**10/20/2023 Board Approved Safeguarding Policy for SVDP Seattle/King County**

**Effective Date: November 1st 2023**

**Purpose and Scope**

This policy covers the protection of those served by The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul of Seattle/ King (SVDPS/KC County. It pertains to the members of Vincentian conferences and other volunteers that serve our neighbors under the auspices of SVDPS/KC.

**Preamble**

**What is Safeguarding?**

**Safeguarding** is the act of protecting from harm people who are vulnerable. It involves reducing and preventing risks of harm and working to ensure that vulnerable individuals and communities are safe and empowered. **Safeguarding** involves recognizing the human rights of all persons and working to ensure that those rights are not violated.

In the context of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, **safeguarding** involves working to ensure that in seeking to assist people in need, we are committed to do no harm to their health and wellbeing or put them at risk of abuse or neglect. This policy seeks to address **safeguarding** as it applies to all vulnerable people, **that include, but are not limited to**, children and young people, the elderly, anyone living in poverty or at risk. We acknowledge that people can potentially be vulnerable to abuse or neglect by reason of their age, physical or mental disability, or poverty and reliance on support services.

As Vincentians, the nature of our work means that there is often a power imbalance when we encounter a person in need; a person’s circumstances, whereby they are seeking help, and our position as a provider of financial, material, or personal support, creates a risk and renders vulnerable the person seeking help. In committing to safeguarding, we are not just seeking to ensure that abuse is prevented, reported, and acted upon; we are also seeking to create safe and respectful environments.

# Why is SVdP Committed to Safeguarding?

*“The protection of minors and vulnerable persons is an integral part of the Gospel message that the Church and all its members are called to proclaim throughout the world. Christ himself, in fact, has entrusted us with the care and protection of the weakest and defenseless: “whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me” (Mt 18:5). Therefore, we all have the duty to welcome openheartedly minors and vulnerable persons and to create a safe environment for them, with their interests as a priority. This requires a continuous and profound conversion, in which personal holiness and moral commitment come together to promote the credibility of the Gospel proclamation and to renew the educational mission of the Church--*Pope Francis

Apostolic letter issued *motu proprio* on the protection of minors and vulnerable persons 26 March 2019

The National Council and its members look to our nation’s Bishops for leadership guidance in the area of Safeguarding to create a safe environment for all, which can be found here: <https://www.usccb.org/topics/catholic-safeguards>

# The Rule, Our Mission, and Our Value

Charity as lived by the Society’s over 800,000 volunteers throughout the world is inspired by the example of St. Vincent de Paul, a great apostle of charity in his day and the Society’s patron saint. SVdP members live the Gospel message by serving Christ in the poor. Inspired by the spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul, members strive to deepen their faith by meeting real needs, undertaking concrete action in neighborhoods, villages, and communities. In that work, we are called to embody these values:

**Empathy** — to listen to and understand those we assist and to work together as members to support those in need.

**Simplicity and Humility** — treating each other, and those we assist, as equals in a fraternal relationship.

**Justice** — respecting people’s convictions and beliefs and helping them to regain and retain their autonomy and human dignity.

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**Definitions**

**How is Abuse Defined?**

Abuse refers to an intentional act committed by a person in a position of trust which harms or threatens to harm a minor’s (under age 18) or vulnerable adult’s physical or mental welfare.

**What are the 4 basic types of Abuse?**

1. **Physical Abuse** - occurs when an adult injures a child or vulnerable adult, and it is not an accident.
2. **Neglect** - is any maltreatment or negligence that harms a child’s or vulnerable adult’s health, welfare, or safety.
3. **Emotional Abuse** - occurs when an adult subjects a child or vulnerable adult to verbal assault or emotional cruelty.
4. **Sexual Abuse** - involves sexual contact between a child or vulnerable adult and an adult or significantly older, more powerful person.
   1. This may include direct sexual contact as well as other exploitive behaviors such as:
      1. Inappropriate verbal stimulation
      2. Taking or showing sexually explicit photographs of or to a child or youth
      3. Exposing a child or youth to pornography or adult sexual activity

**Who are Vulnerable Adults?**

1. Adults over the age of 60 who are unable to care for themselves.
2. Certain individuals with developmental disabilities.
3. Anyone over 18 who has a legal guardian.
4. Individuals receiving in-home care through a licensed health, hospice, or home health care agency or from an aide hired on their own.
5. People dealing with significant medical conditions.
6. Persons who are immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and those displaced by wars.
7. Individuals experiencing homelessness or the threat of homelessness.
8. Survivors of violence.
9. People who have been formerly incarcerated.

# SVDP Seattle/ King County Policy on Safeguarding

1. The Seattle/King County District Council will establish a **Safeguarding Oversight Committee** **consisting of three Vincentians and up to two staff members.**
   1. Vincentian members will be appointed by the board, but only one member MUST be a member of the board. **Members must have completed the required Vincentian trainings of Ozanam Orientation, Rendu Orientation, Virtus required trainings, as well as SVdP’s Background check and Confidentiality Agreement.**
   2. Staff members will be appointed by the Executive Director
   3. The charge of the Safeguarding Oversight Committee shall be:
      1. Meet quarterly to review policies, protocols, and services and to offer written feedback and suggestions to the Executive Director and Board of Directors
      2. **Maintain a pool of Vincentians who can act,** when called upon, as **an Ad Hoc Neighbor Concern Committee** (see Section 6 b) in the event of a serious complaint of concern raised by a neighbor or other community partner. *(“Vincentian pool” for the Ad-Hoc Neighbor Concern Committee, will require two Vincentians per precinct)*
      3. Track and review the outcomes of any complaint or concern inquiries.
      4. Provide adequate communication to conference leadership about the need for and means to compliance with the stipulations of this policy.
      5. Depending on the results of the investigation, the **Oversight Committee recommends actions to the board to rectify non-compliance, Vincentian misconduct, or other findings**.
2. Formal Safeguarding training is **required** for all active Vincentian members. It is also required for all Associates and Inquiring Vincentians as well as employees with access to vulnerable individuals.
   1. Content and frequency of this training will be guided by the requirements of insurance policies carried by the District Council, the advice of the Archdiocesan Council (ADC), and the National offices of SVDP.
   2. Initial training should be completed before a person engages with any vulnerable individuals.
   3. If an Active or Associate Member Vincentian is involved with another ministry and has completed training required by the parish or some other entity, then the initial requirement to attend training may be waived if the Member provides a current certificate verifying their status to SVdP.
3. All new Vincentians, at any level of membership**, are required** to complete a formal application and background check before they engage in any form of Vincentian service. All may attend conference meetings before completing the application and background check. Background checks are also required for all staff and volunteers with access to vulnerable populations.
4. Each Conference will maintain an up-to-date Membership List and track all Safeguarding training records to ensure that anyone with access to vulnerable people has taken training and had a background check.
   1. This record keeping may be done by any member of a Conference.
   2. Conferences may refer to the Council any member (at any level) who may need a background check or training.
   3. Conferences will be expected to provide copies of their membership and safeguarding records upon request.
5. Conferences and any Special Works will ensure that neighbors with whom members interact are provided with a brochure/flyer/or card bearing clear information about whom a vulnerable person or witness should report to, or seek advice from, if they feel they or another person has suffered abuse, exploitation, or disrespect as a result of a Vincentian’s actions.
   1. The contact person for such concerns will be the “Office of Vincentian Support” with an appropriate email monitored by staff appointed by the Executive Director.
   2. The Office of Vincentian Support will be empowered to address concerns, make initial inquiries, and initiate any action by the Neighbor Concern Committee (see 6b)
6. All concerns or allegations of abusive, exploitative, or disrespectful behavior are always taken seriously, investigated, and acted on as appropriate.
   1. The first level of investigation will rest with the contact person in the Office of Vincentian Support. That staff member will be empowered to
      1. make inquiries with neighbors, Vincentians, and potential witnesses,
      2. confer with members of the Help Line and Case Management staff as appropriate,
      3. review any relevant documentation in SVDP databases and records, including records of Safeguarding training.
      4. determine if there MAY be a case for Vincentian misconduct or other failure of our network of care that merits further investigation.
      5. document all their inquiries and actions
      6. conduct a periodic review of inquiries, actions, and elevations and make recommendations to the Executive Director and/or Board of Directors as a result.
   2. If the Office of Vincentian Support is unable to resolve the complaint or determines that there may by a case for misconduct or other failure, then they may ask the Safeguarding Oversight Committee to appoint a three-member, Ad Hoc Neighbor Concern Committee to investigate the claim further and to make recommendations for appropriate follow-up.
      1. Neighbor Concern Committee members must be a) current, active Vincentians of a conference in good standing with the District Council, b) up to date on their own Safeguarding training and background checks, c) **have no direct relationship or conflict of interest with the Vincentian(s) of concern or the leadership of the conference against which the complaint has been made.**
      2. The Neighbor Concern Committee will be charged with determining a) the facts of the case, b) any underlying issues in SVDP processes or procedures, c) accountability for any harm done either to neighbor(s) or to the organization through the actions of Vincentians or any others involved, d) recommendations for actions to reduce future harm or as reparation for the negative impact of their actions, or misconduct.
      3. The Neighbor Concern Committee will serve until a case is investigated, recommendations arrived at, and report delivered (see below).
      4. The Neighbor Concern Committee will document their work and report it along with a summary of their findings and their recommendations to the Safeguarding Oversight Committee so that it may be brought to the Board of Directors.
      5. A member of the Staff may be appointed to help with information gathering, meeting scheduling, note-taking or other work of the Neighbor Concern Committee, but they will not have a direct voice in the recommendations of the committee.
7. It is our understanding that in the state of Washington, Vincentian members, volunteers, and staff are not mandatory reporters at this time.