

# Professional Boundaries Policy

## 1. Our Policy Statement

The Hamlet Charter states that everyone should be happy and safe, is unique, valued and respected. This policy will ensure that the values of the charter are maintained by raising awareness of potentially unprofessional conduct that crosses professional boundaries.

## 2. Purpose of this policy and why we have it

- This policy outlines the many ways that professional boundaries can be crossed without due care and awareness of the issues involved.
- We are aware that staff / volunteers in learning disability services work with vulnerable children and adults where the risk of crossing professional boundaries is relatively high.
- At The Hamlet we expect employees / volunteers to establish a rapport with users and provide friendly and accessible services and understand this could lead to an increase in the risk of crossing professional boundaries
- Staff / volunteers need to understand the difference between professional and personal relationships in the work context
- Staff and volunteers are responsible for establishing and maintaining appropriate boundaries between themselves and users.



- Staff and volunteers need to understand areas of practice that need further consideration to keep within their professional boundaries.
- Learning Disability support staff are not covered by a specific professional code, but at The Hamlet we have adopted the Code of Professional Conduct for Health and Social Care Workers.

### **3. The scope of this policy**

This policy is intended for:

- Staff at The Hamlet
- Volunteers at The Hamlet

### **4. How we will implement and monitor this policy**

**The Hamlet will establish an understanding of the difference between personal and professional relationships:**

- In a professional relationship, the member of staff is paid to provide care through a contract of employment or, if unpaid, a volunteer agreement. There is no payment in a personal relationship.
- The purpose of the relationship is to provide care and activities as opposed to the pleasure and shared interest of a personal relationship.
- The staff member / volunteer has more power due to his / her authority, knowledge and access to privileged information about the child / adult. In a friendship the balance of power tends to be relatively equal.
- The staff member is responsible for establishing and maintaining the relationship whereas in a friendship this is a shared responsibility.
- The staff member / volunteer is in a position of trust and has a duty of care towards the child / adult.
- Staff and volunteers are introduced to this policy in induction.



- Staff are encouraged to discuss and share difficult issues relating to personal boundaries within staff meetings and supervision.

### **The Hamlet will alert staff to areas of possible difficulty:**

#### **Gifts, Rewards and Favouritism**

- All staff should be aware of the Hamlet guidance on rewards including arrangements for the declaration of gifts received and given.
- It is acknowledged that there may be specific occasions when staff / volunteers working with a child / adult may consider it appropriate to give a small personal gift of insignificant value.
- Any gifts should be given openly and not be based on favouritism.
- Staff/volunteers need to be aware, however, that the giving of gifts can be misinterpreted by others as a gesture either to bribe or 'groom' a child/adult.
- All staff should exercise care when selecting children / adults for specific activities or trips in order to avoid perceptions of favouritism. Similar care should be exercised when children / adults are excluded from an activity. Methods of selection and exclusion should always be subject to clear, agreed criteria and involve more than one member of staff.
- Care should also be taken to ensure that all staff / volunteers do not accept any gift that might be construed as a bribe by others, or lead the giver to expect preferential treatment.
- There are occasions when children / adults and or their parents / carers wish to pass small tokens of appreciation to staff / volunteers e.g. on special occasions or as a thank-you and this is acceptable but must be declared.



## **Social Contact**

- Staff / volunteers should not establish or seek to establish social contact with children / adults for the purpose of securing a friendship or to pursue or strengthen a relationship.
- This includes the use of social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter etc.
- If a learner or parent seeks to establish social contact, or if this occurs coincidentally, the member of staff should exercise her/his professional judgement in making a response and seek advice from his / her line manager.
- Social events such as parties: on occasion staff / volunteers maybe invited to attend social events. Any such invitation must be disclosed to his / her line manager and an appropriate response agreed which may be representation of The Hamlet at such an event.
- Staff /volunteers should use caution when talking about their personal life, remembering the nature of the relationship.
- Staff / volunteers must never discuss information about service users outside of The Hamlet, other than in appropriate multi-agency meetings.

## **One to One Working**

- One to one work has the potential to make a child / adult more vulnerable to harm by those who seek to exploit their position of trust.
- Staff/volunteers should be offered guidance on working on a one to one basis at The Hamlet which may place themselves or children / staff/volunteers in vulnerable situations.
- Staff/volunteers working in one to one settings with children /adults may also be more vulnerable to unjust or unfounded allegations being made against them.



- Both possibilities should be recognised so that when staff / volunteers are in a one to one situation reasonable and sensible precautions are taken.
- There are occasions where managers will need to undertake a risk assessment in relation to the specific nature and implications of one to one work. These assessments should take into account the individual needs of the child / adult and the individual worker.

### **Out of Hours Activities**

- Staff/volunteers should take particular care when supervising members' activities in the community where the setting is less formal than The Hamlet premises.
- Staff/volunteers remain in a position of trust and need to ensure that their behaviour remains professional at all times and stays within clearly defined professional boundaries.

### **Photography and Videos**

- Many activities across The Hamlet are documented using photographs and videos.
- It is not appropriate for staff/volunteers to take photographs of children or adults for their personal use.
- Any recording or photography should take place with due regard to the law and the need to safeguard the privacy, dignity, safety and well being of those involved.
- Consent to having images or recording taken should always be checked by the staff.

### **Access to Inappropriate Images and Internet Usage**

- Staff/volunteers should ensure that children/adults are not exposed to any inappropriate images or web links.



- There are no circumstances that will justify staff/volunteers possessing indecent images of children/adults.

### **Transporting Children / Adults**

- Children should not be transported in a member of staff's car under any circumstances.
- Adults may be transported in a staff car in line with the support plan for the individual with another member of staff as an escort and only if all insurances for business use are in place.
- However, wherever possible and practicable transport should be in The Hamlet vehicle with at least one adult additional to the driver acting as an escort.
- Exceptions to transporting children or adults should be fully risk assessed and agreed by a member of the management team.

### **Dress and Appearance**

- All staff / volunteers who work with children / adults should ensure they are dressed appropriately for the tasks and the work they undertake.
- Those who dress in a manner which could be considered as inappropriate could render themselves vulnerable to criticism or allegations.

### **Infatuations**

- Occasionally, a child /adult may develop an infatuation with a member of staff/volunteer who works with them.
- All staff should deal with these situations sensitively and appropriately to maintain the dignity and safety of all concerned. They should remain aware, however, that such infatuations carry a high risk of words or actions being misinterpreted and should therefore make every effort to ensure that their own behaviour is above reproach.



- A member of staff who becomes aware that a child/adult who is developing an infatuation should discuss this at the earliest opportunity with their line manager and appropriate action taken.
- Staff need to be aware of over-involvement with a child / adult that could lead to the child / adult believing the member of staff is the only person who can meet their needs.

### **Sexual Relationships**

- All staff / volunteers should clearly understand the need to maintain appropriate boundaries in their contacts with children / staff/volunteers.
- Intimate or sexual relationships between service users and the staff/volunteers who work with them will be regarded as a grave breach of trust.
- Allowing or encouraging a relationship to develop in a way which might lead to a sexual relationship is also unacceptable.
- Refer to the Touch Policy / Intimate Care Policy.

### **Whistle blowing**

- If any member of staff or volunteer is concerned about the behaviour or professional conduct of another member of staff / volunteer they can make their concerns known to a manager as described in the Whistle Blowing Policy in the Staff Handbook.

### **5. Links to other policies and strategies**

- Data Protection Policy
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Staff/Volunteers Policy
- Safeguarding Children Policy
- Confidentiality Policy
- Use of Mobile Devices Policy
- Behaviour Management Policy



- Touch Policy
- Intimate Care Policy
- Whistle Blowing (Staff Handbook)

## **6. Legal References and Context**

Skills for Care 'Code of Professional Conduct' 2013

'Professional boundaries in learning disability care' Mandy Bowler 2014

**Date approved by the Board:** November 2015

**Date of next review:** November 2017

**Post holder responsible for this policy:** Senior Management Children's and Adult's Services