**An Comunn Gàidhealach**

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**Child Protection and Vulnerable Groups Policy**

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**Child Protection Policy**

*The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 states that:*

*“Each child has the right to protection from all forms of abuse, neglect or exploitation”. The Act also states that children should have the right to express their views on any issues or decisions affecting them.*

*The Protection of Children (Scotland) Act 2003 states that:*

*A child is defined in law (Children Act 1989) as a person who is up to the age of 18 years. The fact that a child has reached 16 years of age, is living independently or is in further education, is a member of the armed forces, is in hospital or in custody, does not change his or her status or entitlement to protection under the Children Act 1989.*

*In February 2011, the Scottish Government introduced a new membership scheme to replace and improve upon the previous disclosure arrangements for people who work with vulnerable groups. The Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) Scheme*

1. **An Comunn Gàidhealach – Statement of Intent**

An Comunn Gàidhealach (ACG) agrees that children, young people and vulnerable adults have the right to be protected from abuse and harm at all times and in all situations. This includes children and young people attending or participating in any event organised either by:

* the ACG National body
* any Branch of ACG
* any Local Mòd organising committee working under the auspices of ACG or
* a Royal National Mòd organising committee

As an organisation working at community, national and international level, ACG offers a valuable service to children and young people. Through ACG and its activities, children learn about how to take part in the activities offered by ACG. They also learn to trust and respect the adults involved. This places all our voluntary workers and staff in a unique position in children’s lives.

There may come a time when a child feels the need to confide in the ACG volunteer or member of staff when that person feels that all is not well in the child’s life. An Comunn Gàidhealach has a duty to ensure that all volunteers and staff are equipped with the necessary information and knowledge to give that child the support, guidance and help needed at the time.

The ACG Child Protection Policy aims to help all volunteers and staff working on behalf of ACG in their communities to think through the issues and develop Child Protection guidelines for all volunteers and staff organising activities under the auspices of ACG and involving children, in their communities.

The Policy will also help volunteers and staff to consider any training issues that they may have and point them in the right direction for help and advice in the future.

1. **Code of Behaviour and Good Practice**

An Comunn Gàidhealach recommends the following principles of good practice in child protection for all staff and volunteers, members of Branches, Local Mòd and Royal National Mòd organising committees:

* An Comunn Gàidhealach believes that all agencies working with vulnerable groups, particularly children, should have a Child Protection policy and statement for all volunteers (including parents and guardians) and staff.
* An Comunn Gàidhealach believes that every child, regardless of age, has at all times, in all situations a right to feel safe and protected from any situation or practice which results in the child being physically, sexually or psychologically abused, neglected or harmed.
* An Comunn Gàidhealach believes that we should all remember that the welfare of the child is of paramount consideration, and we must all work together to ensure the protection of children.

**You should ALWAYS**

* Respect everyone as an individual
* Provide a good example of acceptable behaviour
* Respect everyone’s right to privacy
* Be available as a listening ear and, if necessary, refer for more appropriate help
* Be sensitive to other people’s likes and dislikes
* Try to ensure that your actions cannot be misunderstood or cause offence
* Show understanding when dealing with sensitive issues
* Where possible plan activities which involve more than one person being present or at least within sight or hearing
* Check sleeping arrangements for adults, children and young people is appropriate
* Seek parental consent for photographs/videos

**You should NEVER**

* Permit abusive behaviour e.g. bullying, harassment and discrimination
* Have inappropriate physical or verbal contact with others
* Jump to conclusions or make assumptions about others without checking facts
* Encourage inappropriate attention-seeking behaviour
* Show favouritism to anyone
* Make suggestive and or personal remarks or actions, even in jest

* Deliberately place yourself or others in a compromising situation (bear in mind that letters/emails/phone calls - mobile and land-line -to children, young people and vulnerable adults should be checked for meaning and tone, and used with care and discretion)
* Believe it could never happen to me

All volunteers and staff working on behalf of An Comunn Gàidhealach *must, at all times:*

* Acknowledge the age group they work with
* Never trivialise or exaggerate child abuse issues
* Allow the child, young person or vulnerable adult time to speak and not interrupt nor make suggestions to them which could imply making an investigation
* Reassure the child, young person or vulnerable adult that they are glad she or he has told what has happened and that it was right to tell
* Not interrogate or question other than to clarify your understanding. If the matter is to be investigated further, it will be done by trained professionals
* No matter how well you know the child, young person or vulnerable adult, spare them having to repeat themselves. Apart from anything else, the child, young person or vulnerable adult may begin to think that you don’t believe them
* Be honest, tell the child, young person or vulnerable adult that you cannot keep it a secret, you have to talk to someone else that can help
* Remain calm, no matter how difficult it is to listen to the child
* Think of how hard it must be to say it. Some things are very difficult to talk about, you have been chosen because the child feels they can talk to you. If you show anger, disgust, disbelief then the child, young person or vulnerable adult, may stop talking for fear of upsetting you further or feel that your negative feelings are being directed towards them
* Listen to the child, young person or vulnerable adult - REALLY LISTEN - take what they say seriously. Tell them that they’ve done the right thing by telling you
* As soon as practical write down everything the child, young person or vulnerable adult told you, but remember that this is a confidential matter between you and the child.

1. **Disclosure or Discovery of Abuse**

***Type of abuse***

* Physical - actual or intended injury to a child or vulnerable adult
* Emotional - lack of love and affection
* Sexual - adults or other children using children or vulnerable adults for sexual gratification
* Neglect - failure to care for children or vulnerable adults

***What should you do if abuse is disclosed or discovered?***

* Do not delay
* Do not act alone
* Do not start to investigate
* Do consult with the person to whom you are directly responsible
* Do not discuss the abuse with anyone other than those who need to be involved
* Do not discuss the abuse with the parents/guardian of the child or vulnerable adults (or any alleged abuser), unless guided to do so by Social Work/Police

The only person you should discuss the issue with, is the nominated Child Protection Officer within An Comunn Gàidhealach, or nominated person within your committee who has agreed to act as monitor for child protection issues.

Everyone working for and on behalf of An Comunn Gàidhealach has a responsibility to be aware of child protection issues. Each organising committee should identify a member of the committee who will monitor child protection. That person should be the most appropriately qualified to fulfil that role.

That person will be responsible for ensuring:

* That the Child Protection policy of ACG is up to date and is reviewed annually.
* That it is clearly displayed (if possible) and copies provided to all branches, groups and committees carrying out activities under the auspices of An Comunn Gàidhealach
* That the volunteers and staff are aware of the policy and that they have read and understood the policy
* That volunteers and staff are aware of the Social Work contact within the respective Local Authority
* That volunteers and staff have the telephone numbers of both Social Work and Police to hand
* Awareness amongst adults and volunteers that they should never allow a situation to develop where they are the sole adult in the company of a child

1. **An Comunn Gàidhealach Child Protection and Vulnerable Groups Policy**

An Comunn Gàidhealach, and any group or Committee, working under the auspices of An Comunn Gàidhealach recognises that child protection should not be treated in isolation. An Comunn Gàidhealach will take on board guidance from a range of organisations and will address recruitment and selection of volunteers and employees by doing the following:

1. Checking that all adults, including volunteers, who may have substantial or prolonged access to children, young person or vulnerable adult – such as Tutors - have been appropriately vetted by undergoing a PVG (Protection of Vulnerable Groups) check
2. Ensuring that every new member of staff will complete a Personal Profile Form
3. We will make a request for previous addresses on job application forms
4. We will ask for the names of two referees who will be prepared to provide a written reference
5. We will follow up each reference with a telephone call or personal contact during which we will discuss the applicant’s suitability to work with children, young persons or vulnerable adults. A record of this discussion will be kept in the applicant’s file
6. We will interview prospective volunteers and staff
7. We will note at interview all previous experience of volunteers and staff in working with children, young people or vulnerable adults and ask all applicants if they have any criminal convictions against children, young people or vulnerable adults.
8. A probationary period of 6 months for long term volunteers and permanent staff
9. All staff will be required to attend a child protection training/awareness course as part of staff induction

An Comunn Gàidhealach believes that every child regardless of age has at all times and in all situations a right to feel safe and protected from any situation or practice that results in a child being physically, sexually or psychologically harmed.

If we have suspicions about a child’s physical, sexual or emotional well-being, we will take action. All volunteers or staff are encouraged to share concerns with the nominated An Comunn Gàidhealach Child Protection Officer.

If the situation is clearly an urgent case, the child or young person is too frightened to go home or we have very serious doubts about the child’s safety, we will contact Social Work or Police immediately.

If our concerns are more general about a child or young person’s welfare, then we will discuss these with our group’s child protection monitor, who would then make a referral to Social Work who will make the necessary arrangements.

An Comunn Gàidhealach believes that it is important that all volunteers and staff communicate concerns accurately and timeously.

To this end, volunteers and staff will follow the procedures below:

1. Upon the receipt of any information from a child or suspicions, it is necessary to record what they have seen, heard or know accurately at the time the event occurs
2. Share their concerns with the nominated Child Protection Officer for An Comunn Gàidhealach and agree what action to take
3. Always REFER - never INVESTIGATE - any suspicions or allegations about abuse.

If we have concerns, we must act - it may be the final piece of the jigsaw that is needed to protect that child - or we may prevent further children from being hurt.

1. **An Comunn Gàidhealach Child Protection Officer**

The nominated Child Protection Officer for An Comunn Gàidhealach is the first point of contact for any individual or member of a branch or committee working under the auspices of An Comunn Gàidhealach who may have concerns regarding the welfare of a child/children undertaking activities organised by/on behalf of An Comunn Gàidhealach.

***Responsibilities of the post of Child Protection Officer***

1. Checking that anyone who may have contact with children or vulnerable adults has been PVG checked and, if that check was carried out by another organisation, ensure that ACG is linked to that disclosure
2. Checking that references and self-disclosures have been received for each employee/volunteer and are satisfactory.
3. Checking that staff/volunteer is acquainted with the ACG Child Protection Policy
4. Ensuring that staff/volunteer knows to bring any concerns regarding the protection of children to you in the first instance, and that no investigation should be carried out by them personally.
5. On receiving notice of a concern, or a child having made a disclosure regarding abuse, the Child Protection Officer will liaise with the relevant authorities and submit a Child Concern Form if necessary (attached)
6. Ensuring that any press releases including photographs of children meet appropriate guidelines, i.e. that individual children cannot be identified in group photographs or that photographs of individuals are not named. This is to lessen the opportunities for the criminal practice of “grooming” children for abuse. Permission should be sought for any photographs used for publicity.
7. Ensuring that the local Mòds adhere to their own guidelines and those of ACG in respect of the protection of children
8. Regularly appraising procedures within ACG and to suggest improvements in those procedures to the ACG Board.
9. Keeping and maintaining the Child Protection Policy, Procedures and Records file and implementing updates.
10. Attend training sessions and seminars as may be required from time to time

The Child Protection Officer for An Comunn Gàidhealach is James Graham, Chief Executive and can be contacted as follows:

James Graham

Chief Executive

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**Key details:**

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