incidents to the Charity Commission.
3. The designated safeguarding lead will, if necessary, obtain further details of the allegations and the circumstances in which it was made. They should consider whether a report to the local authority Adult Social Services or to the police is required, and/or whether disciplinary action is appropriate. Common sense and judgement must be applied in considering what action to take.
4. Where serious allegations are made, consideration must be given to the following:
  - The police investigation of a possible criminal offence
  - Enquiries and assessment by Adult Social Services
  - Consideration by the Trust of disciplinary action in respect of any individual working with or for the Trust who has contributed to such abuse or harm or neglected her responsibility to offer protection
5. If a serious allegation is not obviously false and there is reason to suspect that a vulnerable adult is suffering, the designated safeguarding lead must consider whether the allegation should be referred to a relevant local authority and must report the allegation to the trustees.
6. Less serious allegations should be followed up and examined objectively. Where appropriate they should be referred by the designated safeguarding lead for examination by someone independent of the Trust, and unless there is clear evidence that the allegation is false, consideration should be given by the safeguarding lead to reporting the allegation to an appropriate authority.

## **9. Designated safeguarding lead**

ALLISON COX CEO

allison@cottontreettrust.org.uk

07523867953

January 2024

All staff should report any safeguarding concerns to the designated safeguarding lead. If the allegation is against the safeguarding lead, they should seek advice from other trustees.

## 10. Local authority Adult Social Services in the area:

### Islington – Access Service

020 7527 2299

(Emergency Duty Team: 020 7226 0992 *outside of normal working hours*)

[access.service@islington.gov.uk](mailto:access.service@islington.gov.uk)

### Haringey – Integrated Access Team

020 8489 1400

[safeguardingadulthood@haringey.gov.uk](mailto:safeguardingadulthood@haringey.gov.uk)

### Camden Adult Social Services

020 7974 4000 (select option 1)

## 11. Review

This policy and procedures will be reviewed annually, and when required by relevant changes in legislation.

Policy first adopted:	December 7, 2019
Date of approval by the trustees:	February 13, 2021
Reviewed and approved:	January 12, 2024
Next review due:	January 2025

