

Operation Friendship International

Policy Statement on Child Protection (Child Safeguarding)

We affirm our belief in the right of all children to be protected from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence, as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989.

We recognise that as an organisation coming into contact with children we have a fundamental duty of care towards them, and we acknowledge our responsibilities to keep children safe.

We have appointed our international chairperson to be responsible for overseeing our international child protection practice, including collating child protection policies from individual member countries, ensuring all policies are available publicly, to other countries and on the OFI website, and reviewing and updating this international policy statement

At a minimum we expect each country's policy to cover the following areas:

1. Naming a person in that country responsible for child protection (safeguarding)
2. Recruitment in that country (of advisors, hosts, officers)
3. Suitability checks in that country (advisors, host families, relevant other adults);
4. How people in that country will raise concerns and how that country's organisation should handle concerns;
5. Activity risk assessment, child supervision and child protection (for hosting, fundraising, activities etc);
6. I.T. guidelines (online pictures, social media, etc)
7. Making their country policy available to OF International and any other potential or actual exchange partner countries.
8. When each country should review and update it's policy.

The information in "Keeping Children Safe"- standards for child protection, a document available online and via a link from the United Nations Website may help each individual country to produce its policy. Each country should also draw on advice available to voluntary organisations in their own country.

We recognise there are different legal requirements and infrastructures in each country. For this reason we will not prescribe what each country should do in regard to criminal checks of suitability of advisors, adults in host families, etc. We expect each member country to research the questions

1. *What is legally required within the country for a volunteer (unpaid) adult to accompany a group of children on a trip abroad as part of an organisation?*
2. *What is legally required within the country for an unpaid volunteer family to accept an unknown child from another family within that country via an organisation for the likely period of time of an exchange;*

..... and to apply those standards to assessing suitability of its own travel advisor(s) and its own host families. Our guidance is:

- a) We recognise that best international practice is for all those "who have the opportunity for regular contact with children, or who are in positions of trust " to undertake a Criminal Records or Vetting/Barring/Disclosure check, or whatever the local legal process is called.
- b) We suggest that where a) is not expected within that country, is not possible due to cost factors or a lack of legal infrastructure in the country, then minimum practice should be for all those "who have the opportunity for regular contact with children, or who are in positions of trust" to complete a "self declaration" form declaring any previous court convictions, confirming that they are not barred from contact with children or vulnerable adults, and accepting that they may be required to have other legal checks made on them.
- c) Where a country does not include a) or b) in its policy, their policy must state what other arrangements are in place to assess suitability (e.g. interviewing potential families, taking up references etc).

Ultimately it is the position of Operation Friendship International board that the sending country's board or committee is responsible for informing parents of their travellers about the child protection policy of the hosting country. Parents of those travellers should indicate that they are happy

with the child protection arrangements of the host country and give their express consent for their children to travel there on that basis.

We have agreed that wherever possible each country will have a written policy sent to Ge Steiner (our current international chairperson) and to Linda Hogan (our current international secretary) by the end of January 2016.

This statement was unanimously agreed by delegates present at the International Meeting of Operation Friendship held on Anglesey, North Wales, 10th April 2015

Signed on behalf of Operation Friendship International by:



Ge Steiner:

International Chairperson



Stefan Linderas

International Treasurer

This policy to be reviewed in 3 years or if there are any changes to international child protection laws.