



## **VULNERABLE ADULT PROTECTION POLICY**

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### **1. Evergreen Africa's Commitment to Vulnerable adults**

Evergreen Africa commits to working with vulnerable adults to help them discover their potential, to receive healing and restoration where needed, and aim to provide each vulnerable adult with a loving and safe environment.

Each vulnerable adult has the right to a life free from abuse of any kind, be that physical, emotional, sexual, spiritual, or any activity that undermines who they are. Vulnerable adults have a right to speak out, for abuse to be brought into the light, and dealt with appropriately, for the wellbeing and development of the vulnerable adult.

#### **What is the need for a Vulnerable adult Protection Policy?**

Evergreen Africa have staff, volunteers, associates and visitors (collectively referred to hereinafter as 'personnel') within its programmes working with vulnerable adults, as well as personnel working in or visiting local communities where vulnerable adults may be present. It is important that a code of conduct whilst in the presence of vulnerable adults is understood and agreed by all its personnel.

#### **Through the implementation of a VAPP:**

- 1) Vulnerable adults are protected: This is the first and most important reason for a VAPP. Vulnerable adults can have lowered self-protection awareness and this document will ensure that Evergreen Africa is doing everything within its power to make sure the vulnerable adults it works with are safe whilst in its care, and that personnel know how to care for and help any vulnerable adult who is a victim of abuse in any area of his or her life.
- 2) Personnel are protected: Setting guidelines with all personnel empowers them to know what to do should inappropriate behaviour be observed. It also minimises the risk of personnel's behaviour being misconstrued.
- 3) Evergreen Africa is protected: Through the implementation of this policy, the

credibility of Evergreen Africa, with both the beneficiary communities and donors will be protected.

### **Definition of a Vulnerable adult.**

Vulnerable adult (international terminology): an adult who is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse, neglect or exploitation because of being in a position of social disadvantage due to one or more factors. The result is individual, and sometimes collective, vulnerability due to differences in power. These factors include (but are not limited to) poverty, migrant status, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, mental health, caste, religion, health, and age (based on World Health Organisation definition of vulnerable groups)

Adult at risk of abuse or neglect (UK terminology): an adult who has care and support needs is experiencing, or is at risk of abuse or neglect; and because of these care and support needs cannot protect themselves against actual or potential abuse or neglect (Care Act 2014, UK definition)

## **2. Definitions of Abuse**

The WHO definition of vulnerable adult abuse is as follows:

Vulnerable adult abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the vulnerable adult's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power (<http://www.yesican.org/definitions/WHO.html>).

Vulnerable adult abuse can fall into a number of categories:

**Neglect** is where the parent, guardian, legal custodian or another person who has temporary or permanent charge of, or is in a position of care for, a vulnerable adult, fails to provide the vulnerable adult's basic needs. Neglect may be physical, educational, and/or emotional.

**Physical Abuse** is physical injury to a vulnerable adult as a result of force, however small or large the injury is (it may be small bruises, fractures or even death). Suffocation, drowning, and giving vulnerable adults, inappropriate drugs, poison or, where relevant, alcohol are also included in this category.

**Sexual Abuse** is where someone uses the vulnerable adult victim to meet their own sexual needs and desires.

There are categories of sexual abuse: direct contact and non-direct contact.

- Direct contact offences are when the perpetrator comes into direct contact with a vulnerable adult, in an inappropriate way, either direct skin contact or through clothes.
- Non-direct contact includes indecent exposure, peeping, verbal sexual comments or stimulation, showing pornographic material, producing pornographic materials, or allowing/forcing a vulnerable adult to watch sexual relations.

- Sexual exploitation is where a vulnerable adult's vulnerability is abused and they are exploited to make financial profit. Vulnerable adult prostitution and trafficking of vulnerable adults for sexual abuse and exploitation are examples of this.

**Emotional Abuse** damages a vulnerable adult's emotional development, and/or sense of self-worth. It includes repeated criticism, with or without threats, and rejection of the vulnerable adult. Love may also be absent, with vulnerable adults in this position regularly feeling frightened or endangered.

**Spiritual Abuse** is the misuse of those in a position of power, or leadership over a vulnerable adult. Imposing personal opinions coerces compliance (such as forcing a vulnerable adult to pray, worship or join in with all activities). This can also include manipulation, or imposition of personal opinions onto a vulnerable adult to make them conform or behave a certain way.

There are also a number of other recognised forms of abuse including:

**Bullying:** This is recognised as harmful to vulnerable adults in whatever form it takes, be that physical, verbal or emotional intimidation. Racial or sexist remarks may be made frequently, and the victims may find themselves excluded or isolated.

**Witchcraft/ritualistic abuse:** Some communities believe strongly that people, particularly vulnerable adults, may be in possession of evil spirits which can bring bad luck on a family. The tradition comes from a mixture of traditional African spiritual beliefs and evangelical Christianity. These beliefs can lead to practices that may be harmful to vulnerable adults, e.g. fasting, beating, immersion in water. These practices can lead to extreme cruelty and even death of vulnerable adults.

In such communities, disabled vulnerable adults' behaviours are often interpreted as a sign of passion by evil spirits. Other communities or individuals may use and abuse vulnerable adults through ritualistic practices and ceremonies.

### 3. Recognising Signs of Vulnerable adult Abuse

#### Signs of Physical Abuse

Any injuries not consistent with the explanation given for them  
Injuries that occur to the body in places that are not normally exposed to falls, games, etc  
Injuries that have not received medical attention  
Reluctance to change for, or participate in, games or swimming  
Bruises, bites, burns, fractures, cuts, etc which do not have an accidental explanation  
Substance abuse

#### Signs of Neglect

Undernourishment  
Constant hunger  
Stealing or gorging food  
Untreated illnesses  
Inadequate care

#### Signs of Sexual Abuse

Any allegations made by a vulnerable adult concerning sexual abuse

Vulnerable adult with excessive preoccupation with sexual matters  
Sexual activity through words, play or drawing  
Vulnerable adult who is sexually provocative or seductive  
Inappropriate bed-sharing arrangements at home  
Severe sleep disturbances with fears, phobias, vivid dreams or nightmares, sometimes with overt or veiled sexual connotations  
Eating disorders  
Repeated urinary infections or unexplained tummy/head pains

### **Signs of Emotional Abuse**

Changes or regression in mood or behaviour, particularly where a vulnerable adult withdraws  
Depression/aggression  
Extreme anxiety  
Nervousness, frozen watchfulness  
Obsessions or phobias  
Sudden under-achievement or lack of concentration  
Inappropriate relationships  
Attention-seeking behaviour  
Persistent tiredness  
Running away, stealing and lying

Any change in behaviour in a vulnerable adult may indicate that something is not right and must be closely monitored. Within our programmes we will seek to model and share good practice regarding safeguarding vulnerable adults within our communities.

## **4. Personnel**

While recruiting new personnel for its programmes where there is access to vulnerable adults, Evergreen Africa will discuss the VAPP. Only personnel who are happy to comply with the VAPP will be accepted. This applies to all Evergreen Africa personnel.

The following steps will be taken to ensure a person's suitability for working in a post with access to vulnerable adults:

The applicant will complete an application form, which includes in it any habits which may be harmful, convictions, spent or otherwise of offences against vulnerable adults.

Reference checks. Two reliable character referees are needed for each candidate.

Where the candidate has worked with vulnerable adults before, at least one of these should be from someone who has witnessed this work. References will be followed up by a phone call or email exchange as required.

All potential staff, including short or long term volunteers, are required to complete the above steps, and submit an application form to Evergreen Africa before acceptance.

In the case of countries where there are national checks for those working with vulnerable adults, such as the Criminal Record Bureau, this should also be completed and a copy sent prior to accepting the person.

As part of its commitment to excellence in caring for vulnerable adults, Evergreen Africa will not in any circumstances engage personnel who have prior convictions for vulnerable adult abuse, pornography or any offence related to harm of vulnerable adults or children. If background checks prove a person is not suitable to work with vulnerable adults, Evergreen Africa reserves the right not to engage them.

All personnel are required to sign a form to indicate that they have read, understood, and will abide by the conditions in this VAPP. A copy will be kept on their file and a copy will be given to them directly. In the case of illiterate staff, this policy will be discussed with them by their superior, and they will sign to say this has happened.

If after commencing work, it is found that false information was given to secure an engagement, the person will be immediately suspended, whilst a fair hearing is held. If the person is found to have withheld, or given false information, their engagement will be immediately terminated.

## **5. Behaviour and Good Practice Protocols**

Personnel will always behave in a way that demonstrates, through their language, appearance and actions, Evergreen Africa's commitment to treat vulnerable adults as important individuals. Consideration to the vulnerable adult's dignity must be taken into account where photographs or video are taken of activities. In appropriate cases, the vulnerable adults's permission should first be sought with no promises to be given copies.

Photographs may be used with discretion in official reports, official information sharing documents and Evergreen Africa website and Social Media. Permission must be sought from Evergreen Africa first for use in any other place.

Generally, all contact with vulnerable adults should be in an open space, with others present. On the rare occasion it is necessary to talk with a vulnerable adult alone, it must always be in a place that is visible, and, if in a room, with the door open.

Evergreen Africa is committed to working in a safe, clean environment, and will regularly inspect any premises used for work with vulnerable adults for potential hazards. During all their contact with vulnerable adults, Evergreen Africa personnel will at all times seek to put the needs of the vulnerable adults, including their physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual needs, first.

All touch will be directly appropriate to the vulnerable adult's, not the personnel's needs. In all activities, only appropriate levels of touch will be used, and Evergreen Africa personnel will never do something for a vulnerable adult that they can do themselves (e.g. bathing, toileting or dressing).

All touch will be according to the vulnerable adult's needs, though where these needs are inappropriate Evergreen Africa will seek to teach the vulnerable adult appropriate needs. Evergreen Africa personnel will not kiss, touch, hug, hold or fondle vulnerable adults in an inappropriate way.

Individual vulnerable adults' needs should be taken into account. Evergreen Africa personnel will not demand physical attention from the vulnerable adults in their care.

Where possible, vulnerable adult programmes will seek to teach vulnerable adults safe and unsafe touch, thereby empowering the vulnerable adults.

Personnel need to be aware that the situation in Uganda may mean that vulnerable adults have been exposed to situations not conducive to a healthy life. Such vulnerable adults may have been exposed to abuse, or manipulative situations and see this as a normal way of life. Their behaviour may be manipulative or sexually suggestive. The responsibility of conduct always lies with the personnel, with an added responsibility to see that such vulnerable adults receive counselling and help.

All vulnerable adults must be treated fairly, regardless of who they are or which tribe or religion they are from.

All official (or other) visitors to projects must first have permission from the leader of the project and have a briefing on the VAPP. They must have an Evergreen Africa person escorting them all the time and must never be left in charge of, or alone with, vulnerable adults.

## **6. Disciplining and Verbal Interaction**

In all activities, Evergreen Africa personnel will seek to develop a healthy, relationship with vulnerable adults, where the vulnerable adults know problems can be discussed, and their concerns taken seriously. Disciplining in this environment is a healthy way for a vulnerable adult to grow.

Personnel will be aware of their language at all times, and understand how cruel and harsh words can negatively affect vulnerable adults. At no times shall cruel or harsh words, or comments be made to vulnerable adults about home, family, tribe, past experiences or any other situation. At no time should a joke be made at a vulnerable adult's expense, whether in front of vulnerable adults or others. Conversations regarding sexual life skills and the like, will take place within designated sessions; if a vulnerable adult brings up the subject outside of these times, personnel will need to make a decision as to whether this is a healthy time to continue the discussion, bearing in mind any other vulnerable adults present, and the activities at the time.

Where a vulnerable adult displays regular misbehaviour, personnel will seek to work with the vulnerable adult concerned by discussing their behaviour and will aim to seek the root cause, and identify ways for behaviour change, developing an individual plan for the vulnerable adult to improve behaviour where needed.

All Evergreen Africa activities will have a clear set of standards stating appropriate behaviour in a language that is understood as are the consequences of breaking them. Where possible vulnerable adults will be a part of setting these standards.

Evergreen Africa personnel will always seek to focus on the positive behaviour of the vulnerable adult, praising, wherever possible, good behaviour and attitudes.

Each vulnerable adult will be viewed as an individual, and as such, it is recognised that different methods of discipline may need to be used with each vulnerable adult. Evergreen Africa believes that discipline is a crucial aspect of vulnerable adult development. A vulnerable adult needs discipline to know what behaviour is acceptable, and what is not.

They need to know boundaries and what is expected of them. Appropriate discipline creates a healthy environment for a vulnerable adult to develop in and feel accepted. Appropriate discipline always accepts the vulnerable adult but rejects unwanted behaviour.

Evergreen Africa personnel will seek to discipline appropriately at all times, never disciplining in anger. Should personnel be so involved in the incident that a high level of anger is felt, and fair disciplining is not possible, other personnel should be sought to administer discipline.

Public disciplining should not be used as the norm and only used in extreme circumstances. Each vulnerable adult requiring discipline should be taken aside and dealt with as an individual and in private.

Evergreen Africa personnel will never use culturally inappropriate and undue physical discipline, or violence in words or action of any kind when disciplining a vulnerable adult.

Vulnerable adults must not be physically hurt, scared, degraded, intimidated or humiliated through discipline. Many vulnerable adults have already experienced violence, and possibly abuse. Such punishment rarely addresses the root of the behavioural problem and damages relationships.

When disciplining is needed, the vulnerable adult must always have an explanation as to why sanctions are being used. Although isolation is a good and approved form of discipline, this should not be in a locked room or out of sight of the leader; rather it is time of missing out on what is going on for a short period of time. Missing time in an activity is acceptable; missing food, water or medical assistance is not.

Any personnel displaying inappropriate or abusive behaviour towards vulnerable adult(s) will be subject to discipline, and possible dismissal.

## **7. Disclosure Protocol**

The following are guidelines for Evergreen Africa personnel to follow under the circumstances of a vulnerable adult disclosing abuse.

Do not promise confidentiality, but reassure them they are right to tell you.

Listen carefully, talk little, encourage the vulnerable adult that they have not done anything wrong, and they have done well to tell you.

Avoid leading questions; e.g. ask 'Then what happened?' not 'Did he touch your leg?'

Try to get a clear understanding of what happened.

React calmly, never show shock or disgust.

Do not speak ill of the abuser – the vulnerable adult may still love him or her.

As soon as possible, inform a person in authority of what the vulnerable adult disclosed. Write down a record of the conversation using the vulnerable adult's own words on the appropriate form, including any other relevant information, such as body language etc.

Maintain the vulnerable adult's confidentiality to all other people – do not share with the Evergreen Africa team.

Take the vulnerable adult seriously, even if it involves someone you find it hard to believe would harm a vulnerable adult. Experience tells us we MUST listen and respond.

Do not alert the alleged abuser, even if you know him or her, to ensure the safety of the vulnerable adult. If the vulnerable adult needs urgent medical attention, make sure they receive it.

Parents and carers should only be contacted once you have advice and guidance from Evergreen Africa's senior leaders.

The guiding principle in responding to any concerns around vulnerable adult protection is that the safety and welfare of the vulnerable adult should always come first. No vulnerable adult should be put at more risk by any action you take.

### **Reporting by Personnel**

All Evergreen Africa personnel shall notify the Executive Officer or a Trustee in his absence, as soon as possible, and *no longer* than 24 hours after first observing or suspecting an abuse or receiving an allegation. He/she will act immediately but keep strict confidentiality.

Any allegation of personnel MUST be reported for an appropriate investigation to take place. It is important that the person accused is not informed of the accusation until advice is given.

A report using the form below should be completed as a matter of urgency.

### **Reporting Procedures**

Procedures and systems operate under the premise that vulnerable adult abuse and silence about abuse is wrong. The safety of the vulnerable adult is always the overriding consideration. **Vulnerable adult protection is the responsibility of all Evergreen Africa personnel.**

Any behaviour which violates Evergreen Africa's Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy is to be reported:

- 1) When abuse is observed or suspected
- 2) When an allegation or disclosure of abuse is made (by an adult or vulnerable adult).

Any incident regarding the abuse of a vulnerable adult will be treated seriously - believing the vulnerable adult until proven otherwise.

### **Reporting Mechanism**

There are 2 types of reports that can be made.

**Category 1** For concerns relating to Evergreen Africa personnel:



Where it is suspected that a possible criminal activity has taken place, report to relevant vulnerable adult protection authorities to determine next steps.

Ensure appropriate disciplinary proceedings are instigated within Evergreen Africa.

**Category 2** For concerns relating to vulnerable adult abuse in the community.

Report to vulnerable adult protection authorities if criminal activity has taken place.

Offer advice and support to the vulnerable adult and family concerned.

Work together with other appropriate agencies on vulnerable adult protection.

### **Duties of the Executive Officer/Trustees**

Within 24 hours of receiving information on an allegation of vulnerable adult abuse, the Executive Officer/Trustee shall:

Convene a Vulnerable adult Protection Meeting which will include at least one other senior leader plus the personnel making the allegation.

Assess together with members at the meeting the nature of the allegation through a thorough investigation of the incident and, where it involves a possible criminal matter, report this to the appropriate authorities.

If the matter is in breach of this Vulnerable adult Protection Policy, implement the appropriate disciplinary procedure for the personnel concerned.

Depending on the outcome of the Vulnerable adult Protection Meeting and investigations carried out, make recommendations deemed appropriate to respond to the concerns, based on what is in the best interest of the vulnerable adult.

Send a written report to Evergreen Africa Trustees.

### **Confidentiality**

The report will be kept in the strictest confidentiality to protect the identity of the witness, the vulnerable adult or vulnerable adults involved, and the alleged offender. However, it is very important that Evergreen Africa personnel never promise confidentiality either to a vulnerable adult disclosing abuse, or to an adult disclosing concerns about another's abusive actions or information about their own behaviour. It must be made clear to Evergreen Africa personnel at time of engagement that they are obliged to follow this policy and be made aware of the possible outcomes that will result from acting outside this policy.



**EVERGREEN AFRICA VULNERABLE ADULT PROTECTION REPORTING FORM**  
**CONFIDENTIAL**

Note - it is not necessary to follow this format exactly, but a report must cover the points shown. A report can be given verbally to the Executive Officer or to a Trustee, but in that case the Executive Officer/Trustee must complete the report, read it to the person raising the issue, and get her/his signature in confirmation of its accuracy.

Vulnerable adult's name:

Date of Birth: (if known)

Relationship of person responsible for care of the vulnerable adult – and others living in the household:

Religion:

Village:

Time and date of referral:

Name of person reporting disclosure/concern:

Contact details:

Relationship to vulnerable adult:

Details of disclosure/concern (using vulnerable adult's words if a disclosure):

Suspected perpetrator's details:

Is the vulnerable adult currently safe to the best of your knowledge?

Does the vulnerable adult need (has s/he received) emergency medical care?

Is anyone else aware of the situation to your knowledge?

What action has been taken?

Signed (person making referral):

Name:

Date:

Received by (Executive Officer/Trustee) signature:

Name:

Date: