



## **VIOLENCE POLICY**

*The Living Room* acknowledges the responsibility of the committee and various churches to provide direction and support to volunteers. In addition, all volunteers have an individual responsibility never to put themselves, their colleagues, clients or members of the public at unnecessary risk. These procedures should be viewed within the context of that shared responsibility.

### **Defining violence and aggression**

Although these guidelines focus on the extreme end of violent behaviour, this does not mean to imply that only physical assault is of concern. Threats and verbal abuse, for example, are also recognized for their intimidating and undermining impact and, where appropriate, these guidelines should apply to all forms of aggressive behaviour.

### **Principles**

- Every effort will be made to diffuse any potentially violent situation
- Physical violence will not be tolerated amongst guests or volunteers
- Implied violence and threatening behaviour will not be tolerated
- The use or threatened use of any weapon will not be tolerated

### **General guidelines**

- It is natural to be frightened of violence, and this needs to be taken into account in the expectations of oneself or others when dealing with actual or potential violence or threatening behaviour.

- In responding to violence or potential violence, one's own safety and that of colleagues and the client group must be seen as the first consideration.
- Guidelines can never cover every eventuality. Volunteers must also draw on their experience, skills and common sense when faced with aggressive situations.
- Any guest or volunteer who uses physical violence may be banned immediately.
- Anyone who consistently provokes violence may be banned
- Anyone who consistently threatens or implies violence may be banned.
- All volunteers should co-operate in taking a consistent approach to confronting clients about unacceptable behaviour and in banning or excluding clients from the building. As far as possible, one volunteer should not be identified as the instigator of a ban – these should be presented as team decisions, and all volunteers must actively support the decision even if they have a different opinion.

Please note that banning is a last resort for guests who do not exhibit continuous violent or harmful behaviour.

#### **When a violent incident occurs**

- It is the responsibility of all volunteers to alert colleagues at the first sign of aggression and to act co-operatively to diffuse the situation.
- One or two volunteers should talk to the individual/s concerned, remaining calm, but firm, and trying to create opportunities for the client/s to back down without feeling humiliated. Where possible, the client/s should be taken aside.
- Other volunteers should remain at a reasonable distance but pay attention in case the situation escalates. Volunteers who are not directly involved with the main protagonists should attempt to keep other clients calm, and prevent them from becoming involved unless they are friends who can assist.

- In particular, one volunteer should ensure that any vulnerable people are removed from the area and if possible, potential weapons such as plates, cutlery, etc should be removed from the area.
- Space should be created to ensure that people are not crowded into a confined area. All those present should be mindful of their own and others “escape route” should it be necessary to get out of the way fast.
- One worker should be in a position to phone for police assistance should this become necessary. It may be useful to identify in advance which volunteer on your shift would have this responsibility should a situation arise.
- If an incident escalates and the client/s cannot be calmed, then volunteers should be prepared to vacate the area. Personal safety must be put before the protection of property. The police should be summoned immediately.
- In exceptional circumstances, if retreat is not possible, volunteers should take appropriate measures to defend themselves. In the unlikely event of an attack, only force sufficient to stop the attacker and prevent injury to self, colleagues or clients should be used, but reasonable restraint is acceptable.

**When an incident has taken place:**

If an incident does occur, it is likely to be very unsettling for everyone involved in the project, whether volunteer or client.

Some things that can be done (guided by the Team Leader for the shift) include:

- Promote first aid where necessary
- Providing reassurance and helping everyone to calm down
- Recording details of the incident as quickly as possible, please include names and times. Full statements will be taken at another time. Details of the incident will be recorded on an incident form with any action taken
- Arranging for any volunteer that has been scared or hurt to leave the shift
- Arranging longer term support where necessary

- Discuss the incident and try and draw out constructive lessons for avoiding a similar incident in the future in the morning with the Project Co-ordinator
- Consider providing Guests with brief details of what happened and how it was dealt with; this is to prevent rumours and provide reassurance that incidents are dealt with effectively.
- Details of individuals who have been banned will be circulated to the next shift team, the other shelter venues and the management committee.

**The police may be called in the following instances:**

- If anyone is being threatening/violent with a weapon or is seen to be in possession of a weapon
- If there is a multiple fight which cannot be contained
- If anyone has failed to accept a ban, refuses to leave when asked and/or is persistently coming back to a shelter.
- Or any situation where volunteers feel unable to contain the situation.

**Role of volunteers**

- Volunteers are encouraged to de-escalate any potential problems if they feel confident and safe to do so.
- Do not put yourself at risk of harm.
- If you have time, ask another volunteer to keep an eye on the situation, and inform the Team Leader if necessary.
- If you see another volunteer in a situation which may escalate, try to inform the Team Leader before trying to offer assistance. Be sensitive to the fact that joining heated discussions can be unhelpful, especially if the guest may feel that people are 'ganging up' on them.
- If any Volunteer feels uncomfortable or unsafe then it is better for them to remove themselves from the situation and then to inform the Team Leader.

### **Counselling**

- This may be offered to members of staff or volunteers after any serious incident.

### **Weapons**

- If a volunteer sees a weapon at any time on a guest they should inform the Team Leader and inform the Police. Please see Police Protocol.

### **Training**

- All volunteers and staff will be offered training on personal safety.