



# ***CHILD PROTECTION OPERATING GUIDELINES***

**Amar Seva Sangam, Ayikudi**

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## 1. PREAMBLE

AMAR SEVA SANGAM (hereinafter called the "Sangam") is a Society registered under the Tamil Nadu Society Registration Act, 1975 vide Registration Number 16/1981 established in 1981. Amar Seva Sangam (ASSA) is a premier Organization in the field of disability management focusing on rural areas, located in Ayikudy Village in Tirunelveli District in South Tamil Nadu, with a mission to empower the disabled citizens by establishing a 'Valley for the Disabled' as a Rehabilitation and Development Centre for the region and developing models for self-help initiatives by integrating the disabled individuals with the society for improved living conditions in the villages. The Sangam is engaged in working with the differently able and rural poor and promotes the well being of all disabled children whose lives are directly impacted through its Projects. One of the core activities of the Sangam is the Early Intervention Program for children with developmental delays in the age group of 0 to 6 years, besides running a special school for mentally retarded, spastic, cerebral palsy children and to integrate them into our inclusive school after due rehabilitation. As a reflection of our commitment to the vision and considering the fact that children are often vulnerable to abuse and exploitation Sangam places highest importance to protection and safety of children in all its dealings. Protection is a right of the child.

Sangam commits to comply with all Partnership standards for child protection designed to safeguard children from exploitation, neglect, sexual and physical abuse. Sangam continually examines the need to reduce the risk to children in all its Programmes. Therefore these Standards for child Protection are intended to keep children safe from possible abuse and exploitation by Staff, sponsors, and others with whom they are in contact. This policy also intends to increase the awareness on child protection in the community and in the family.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) shall be the guiding principle for implementing basic rights for all children below the age of 18 years. The Government of India acceded to the UN Convention on the Rights of the child in 1992, and has also ratified the two Optional Protocol in 2007

- (1) Involvement of children in armed conflict
- (2) Sale of children, child prostitution & child pornography.

There are other laws pertaining to children in India such as the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) 2000 and Amendment Act 2006 and The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation Act), 1986. By the amendment with effect from 10<sup>th</sup> October 2006, it has extended the ban on employment of children below the age of 14 years in the area of:

1. Domestic help and in *dhabas*
2. Restaurants, hotels and the hospitality sectors.

The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006 and the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 (amended Act of 44 of 1986) also provide guidelines for safety and security of children.

This Policy is in conformity with the above laws, Sangam core values, Partnership policy on Child Protection, Customer Relations Service standards and Human Resource Policy of Sangam.

**The procedures and guidelines for implementing the Policy are outlined in the following 10 sections.**

1. Awareness Raising
2. Program Planning
3. Personnel – Screening and Recruiting
4. Behavior Protocols and code of conduct
5. Allegation / Incident Management Plan
6. Protection of Sponsored children
7. Advocacy on child protection and child Rights
8. Communications about children and Photographs
9. General Confidentiality of child information
10. Contractor and Vendor's agreement

## **2. Procedures and Guidelines**

## ***2.1 Awareness Raising***

### **The Sangam will...**

- promote regular awareness on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), including their right to protection, to Sangam Staff, Board & Society members. This includes members of the Sangam Board, and the Advisory Council.
- promote awareness of rights of children among Interns, consultants, community leaders, community volunteers, in the communities in which it works, including children and the general public.
- ensure Project Staff are given specific child protection training and skill enhancement.
- facilitate in establishing local Child Protection Units in the communities it works, consisting of community leaders, key officials from Government, Medical Professionals, Police officers of the local area, judiciary and Project Staff to help in implementing Child Protection Programmes, to ensure protection of all children in the community and also handle any case on child abuse.

## ***2.2 Programme Planning***

### **The Sangam will...**

- incorporate into its project design activities that focus on Child protection in the framework of United Nations convention on the rights of the child (UN CRC).
- plan programs to reduce risks facing vulnerable children and to address particularly the needs of children who are in situations of abuse, neglect or exploitation.
- design programs addressing the causes of abuse such as threats/vulnerabilities/existing violations and promote responses that support family and community responsible for the well being of children and the prevention of child abuse, exploitation and neglect.

## ***2.3 Personnel Screening and Recruiting***

### **The Sangam will...**

- recruit staff, both permanent and contract, only after obtaining adequate background verification from references and Sangam's own sources for any history of child exploitation, neglect and abuse.
- ascertain their aptitude, interest and sensitivity in working with children and their previous work with children. Prospective employees, Volunteers appointed by the Community Based Organizations, interns, consultants, the Board & Society members are informed of Sangam Child Protection Policies at the start of any recruiting process and they are also screened similarly.
- enhance capacities of staff working with children in projects, to effectively deal with issues of child rights and advocacy, to promote rights of children and to provide protection from exploitation, neglect and abuse.
- ensure that all work and activities of staff, both permanent and contract, supports the protection of all in communities from any form of exploitation, neglect and abuse.
- ensure that personnel exercise behavior protocols in their relationship with children, in the context of their language, actions, dress, and behavior

## ***2.4 Behavior Protocols and code of conduct***

### **The Sangam...**

- personnel including staff, volunteers, interns and consultants will establish an atmosphere conducive for the development of children through their word, deed and demeanor. This includes listening to children and showing respect to them.
- staff, interns, consultants, volunteers and visitors including sponsors will respect the local cultural context and behave in appropriate with children in communities as per the behavior protocols.
- personnel including staff, volunteer, interns and consultants will not allow project children to visit their homes under any pretext without the prior knowledge and agreement of their superiors.
- Project children are not permitted to stay overnight in the home of Sangam personnel at any time.
- Staff will not employ children as domestic workers in their homes.
- personnel including staff, interns, volunteers, consultants and visitors will not spend time alone with a child or children. There will always be another adult ("two adult rule" principle) who will be able to see the interaction. The exception to this may be in the event where personnel are employed as professionally recognized trained counselors.
- personnel including staff, interns, volunteers, consultants and visitors are always responsible for the interaction between an adult

and a child even when it appears that a child is acting in a provocative manner.

- personnel including staff, interns, volunteers, consultants and Visitors will not touch private parts of the body, or the touch, which will make the child uncomfortable.

## ***2.5 Allegation/Incident Management Plan***

- Any incident of child abuse in Sangam programmes directly implemented or implemented in partnership with other stakeholders in the target community shall be reported and managed in the following manner:
- Community level: Incidents such as child sexual abuse, missing child, child's death (unnatural death) and severe physical abuse of a child, to the extent of grievous injury in the child's body that may take place in the target area involving any of the community members including volunteers, shall be reported to the Community Development Coordinator (CDC) who is the facilitator of the Child Protection Unit at the Community level and also to the Programme Manager.
- The CDC and representatives of CPU shall meet the parents or caregiver and the child immediately for obtaining a detailed report on the incident. They shall also be responsible to render support for child's medical treatment in the government hospital and to ensure that the case of the child is registered in the records of the hospital. The CPU members shall provide moral support to parents and the victim (child) to file the First Information Report (FIR) at the local police station.
- If any threat is faced by the parents while filing the FIR then the child and/ or the parents can inform the Child Line or the Child Welfare Committee.
- The CDC has the responsibility of informing the abuse case immediately to the concerned Programme Manager and the latter to report to the Point Person in the Office within 7 hours of the incident and the issue will be dealt sensitively by protecting the confidentiality and image of the child.
- If the perpetrator (abuser) is a staff of the Sangam, then it should be reported to the Child Protection Point Person and the Secretary by the Programme Manager.
- If the perpetrator (abuser) is the Programme Manager, then it should be reported by the staff who has knowledge of the incident or the affected party to the Child Protection Point Person through a phone call followed up by email documentation. The confidentiality of the reporting person shall be maintained.
- Often a child may be physically injured by the abuser. However, the psychological damage inflicted is far more painful and, ultimately, far more damaging to the child. Abused children must juggle a number of conflicting emotions. The most common psychological reactions are

fear, confusion, anger, shame, depression, and lowered self-esteem, any or all of which may cause serious problems later in life if not resolved. Due care need to be paid to these aspects while managing the allegation/incident involving a child.

- In the event of a staff being involved, the Child Protection Point Person shall inform the details to the Legal and HR Dept for appropriate action.
- When such a report is received against a staff/manager, a due process enquiry shall be held to ascertain the facts in accordance with the principles of natural justice. Based on the findings of the enquiry, appropriate action will be taken to bring a closure to the matter.
- Ensures investigation will be treated with care, concern and in absolute confidentiality.

## ***2.6 Protection of sponsored children***

### **The Sangam will...**

- follow childcare Policy and Child Sponsorship Standards.
- ensure Staff members directly relating to sponsors receive raising and training about the need for child protection, strategies to protect children and the detection of possible irregularities in requests related to sponsorship.
- ensure sponsored child's history, picture folders of children are stored in locked and secure facilities with a limited number of people to have access.
- ensure all sponsor correspondence with a sponsored child is for inappropriate or suggestive comments, requests or obscenities. In the event of inappropriate correspondence being discovered, the Sangam reserves the right to decline sponsorship or sever the sponsorship relationship.
- ensure Sangam sponsor and his or her sponsored child should not exchange home addresses.
- ensure Staff to be aware of Sangam's policy on the use of the World Wide Web. Sponsors are advised that information via the World Wide Web is provided as a service and is not to be downloaded or redistributed to another site. Any posting on the World Wide Web should have a clear warning that the information is not to be downloaded or redistributed for any reason unless is obtained in writing from the office. Such activity could subject the user to legal action by Sangam.
- decline any request for assistance in child adoption from Partnership or from any other source



## ***2.7 Advocacy on child protection and child rights***

### ***Sangam will...***

- endeavor to influence relevant changes in public policy that will support Child Rights and provide protection to children through at different levels of administration and Non-Government Organizations.
- Encourage, promote and develop research activities that will support such advocacy efforts to seek structural and system changes for child protection and to promote children's participation in securing their rights.
- collaborate and network with agencies engaged in Child Rights and Child Protection for sharing knowledge and spearheading to secure the rights of children.
- provide support in the areas of legal aid/advocacy pertaining to instances of infringement of child rights/protection.
- share best practices and lessons learned concerning child rights and child protection and disseminate to Sangam partnership to enhance knowledge, Staff competency and ministry approaches.

## ***2.8 Communications about Children and Photographs***

### ***Sangam will...***

- ensure that all communication material on children in the form of pictures/captions are decent, dignified and respectful, and will not present children as victims, nor will exaggerate/glamorize poverty at the cost of the child. They will abide by Sangam communications reporting standards with regards to vulnerable children.
- ensures Sangam's web sites should not use scanned images of children without formal permission of the parents/guardians of the child. Written permission should be obtained.
- ensure child personal and physical information that could be used to identify the location of child in the projects should not be used on Sangam websites or in any other form of communication about a child.
- ensure individuals or organizations requesting the use of Sangam resource such as videos or photographs should be required to sign an agreement with the appropriate personnel as to the proper use of such materials.

## ***2.9 General Confidentiality of child information:***

### **Sangam will...**

- ensure Projects and Offices to protect and safeguard records and documents of children and maintain their confidentiality.
- share Information about a child protection incident shared with people only if it is deemed necessary by Child Protection monitoring group.
- ensure names and identities are not to be disclosed outside or to the media.
- Child abuse incidents to be flagged as confidential and handled with care and concern.

## ***2.10 Contractors & Vendor's agreement***

- The Sangam's Contractors/Vendors make a self declaration stating that children (below 18 years) will not be employed by them for any task. This is one of the clauses in the MOU in dealings with the Contractors/Vendors.
- All the associates of Sangam to adhere to the Child Protection standards to safeguard children from exploitation, neglect, sexual and physical abuse. Also ensures volunteers appointed by SHGs to comply with the child protection behavior standards and a self-declaration from Volunteers stating that they have not committed violence against children.