**SOCIAL NETWORKING POLICY**

**Section 1: Introduction**

**Objectives**

This policy sets out Seeds4Success’s policy on social networking. This document aims to:

* Enable staff and volunteers to work safely and responsibly with the internet and other communication technologies in their work with young people and to monitor their own standards and practice
* Set clear expectations of behaviour and/or codes of practice relevant to social networking for educational, personal or recreational use
* Give a clear message that unlawful or unsafe behaviour is unacceptable and that, where appropriate, disciplinary or legal action will be taken
* Support safer working practice
* Minimise the risk of misplaced or malicious allegations made against adults who work with young people
* Prevent adults abusing or misusing their position of trust

Whilst every attempt has been made to cover a wide range of situations, it is recognised that this policy cannot cover all eventualities. There may be times when professional judgements are made in situations not covered by this document, or which directly contravene the standards outlined in this document. It is expected that in these circumstances staff and volunteers will always advise the Charity Director or Lead Trustee for Safeguarding of the justification for any such action already taken or proposed.

This policy takes account of employment legislation and best practice guidelines in relation to social networking in addition to the legal obligations of employers and current relevant legislation.

**Scope**

This document applies to all Staff members, volunteers and trustees who work or volunteer for Seeds4Success.

This policy should not be used to address issues where other policies and procedures exist to deal with them. For example, any alleged misconduct which falls within the scope of the allegations management policy requires that the charity comply with additional child protection requirements as set out in that policy.

**Status**

This document does not replace or take priority over advice given by HR or code of conduct, dealing with allegations of abuse, other policies issued around safeguarding or IT issues (Internet use & e-safety, data protection policies), but is intended to both supplement and complement any such documents.

**Principles**

* Staff members, volunteers and trustees are responsible for their own actions and behaviour and should avoid any conduct which would lead any reasonable person to question their motivation and intentions.
* Staff members, volunteers and trustees should work and be seen to work, in an open and transparent way.
* Staff members, volunteers and trustees should continually monitor and review their practice in terms of the continually evolving world of social networking and ensure they follow the guidance contained in this document.

**Section 2: Safer Social Media Practice**

**What is social media?**

For the purpose of this policy, social media is the term commonly used for websites which allow people to interact with each other in some way – by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. Social networking websites such as Facebook are perhaps the most well-known examples of social media, but the term also covers other web-based services such as blogs, video and audio podcasts, wikis, message boards, photo document and video sharing websites such as YouTube and micro blogging services such as Twitter. This definition of social media is not exhaustive as technology develops with new ways of communicating advancing every day.

For the purpose of this document the terminology Social Media is not exhaustive and also applies to the use of communication technologies such as mobile phones, cameras, PDAs / PSPs, tablets or other handheld devices and any other emerging forms of communications technologies.

**Overview and expectations**

All staff, volunteers and trustees working with young people on behalf of Seeds4Success have a responsibility to maintain public confidence in their ability to safeguard the welfare and best interests of young people. It is therefore expected that they will adopt high standards of personal conduct in order to maintain the confidence and respect of their colleagues, young people, public in general and all those with whom they work in line with the Seeds4Success code of conduct. Staff, Volunteers and Trustees in contact with young people should therefore understand and be aware that safe practice also involves using judgement and integrity about behaviours in places other than the work setting.

This guidance sets out expected behaviours of adults who work with or have contact with young people. Anyone whose practice deviates from this document and/or their professional or employment-related code of conduct may bring into question their suitability to work with young people and this may result in disciplinary action being taken against them.

Seeds4Success has clear policies in place relating to child protection; allegations management; use of both personal and charity equipment i.e. emails addresses; camera’s etc. This will help ensure that individuals are aware of expectations regarding interaction and contact with young people.

Staff, volunteers and trustees within their work setting should always maintain appropriate professional boundaries and avoid behaviour, during their use of the internet and other communication technologies, which might be misinterpreted by others. They should report and record any incident with this potential.

**Safer online behaviour**

Managing personal information effectively makes it far less likely that information will be misused.

In their own interests, individuals need to be aware of the dangers of putting personal information onto social networking sites, such as addresses, home and mobile phone numbers. This will avoid the potential for young people or their families or friends having access to staff members, volunteers or trustees outside of the work environment. It also reduces the potential for identity theft by third parties.

All staff members, volunteers and trustees, particularly those new to the charity, should review their social networking sites when they join to ensure that information available publicly about them is accurate and appropriate. This includes any photographs that may cause embarrassment to themselves and the agency if they are published outside of the site.

Staff members, volunteers and trustees should never make a ‘friend’ of a young person they are working with on their social networking page and should not become ‘friends’ with young people under the age of 19 who are no longer receiving a service.

Staff members, volunteers and trustees should never use or access social networking pages of young people and should never accept an invitation to become a ‘friend’ of a young person with whom they are working. Where this has been requested the adult should inform their manager who will decide whether to discuss with the young person’s parents/carers.

Confidentiality needs to be considered at all times. Social networking sites have the potential to discuss inappropriate information and employees need to ensure that they do not put any confidential information on their site about themselves, their employer, their colleagues, young people or members of the public.

Staff members, volunteers and trustees need to ensure that when they are communicating about others, even outside of work, that they give due regard to the potential for defamation of character. Making allegations on social networking sites (even in their own time and in their own homes) about other employees, children, young people or other individuals connected with the charity could result in formal action being taken against them.

Staff members, volunteers and trustees are also reminded that they must comply with the requirements of equalities legislation in their on-line communications.

Staff members, volunteers and trustees must never post derogatory remarks or offensive comments on-line or engage in on-line activities which may bring Seeds4Success into disrepute or could reflect negatively on their professionalism. Where derogatory, racist, or other inappropriate comments are made, these should be referred to the Designated Officer in the Local Authority (formally known as the Local Authority Designated Officer - LADO) for consideration as to whether a criminal offence has taken place and regarding the individuals suitability to work with children.

Some social networking sites and other web-based sites have fields in the user profile for job title etc. Staff, Volunteers and trustees should not put any information onto the site that could identify either their profession or the agency where they work. In some circumstances this could damage the reputation of the agency or their profession.

**Protection of personal information**

Staff members, volunteers and trustees should:

* Ensure that they do not use agency ICT equipment for personal use, e.g. camera or computers unless agreed with Charity Director or Board of Trustees
* Keep their personal phone numbers private and not use their own mobile phones to contact young people or parents.
* Never share their work log-ins or passwords with other people.
* Not give their personal e-mail addresses to young people or parents. Where there is a need for correspondence or written information to be sent electronically the work e-mail address should be used.
* Understand who can view the content on their pages of the sites they use and how to restrict access to certain groups of people.

**Communication between young people and staff, volunteers and trustees**

Communication between young people and staff, volunteers and trustees by whatever method, should take place within clear and explicit professional boundaries. This includes the wider use of technology such as mobile phones, text messaging, e-mails, digital cameras, videos, web-cams, websites and blogs.

Seeds4Success provides a work mobile to staff for communication with young people where this is necessary. Staff, Volunteers and trustees should not give their personal contact details including home or mobile numbers or personal e-mail addresses to young people or parents/carers unless the need to do so is agreed with the Charity Director or Lead Trustee for Safeguarding and, in the case of young people, parents / carers. Where agreed, the purpose of contact should be explicit, and access to such correspondence should be available to managers for review. Staff, Volunteers and trustees should not request, or respond to, any personal information from a young person, other than that which might be appropriate as part of their professional role.

Staff members, volunteers and trustees should ensure that all communications are transparent and open to scrutiny. They should also be guarded in their communications with young people so as to avoid any possible misinterpretation of their motives or any behaviour which could be construed as ‘grooming’ in the context of sexual, financial or emotional exploitation.

E-mail or text communications between a staff member, volunteer or trustee and a young person outside agreed protocols may lead to disciplinary and/or criminal investigations. This also includes communications through internet based web sites. Internal e-mail systems should only be used in accordance with the agency’s policy.

**Social contact**

Staff members, Volunteers and trustees should not establish or seek to establish social contact via social media /other communication technologies with young people other than through the Seeds4Success Social Media Platforms.

There will be occasions when there are social contacts between young people and staff, volunteers or trustees, where for example the parent and staff, trustees and volunteers are part of the same social circle. These contacts however, will be easily recognised and should be openly acknowledged with the Charity Director or Lead Trustee for Safeguarding, here there may be implications for the adult and their position within the agency setting.

There must be awareness on the part of those working with or in contact with young people that some social networking contacts, especially where these are not common knowledge, can be misconstrued as being part of a grooming process. This can also apply to social networking contacts made through outside interests or through the staff member, volunteer or trustees own family.

**Access to inappropriate images and internet usage**

There are no circumstances that will justify adults possessing indecent images of children or young people. Adults who access and possess links to such websites will be viewed as a significant and potential threat to children. Accessing, making and storing indecent images of children and young people is illegal. This will lead to criminal investigation and disciplinary action being taken.

Staff members, volunteers and trustees should not use equipment belonging to their agency to access any adult pornography; neither should personal equipment containing these images or links to them be brought into the workplace. This will raise serious concerns about the suitability of the adult to continue to work with and associated risk to children.

Staff members, volunteers and trustees should ensure that children/young people are not exposed to any inappropriate images or web links. Agencies need to ensure that internet equipment used by children/young people have the appropriate controls with regards to access e.g. personal passwords should be kept confidential.

Where indecent images of children are found, the police and local authority Designated Officer (formally known as the Local Authority Designated Officer - LADO) should be immediately informed. Trustees should refer to the Allegations Management policy on the WSCB website – http://www.wiltshirelscb.org and should not attempt to investigate the matter or evaluate the material themselves, as this may lead to evidence being contaminated or compromised which in itself can lead to a criminal prosecution.

The individual should not be confronted or otherwise informed of the discovery of indecent images as this may lead to destruction of evidence or increased risk to children or compromise a criminal investigation. The Designated Officer and police will advise of the process and timing of any investigation.

Where other unsuitable material is found, which may not be illegal, but which raises concerns about that adult, either the Service Manager or the Lead Trustee for Safeguarding should be informed, and advice sought. They should refer to the Allegations Management policy on the WSVPP website and should not attempt to investigate or evaluate the material themselves until such advice is received.

**Cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying can be defined as ‘the use of modern communication technologies to embarrass, humiliate, threaten or intimidate an individual in the attempt to gain power and control over them.’

Prevention activities are key to ensuring that adults are protected from the potential threat of cyberbullying. All staff members, volunteers and trustees are reminded of the need to protect themselves from the potential threat of cyberbullying. Following the advice contained in this guidance should reduce the risk of personal information falling into the wrong hands.

If cyberbullying does take place, records should be kept of the abuse such as text, e-mails, website or instant messages and texts or e-mails should not be deleted. Staff members, volunteers and trustees are advised to take screen prints of messages or web pages and be careful to record the time, date and place of the site. Staff members, volunteers and trustees may wish to seek the support of their trade union or professional association representatives or another colleague to support them through the process.

Staff members, volunteers and trustees are encouraged to report all incidents of cyberbullying to the Charity Director or Lead Trustee for Safeguarding. All such incidents should be taken seriously and dealt with in consideration of the wishes of the person who has reported the incident. It is for the individual who is being bullied to decide whether they wish to report the actions to the police.

Equally staff members, volunteers and trustees need to be very clear that any online activity they undertake that may be considered bullying of another person, whether young person or adult, or any threatening statements will be considered a disciplinary matter and may lead to criminal investigation and conviction. This is regardless of whether the behaviour has occurred within or outside of work, on work or personal equipment.

**Section 3: Link with other policies**

This document should be read in conjunction with their organisations relevant policies and proceedures on;

* Safeguarding Children and Young People
* Internet and E-Safety
* Data Protection
* Disciplinary Policy and Procedures
* Equal Opportunities Policy
* Code of Conduct

All staff members, volunteers and trustees must adhere to, and apply the principles of this document in all aspects of their work. Failure to do so may lead to action being taken under the disciplinary procedure.

**Section 4: Review of policies**

Due to the ever-changing nature of information and communication technologies it is best practice that organisational policies be reviewed annually and, if necessary, more frequently in response to any significant new developments in the use of technologies, new threats to e-safety or incidents that have taken place.

**Signed:** Andrew Noble **Lead Trustee for Safeguarding**

**Date:** 25/3/21

**Review Date:** March 2022