



**DECEMBER 2024**  
SAFEGUARDING SUITE

# SAMOA VICTIM SUPPORT GROUP (SVSG)

## CHILD SAFEGUARDING POLICY

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## VERSION CONTROL

The following table pertains information regarding the version control of this Policy.

<b>Policy Title:</b>	<i>Child Safeguarding Policy</i>			
<b>Policy Category</b>	<b>SAFEGUARDING</b>			
<b>Version 1</b>	<i>Jan 2010</i>	<i>Drafted by</i> Pepe Tevaga, Projects Officer	<i>Authorised By</i> President	<i>Approved by:</i> Executive Committee
<b>Version 2</b>	<i>Jan 2014</i>	<i>Drafted by</i> Pepe Tevaga, Projects Officer. Addition to Section 4 with regards to recognition of the best interest of the child.	<i>Authorised By</i> President	<i>Approved by:</i> Executive Committee
<b>Version 3</b>	<i>April 2018</i>	<i>Drafted by</i> Pepe Tevaga, Communications & Networking Manager, with the assistance of Donna Kingelty, Senior Program Officer, DFAT  Updated Policy following review by Australia 's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)	<i>Authorised By</i> President	<i>Approved by:</i> Executive Committee
<b>Version 4</b>	<i>May 2019</i>	<i>Drafted by</i> Shelley Casey, UNICEF Regional Consultant. Updated following review by the UNICEF Regional Consultant	<i>Authorised By</i> President	<i>Approved by:</i> Executive Committee
<b>Version 5</b>	<i>Dec 2024</i>	<i>Drafted by</i> Pepe Tevaga, Communications & Networking Manager with support from Donna Webb, Safeguarding Consultant Updated following review	<i>Authorised By</i> President	<i>Approved by:</i> SVSG Board
<b>Next scheduled review date:</b>	<i>Dec2027</i>			

## **PREAMBLE**

Samoa Victim Support Group Incorporated (SVSG), founded in 2005, is a legally registered non-government organisation (NGO). In recognition of the inherent dignity and equal rights of all members of our society, Our Vision is that all victims of crime are cared for and supported, where their fundamental rights are respected and they are not alone when faced with exploitation and injustice.

As a non-profit organization driven to bolster the safety, respect, and inclusive communal growth of individuals, it is essential that every single member of the SVSG team, from employees to volunteers, embody our organizational ethos.

### **Vision:**

Caring for children, supporting victims of crime and uplifting the vulnerable.

### **Mission:**

Our mission is to be recognised in Samoa as a community organisation that:

1. provides access to an integrated, personalised, professional service to all survivors of crime.
2. advocates for the rights and interests of survivors of crimes
3. supports those at risk of becoming victims.
4. advocates for violence-free families and communities
5. provides safe and secured shelters for survivors.
6. champions the interests and rights of persons who members of vulnerable groups in our society.

### **SVSG is founded on the following Principles:**

- All victims have a right to be treated with dignity and respect, acknowledging their values, lifestyles, cultural and religious beliefs.
- All victims have the right to support and advocacy services that respond to their personal needs and empower them to make decisions that are relevant for them.
- All victims have the right to greater recognition and support in the justice system through equal access to judicial processes without further victimization.
- Crime prevention has long term benefits for the society we live in and working together as a society is a force for making a difference in a civil society.
- We are transparent about the initiatives we undertake and the funding we receive as well as the people we help.
- SVSG accepts the responsibility and obligation of ensuring sound organisational management, financial procedures and meeting our objectives.
- All humans are endowed with fundamental rights and SVSG under no circumstances will violate those rights.
- SVSG is formed by private initiative through the voluntary action of its members to serve and protect victims and vulnerable groups in our society.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## About SVSG Services

Samoa Victim Support Group (SVSG) uses a human rights-based approach to service delivery. The approach includes:

- Support through the criminal adversarial system
- Advocacy for child rights
- Rehabilitation programs and prevention projects
- Mediation Services
- psychosocial support,
- community engagement, and
- residential care, through our campus of hope.
- We are the sole provider of temporary residential care for abused women and children in Samoa. The Campus of Hope offers 7 facilities:

**Sakura House** is a domestic violence shelter for women.

**Ray of Hope**, built in 2016, shelters pregnant survivors of rape who are under the care of SVSG. The house offers private clinical rooms for regular check-ups, which protects them from being exposed in public hospitals.

**House of Blessings** is a nursery and a place where young mothers can raise their children when they need a safe environment. The majority of the children who are raised in the nursery (until 3+ years old) are born from children who are survivors of rape. It also includes an isolation unit and a clinic.

**House of Hope** was the first shelter to be built in Samoa (in 2012) to provide a temporary home for children aged 3 to 12 years old. The house safely cares for children who are victims of crime.

**House of Dreams**, built in 2015 provides a temporary home for female survivors of crimes who are 13 years old or above and under the care of SVSG.

**Asahi House** is a training centre for the children that includes a computer lab.

**School of Hope** follows the curriculum of mainstream schooling. It also offers ongoing counselling as well as opportunities for growth and development to traumatized victims of sexual abuse. It is important that the school remains private to protect the children from public scrutiny.

SVSG remains the only organisation to refuge vulnerable children in Samoa, and at any time we have an average of 70 children in our care.

## 2. LEGISLATION

The Child Safeguarding Policy is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#). The UNCRC is an international treaty that sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children. It is an official agreement made by countries to protect and fulfil children's rights. It has four key principles: non-discrimination, best interests of the child, right to life, survival and development, and respect for the child's views. The Samoan government ratified UNCRC on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1994

This Policy, and SVSG services, are informed by the laws of Samoa. SVSG has long advocated for legislative change in Samoa that better protects the rights of vulnerable people. In 2013, we welcomed the Samoa Family Safety Act 2013: [Family-Safety-Act-2013.pdf \(mjca.gov.ws\)](#), which established a family court and also provided an avenue for protection orders to be filed if a child is at risk of domestic violence. The issue with this legislation is that there is no government framework to provide support for the family court and thus SVSG became involved with the family court in trying to provide a framework in order for the Court to be workable. For example, Samoa does not have social services to provide support for orders in the placement of children under the Family Court and thus SVSG has become more and more involved with the family court.

The Infant's Ordinance 1961 covers subject matter including guardianship and custody of infants, adoption of infants, protection of children and welfare of children, contracts and claims of infants and the legitimation of marriage. Children are either under the care of SVSG through referrals from the Ministry of Police of which the Police have to file for that the family protection order placing the children under the care of SVSG or through the consent of a guardian of the child or through guardianship orders under the Infants Ordinance 1961.

## 3. CHILD SAFEGUARDING COMMITMENT

SVSG is committed to always promoting and protecting the well-being and safety of children. We are committed to:

- Maintaining a caring, protective, and **safe environment** for all children and young people who use our services or are in our care.
- Providing **strong and clear child safeguarding leadership** that ensures that all child safety concerns are brought out into the open and dealt with appropriately.
- Prioritizing **child safety risk management**. We cannot entirely eliminate risk; however, risk management processes are in place to identify, mitigate, manage, or reduce the risks to children associated with our programs and services.
- **Safeguarding in our recruitment processes, including appropriate screening**. We will not knowingly engage—directly or indirectly—anyone who poses a risk to children.
- **Training** all our Personnel to support them understanding and implement our Child Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct.
- Promoting an open environment where children and young people feel safe, **can speak out, and are respected**, and where all personnel feel confident and comfortable raising concerns.
- Ensuring that all concerns, allegations, suspicions, complaints or incidents of actual are **recorded and reported internally and where required externally**, in line with confidentiality, while also ensuring that the safety and wellbeing of the child or young person is protected.
- Ensuring that **all concerns**, allegations, suspicions, complaints or incidents of actual or a risk of harm **will be responded to and treated seriously**.

- Having systems in place for **monitoring, reviewing and continually improving** this Child Safeguarding Policy and its associated procedures.

## 4. POLICY PURPOSE

This Child Safeguarding Policy sets out expectations and requirements for SVSG personnel and partners to prevent any form of child abuse or exploitation occurring during the delivery of our services. It outlines SVSG's approach to ensuring we meet our child safeguarding commitments, by outlining:

- The Child Safeguarding Principles apply across all aspects of our operations and service delivery.
- The safeguarding roles and responsibilities across our organisation.
- Practical guidance about how to implement expected strategies to prevent any form of child abuse or exploitation occurring in the delivery of our services.
- The standards of behaviour and codes of conduct expected of all of our personnel and partners.
- What action all personnel and partners should take if they suspect any child abuse or exploitation within or outside of SVSG.
- What steps SVSG will take if it receives any suspicions, concerns, complaints, allegations, or disclosures of any child abuse or exploitation.

## 5. POLICY PRINCIPLES

Our approach is guided by the following principles:

### ***Principle 1: Zero tolerance of child exploitation and abuse***

SVSG has zero tolerance to all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of children. All reports will be handled professionally, confidentially and as quickly as possible. Child exploitation and abuse will attract criminal, civil and disciplinary sanctions.

### ***Principle 2: Shared responsibility for protecting children.***

Protecting children from harm and ensuring the well-being and safety of children is the responsibility of all those who participate in SVSG's work. Children are dependent on adults to care for and protect them, and SVSG personnel working with children are in special positions of trust and authority towards vulnerable children in their care.

### ***Principle 3: Best interests of the child***

SVSG is committed to promoting and protecting the rights of children, and the first priority in everything the organisation does is the well-being and protection of children. In all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration.

### ***Principle 4: Risk Management Approach***

SVSG recognises there are a number of potential child safety risks associated with delivering its services to vulnerable children. While it is not possible to entirely eliminate risks of child exploitation and abuse, SVSG makes a commitment to identify, mitigate, manage and reduce risks to children that may be associated with SVSG programs, services and activities.

### ***Principle 5: Procedural fairness***

SVSG will apply procedural fairness when making decisions that affect a person's rights or interests. SVSG's partners are expected to adhere to this principle when responding to concerns or allegations of child exploitation and abuse.

## 6. RELATED DOCUMENTS

This Child Safeguarding Policy is part of a suite of Safeguarding Policies, which also include the SVSG Code of Conduct and the SVSG Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) Policy. All three Policies in the Safeguarding Suite are publicly available on our website.

In addition, the following documents (available at SVSG 's main office in Apia and at SVSG's office at Tuasivi Savaii), must be read in conjunction with this Child Safeguarding Policy:

- SVSG Complaints Management Procedure
- SVSG Child Safeguarding Risk Management Plan
- SVSG Recruitment and Selection Policy

## 7. SCOPE AND APPLICABILITY

This Policy applies across all SVSG's sites, operations, programs, and services. It always applies, both during and after normal working hours.

The Child Safeguarding Policy applies to all SVSG Personnel, including:

- Governing Board Members
- Paid Staff.
- Volunteer Village Representatives
- Volunteers, including Youth Volunteers
- Volunteers placed with us through international volunteering programs such as the United States peace Corps, the Volunteer Service Abroad New Zealand, or Australian Volunteers International.
- Interns and Students on Placement.
- Associates.

This group is hereafter referred to as Personnel.

In addition, contractors/subcontractors, consultants and advisors, and contracted Partner organisations (including their respective personnel) will be required to sign and comply with this Policy and our Code of Conduct.

### Visitors

From time to time, SVSG receives visitors from donors, partners, church groups, community, media, researchers, and members of our subcommittees.

Any visit to SVSG facilities must be approved in advance by the SVSG President. Visits require the following for approval to be considered:

- All visits must be risk assessed in accordance with the Child Safeguarding Risk Management Plan.
- All visitors must sign and agree to abide by SVSG 's Visitors Agreement (Annex 2).
- All visitors must be briefed on their obligations during their visit to SVSG premises. This includes maintaining confidentiality during and after their visit to SVSG, and their obligation to act in a professional and respectful manner.
- Visits after 5pm will never be approved.

Visitors will always be closely supervised by SVSG staff and will never be left alone with children.

## 8. DEFINITIONS

In this policy we use the terms child safeguarding and child protection.

Child protection is the prevention of and response to violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect of children.

Child safeguarding is our responsibility to ensure that our staff and other personnel, programs and operations do not harm children. Safeguarding includes our policy, procedures, and practices to prevent children from being harmed as well as the steps to respond if harm occurs.

[All other definitions can be found in Annex 1 of this Policy.](#)

## 9. CODE OF CONDUCT AND EXPECTED BEHAVIOURS

SVSG expects all personnel and partners to maintain a high standard of professional conduct in all their interactions with children. In both their **work and personal life**, they will conduct themselves in a manner that respects children's rights, protects children from harm, and reinforces SVSG's reputation as an organisation committed to children's rights.

The SVSG Code of Conduct, which must be read alongside this Policy, outlines the conduct that SVSG expects of everyone involved in our programs and activities.

Everyone in scope of the Child Safeguarding Policy is expected to follow the Code of Conduct and must sign a declaration stating that they have read, understand, and agree to comply with it. SVSG will keep a register documenting details of personnel who have signed the Code of Conduct.

The Code of Conduct will be included in relevant information packages for prospective personnel and volunteers and will be prominently displayed in reception areas, staff meeting rooms etc. of all SVSG premises.

## 10. SAFEGUARDING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Effectively managing risks to children requires commitment, support, and cooperation of everyone involved in SVSG programs, services, and activities.

**SVSG expect all Personnel, regardless of position to:**

- Comply with this policy and all its Annexes and Related Documents.
- Comply with the SVSG Code of Conduct.
- Model child safeguarding behaviours and act in the best interest of children.
- Report any suspected or alleged child abuse or exploitation.
- Report any suspected or alleged non-compliance with this Child Safeguarding Policy, any of its related policies and procedure, or the associated Code of Conduct.
- Cooperate with investigations.
- Never retaliate against individuals who report child abuse or exploitation or cooperate with an investigation.

Some Personnel have additional child safeguarding responsibilities. These include:

### **GOVERNING BOARD**

- Provide governance leadership to ensure child safeguarding is an organisational focus, adequately resourced and continually improved.
- Ensure that child safeguarding is prioritised and addressed at a strategic level.
- Ensure the CEO (or equivalent) implements the Policy.

- The Board is responsible for endorsing any revisions to this Policy.
- Demonstrate effective leadership by championing child safe practices both internally and externally.
- Review quarterly safeguarding reports, including analysing redacted information from child safeguarding complaints, reports or investigations.
- Deciding when Child Safeguarding Complaints should be investigated externally, and managing External Workplace Investigations

### **SVSG PRESIDENT**

- Responsible for approving any revisions to this Policy to be presented to the Board for endorsement.
- Responsible to review and approve requests for visitors.
- Responsible for managing the process for the use of children or young people's stories in its media, communications, and promotional material.
- Making any required external child safeguarding reports.
- Managing Safeguarding Internal Workplace Investigations

### **OFFICE MANAGER\***

- Ensure child safeguarding strategy is operationalised.
- Ensure that child safeguarding practices are included in SVSG planning processes and documents.
- Ensure all staff are aware of safeguarding roles and responsibilities that are set out in this Policy, its Annexes and any Related Documents.
- Ensure that adequate human and financial resources are allocated to child safeguarding.
- Demonstrate effective leadership by championing child safe practices both internally and externally.
- Monitor, manage, and continually improve child safeguarding approaches and this Policy.
- Ensure that the children and young people who we support are consulted and empowered to share their views about issues which impact them.

*\*Note: The Office Manager takes on the responsibility of Managing the Office in the absence of the SVSG President.*

### **Division Managers**

- Promote child safe practice across the organisation.
- Communicate information and promote organisational initiatives and practices (internal and external)
- Demonstrate effective leadership by championing and engaging, participating, and valuing child safe practices both internally and externally.
- Provide opportunities for training, supervision, and ongoing support for those responsible for child safe practices.
- Ensure the programs and services in their respective Divisions are safe for children and young people.

### **Campus of Hope Manager**

- Inducts all new Campus Personnel into the Child Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct.
- Completes Child Safeguarding Visitor Risk Assessments for any visitors to the Campus.
- Completes Child Safeguarding Site Risk Assessment for the Campus.
- Completes Child Safeguarding Risk Assessment for any requests for children to make public appearances and/or media requests.
- Responsible for Child Safeguarding risk management across the Campus.
- Responsible to ensure that all children and young people receive information about child safeguarding and understand how they can make a complaint.
- Ensuring that child friendly child safeguarding material is available and on display across the Campus.
- **Child Safeguarding Focal Point for the Campus**

### **Psychosocial Support Officer.**

- Inducts all new Personnel into the Child Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct.
- Completes Child Safeguarding Risk assessments prior to the implementation of any SVSG program.
- **Child Safeguarding Focal Point for all SVSG Sites and Programs (other than the Campus of Hope).**
- **Conducting Safeguarding Internal Workplace Investigations**

### **Communication Manager**

- Update the version control table of this Child Safeguarding Policy.
- Publishing child safeguarding policy and codes of conduct onto the SVSG website.
- Supporting the Child Safeguarding Focal Points to create child friendly versions of the Child Safeguarding Policy and Reporting Procedure, and the SVSG Code of Conduct
- Completes Child Safeguarding Risk assessments prior to the implementation of any SVSG program.

## **11. PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES**

Abuse of children is neither a norm or associated with traditional Samoan culture or values. All children, regardless of their gender, race, religious beliefs, age, disability, sexual orientation, family, or social background, have equal rights to protection from abuse, violence, or exploitation.

As a child-centred organisation, SVSG is committed to promoting children's participation, enabling children's voices, and empowering children to protect themselves.

SVSG will ensure that the Child Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct are widely publicised and fully understood by all Personnel, Village Representatives, contractors, partners, children, young people, and their families through the following measures:

- The Policy and Code is published on the SVSG website and profiled in the SVSG newsletter and annual reports.
- Print copies of the Policy and Code of Conduct are available in public areas of the SVSG office and Campus of Hope facilities.
- Full versions and easy to read/child friendly versions are provided to all children who use our services and are visibly displayed at all facilities at the Campus of Hope. Where appropriate, we also ensure that parents/carers receive a copy of these documents.
- Explaining them, in age-appropriate ways, to all children residing at the Campus of Hope.
- Engaging with children, their parents/carers (where possible) to support their participation in the ongoing review of our child safeguarding approaches. Our trained educators at the Campus of Hope will seek the views of children and young people into the scheduled review processes for the Child Safeguarding Policy and our Code of Conduct.

## **12. RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION**

SVSG is committed to only recruiting Personnel who are qualified and suitable to work with children and will not engage anyone – directly or indirectly, paid or volunteer - who poses a risk to children. All Personnel undergo rigorous selection processes to identify suitable personnel and deter unsuitable personnel.

Our Recruitment and Selection Policy details our approach to child safeguarding in our recruitment process. It includes stringent measures to prevent any individual who fails to meet our guiding

principles from becoming part of the SVSG's workforce. In summary, these include:

- Job Analysis to determine the level of safeguarding risk and contact with children. This helps us identify any specific KPIs for job descriptions or additional screening for the role.
- Job descriptions and advertising of vacancies include a summary of our commitment to child safeguarding.
- Shortlisted applicants complete a pre-employment Application Form, which requires them to declare any prior convictions, criminal proceedings, allegations or investigations that could prevent them from working with children.
- We document at least two verbal reference checks that ask behavioral based questions for any roles that work with or could have contact with children (or their data).
- Interviews incorporate behavioral-based questions relevant to the role that test a person's suitability for working with children. At least one member of the interview panel will have child protection skills or background.
- All Personnel are required to undergo background checks, including criminal history checks.
- Employment contracts contain provisions to warn, suspend, transfer to other duties, or to terminate an employee or volunteer who violates the Child Safeguarding Policy or Code of Conduct. In addition, all new Personnel **must** sign the Child Safeguarding Policy and our Code of Conduct as a condition of their engagement.
- During onboarding, all Personnel, including any Village Representatives, Youth Volunteers or other volunteers, are fully briefed into the Child Safeguarding Policy, Child Safeguarding Reporting Procedure and SVSG Code of Conduct by the Psychosocial Support Officer.
- All new staff appointments are made with a probationary period to ascertain suitability and reliability of the new staff member/volunteer.

The Recruitment and Selection Process also outlines the process for SVSG Village Representatives. In summary, this includes:

- A defined Volunteer Village Representative Role Description, with specific requirements for safeguarding.
- Completing a Village Representative Registration Form, which includes safeguarding requirements.
- Documenting at least two verbal reference checks that ask behavioral based questions for any roles that work with or could have contact with children (or their data).
- Interview process, that includes questions that test a candidate's suitability.
- Background checks, including criminal history checks.
- All Village Representatives **must** sign the Child Safeguarding Policy and our Code of Conduct as a condition of their engagement.
- During onboarding, all new Village Representatives are fully briefed into the Child Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct by the Psychosocial Support Officer.

Youth Volunteers (aged 16-30 years) are required to complete a Youth Volunteer Form

As a child-safe organisation, **SVSG is opposed to —orphanage tourism or —voluntourism**. Whilst tourists who want to visit or volunteer for SVSG may be well-meaning, exposing vulnerable children

in SVSG 's care to frequent visitors and short-term volunteers can harm children's emotional well-being and their sense of safety, privacy and stability. In addition, allowing people who have not been vetted and who do not have the necessary qualifications or training to interact with children is a significant child safeguarding risk. SVSG will therefore not permit tourists or short-term volunteers to visit its safe houses and shelters or be engaged in positions that involve contact with children in its care.

Overseas volunteers will only be recruited through respected volunteer placement organisations (AVI, Peace Corp, Volunteer Service Abroad etc.), must have appropriate qualifications and experience to work with children, and must undergo thorough vetting and background checks.

### **13. PARTNERS AND CONTRACTORS**

Any consultants contracted by SVSG will be recruited in line with the safeguarding recruitment processes outlined in Section 12 and Safeguarding clauses are included in their contract/MoU process.

Any partners that we contract with or fund to deliver our work or co-deliver our work with will be required to abide with our Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct, and this requirement will be outlined in our contracts or agreements with them. Failure to comply with these policies could result in consequences for the partner, as specified by us. The requirement for compliance with the Code of Conduct and policies underlines the importance of responsible and ethical behaviour for all partners working with the organization.

We also emphasize our child safeguarding approach with any Partners that we work alongside and expect their processes to be aligned with this Policy.

### **14. TRAINING**

All staff and volunteers at SVSG, regardless of their role, are required to attend induction training, within 12 weeks of commencing in their role. It is mandatory for the induction training to include child safeguarding training.

We will hold separate induction sessions for staff and volunteers, ensuring that the information is relevant for their roles with us.

In addition, all Board members and staff will receive structured annual child safeguarding training, which includes:

- Refresher on obligations under our Child Safeguarding Policy
- Refresher on appropriate professional boundaries and our Code of Conduct.
- Signs and indicators of child abuse, focusing on developing a heightened awareness of potential abuse and identifying red flags that could indicate abuse or harm.
- Information about child safeguarding risk management
- Information about how to manage safeguarding complaints, including supporting survivors.
- Information about our Safeguarding Reporting Process.
- Any relevant changes to Samoan legislation, regulations or referral pathways.

SVSG will keep a record of who attended training, a copy of the training agendas (including when the training was held, where it was held, who conducted the training, an overview/description of the training and a copy of materials used/distributed during the training).

## 15. SUPPORT, SUPERVISION & PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

SVSG is committed to incorporating child safeguarding into all aspects of staff supervision and performance management and ensuring ongoing monitoring and assessment of the suitability of its Personnel to work with children.

All paid staff will receive ongoing supervision, monitoring, and support to ensure that Safeguarding policies and procedures are understood and implemented, and that any problems or queries are dealt with as soon as they arise.

Volunteers will always work under the supervision of a designated SVSG staff member.

SVSG Village Reps and SVSG Youth Volunteers will always work under the supervision of the Community Manager and SVSG Youth Coordinator, respectively.

Child protection and safeguarding issues and an assessment of interactions with children will also be incorporated into regular performance evaluations for all staff. This will help to assess staff capacity and identify further training needs and provides an opportunity for staff to input suggestions for the improvement of SVSG's child safeguarding practices.

All personnel are also required to immediately notify their manager if they are investigated for or charged with any offence relating to a child or involved in any situation which would be likely to have a negative impact on the reputation of SVSG.

### Ongoing Discussion of Child Safety

To ensure alignment, SVSG will regularly monitor, review, and reinforce our policy and guidelines to Personnel. Awareness campaigns, continuous training, and consistent communication will be used to ensure that the importance of the SVSG Child Safeguarding Policy is understood and adhered to by all Personnel.

Creating a child-safe organization also depends on having an open and aware culture where all Personnel and children feel confident and comfortable speaking out and implementing safeguards. Outside of formal supervision and performance management, SVSG will encourage open and honest discussion of child safeguarding and protection issues and provide opportunities for personnel to raise concerns, to ask questions, and to get feedback and advice about how to keep children safe.

Discussion of child protection and child safeguarding issues will be incorporated into regular staff meetings and staff retreats.

Personnel will also be encouraged to reflect on child safeguarding practices by participating in the annual review of the SVSG Child Safeguarding Risk Management Plan, which is outlined in the next section of this Policy.

## 16. SAFEGUARDING RISK MANAGEMENT

SVSG is committed to maintaining risk management processes which help us detect and prevent potential risks before they arise. Child safeguarding risks are identified, assessed, and managed in accordance with our **Child Safeguarding Risk Management Plan**, which is approved by the SVSG Management.

We expect all our Personnel to be proactive in identifying and mitigating potential risks for children and young people. We recognise that risk management is an ongoing process, and as such:

- The SVSG Management monitors and reviews the risk management plan quarterly, as well as

after any child safety related incidents or complaints.

- The Psychosocial Support Officer together with the Communications Manager complete Child Safeguarding Risk Assessments prior to the implementation of any new SVSG program, events, activities or sites.
- The Manager of the Campus of Hope is responsible for ensuring the Plan includes child safeguarding risks across the Campus.
- The SVSG Management engage Personnel in the annual review of the Risk Management Plan.

## **17. INFORMATION, MEDIA, AND COMMUNICATIONS**

SVSG will ensure that all depictions of children in its media, communications and promotional material are respectful of children, protect their privacy and dignity, and do no harm. Any use of a child's story or image on the SVSG website, social media, reports or other publications will first be checked to ensure that the following safeguards have been met:

- All communications will portray children in a dignified and respectful manner and not as helpless victims.
- Children must be adequately clothed, in accordance with the context and local customs, and not depicted in a sexually suggestive manner.
- Informed consent from the child and parent/caregiver must be obtained and documented before photographing or filming a child. An explanation of how the photograph or film will be used must be provided.
- The image, personal details, location or other information that might identify a child survivor must not be published in any form. Photos of children must be blurred so that their identity is not revealed.
- SVSG will never publish a story that may put a child or their family at risk - even when identities are changed or obscured.
- Partner organisations, contractors, sub-contractors and visitors will be prohibited from using any images or stories of children taken in the course of a visit to SVSG facilities or an SVSG-funded activity without the written permission of SVSG.

SVSG will also implement safeguards to prevent harm to children through communications, social media and digital technology:

- When sending images electronically or publishing images in any form, file labels, meta data, and text descriptions will be modified to ensure that no identifying information about a child is revealed. The geotagging functions will be turned off on cameras and mobile phones.
- Personnel must not use their personal social media, messaging service, or web-based forums to share or upload images of children they encounter through their work, or personal information about children engaged in SVSG programs and services
- Personnel are strictly prohibited from using SVSG or personal computers, mobile phones, video or digital cameras or any other technology for the purpose of exploiting, harassing or grooming children, or to access, possess, create, or distribute child sexual abuse or exploitation material (defined as child pornography in Samoan legislation).

## 18. CHILD SAFEGUARDING COMPLAINTS

SVSG welcomes feedback, including safeguarding complaints, concerns, allegations, disclosures, or suspicions (*complaints*).

### **Anyone can complain, including:**

- SVSG Personnel and our partners or contractors.
- Children and young people who are accessing our services or in our care.
- Families of children and young people who are accessing our services or in our care.
- Village representatives.
- Any member of the community

### **Complaints can be made about:**

- Any harm or risk of harm to a child, including (but not limited to) any form of child abuse or exploitation.
- Any reasonable concerns or beliefs about the safety or wellbeing of a child in SVSG's care.
- Any suspected or alleged violation or breach of the Child Safeguarding Policy
- Any suspected or alleged child safeguarding misconduct from our Personnel or any violation of the SVSG Code of Conduct

### **Complaints can be made by:**

- Phone: +685 25392 or +685 7576601. Ask to speak with the Child Safeguarding Focal Point.
- Email to [svsginsamoa@gmail.com](mailto:svsginsamoa@gmail.com). Please mark the email as a complaint.
- Completing a reporting form on our website <http://www.svsg.org.ws>
- Writing to Complaints at P O Box 2554, Police Central Station, Apia
- Through feedback boxes, located in the reception areas of each SVSG location.
- In person to either of our Child Safeguarding Focal Points.

SVSG has introduced additional measures to enable children at the Campus of Hope to raise concerns. These include:

1. Child Friendly materials, explaining children's rights and the process to raise a complaint, are on display across the campus.

2. *Speak to a Trusted Staff Member/Caregiver/Volunteer/Counselor:*

Encourage the children to speak with a trusted staff member, caregiver, volunteer, counselor or the SVSG President, Campus of Hope Manager within the residential care facility. These individuals may be able to address the issue directly or guide the child toward the appropriate steps to take.

3. *Additional Feedback Boxes*

Through feedback boxes, located in each of the classrooms at the Campus of Hope. The boxes should be checked three times a week, for timely response to concerns/complaints by the children.

4. *Contact Staff at the Main Office:*

If the child feels that their complaint is not being addressed within the Campus of Hope, or if the issue is more serious, they can relay to the Campus of Hope Manager or Child Protection Officer on Campus the need to talk to a Safeguarding Officer at the Office.

5. *Counselling and Psychosocial support:*

Counsellors at the Campus have received training about child safeguarding, are aware of the indicators, and provide a safe space for children to raise concerns.

When engaging with children and young people SVSG explains the limitations of confidentiality. That is, if we become concerned for the safety of a child, we must report it so that the child gets the help they need.

### **Responding to Complaints**

SVSG will respond immediately to *complaints* about child abuse, exploitation or harm. We will respond to Policy or Code of Conduct noncompliance or breaches within 48 hours of the complaint.

SVSG will offer immediate support to the child to ensure they are safe. SVSG will seek emergency assistance if required.

During this stage we also:

- provide reassurance that the complaint will be taken seriously.
- clarify the details of the *complaint*, gathering enough details to perform an initial assessment of risk to inform the next steps.
- provide the child (and their family if appropriate) with information, in language appropriate to their age and level of development, about next steps and specifically letting them know about the internal reporting process.

At this stage, and throughout the management of the complaint, SVSG will ensure the child is safe, secure and supported. This includes making sure they understand that the allegation is being taken seriously and that they are not at fault. We will arrange and/or refer for any care or treatment that may be required.

All SVSG Personnel receive annual training in how to receive and manage complaints, including disclosures of child abuse.

### **Reporting Safeguarding Complaints**

SVSG has zero tolerance for any form of child abuse or neglect and takes all forms of violence, abuse, and exploitation of children very seriously. Child abuse in all its forms is a serious offence under Samoan law, threatens the well-being of the child, and undermines SVSG's mission and reputation.

It is mandatory for all personnel to immediately report any child safeguarding complaint or suspected or alleged breach or non-compliance of this Policy or Code of Conduct, or any concerns they have for the safety or wellbeing of a child.

All complaints received by mail, email or through the website will be immediately forwarded to the SVSG President and/or Office Manager, copied to the Psychosocial support offer. If the person who opened the mail, email or webmail became aware of the content of the complaint, they are expected to ensure the information is held confidentially.

All complaints received in person or by phone will be responded to (as above) and must be reported to the SVSG President and/or the Office Manager and copied to the Psychosocial Support Officer.

Any concerns, suspicions or observations that SVSG form themselves must also be reported to the SVSG President and/or the Office Manager and copied to the Psychosocial Support Officer.

A person who knowingly fails to report will be subject to disciplinary action.

Initial reports can be verbal but must be followed within 24 hours with the written reporting form.

Further complaints management and reporting is completed in accordance with our Child Safeguarding Procedure, which provides detailed guidance about reporting expectations and processes. The procedure is summarised in a flow chart (in Annex 3). The procedure outlines the processes for external reporting – including reporting any alleged or suspected criminal conduct to the police, workplace investigations, support offered, record keeping and analysis of complaints for continual improvement.

Investigations are handled professionally, sensitively and in the strictest confidentiality (except where external reporting is required). While our primary consideration is the safety and rights of the child, we ensure that the process affords the subject of the complaint procedural fairness.

Investigation outcomes, along with corrective actions or disciplinary measures, will be communicated to the subject of the complaint and the child (and the child’s family).

To ensure an independent review is undertaken in how these complaints are being handled, reports must be provided to the Board appointed member on the subject matter of the complaint, how it was handled, the results of any investigations and any actions taken.

## **19. POLICY COMPLIANCE**

SVSG is committed to safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of all children associated with our services. Any behaviour or conduct that contravenes our Child Safeguarding Policy is subject to our disciplinary process, which could lead up to and include termination of employment.

Personnel and Partners will be held accountable for complying with this Policy, and its associated Code of Conduct, through Employee Contracts, Partner Agreements and Memorandum of Understanding.

## **20. REVIEW AND CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT**

This **Child Safeguarding Policy** is reviewed at a minimum of every three years. The review process will seek feedback from Personnel, partners, children, and young people and use their opinions to develop and strengthen future versions of this Child Safeguarding Policy.

The SVSG Board review every report and investigation to assess whether this Policy and the Reporting Procedure have been consistently followed. Lessons learned from this process inform lessons learned from these assessments.

We will also review this Policy following child safeguarding incidents or near misses. Changes may also be made to the policy following key legislative change or emerging best practice standards.

Any amendments to the Policy must be approved by the President of Samoa Victim Support Group and endorsed by the Chair of the Board.

## **21. POLICY DECLARATION**

I acknowledge that I have read, understand, and agree to comply with SVSG Child Safeguarding Policy, Associated Policy and Procedures, and Code of Conduct.

I know what to expect if a report is made by me or an allegation is made against me. I understand and agree that a breach of the Policy may provide grounds for my employment/engagement with SVSG to be terminated. I also understand that a breach of the Policy could result in criminal prosecution.

Name	
Position	
Signed	
Date	

## ANNEX 1: DEFINITIONS

<p><b>Authorised counselling agency</b></p>	<p>means any organisation, association, incorporated body, person or group of persons or agency with qualified counsellors providing counselling to victims and perpetrators of domestic violence approved by the Minister of Justice and Courts Administration.</p> <p><i>(Family Safety Act 2013)</i></p>
<p><b>Behavioural- based interview questions</b></p>	<p>Interview questions that probe the applicant ‘s past behaviour in specific situations relevant to the position. Behavioural-based questions give interviewers additional information about the applicant ‘s suitability to work with children.</p>
<p><b>Changes in circumstances</b></p>	<p>Personnel should report the following changes in circumstances to management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- involvement in criminal activity</li> <li>- disciplinary procedures and criminal or civil court proceedings relating to child exploitation and abuse.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Child or children</b></p>	<p>In accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, <b>‘child’ means every human being under the age of 18</b> unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.</p> <p><b>For the purposes of this policy, SVSG considers a child to be a person under the age of 18 years.</b></p>
<p><b>Child Abuse</b></p>	<p>Child abuse is an act of omission or commission that endangers the physical or emotional development or well-being of a child. It can be a single act but more often takes place over time. Child abuse includes physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation.</p> <p><i>Ref: Samoa National Child Care and Protection Policy 2020 -2030</i></p> <hr/> <p><b>Forms of Child Abuse</b></p> <p><u>Emotional Abuse</u></p> <p>This means a single act or omission or series of acts causing or likely to cause mental or emotional suffering, including patterns of belittling, denigrating, threatening, scaring, ridiculing or other non-physical forms of degrading or rejecting treatment. Examples include cursing; making a child feel unloved, unworthy, inadequate, or frightened; blaming, ridiculing, or humiliating a child; discrimination; exclusion of a particular child; unrealistic expectations of a child; and threatening or corrupting a child.</p> <p><i>Samoa Inter-Agency Essential Services Guide for Responding to Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection</i></p> <hr/> <p><u>Physical Abuse</u></p> <p>This means any act of violence or maltreatment that results in physical wounds or bodily injury to the child. It may consist of a single incident or repeated incidents. Examples are kicking, punching, shoving, shaking, throwing, strapping, slapping causing injury, pinching leaving bruises, or choosing not to assist a child when a situation is causing them physical pain. Indicators of child physical abuse include broken bones, multiple bruising, and cuts.</p> <p><i>Samoa Inter-Agency Essential Services Guide for Responding to Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection</i></p>

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### Sexual Abuse

Means engaging in sexual activity with a child. Child sexual abuse can take the form of contact acts such as kissing, touching a child in a sexual manner (fondling or masturbation), penetration of the vagina or anus either by fingers, penis, or any other object, or making a child perform these acts on themselves or anyone else.

Non-contact acts of sexual abuse can include sexual harassment or unwanted sexual comments, flashing, exposure to pornography, having a child pose or perform in a sexual manner, grooming and communication of graphic sexual matters using technology, including but not limited to instant messenger, text messages and emails.

*(Adapted from Samoa Inter-Agency Essential Services Guide for Responding to Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection)*

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### Sexual Exploitation

Committed by a person in a position of power, influence or control over another more vulnerable person, sexual exploitation is the abuse of that power and the vulnerable person's trust for sexual purposes; this includes profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. Acts of sexual exploitation include trafficking, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy or sexual slavery/servitude.

*See the Crimes Act 2013*

#### *Child Sexual Exploitation*

Two types of child sexual exploitation have been identified:

1. child prostitution: engaging a child in sexual activity in exchange for cash, gifts, favours, or any other form of payment.
2. child pornography\*: any depiction of a child engaged in sexually explicit conduct or depiction of the sexual parts of a child for sexual purposes.

Ref: Samoa Inter-Agency Essential Services Guide for Responding to Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection

\*Note that SVSG does not use the term child pornography. Instead, we use the term child sexual abuse material, however this is the term used in the Essential Services Guide.

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### Neglect

Failure by a parent/caregiver to provide for a child's basic physical, intellectual, emotional, or social needs, including any special needs in relation to disability, such that it is likely to cause harm to the child's development. This includes an inability to respond emotionally to a child, child abandonment, depriving or withholding physical contact, the failure to provide psychological nurturing and treating one child differently from another.

*Ref: National Samoa Child Care and Protection Policy and Plan of Action 2019-2024.*

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### Family / Domestic Violence

involves violent, abusive, or intimidating behaviour carried out by an adult against a partner or former partner to control and dominate that person. Domestic violence causes fear and physical and/or psychological harm. Living with domestic violence has a profound effect on children and young people and may constitute a form of child abuse.

*Ref: National Samoa Child Care and Protection Policy and Plan of Action 2019-2024.*

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<b>Child exploitation</b>	<p>One or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- committing or coercing another person to commit an act or acts of <b>abuse</b> against a child</li> <li>- possessing, controlling, producing, distributing, obtaining or transmitting <b>child exploitation material</b></li> <li>- committing or coercing another person to commit an act or acts of <b>grooming</b> or <b>online grooming</b></li> <li>- using a minor for profit, labour, sexual gratification, or some other personal or financial advantage</li> </ul>
<b>Child pornography</b>	<p>In accordance with Samoa ‘s Crimes Act 2013, child pornography‘ means pornographic material that depicts, presents or represents (i) a child engaged in sexually explicit conduct; or (ii) a person appearing to be a child engaged in sexually explicit conduct; or (iii) images representing a child engaged in sexually explicit conduct; and includes any audio, visual or text pornographic material. It is a crime under Samoan law to sell, distribute, exhibit, print, publish or knowingly possess child pornography.</p> <p>SVSG refers to child pornography as —child sexual abuse materiall.</p>
<b>Child protection</b>	<p>An activity or initiative designed to protect children from any form of harm, particularly that arising from child exploitation and abuse.</p>
<b>Child safeguarding</b>	<p>The broad obligation on personnel and partners to ensure that the design and delivery of SVSG programs and organisational operations do not expose children to adverse impacts, including the risk of abuse and exploitation, and that any concerns about children ‘s safety within the communities where they work are appropriately reported.</p>
<b>Contact with children</b>	<p>Working on an activity or in a position that involves or may involve contact with children, either under the position description or due to the nature of the work environment (also see Working with children definition)</p>
<b>Contractor</b>	<p>The individuals engaged to perform specific services under a contract. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) specified personnel nominated in a head agreement with an intermediary company (the contractor) to which payment is made; or</li> <li>(b) if the person performing the service is the service provider, he/she is an individual contractor</li> </ul>
<b>DFAT</b>	<p>Australia ‘s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade</p>
<b>Disclosure</b>	<p><b>Disclosures</b> may be when a child tells us they have been harmed or are concerned about being harmed. A disclosure may also be when a child tells us that they know of someone who has been harmed or abused, when an adult tells us that a child has been harmed or abused or that they are concerned that a child may be at risk of harm.</p>
<b>Grooming</b>	<p>Generally, refers to behaviour that makes it easier for an offender to procure a child for sexual activity. For example, an offender might build a relationship of trust with the child, and then seek to sexualise that relationship (for example by encouraging romantic feelings or exposing the child to sexual concepts through pornography). Grooming can take place through in-person contact, or online (see online child solicitation).</p>

<b>Harm</b>	Any detrimental effect on a child ‘s physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing. Harm may be caused by financial, physical or emotional abuse, neglect, and/or sexual abuse or exploitation whether intended or unintended
<b>Informed consent</b>	Ensures the child and the parent or guardian understand the implications, purpose and potential uses of photographs or videos
<b>Online Child Solicitation / Grooming</b>	The act of sending an electronic message to a recipient who is a child (or the sender believes to be a child), with the intention of procuring the child to engage in or submit to sexual activity with another person, including but not necessarily the sender; or of sending an electronic message with indecent content to a recipient who the sender believes to be a child. It is a crime under the Crimes Act 2013 to use information and communication technology to propose to a child to meet him or her, with the intent of committing an offence and where such proposal has been followed by material acts leading to such meeting.
<b>Personnel</b>	<p>Personnel are either employed by an organisation, engaged by an organisation on a subcontract basis, or engaged by an organisation on a voluntary or unpaid basis.</p> <p>For the purposes of the SVSG Child Safeguarding Policy, ‘personnel’ includes SVSG board members, executive committee members, and paid staff,</p> <p>Other Personnel include, volunteer village representatives, youth volunteers, other volunteers, consultants, interns, associates.</p>
<b>Police clearance certificate</b>	The certificate showing the results of a criminal record check, which is issued by the police or other authority responsible for conducting such checks
<b>Policy non-compliance</b>	The failure to abide by SVSG ‘s Child Safeguarding Policy, and DFAT’s Child Protection Policy if it is a DFAT funded activity
<b>SVSG</b>	Samoa Victim Support Group
<b>SVSG Village Representative</b>	Volunteer advocates for SVSG support services in their community. The main role of the Village Representative is to refer alleged incidents of violence or requests for assistance to SVSG. They also provide advocacy and support for SVSG services within their community.
<b>Statutory Declaration</b>	A written statement which you sign and declare to be true before an authorized witness
<b>Working with children</b>	Working with children means being engaged in an activity with a child where the contact would reasonably be expected as a normal part of the activity, and the contact is not incidental to the activity. Working with children includes volunteering or other unpaid works (also see Contact with Children definition).

## ANNEX 2: SVSG Visitors Agreement

Thank you for your interest in SVSG and our work. SVSG is committed to safeguarding the well-being of all children involved in our programs, services, and activities. To ensure the full protection of vulnerable children in our care, we ask you to read this Agreement carefully.

In order to keep children safe, all visitors to SVSG programs and facilities are required to comply with the following safeguards.

### Visitors must always:

- Have prior approval from the SVSG President before the visit.
- Be accompanied by an SVSG staff members at all times.
- Treat all children with respect, dignity, and compassion.
- Report any child safeguarding concerns, complaints or disclosures using the SVSG Safeguarding Reporting Procedure.
- Leave all phones, cameras and recording devices at the gate.

### Visitors must never:

- Leave the common areas of our safe houses or shelters. This is to protect the privacy and dignity of children in our care.
- Have intimate contact with children (kissing, hugging, etc.).
- Use inappropriate language – whether of an offensive, demeaning, abusive, threatening or sexual nature – when speaking with or whilst in the presence of a child.
- Give money or gifts directly to children in our care. Visitors wishing to make donations of money or gifts may do so through SVSG management.
- Share verbally or through written or electronic means, any information about cases discussed or overheard during their time in the office or shelters, or any information that might disclose the identity of a child in our care. This includes photographs and other related documents.
- Take photos or videos or collect stories or take interviews of children in our care, without the express, written authorization of the SVSG President. Authorization will only be considered in accordance with an approval process outlined in our Risk Management Plan.

This Agreement established herein between Samoa Victim Support Group (SVSG) and the Visitor will be effective upon signing this Agreement by the SVSG President and the Visitor. By signing this agreement, you agree to be bound by this Agreement and accept the consequences of legal action that may be taken by SVSG due to any breach of this Agreement.

SVSG is registered as an Incorporated Non-Government Organisation with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour in Samoa. It is therefore a legal entity and can sue and be sued in its name – Samoa Victim Support Group.

_____ SVSG President Signature	_____ Signature of Visitor
_____ Print Name	_____ Print Name
_____ Date	_____ Date

## ANNEX 3: COMPLAINT & REPORTING FLOWCHART

