

Time for change

May 16

WINGS is conscious of the enormous disruption occurring within the fellowship as light is shined on the serious issues of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) cases that have occurred and been mismanaged in the past.

Many are asking "what can we do?"

For more than a decade, WINGS has been advocating for implementation of changes to prevent harm to children. Pockets of improvement have occurred. However, there are still many changes to be implemented.

Historic attitudes and practices have allowed children to be harmed and further harm to survivors who were not believed or supported. Openness and transparency, victims being believed, and support of survivors on their healing journey is critical.

Although fellowship members may not consider they are part of an organisation, people act within the group with a degree of organisation and levels of responsibility. The benefits of being an international group where people freely move between areas, connect with others with the same beliefs and instinctively trust creates risk. Work already done for other organisations can easily be applied across the fellowship to protect children.

This statement is focused on **child safety for young people in the fellowship**.

Action must be taken now to protect children within the fellowship. We call upon all within the fellowship to advocate in your area for change.

WINGS calls for the following steps to be taken to keep children safe:

- Groups must be set up to develop and govern child safety to ensure that there is consistent good practice across the worldwide fellowship.
- Involve workers (including sister workers), elders, friends, young people and professionals. Heed external advice. Wisdom and knowledge doesn't reside solely in overseers.
- Policies and processes for child safety must be documented, shared with all members and regularly reviewed.

- Codes of conduct for workers must be in place, attested to and monitored for compliance.
- Training and education must occur for workers and elders, with compliance monitored and recorded regularly.
- Complaint management processes must be transparent and adhered to.
- Families and all attendees must be openly informed and regularly communicated with and involved in decisions impacting on children.
- Ensure that all regions globally implement these new practices.
- Voluntarily examine history and be open about past CSA cases that were not disclosed or were handled inadequately e.g. workers who quietly left and married; or were just shifted to another area; victims who were shame silenced.
- Learn from one another globally and share information openly.
- Recognise that this is a new normal that must continue forever.
- Acknowledge that adult abuse (physical, sexual, emotional) is different to CSA but is also unacceptable.

Simply ask your overseer:

- What is our policy to keep children safe?
- Can I see the policy and workers code of conduct?
- Have all workers had training and police checks and is it being kept up to date?
- How do you manage allegations and complaints about abuse?
- Are there current attendees in my meeting with CSA allegations?

Contact wingsfortruth@googlegroups.com if you require support or access to further information.

The below information may be useful for those wanting to understand what others do to address these matters in volunteer groups across the world.

Keeping Children Safe is an international group that is focused on child safeguarding. Its International Child Safeguarding Standards (ICS Standards) have general principles that are relevant to the friends and workers fellowship:

- All children have equal rights to protection from harm
- Everybody has a responsibility to support the protection of children
- Organisations have a duty of care to children with whom they work, are in contact with, or who are affected by their work and operations
- All actions on child safeguarding are taken in the best interests of the child, which are paramount.

They call for 4 key actions:

1. **Policy** (written document specific to the group) that describes how it is committed to preventing and responding appropriately to harm to children, i.e. a documented approach to keeping children safe.
2. **People** - clear responsibilities and expectations are placed on people (i.e. workers code of conduct). Supports them to understand and act in line with these.
3. **Procedures** are in place to keep children safe.
4. **Accountability** - Measures in place are monitored and enforced.

See <https://www.keepingchildrensafe.global/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/KCS-CS-Standards-ENG-200218.pdf>

Another useful resource is <https://www.stopitnow.org/ohc-content/safety-planning-within-faith-based-communities>