



PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE ADULTS (POVA) POLICY

Protection from abuse should become an integral part of the policy and practice of all organisations working with, or coming into contact with, vulnerable adults.

The broad definition of a vulnerable adult is:

‘A person who is 18 years of age or over, and who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness and who is or may be unable to take care of him/herself, or unable to protect him/herself against significant harm or serious exploitation’

(Ref: Law Commission – Who decides?: Making decisions on behalf of mentally incapacitated adults 1997)

People with learning disabilities, mental health problems, older people and disabled people may fall within this definition.

All vulnerable adults have a right to protection from harm.

We must ensure that:

- All vulnerable adults, whatever their age, culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin, religious belief and/or sexual identity have the right to protection from abuse.
- All suspicion and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately.
- All staff and volunteers have a responsibility to report concerns to the appropriate officer.
- All partner agencies and organisations must co-operate with each other on issues relating to the identification, investigation, treatment and prevention of abuse of vulnerable adults.
- Each agency has a responsibility to share information on a ‘need to know’ basis so that effective decisions can be made and appropriate preventative action taken.
- (Ref: Inter-Agency Policy and Procedures for responding to Alleged Abuse and Inappropriate Care of Vulnerable Adults in South Wales).

OUR VALUES, PRINCIPLES AND BELIEFS

INTERLINK BELIEVES:

- All vulnerable adults have equal rights to protection from abuse and exploitation.

- Abuse of vulnerable adults is never acceptable.
- We have a commitment to protecting vulnerable adults with/for whom we work.
- When we work with partners, they have a responsibility to meet minimum standards for protection of vulnerable adults in their programmes.

Core Values and Principles:

- Vulnerable adults have the right to privacy, dignity, independence, self-determination, choice, fulfilment and the maintenance of all the rights and entitlements associated with citizenship.
- A person's right to involvement in decision-making is promoted to the fullest capacity.
- A person is enabled to protect him/herself from harm.
- Involvement of others significant to the person's life is identified and supported.
- The response is appropriate and only as intensive as the situation demands.
- A vulnerable adult and the alleged abuser have the right to the protection of the law.
- A vulnerable adult will have the opportunity and right to comment or complain about the service they receive.
- Vulnerable adults will have the opportunity and right to independent advice and advocacy when they request it. This will also apply to those vulnerable adults who are incapable of making such a request but are deemed in need of such independent advice and advocacy.
- The awareness and understanding of other agencies, organisations and the public is raised and with it, a commitment to respond.

POLICY AIMS

The aim of Interlink's Policy on the Protection of Vulnerable Adults is to promote good practice:

- Providing vulnerable adults with appropriate safety and protection.
- Allowing all staff and volunteers to make informed and confident responses to specific issues on the protection of vulnerable adults.

DEFINITIONS AND INDICATORS OF ABUSE

- **Physical Abuse** – includes hitting, slapping, pushing, misuse of medication, undue restraint or inappropriate sanctions.
Possible indicators include: multiple bruising, which is not consistent with the explanation given; cowering and flinching; unusually sleepy or docile.
- **Sexual Abuse** – includes rape and sexual assault or sexual acts to which the vulnerable adult has not, or could not, consent and/or was pressured into consenting. Possible indicators include: unexplained and uncharacteristic changes in behaviour; excessive washing; deliberate self-harm.

- **Psychological Abuse** – includes threats of harm or abandonment, humiliation, verbal or racial abuse, isolation or withdrawal from services or supportive networks. Possible indicators include: anxiety, confusion or general resignation; loss of confidence; excessive or inappropriate craving for attention.
- **Financial Abuse** – includes theft, fraud, pressure around wills, property or inheritance, misuse or misappropriation of benefits. Possible indicators include: unexplained or sudden inability to pay bills; sudden withdrawal of money from accounts; personal possessions going missing.
- **Neglect and/or Acts of Omission** – includes failure to access medical care or services, failure to give prescribed medication, poor nutrition or lack of heating. Possible indicators include: poor hygiene and cleanliness; repeated infections; reluctant contact with health and social care agencies.

Whilst not classified as an individual category of abuse, racial and homo-phobic motivated abuse can take any of the above forms and needs to be noted. Domestic Abuse is a serious crime, which must be treated as seriously as any other crime. Victims of domestic abuse may also be vulnerable adults within the meaning of the Adult Protection procedures.

The Protection of Vulnerable Adults – POVA – Scheme introduces the POVA list. The Scheme acts as a workforce ban on those professionals who have harmed vulnerable adults in their care. It adds an extra layer of protection to pre-employment processes alongside Criminal Records Bureau checks. Employers will be able to check applicants against the POVA list.
(From October 2009, the POVA list will be incorporated into the vetting and barring scheme from the Independent Safeguarding Authority)

PREVENTION OF ABUSE – DEVELOPING POSITIVE SERVICE CULTURES & GOOD PRACTICE

- Wherever possible, abuse must be prevented. Creating ‘safe care’ or support for vulnerable people involves a holistic approach, which is centred upon the needs of the cared-for/supported person. It also recognises that this will only be achieved through effective recruitment, induction, support, training and management of staff.
- Staff are encouraged to be alert and to feel confident about reporting abuse. Staff, who make confidential disclosures or ‘whistle-blow’ are supported and protected.
- Staff are knowledgeable about signs and causes of abuse in both community and service settings. Detailed knowledge and understanding of procedures is underpinned by appropriate and ongoing training and support.
- Thorough and credible records are kept and regularly checked.
- A good balance is maintained between confidentiality and positive information sharing.

INTERLINK’S CODE OF CONDUCT FOR WORKING WITH VULNERABLE ADULTS

Staff and Volunteers must never:

- Hit or otherwise physically assault or abuse vulnerable adults.
- Develop physical or sexual relationships with vulnerable adults.
- Develop relationships with vulnerable adults, which could in any way be deemed inappropriate or exploitative.
- Act in ways that may be abusive or place vulnerable adults at risk of abuse.
- Use language, make suggestions or offer advice, which is inappropriate, offensive or abusive.
- Behave in an inappropriate or sexually provocative manner.
- Allow vulnerable adults with whom they are working to stay overnight at their home unsupervised.
- Sleep in the same room as vulnerable adults on residential experiences.
- Do things of a personal nature that vulnerable adults are able to do for themselves.
- Condone, or participate in the behaviour of vulnerable adults, which is illegal, abusive or unsafe.
- Intentionally act in ways intended to shame, humiliate or degrade vulnerable adults.
- Discriminate against, show differential treatment, or favour particular vulnerable adults to the exclusion of others.

IT IS VITAL FOR ALL STAFF/VOLUNTEERS IN CONTACT WITH VULNERABLE ADULTS TO:

- Be aware of situations, which may present risks.
- Plan and organise the work and the workplace so as to minimise risks.
- Be visible in working with vulnerable adults – as far as is humanly possible.
- Ensure that a culture of openness exists to enable any issues of concern to be discussed.
- Ensure that a sense of accountability exists between staff so that poor practice or potentially abusive behaviour does not go unchallenged.
- Empower vulnerable adults – discuss their rights, what is acceptable and unacceptable, and what to do if there is a problem.

WHAT WE WILL DO.

Interlink will meet our commitment to protect vulnerable adults from abuse through the following means:

AWARENESS: We will ensure that all staff and volunteers are aware of the issues of the protection of vulnerable adults (POVA), the problem of abuse of vulnerable adults and the risks.

PREVENTION: We will ensure, through awareness and good practice, that all staff and volunteers minimise the risk to vulnerable adults.

REPORTING: We will ensure that all staff and volunteers are clear about what steps to take where concerns arise regarding the safety of vulnerable adults.

RESPONDING: We will ensure that action is taken to support and protect vulnerable adults where concerns arise regarding possible abuse.

RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OR SUSPICIONS

It is not the responsibility of anyone working in Interlink, in a paid or unpaid capacity, to decide whether or not the abuse of vulnerable adults has taken place. There is however a responsibility to act on any concerns through contact with the appropriate authorities.

Interlink will assure all staff/volunteers that it will fully support and protect anyone, who in good faith reports his or her concerns that a colleague is, or may be, abusing a vulnerable adult.

Where there is a complaint made, there may be three types of investigation:

- A criminal investigation
- A protection of vulnerable adults investigation
- A disciplinary or misconduct investigation.

The result of the police and protection of vulnerable adults investigation may well influence the disciplinary investigation, but not necessarily.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort must be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned. Information should be handled and disseminated on a need to know basis only. Information must be stored in a secure place with limited access to the designated people, in line with data protection.

CRIMINAL RECORDS BUREAU (CRB) CHECKS

A risk assessment will be carried out for each post within Interlink to determine whether a CRB check is required for the post-holder.

(From October 2009, the same risk assessment will determine whether registration with the Independent Safeguarding Board [ISA] is required. Interlink's job application form will reflect this requirement for new staff and a timeline will be put in place for the registration of existing staff)