



# Hillingdon Narrowboats Association

## Vulnerable Adults Policy

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## Statement

HNA considers it the duty of staff and volunteers to protect vulnerable adults with whom they come into contact from abuse.

## Introduction

HNA is involved in providing services for a wide range of people. Some of these people are likely to be 'vulnerable adults.'

This policy is based on No Secrets, the national guidance on developing and implementing multi-agency policies and procedures to protect vulnerable adults from abuse (Department of Health, 2000).

The charity has obligations to strive to protect vulnerable adults who it may believe to be abused or at risk of abuse or neglect.

The policy and procedures have been developed to assist staff and volunteers in acting on reported or suspected abuse.

Depending upon the nature of particular services or the requirements of particular funders or partner agencies, the policy and procedures may be supplemented by local procedures.

## Definitions

No Secrets defines a vulnerable adult as:

A person (over 18) who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability<sup>1</sup>, age or illness

AND

Who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against

No Secrets defines abuse as:

Abuse is a violation of an individual's human and civil rights by any other person or persons.

### Categories of Abuse

No Secrets recognises six categories of abuse:

- Physical abuse, including hitting, slapping, pushing, kicking, misuse of medication, restraint, or inappropriate sanctions.
- Sexual abuse, including rape and sexual assault or sexual acts to which the vulnerable adult has not consented, or could not consent or was pressured into consenting;

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<sup>1</sup> Disability includes sensory impairment, physical impairment, learning difficulties, etc.

- Psychological abuse, including emotional abuse, threats of harm or abandonment, deprivation of contact, humiliation, blaming, controlling, intimidation, coercion, harassment, verbal abuse, isolation or withdrawal from services or supportive networks;
- Financial or material abuse, including theft, fraud, exploitation, pressure in connection with wills, property or inheritance or financial transactions, or the misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions or benefits;
- Neglect and acts of omission, including ignoring medical or physical care needs, failure to provide access to appropriate health, social care or educational services, the withholding of the necessities of life, such as medication, adequate nutrition and heating; and
- Discriminatory abuse, including racist, sexist, that based on a person's disability, and other forms of harassment, slurs or similar treatment.

## **Responsibilities of Staff and Volunteers**

Paid staff and volunteers have a responsibility to be aware and alert to signs that all is not well with a vulnerable person. However, they are not responsible for diagnosing, investigating or providing a therapeutic response to abuse. In addition, not all concerns relate to abuse, there may well be other explanations. It is important to keep an open mind and consider what is known about the vulnerable person and his or her circumstances. No action should be taken without discussion with a member of the management team.

## **Disclosure of Abuse**

If a vulnerable person discloses that they are being abused or any service user discloses that they are involved in abuse of a vulnerable person, action should continue as detailed further in this policy. All action must proceed urgently and without delay.

## **Suspicion of Abuse**

There may be circumstances when a volunteer or member of staff suspects that a vulnerable adult is being abused or neglected.

It is vital that any anyone who suspects a vulnerable adult is being neglected or abused discusses the situation immediately with his or her line manager or another member of the management team.

Action should continue as detailed further in this policy

## **Action on Disclosure of Abuse**

There should always be the opportunity to discuss welfare concerns with and seek advice from colleagues, managers and other agencies, but:

- Never delay emergency action to protect a vulnerable adult
- Always record in writing concerns about a vulnerable adult's welfare, whether or not further action is taken
- Always record in writing discussions about a vulnerable adult's welfare.

- At the close of discussion, always reach clear and explicit recorded agreement about who will be taking what action, or that no further action will be taken.

At all times action must proceed urgently.

A staff member or volunteer informed of abuse should remind the service user that the charity cannot guarantee confidentiality where a vulnerable person is at risk of abuse or further abuse.

Volunteers should consult with the staff member co-ordinating their service before taking any action.

Additionally, all action taken following a disclosure of abuse should be discussed in advance with a member of the management team.

In circumstances where a service user declines to disclose, despite some work having been done towards disclosing, it may be necessary to report the alleged abuse without the service user's agreement. In these circumstances, a service user must be notified in advance of the decision to report to social services.

Any staff member may report a disclosure of abuse to social services irrespective of the opinion of other staff.

It is important for staff and volunteers to make written records of any incidents or concerns that they have as soon as possible and if appropriate to include sketches of sites and sizes of injuries. It is also important to make a record of conversations with the vulnerable person using the same language the vulnerable person used especially names used for body parts or sexual acts.

Full written records must be maintained of all disclosures and actions following disclosure.

## **Action on Suspicion of Abuse**

There should always be the opportunity to discuss welfare concerns with and seek advice from colleagues, managers and other agencies, but:

- Never delay emergency action to protect a vulnerable adult
- Always record in writing concerns about a vulnerable adult's welfare, whether or not further action is taken
- Always record in writing discussions about a vulnerable adult's welfare.
- At the close of discussion, always reach clear and explicit recorded agreement about who will be taking what action, or that no further action will be taken.

At all times action must proceed urgently.

Volunteers should consult with the staff member co-ordinating their service before taking any action. Additionally, all action taken following suspicion of abuse should be discussed in advance with a member of the management team.

In all cases of suspected abuse the manager and staff member should discuss whether issues relevant to different cultures and lifestyles have any bearing on the matter.

As an organisation HNA welcomes the fact that people and lifestyles are diverse and does not make judgements about the acceptability or otherwise of lifestyles. However it is important that this philosophy does not stand in the way of the organisation's responsibility to protect vulnerable people from harm.

Any staff member may report a suspicion of abuse to social services irrespective of the opinion of other staff.

It is important for staff and volunteers to make written records of any incidents or concerns that they have as soon as possible and if appropriate to include sketches of sites and sizes of injuries. It is also important to make a record of conversations with the vulnerable person using the same language the vulnerable person used especially names used for body parts or sexual acts.

Full written records must be maintained of all disclosures and actions following disclosure.

## **Making a Referral**

Social services departments have been designated as the lead agencies with responsibility for co-ordinating a response to allegations or concerns of abuse.

Each of the charity's managers has the responsibility of informing the relevant social services department of concerns over the abuse or neglect of vulnerable adults. Detailed referral arrangements may differ between localities and, therefore, managers should ensure that they have up-to-date referral information for their locality.

Managers should work within the following timescales for reporting allegations or suspicions of abuse:

- Immediate if the vulnerable person is at risk of serious physical harm, or a serious criminal act has taken place, and evidence will need to be kept safe
- Within 24 Hours if it relates to a specific incident which is, or may be still going on, or may happen again
- Within 7 Days if it is a more general concern, which does not indicate immediate harm.

## **Support to Staff and Volunteers**

HNA will support staff and volunteers in these circumstances. If the social services department need further involvement from staff or volunteers following a report of abuse, a member of the management team will discuss with the social services department the nature of their needs and how they might be met.

## **Allegation of Abuse Made Against a Staff Member or Volunteer**

Staff and volunteers may be subject to abuse allegations. The Charity will offer support in these circumstances, but the social services department will be assisted in their investigation and the disciplinary procedure may be implemented.

## **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is central to the work of HNA and the attention of all staff and volunteers is drawn to the Confidentiality Policy.

## **Preventing Abuse by Staff and Volunteers**

It is important that any staff or volunteers who are likely to be working alone with vulnerable people are thoroughly vetted before being employed. At HNA this means as well as references being checked there will also be a requirement for offences to be declared and a Criminal Records Bureau check undertaken.

It should be noted that having a criminal record does not prevent someone from being recruited as a staff member or volunteer in all circumstances. Staff should seek the advice of their manager in cases of doubt.

It may be very hard for a worker to report a concern about a colleague to a line manager but, as with all the other difficulties people will come across, the safety and protection of a vulnerable person must be the priority in any decision that is made.