

WELLS little THEATRE

Wells Operatic Society

SAFEGUARDING

CHILDREN

POLICY AND PROCEDURES

JUNE 2023

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Vision, Mission and Aims

Wells Operatic Society (WOS) recognises its duty of care under the Children and Young Persons Act 1963, the Child (Performances) Regulations 1968, the Protection of Children Act 1999 and the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000. The society recognises that abuse can take many forms, whether it be physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse or neglect. The society is committed to practice which protects children from harm. All members of the society accept and recognise their responsibilities to develop awareness of the issues which cause children harm.

The society believes that:

- The welfare of the child is paramount.
- All children, whatever their age, culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin, religious beliefs and/or sexual identity have the right to protection from abuse.
- All suspicions and allegations of abuse should be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately.

The society will ensure that:

- All the children will be treated equally and with respect and dignity.
- The duty of care to children will always be put first.
- A balanced relationship based on mutual trust will be built which empowers the children.
- Bullying will not be accepted or condoned.
- All adult members of the society provide a positive role model for dealing with other people.
- Action will be taken to stop any inappropriate verbal or physical behaviour.
- It will keep informed of changes in legislation and policies for the protection of children.
- It will undertake relevant development and training.
- It will hold a register of every child actively involved with the society and will retain a contact name and number close at hand in case of emergencies.

The society has child protection procedures included in this policy.

Designated Safeguarding Leads

WOS has two Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs), who ensure that the child protection policy and procedures are adhered to. The current DSLs are **Adam Lanfranchi** and **Lucy Payne**. They can be contacted on DSL@wellslittletheatre.com

There is also a Child Protection Officer, who assists with these matters but takes a more active approach on a show-by-show basis. This includes but is not limited to, ensuring enough chaperones have been recruited for performances, ensuring all policies and procedures are followed during a performance and conform to safeguarding regulations. The current Child Protection Officer is **Kylie Siggs** who can be contacted on kylie.siggs@googlemail.com

Creating a safe environment

This section provides an introduction and overview of the societies safeguarding policy.

Children and young people have contact with the society in many ways. For example, they may perform with us, be members of our audiences, attend our events and workshops, log on to our website, be members of our cast.

Whenever and however children and young people encounter us, we want them to be safe from harm. We recognise that the society is not a child protection agency; however, we are committed to working in a child-centred way, and more generally, where everyone we work with is safe, valued and respected, and has their views and concerns listened to.

All members of the society should:

- Treat children with respect.
- Listen to and take account of children's views.
- Take concerns about children's welfare seriously.

All members should also:

Uphold the principle that the welfare of children is paramount and that all children, whatever their age, culture, disability, gender, language, racial or ethnic origin, religious belief or sexual identity, have the right to protection from abuse.

Be aware that the word 'child' or 'children and young people' is used to refer to anyone under the age of 18, as defined by the Children Act 1989. The fact that a child has reached 16 years of age, is living independently, is in further education, is a member of the armed forces, is in hospital or in custody, does not change their status or entitlements to services or protection.

Safeguarding and Child Protection defined

Safeguarding and promoting children and young people's welfare is defined as:

- Protecting children from maltreatment.
- Preventing impairment of children's mental and physical health or development ensuring that children grow up with the provision of safe and effective care.
- Taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.

Child Protection is part of the safeguarding process. It focuses on protecting individual children identified as suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm. The societies safeguarding procedures are intended to:

- Offer safeguards to the children with whom we work and encounter.
- To our society membership to help them maintain professionalism and high standards of practice.

To summarise, **safeguarding** is what we do to prevent harm, **child protection** is the way in which we respond to harm.

Other policies and procedures

The society recognises that in addition to this policy and procedure there are other relevant WOS policies and procedures that have aspects which relate to safeguarding children, and which should be read in conjunction with this document. These are:

- Wells Operatic Society Rules
- Grievance procedure
- Code of Conduct
- Disciplinary rules

Breaches of the safeguarding policy and procedures will be taken seriously and may require disciplinary processes to be applied and/or a referral to the police or social care services.

Version Control

The WOS safeguarding children policy and procedures were first adopted prior to January 2009.

It has been revised and updated since then. In the future it will be revised annually, or where there is a change in legislation or guidance or an incident that warrants immediate changes.

APPROVAL DATE	NEXT REVIEW DATE	RESPONSIBLE PERSON	AUTHOR
January 2009	June 2015	Child Protection Officer	NODA
June 2023	June 2024	Designated Safeguarding Lead	WOS DSLs

Roles and responsibilities for safeguarding

Responsibilities for the management of the Safeguarding of Children at WOS are grouped into the following areas:

- The Society
- Membership
- Parents
- The Committee

The Society

At the start of any production involving children the society will:

- Undertake a risk assessment and monitor risk throughout the production process.
- Identify at the outset the DSLs with designated responsibility for child protection and how to contact them.
- Identify the Child Protection Officer and how to contact them.
- Engage in effective recruitment of chaperones and other individuals with responsibility for children, including appropriate vetting (if necessary, in consultation with the local education authority).
- Ensure that children are always supervised.
- Ensure there are appropriate spaces for changing rooms for each sex, that is separate from adult members. The sex of a child is determined by their birth sex.
- Know how to get in touch with the local authority social services in case it needs to report a concern.

Membership

All members have a responsibility to:

- Comply with WOS Safeguarding Children Policy and statutory requirements.
- Attend all relevant Child Safeguarding training required by the WOS.
- Report all incidents in line with the incident reporting procedure (see 'Making a referral')
- Report to the Designated Safeguarding Lead or Child Protection Officer.
- Co-operate with Child Safeguarding audits and inspections.

Parents

Note: the term 'parent' can also mean 'legal guardian'.

It is important for parents to realise that WOS is not a childcare facility and is therefore not licensed or registered to provide day care accordingly. The society believes that there is a partnership between parents and the society and that care for children is the joint responsibility of parents and the society.

- Parents are encouraged to be involved in the activities of the society and to share responsibility for the care of children. All parents will be given a copy the society's Child Protection Policy and procedures.

- All parents have the responsibility to collect (or arrange collection of) their children after rehearsals or performances. It is NOT the responsibility of the society to take children home.
- If a parent wishes to help backstage during a show as a chaperone, they must be DBS checked. This is regardless of if their child is in said show.

The Committee

Members of the committee are responsible for:

- Ensuring that Child Safeguarding issues are given the highest priority in all areas under their control.
- Setting suitable targets for improving Child Safeguarding performance, in liaison with the DSLs.
- Ensure that the Child Safeguarding Policy is effectively distributed to and understood by all members.
- Ensuring that the WOS Child Safeguarding Policy is appropriately enforced, and any breaches of the Policy are dealt with in line with the societies disciplinary procedures, as necessary.
- Participating in the regular review of the Child Safeguarding Policy and make recommendations for improvement.
- Where they do not have relevant competence or knowledge, ensure that advice on matters with Child Safeguarding implications is sought from the Somerset Local Authority.

The safeguarding code of conduct

This section outlines the behaviour expected of WOS members, volunteers and freelancers in respect of their work and contact with children.

This code will not only help to protect children but will also help all members, volunteers and freelancers identify any practices which could be mistakenly interpreted and perhaps lead to false allegations of abuse being made.

If in doubt, you should always consider how an action or activity may be perceived as opposed to how it is intended.

The safeguarding children code of conduct should guide all actions taken by WOS members, volunteers and freelancers. If it is necessary to act contrary to it you should only do so after discussion and with the documented approval of, the committee or the director of a production.

The safeguarding children code of conduct is in addition to the other requirements of behaviour detailed in:

- Wells Operatic Society Rules
- Grievance procedure
- Code of Conduct
- Disciplinary rules

Engaging directly with children

All members should clearly understand the need to maintain appropriate boundaries in their dealings with children and young people. Members should be aware that they may be seen as role models by children and must always act in an appropriate manner.

When you are working with children on behalf of the WOS you are acting in a position of trust. Broadly speaking, a relationship of trust can be described as one in which one party is in a position of power or influence over the other by virtue of their work or the nature of their activity. It is vital for all those in positions of trust to understand the power this can give them over those they care for and the responsibility they must exercise because of this relationship.

Although children over the age of 16 can legally consent to sexual activity, they may still be relatively immature emotionally and vulnerable to harm through an abusive sexual relationship. It is essential that those who may be in a position of responsibility and trust recognise this vulnerability and ensure that it is not exploited.

Guidance across the UK makes it clear that sexual activity between children who are close in age and understanding should not automatically result in prosecution. Instead, a range of factors should be considered to determine whether it would be in the public interest (Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) 2021). These include:

- Whether the sexual activity was entered into willingly
- Any power imbalance, coercion or exploitation
- The children's relative age, maturity and level of development.

Where a person aged 18 or over is in a specified position of trust with a child under 16 (the age of consent), it is an offence for that person to engage in sexual activity with or in the presence of that child, or to cause or incite that child to engage in or watch sexual activity even if the young person is ostensibly consenting.

The law gives extra protection to all under-18-year-olds, regardless of whether they are over the age of consent. It is illegal:

- To take, show or distribute indecent photographs of a child under the age of 18 (this includes images shared through sexting or sharing nudes)
- To sexually exploit a child under the age of 18
- For a person in a position of trust (for example teachers or care workers) to engage in sexual activity with anyone under the age of 18 who is in the care of their organisation.

Any behaviour, which might allow a sexual relationship to develop between the person in a position of trust and the children in their care, must be avoided.

Any sexual relationship within a position of trust relationship is unacceptable so long as the relationship of trust continues.

All those in WOS have a duty to raise concerns about behaviour of staff, volunteers, managers and others, which may be harmful to those in their care, without prejudice to

their own position.

Allegations relating to a breach of this code may be reported to the police and social services and may also be investigated in line with WOS disciplinary procedures.

Unsupervised Contact

- The society will attempt to ensure that no adult has unsupervised contact with children.
- If possible, there will always be two adults in the room when working with children.
- If unsupervised contact is unavoidable, steps will be taken to minimise risk. For example, work will be carried out in a public area, or in a designated room with a door open.
- If it is predicted that an individual is likely to require unsupervised contact with children, they may be required to obtain a criminal record disclosure (DBS).
- If during a rehearsal there is only one adult present who is not DBS checked, they will either need to find an adult who is DBS checked or cancel the rehearsal.

Physical Contact

- All adults will maintain a safe and appropriate distance from children.
- Adults will only touch children when it is necessary in relation to the activity.
- Adults will seek the consent of the child prior to any physical contact and the purpose of the contact shall be made clear.

Child-on-child abuse

Child-on-child abuse is a growing concern. Child-on-child abuse includes:

- Physical and sexual abuse
- Sexual harassment and violence
- Emotional harm
- On and offline bullying
- Teenage relationship abuse
- Gang activity

This list is not exhaustive. The perpetrator and victim should be under 18 years old. Normal safeguarding and child protection policies should still be followed in this instance.

Managing sensitive information

- Permission will be sought from the parents for use of photographic material featuring children for promotional or other purposes.
- The society's web-based materials and activities will be carefully monitored for inappropriate use.
- The society will ensure confidentiality in order to protect the rights of its members, including the safe handling, storage and disposal of any sensitive information such as criminal record disclosures.

Identifying and responding to safeguarding concerns

There are key steps to follow:

1. Suspicion of abuse
2. Disclosure of abuse
3. Recording
4. Rights & Confidentiality

Suspicion of abuse

- If you see or suspect abuse of a child while in the care of the society, please make this known to the DSLs or if they are not available the Child Protection Officer. If you suspect that the person with responsibility for child protection is the source of the problem, you should make your concerns known to the DSLs ASAP.
- Please make a note for your own records of what you witnessed as well as your response, in case there is follow-up in which you are involved.
- If a serious allegation is made against any member of the society, chaperone, member etc., that individual will be suspended immediately until the investigation is concluded. The individual will be excluded from the theatre, rehearsal rooms etc. and will not have any unsupervised contact with any other children in the production.

Disclosure of abuse

If a child confides in you that abuse has taken place:

- Remain calm and in control but do not delay taking action.
- Listen carefully to what has been said. Allow the child to tell you at their own pace and ask questions only for clarification. Don't ask leading questions that suggest a particular answer.
- Don't promise to keep it a secret. You must use the first opportunity to share the information with the person with responsibility for child protection. Make it clear to the child that you will need to share this information with others. Make it clear that you will only tell the people who need to know and who will be able to help.
- Reassure the child that 'they did the right thing' in telling someone.
- Tell the child what you are going to do next.
- Speak immediately to the person with responsibility for child protection, in this case the DSLs. It is their responsibility to liaise with the relevant authorities, usually social services or the police.
- As soon as possible after the disclosing conversation, make a note of what was said, using the child's own words. Note the date, time, any names that were involved or mentioned, and who you gave the information to. Make sure you sign and date your record.
- If the child makes an allegation about one of the DSLs, then you must report this to the other DSL.
- If both DSL's have an allegation made against them then this disclosure will be made to the Child Protection Officer, who will then pass this on to the Committee.

Recording

- In all situations, including those in which the cause of concern arises from a disclosure made in confidence, the details of an allegation or reported incident will be recorded, regardless of whether the concerns have been shared with a statutory child protection agency.
- An accurate note shall be made of the date and time of the incident or disclosure, the parties involved, what was said or done and by whom, any action taken to investigate the matter, any further action taken e.g., suspension of an individual, where relevant the reasons why the matter was not referred to a statutory agency, and the name of the persons reporting and to whom it was reported.
- The record will be stored securely and shared only with those who need to know about the incident or allegation.

Rights & Confidentiality

- All disclosures MUST be treated as confidential. It is at the discretion of the DSLs to decide who needs to know what regarding a disclosure. Members of the society cannot take it upon themselves to tell other parties. This includes but is not limited to committee members, normal members, parents or other children.
- If a complaint is made against a member of the society, they will be made aware of their rights under the society's disciplinary procedures.
- No matter how you may feel about the accusation, both the alleged abuser and the child who is thought to have been abused have the right to confidentiality under the Data Protection Act 1998. Remember also that any possible criminal investigation could be compromised through inappropriate information being released.
- In criminal law the Crown, or other prosecuting authority, must prove guilt and the defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

Making a referral

It is WOS policy that all concerns about children are reported as soon as possible and within one working day, to the relevant DSL. The following steps must be followed:

1. The person who identifies the concern should record the details of the concern (see 'Disclosure of abuse').
2. Once this has been recorded, it should then be passed on to the DSLs.
3. The DSLs will decide if it is appropriate to make a referral to social care, the local authority, or the police. As part of making this decision the DSLs may consult with, social care or the NSPCC Helpline. All referrals must be made within 24 hours of the concern or disclosure coming to light.
4. All urgent referrals (where there is an immediate concern) should be made by telephone and then written details of the referral must be sent to social care within 48 hours of contacting them by phone.
5. If it is decided that a referral to social care or the police is not required, the relevant DSL should keep the original written referral (step 1) and indicate the reason for not

making a referral. This information may become relevant later if further concerns emerge. This information should be put in secure storage.

6. Once a referral has been made to social care the social worker has a day to decide what further action is necessary to take and should inform the referrer of this. If the DSL has not heard anything back from the social worker within three working days, they should follow this up.
7. If further signs of potential abuse and neglect are identified again, then report and refer again as per this procedure.

Dos and don'ts

These useful tips will help you during a disclosure:

- **Do** listen to the child.
- **Do** take what the child says seriously.
- **Do** act quickly.
- **Do** share your worries with Children's Social Care, the police or the NSPCC – they are there to help you.
- **Do** continue to offer support to the child.
- **Don't** delay.
- **Don't** probe or push the child for explanations.
- **Don't** assume that someone else knows and will help the child. You must act.
- **Don't** be afraid to voice your concerns, the child may need urgent protection and help.

Referring to social care and/or the police

It is not the responsibility of anyone at WOS to decide whether a child is being abused or neglected. However, it is your job to pass on the information to those who are qualified to do so.

Children's social care has a statutory duty under the Children Act 1989 to ensure the welfare of each child. When it receives a child protection referral it has a legal responsibility to make enquiries to protect the child. This may involve talking to the child and family and gathering information from other people who know the child. The enquiries may also be carried out jointly with the police. In some circumstances there will be a child protection conference and possibly court proceedings, but this is rare. In most cases the local authority will seek to offer the child and the family help and support (often referred to as 'early help').

Criminal Record Disclosures

- If the society believes it is in its best interests to obtain criminal record disclosures for chaperones or other personnel, it will inform the individual of the necessary procedures and the level of disclosure required. A Standard disclosure will apply for anyone with supervised access to children. An Enhanced disclosure will be required for anyone with unsupervised access.
- The society will have a written code of practice for the handling of disclosure information.

- The society will ensure that information contained in the disclosure is not misused.

Chaperones

- Chaperones will be appointed by the society for the care of children for the duration of all dress rehearsals and performances. By law the chaperone is acting in loco parentis and should exercise the care which a good parent might be reasonably expected to give to a child. The maximum number of children in the chaperone's care shall not exceed 12.
- Potential chaperones will be required to supply proof that they are in possession of a chaperone licence from Somerset Country Council.
- Chaperones will be made aware of the society's Safeguarding Policy and Procedures.
- Chaperones will not usually have unsupervised access to children in their care. If unsupervised access is unavoidable, or if this is a requirement of the local authority, a criminal record disclosure will be sought.
- Chaperones must be informed of any additional medical requirements a child may have. This includes but is not limited to, if they are diabetic, have ADHD or are autistic.
- Where chaperones are not satisfied with the conditions for the children, they should bring this to the attention of the director, producer or the committee. If changes cannot be made satisfactorily, the chaperone should consider not allowing the child to continue.
- If a chaperone considers that a child is unwell or too tired to continue, the chaperone must inform the producer and not allow the child to continue.
- Under the Dangerous Performances Act, no child of compulsory school age is permitted to do anything which may endanger life or limb. This could include working on wires or heavy lifting. Chaperones should tell the director or producer to cease using children in this way and should contact the local authority.
- During performances, chaperones will be responsible for meeting children at the stage door and signing them into the building.
- Children will be always kept together except when using separate dressing rooms.
- Chaperones will be aware of where the children are at all times.
- Children are not to leave the theatre unsupervised by chaperones unless in the company of their parents.
- Children will be adequately supervised while going to and from the toilets.
- Chaperones should be aware of the safety arrangements and first aid procedures in the venue and will ensure that children in their care do not place themselves and others in danger.
- Chaperones should have written arrangements for children after performances. If someone different is to collect the child, a telephone call should be made to the parent to confirm the arrangements.
- Children should be signed out when leaving and a record made of the person collecting.

- If a parent has not collected the child, it is the duty of the chaperone to stay with that child or decide to take them home.

Safeguarding contacts

When making a safeguarding referral this should always be directed to the relevant local authority of the child's domestic residence. The relevant contact details will be found on the website for the local authority and on the website for the local safeguarding children board for the area www.somerset.gov.uk

If you are worried about a child, a young person under the age of 18, or a vulnerable adult you should contact Somerset Council on **0300 1232224** or childrens@somerset.gov.uk.

For free 24-hour advice on safeguarding concerns call NSPCC Helpline **0808 800 5000** or help@NSPCC.org.uk

For a child/young person to speak confidentially about their concerns and worries advise that they call Childline on **0800 1111** or www.childline.org.uk

Disclosure and Barring Services **01325 953795**

Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command **0870 000 3344**

In an emergency always contact the police by dialling 999