

Child Safe and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Framework

August, 2024



Leadership

We are committed to keeping our participants safe.

BB1



People

Our people are trained in and committed to working safely with our participants.

BB2



Environments

Our environments are safe and welcoming for our participants.

BB3



Response

If something does go wrong, we all know what to do about it.

BB4

Child Safe and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Framework

Micah Projects, August 2024

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Chair/CEO Foreword

Micah Projects Culture of Safety

Micah Projects is deeply committed to the safety of people who participate in our programs. While Micah recognises the strengths of the people that we work with, we also recognise that some of the life experiences of our participants make them susceptible to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. We particularly recognise the potential vulnerabilities of the following groups that we work with:

- » Children
- » Young mothers
- » People with disabilities and mental illness
- » Women and children experiencing or at risk of domestic and family violence
- » People experiencing or at risk of homelessness
- » People who were in the care of the state as children
- » People who experienced abuse as children
- » People experiencing social and economic disadvantage.
- » People who have experienced historic childhood abuse

This document sets out our commitment to the safety of our participants and how we make our services as safe as possible for people we work with.

Because of the services we provide, we are required to comply with a range of quality frameworks, legislative provisions, regulatory and accreditation

requirements and contractual obligations under funding and other arrangements as well as our commitment to promote and protect the human rights of our participants. This document meets those requirements as they relate to participant safety.

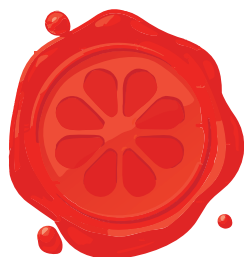
But, we want to do better than mere compliance. This document is the cultural foundation of our approach to participant safety. The principles and commitments set out in this document are reflected in relevant policies and procedures, risk management documents and practice frameworks. Our participants see our commitment to safety on display when they visit our service sites and engage with our staff and volunteers wherever our services are delivered.

This framework applies to all of our Micah Projects people – from our Board to our front-line, staff and volunteers – and across every service and site.

We want to make Micah Projects a place where every person is safe and supported. If someone has been harmed, we respond with compassion and care.

We encourage any participant or community member who has a concern to come forward. We expect our staff and volunteers to do the same. Such conversations can be tricky and uncomfortable, but it is always best to take action.





CHAIR/CEO

Our Statement of Commitment

Micah Projects works to break down barriers that exclude people from housing, healthcare, employment, meaningful connections, and to give people a voice. The needs of individuals and families are met in a supportive, informed and respectful manner.

Micah Projects is committed to the safety and wellbeing of participants in their interactions with us. We are committed to providing safe and supportive environments and a culture that respects and upholds people's rights.

We are deeply committed to the prevention of violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation of our participants in their contact with our services. We know that there are risks of "institutional harm" to our participants and we take steps to manage these risks. We strive to prevent harm and always respond if it does occur.

A note on "institutional harm"

At Micah Projects, we are committed to making sure our participants are safe when they are in receipt of our services.

We note that we work with people who are experiencing complex issues in their lives. Our obligations under this framework sit alongside our 'common sense' approach to supporting people to manage this complexity. Fundamental principle is to listen to what participants are saying to us.

Many staff, volunteers and participants are familiar with the situation where a child or participant discloses harm that is occurring in a family home, or at school or in another context, and people understand their role as our reporting responsibilities.

However, sometimes, people don't think much about the risk of harm to participants occurring in their own work environment. This framework deals with this "institutional harm" – where participants are vulnerable to harm because of the action/ or in action of people connected to an organisation.

Recent Royal Commissions into institutional responses to child sexual abuse have given us many examples of where participants were not safe in their interactions with staff and volunteers and with other participants of service providers.

We are committed to keeping our participants safe and here is how we will show it...

- Our board, managers and staff regularly talk about the safety of our participants and what it means for us and the people we work with.
- You will see evidence of our commitment in our service sites, on our website, in our policies and procedures.
- We focus on physical, psychological and spiritual safety.
- We celebrate and respect our participants, their cultures, and their individual identities, and make safe spaces for them.

BB1 Leadership



Our environments are safe and welcoming for our participants and here is how we go about it...

- We know what the safety risks are in the environments we work in and for the people we work with and we eliminate them as much as possible.
- We make our physical spaces safe for our participants.
- We make our online spaces safe for our participants.
- Our spaces are safe, respectful and welcoming for our participants from all backgrounds and cultures.

BB3 Environments



Our Building Blocks of Safety

Our people are trained in and committed to working safely with our participants, including children and here is how we make sure of it...

- The people joining our organisation know the safety of our participants, including children is our priority.
- When we recruit people, we ask why they want to work with our participants and check their full employment history and references.
- Everyone working with our participants will have valid screening undertaken as required (e.g., working with children checks, criminal history, disability worker screening).
- People who work with us sign up to a Code of Conduct so everyone knows what's in, what's out and where our professional boundaries sit.
- People who work with us get training, support and supervision to work safely with our participants including children.
- Our team are trained in knowing the signs of grooming and abuse, neglect and exploitation and speak up and act on concerns.

BB2 People



If something does go wrong, we all know what to do about it because...

- If you have a concern we have a clear process for people to come forward to talk about any concerns and will report to and cooperate with authorities to protect anyone being harmed or at risk of harm.
- Our staff raise concerns about participant (including children) safety with their managers and in accordance with our processes.
- We learn from feedback, complaints, reports, concerns and incidents to keep safety as a priority.
- We respond compassionately to anyone who has experienced harm in our service and in a way meaningful to that person.

BB4 Response





BB1 – Leadership

We are committed to keeping our participants and children safe and here is how we will show it...

- » We state it loud and proud that the safety of our participants and children is our priority – it is **OUR responsibility**
- » Our board, managers and staff regularly talk about the safety of our participants and children and what it means for us and the people we work with
- » You will see evidence of our commitment in our service sites, on our website, in our policies and procedures
- » We focus on physical, psychological and spiritual safety
- » We celebrate and respect our participants and children, their cultures, and their individual identities, and make safe spaces for them.

BB1 – Leadership

1.1 Our commitment to safety

We commit to being open and transparent and are clear that the safety of our participants and children is our highest priority. The safety of any participant that we work with will be put first.

1.2 Our leaders know about and talk about safety

Safety is regularly discussed at the highest levels of our organisation, including our Board, Leadership and Team Leaders. Through induction and ongoing education, the Micah Projects leadership know what it means and they know what to ask to check in on how things are going. Our Board gets a report from our Leadership on safety concerns and they have high expectations that concerns will be thoroughly looked into.

Our Board, Leadership and Team Leaders know their legal obligations and make sure the organisation is meeting its requirements.

We have a committee dedicated to the safety of participants and children in our organisation. It is made up of representatives from the organisation – the cluster leaders are safety champions, the leaders know practice and understand risks to participants in our organisation and how to reduce them.

1.3 Safety in action

Our policies and procedures reflect our commitment to excellent safety practice and are up to date and reviewed regularly.

On our website and in our service sites you will easily find information about our commitment to safety and what this means for the participants we work with.

1.4 Psychological safety

We know that it can be difficult for concerns to be raised by participants and staff – we strive for an environment where we encourage all feedback and complaints and aim to resolve low level concerns as quickly as possible, and to ensure higher level concerns are taken seriously. We listen to our staff and our participants where they raise concerns. We learn from feedback and complaints as an opportunity to improve services and strengthen relationships. We have a dedicated complaints officer independent of teams.

1.5 Celebrating, valuing and making safe spaces our participants

We celebrate our participants and let them know we want to hear their voices. We know that every participant is different, and we will celebrate every participant as an individual, with respect to their culture, their identity, their ability, their background and their hopes for the future. We know that some people find it difficult to talk about their concerns and we facilitate safe environments for participants to raise issues with us.



BB2 – People

Our people are trained in and committed to working safely with our participants and ensuring children's safety and here is how we make sure of it...

- » The people joining our organisation know that the safety of our participants is our priority.
- » When we recruit people - staff and volunteers - who will work with our participants, we ask them why they want to work with us and our participants and check their full employment history. Everyone working with vulnerable people will have valid screening and background checks
- » People who work with us sign up to a Code of Conduct so everyone knows what's in and what's out and where our professional boundaries sit
- » People who work with us get training, support and supervision to work with our participants and the needs of children in a safe way
- » Our team are trained in knowing the signs of grooming and abuse, neglect and exploitation and speak up and act on concerns.

BB2 – People

2.1 Recruitment and screening

From the moment a person starts to think about working with us, they see our commitment to safety. It will be on our website and written into job ads, position descriptions and application material.

In any interview for a role working with vulnerable people, we ask people why they want to work with our participants and listen carefully to the answers. We explore employment history, including any gaps or time working overseas. We undertake detailed reference checks. We look for red flags.

Every person making decisions that affect or who is working directly with participants must have a current clearance as required by the position (e.g. working with children check; criminal history clearance, disability worker screening). It is important to understand that these checks do not guarantee the ongoing suitability of a person to work with our participants and that's why we do all the other things set out in this framework.

2.2 Code of Conduct

People who work with us understand and agree to follow a Code of Conduct, which includes requirements for working safely with our participants. This sets out behavioural expectations of our team and our people are required to restate their commitment to the Code of Conduct annually. It makes clear that there are professional boundaries we must observe.

Professional boundaries are important because we know that abuse can occur where there are trusting relationships between staff and participants. We want to foster trust so that people can receive the support they need - so we need to make sure that these relationships are appropriate to the service we deliver. When there is blurring of the lines, there can be confusion and this can be the type of situation where grooming and ultimately abuse and/or exploitation might occur.

This is why, for example, we don't let our staff babysit for the children and families we work with outside the service context.

2.3 Training, support and supervision

People who work with us get training, support and supervision to be good at their jobs and work with our participants in a safe way. We make sure staff know how much they are valued and this supports them do a great job with the participants they work with. We make sure people working with our participants and children get regular training on safety issues. They are supported to speak up about concerns. Supervision includes working as part of a team but also, for those in professional roles, opportunities to debrief and reflect on their own work practice.

2.4 Support to recognise and act

We ensure our team have at least annual training on the signs of grooming and abuse. This means that they know what to look for and are aware of the possibilities. We create an environment where they are supported to - and expected to - speak up and act on concerns. Safety is regularly discussed in team meetings, performance reviews, manager gatherings and at the executive and board level.

Where there are breaches of Codes of Conduct, this policy, or the law, there are consequences for the person who has committed the breach. This depends on the nature of the breach and could include termination of employment. Any disclosures of sexually inappropriate behaviour and abuse are reported to police.



BB3 – Environments

Our environments are safe and welcoming for our participants including children and here is how we go about it...

- » We know what the safety risks are in the environments we work in and for the participants we work with and we eliminate them as much as possible
- » We make our physical spaces safe
- » We make our online spaces safe
- » We make our spaces warm and welcoming for participants from all backgrounds and cultures

BB3 – Environments

3.1 Understanding our risks

We know there are things that can make environments safer for our participants. Some of these are the way our people behave and treat each other and our participants as we talk about in BB2. The relationships our team has with our participants and each other is critical to safety – these relationships must be appropriate to the context in which we provide services.

Micah Projects staff and volunteers understand that relationships of trust come with responsibility and possible risks. We work hard to share realistic expectations with our participants, and understand the risks associated with a lack of clarity. Building trusting relationships does not mean that there are not boundaries about what we can or can't do.

We know that our people go 'above and beyond' for our participants (including children). Where a team member is engaging with a participant outside of work hours, they always make sure their team leader knows about it.

Sometimes our participants' living situations and where they congregate are complex. We adapt our practice and continually monitor safety to help spaces be safe for all.

3.3 Online environments

In our online spaces, our relationships and communication must be appropriate to the service context. Any online communications with our participants must be through official channels, unless it is an emergency situation. This could include ensuring that organisational (not personal) devices/emails/handles are used for communications. Where there is a need to communicate with children, this will be through parents and caregivers where appropriate, and can only be done as part of the service and part of the plan.

We will only photograph participants with written permission, using organisation owned devices, not the personal devices of staff. Staff know and respect the reasons behind these limitations.

3.2 Physical environments

We conduct risk assessments on our physical spaces. We think about our spaces to ensure that there is natural surveillance wherever possible, that spaces are well lit, and that there is appropriate privacy and supervision of toilets and areas where natural surveillance is not possible. We think about transporting our participants where that is required and make sure that is done in a safe way. Where participants of mixed ages are together we ensure that they are appropriately supervised. We are respectful in all interactions with our participants and each other.

Where privacy is required for delivery of services, or we are working in someone's home, we have measures in place so that other team members know the plan and expectations about how the service is being delivered.

3.4 Welcoming spaces

We are committed to ensuring our spaces are safe, respectful and welcoming for our participants. We honour and respect cultural diversity, welcome participants with disabilities and honour the individual identities of the participants we work with.

It is visible in our communications to our participants. Our participants know that if they need help or have concerns they can come to us.



BB4 – Response

If something does go wrong, we all know what to do about it because...

- » If you have a concern we have a clear process for people to come forward to talk about any concerns and will report to and cooperate with authorities to protect anyone being harmed or at risk of harm.
- » Our staff raise concerns about participant safety with their managers and in accordance with our processes.
- » We learn from feedback, complaints, reports, concerns and incidents to keep getting better at safety.
- » We respond compassionately to anyone who has experienced harm in our service and in a way that is meaningful to that person.

BB4 – Response

4.1 Hearing the voices of participants and staff

Our staff are trained to know the different ways that participants might be telling us their concerns about their safety. Our staff know how to respond to disclosures and also know when to act on their own concerns. Our staff act quickly and professionally.

They don't have to wait for "proof" that abuse is occurring, and they do not need to make a judgement about what they are concerned about. They raise it with their Cluster Lead and decisions will be made about the next steps with the safety of the participant as the key consideration. If a participant or staff member is not satisfied with how a report has been handled, they are confident to report to the authorities themselves and will always be supported when acting in good faith.

Concerns that must be reported include breaches of the code of conduct, the framework, policies and procedures. Suspected criminal activity that impacts on the personal safety of our participants will be reported to the police. We prioritise safety for anyone being harmed or at risk of harm.

4.2 Reporting process

We have a reporting process so that our participants and staff know who to talk to if they have concerns. We act on reports in a timely manner to follow up, check into what is going on and report to authorities – which could be the police, child safety or other agency. We cooperate with authorities. Our priority is the safety of our participants. We meet any external reporting obligations. If it is appropriate, we will conduct our own investigation.

Information is kept in line with confidentiality and record keeping provisions to maintain the privacy of the person who has been harmed and so as not to interfere with any investigation by authorities. We only share information as required by law or to progress an investigation. We proactively and sensitively work to identify others who may have been harmed or be at risk of harm.

4.3 Review and improvement

Wherever there is a report about a safety concern, an allegation or an incident, it is taken seriously, looked into and investigated and reported, including to our board and authorities, as appropriate. We proactively enable any official investigations to take place and review what has happened so that we can consider whether our policies, procedures, practice and culture need to be improved in any way. The results of any reviews are reported to our board. We learn from any incidents because we want to continuously strengthen our organisation to be a safe place for the participants and communities we serve.

We review this framework and all related safety documents annually to ensure it remains best practice and relevant to our work and participants.

4.4 Responding to participants who have experienced harm at Micah Projects

We are committed to responding compassionately if people have experienced harm in their contact with our services. Micah:

- Supports people who have experienced harm to report to authorities
- Provides access to independent counselling to any participant who has experienced harm
- Provides access to information about legal remedies that might be available to a participant in relation to harm
- Supports the provision of meaningful redress and apology to a participant who has experienced harm.

