

Vulnerable Persons policy

Certain types of charity are set up to assist or provide services to those who are particularly vulnerable, perhaps because of their age, physical or mental ability, ill health or personal history. The Bermuda Zoological Society (“**BZS**”) recognizes that its staff and volunteers have regular direct contact with young people and other vulnerable persons (eg. those with disabilities), particularly through its extensive educational and volunteer programmes.

The Executive Committee of the BZS is responsible for ensuring that those benefiting from, or working with, BZS are not harmed in any way through contact with it. BZS has a legal duty to act prudently, which includes taking all reasonable steps within BZS’s power to ensure that such harm does not happen.

Young people are an especially vulnerable group and BZS recognizes the importance of having proper safeguards in place for their protection.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is broader than ‘protection’ and includes prevention. Safeguarding has been defined as:

- All agencies working with vulnerable persons and their families taking all reasonable measures to ensure that the risks of harm to vulnerable persons’ welfare are minimized; and
- Where there are concerns about the vulnerable person’s welfare, all agencies taking appropriate actions to address those concerns, working to agreed policies and procedures in full partnership with other local agencies.

BZS recognizes that safeguarding vulnerable persons is vital for charities because they have a duty of care towards those with whom they have contact. Having safeguards in place within an organization not only protects and promotes the welfare of vulnerable persons but also it enhances the confidence of trustees, staff, volunteers, parents/carers and the general public. Safeguarding vulnerable persons is beneficial to a charity in many ways: protecting its reputation, helping to effectively meet its objectives and protecting its finances.

1 Statement

- 1.1 BZS considers it the duty of its staff and volunteers to protect from abuse vulnerable persons with whom they come into contact.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 BZS is involved in providing services for a wide range of people. Some of these people are likely to be 'vulnerable persons.'
- 2.2 BZS has obligations to strive to protect vulnerable persons who it may believe to be abused or at risk of abuse or neglect.
- 2.3 These policy and procedures have been developed to assist staff and volunteers in acting on reported or suspected abuse, and may be supplemented or amended from time to time as circumstances warrant.

3 Definitions

- 3.1 A vulnerable person is defined as:

'any person who is particularly vulnerable to abuse by virtue of their age, physical or mental ability, ill health or personal history (which may include criminal history)'

- 3.2 Abuse is defined as:

'a violation of an individual's human and civil rights by any other person or persons.'

- 3.3 The Education Officer and the Volunteer Coordinator shall each be BZS's Vulnerable Person Officer ("VPO") and the Principal Curator shall be the Assistant Vulnerable Person Officer ("AVPO"). In the absence of an Education Officer, Volunteer Coordinator or the Principal Curator the VPO and AVPO, as appropriate, shall be appointed by the Executive Committee. The duties and responsibilities of the VPO and AVPO officers are described in this Vulnerable Persons Policy.

4 Categories of Abuse

4.1 BZS recognises six categories of abuse:

- **physical abuse**, including hitting, slapping, pushing, kicking, misuse of medication, restraint, or inappropriate sanctions
- **sexual abuse**, including rape and sexual assault or sexual acts to which the vulnerable adult has not consented, or could not consent or was pressured into consenting;
- **psychological abuse**, including emotional abuse, threats of harm or abandonment, deprivation of contact, humiliation, blaming, controlling, intimidation, coercion, harassment, verbal abuse, isolation or withdrawal from services or supportive networks;
- **financial or material abuse**, including theft, fraud, exploitation, pressure in connection with wills, property or inheritance or financial transactions, or the misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions or benefits;
- **neglect and acts of omission**, including ignoring medical or physical care needs, failure to provide access to appropriate health, social care or educational services, the withholding of the necessities of life, such as medication, adequate nutrition and heating; and
- **discriminatory abuse**, including racist or sexist abuse, abuse based on a person's disability, and other forms of harassment, slurs or similar treatment.

5 Responsibilities of Staff and Volunteers

5.1 BZS staff and volunteers have a responsibility to be aware and alert to signs that all is not well with a vulnerable person. However, they are not responsible for diagnosing, investigating or providing a therapeutic response to abuse. In addition, not all concerns relate to abuse, there may well be other explanations. It is important to keep an open mind and consider what is known about the vulnerable person and his or her circumstances. No action should be taken without discussion with a VPO, or in their absence the AVPO or a member of the Executive Committee (as appropriate).

6 Disclosure of Abuse

- 6.1 If a vulnerable person discloses that they are being abused or any service user discloses that they are involved in abuse of a vulnerable person, action should continue as in Section 8. All action must proceed urgently and without delay.

7 Suspicion of Abuse

- 7.1 There may be circumstances when a volunteer or member of staff suspects that a vulnerable person is being abused or neglected.
- 7.2 It is vital that any anyone who suspects a vulnerable person is being neglected or abused discusses the situation immediately with a VPO. In the absence of either VPO, the AVPO should be alerted, and in the absence of the AVPO, a member of the Executive Committee (as appropriate). Action should continue as in Section 9.

8 Action on Disclosure of Abuse or Suspicion of Abuse

- 8.1 There should always be the opportunity to discuss welfare concerns with and seek advice from a VPO. In the absence of either VPO, advice should be sought from the AVPO or a member of the Executive Committee (as appropriate) and other agencies, but:
- Never delay emergency action to protect a vulnerable person
 - Always record in writing concerns about a vulnerable person's welfare, whether or not further action is taken
 - Always record in writing discussions about a vulnerable person's welfare.
 - At the close of discussion, always reach clear and explicit recorded agreement about who will be taking what action, or that no further action will be taken.
- 8.2 At all times action must proceed urgently.
- 8.3 A staff member or volunteer informed of abuse should remind the informing party that the charity cannot guarantee confidentiality where a vulnerable person is at risk of abuse or further abuse. Action to prevent such abuse will take priority.

- 8.4 Volunteers should consult with a VPO before taking any action. In the absence of either VPO, the AVPO or a member of the Executive Committee (as appropriate) should be consulted before taking any action.
- 8.5 Additionally, all action taken following a disclosure of abuse should be discussed in advance with a VPO (action may also be discussed with the AVPO and the Executive Committee (as appropriate)).
- 8.6 In circumstances where an informing party declines to disclose, despite some work having been done towards disclosing, it may be necessary to report the alleged abuse without the informing party's agreement. In these circumstances, that informing party must be notified in advance of the decision to report to social services.
- 8.7 In all cases of suspected abuse the volunteer and staff member should discuss whether issues relevant to different cultures and lifestyles have any bearing on the matter.
- 8.8 As an organisation BZS welcomes the fact that people and lifestyles are diverse and does not make judgments about the acceptability or otherwise of lifestyles. However it is important that this philosophy does not stand in the way of BZS's responsibility to protect vulnerable people from harm.
- 8.9 Any staff member may report a disclosure of abuse to social services irrespective of the opinion of other staff.
- 8.10 It is important for staff and volunteers to make written records of any incidents or concerns that they have as soon as possible and if appropriate to include sketches of sites and sizes of injuries. It is also important to make a record of conversations with the vulnerable person using the same language the vulnerable person used especially names used for body parts or sexual acts.
- 8.11 Full written records must be maintained of all disclosures and actions following disclosure.

9 Making a Referral

- 9.1 Social services departments have been designated as the lead agencies with responsibility for co-ordinating a response to allegations or concerns of abuse.

9.2 Each of BZS's staff members and volunteers has the responsibility of informing the relevant social services department of concerns over the abuse or neglect of vulnerable persons. Detailed referral arrangements may change from time to time and, therefore, BZS should ensure that staff and volunteers have up-to-date referral information.

9.3 Staff members and volunteers should work within the following timescales for reporting allegations or suspicions of abuse:

- **Immediate** if the vulnerable person is at risk of serious physical harm, or a serious criminal act has taken place, and evidence will need to be kept safe
- **Within 24 hours** if it relates to a specific incident which is, or may be still going on, or may happen again
- **Within 7 Days** if it is a more general concern, which does not indicate immediate harm.

10 Support to Staff and Volunteers Following a Referral

10.1 BZS will support staff and volunteers in these circumstances. If the relevant social services department needs further involvement from staff or volunteers following a report of abuse, the VPO or AVPO or Executive Committee member (as appropriate) will discuss with the social services department the nature of their needs and how they might be met.

11 Allegation of Abuse Made Against a Staff Member or Volunteer

11.1 Staff and volunteers may be subject to abuse allegations. BZS will offer support in these circumstances, but the social services department will be assisted in their investigation and the disciplinary procedure may be implemented.

12 Confidentiality

12.1 Confidentiality is an important aspect of the work of the BZS, particularly as it relates to BZS's activities with vulnerable persons, and the attention of all staff and volunteers is drawn to BZS's Confidentiality Policy.

13 Preventing Abuse by Staff and Volunteers

13.1 It is important that any staff or volunteers who are likely to be working alone with vulnerable people are thoroughly vetted before being employed. For BZS this means as well as references being checked (where appropriate) there will also be a requirement for offences to be declared and a Police Criminal Records check undertaken.

13.2 It should be noted that having a criminal record does not prevent someone from being recruited as a staff member or volunteer in all circumstances. Staff should seek the advice of a VPO, or in their absence, the AVPO in cases of doubt.

13.3 It may be very hard for a staff member to report a concern about a colleague but, as with all the other difficulties people will come across, the safety and protection of a vulnerable person must be the priority in any decision that is made.

14 Annual Training

14.1 Vulnerable Person training shall be offered to staff and volunteers on at least an annual basis and shall address, amongst other things, the following:

- what abuse is and how to spot abuse;
- mandated reporting requirement and procedures;
- what "duty of care" means and how the charity fulfills that requirement to protect vulnerable populations being saved from harm; and
- how client confidentiality of vulnerable persons is addressed.

14.2 Vulnerable Person training shall be documented by BZS in accordance with usual operating policy