



Whistleblowing Policy

What is Whistleblowing?

In this policy 'Whistleblowing' means the reporting by staff of suspected misconduct, illegal acts or failure to act in accordance with the mission, vision and aims of the Fields of Dreams.

The aim of this Policy is to encourage staff and others who have serious concerns about any aspect of a colleagues work to come forward and voice those concerns.

Staff are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within Fields of Dreams. 'Whistleblowing' is viewed by the Fields of Dreams as a positive act that can make a valuable contribution to the wellbeing of the special animals and children who attend. It is not disloyal to colleagues to speak up for the benefit of the greater good. Fields of Dreams is committed to supporting and empowering vulnerable children, providing a happy home for the animals and a positive and welcoming environment for all. To help achieve this we encourage freedom of speech.

If you are considering raising a concern you should read this policy first. It explains:

- the type of issues that can be raised
- how the person raising a concern will be protected from victimisation and harassment
- how to raise a concern, and

- what the Senior Management at Fields of Dreams will do.

What is the aim of the policy and when does it apply?

The Policy is designed to ensure that you can raise your concerns about wrongdoing or malpractice within Fields of Dreams without fear of victimisation or subsequent discrimination.

It is also intended to encourage and enable you to raise serious concerns **within** Fields of Dreams rather than ignoring a problem or 'blowing the whistle' outside.

This Policy aims to:

- encourage you to feel confident in raising serious concerns at the earliest opportunity and to question and act upon concerns about practice
- provide avenues for you to raise those concerns and receive feedback on any action taken
- ensure that you receive a response to your concerns and that you are aware of how to pursue them if you are not satisfied
- reassure you that you will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if you have made any disclosure in good faith.

This policy is intended to enable staff who become aware of wrongdoing in the Fields of Dreams that is affecting another person, animal or service, to report their concerns at the earliest opportunity so that they can be properly investigated.

If a student, parent, carer, school, organisation or visitor has a concern about the provision it should be raised as a complaint to the Fields of Dreams.

What should be reported?

Any serious concerns that you have about service provision or the conduct of staff & representatives of Fields of Dreams that

- make you feel uncomfortable in terms of the vision, mission statements and ethos of Fields of Dreams;
- are not in accordance with Fields of Dreams policies;
- demonstrate improper or inappropriate behaviour.

These might relate to:

- conduct which is an offence or a breach of the law (a criminal offence has been committed or failing to comply with any other legal obligation)
- disclosures related to miscarriages of justice
- racial, sexual, disability or other discrimination
- health and safety of the public, children, animals and/or other staff
- damage to the environment
- unauthorised use of Fields of Dreams funds or other assets
- neglect or abuse (as determined in the Safeguarding Policy) of students and/or animals
- bullying or affecting others right to a positive working environment
- other unethical conduct.

This list is not exhaustive.

Protecting the Whistleblower

Your legal rights

This policy has been written to take account of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 which protects workers making disclosures about certain matters of concern, when those disclosures are made in accordance with the Act's provisions and in the public interest.

The Act makes it unlawful for Fields of Dreams to dismiss anyone or allow them to be victimised on the basis that they have made an appropriate lawful disclosure in accordance with the Act.

Harassment or Victimisation

Fields of Dreams is committed to good practice and high standards and to being supportive of you as a valued member of the collective.

Fields of Dreams recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. If you honestly and reasonably believe what you are saying is true, you should have nothing to fear because you will be doing your duty to support the aims of Fields of Dreams, promoting a positive environment for all including those for whom you are providing a service.

Fields of Dreams will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation of a whistleblower (including informal pressures) and will take appropriate action to protect you when you raise a concern in good faith and will treat this as a serious disciplinary offence which will be dealt with under the disciplinary rules and procedures as stipulated in the Safeguarding Policy.

Support to you

Throughout this process:

- you will be given full support from senior management

- your concerns will be taken seriously, and
- Fields of Dreams will do all it can to help you throughout the investigation

Confidentiality

All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal your identity if that is your wish. If disciplinary or other proceedings follow the investigation, it may not be possible to take action without your help, so you may be asked to come forward as a witness. If you agree to this, you will be offered advice and support.

Anonymous Allegations

This policy encourages you to put your name to your allegation whenever possible. If you do not tell us who you are it will be much more difficult for us to protect your position or to give you feedback. This policy is not ideally suited to concerns raised anonymously.

Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful, but they may be considered at the discretion Fields of Dreams senior management. In exercising this discretion, the factors to be considered would include:

- the seriousness of the issue raised
- the credibility of the concern, and
- the likelihood of confirming the allegation from other sources

Untrue Allegations

If you make an allegation in good faith and believe it to be true, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, Fields of Dreams will recognise your concern and you have nothing to fear. If, however, you make an allegation frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, appropriate action that could include disciplinary action, may be taken.

Raising a Concern

Who should you raise your concern with?

This will depend on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is suspected of the wrongdoing. You can raise your concerns with any member of the Senior Leadership Team as below:

Emi-Lu Daley – Director & Founder emi@fieldsofdreamsfarm.org

Kerry Fisher - Education, Training & Creative Director
kerry@fieldsofdreamsfarm.org

Office Manager office@fieldsofdreamsfarm.org

How to raise a concern

You may raise your concern by telephone, in person or in writing. The earlier you express your concern, the easier it is to take action. Whichever way you decide to disclose the information you will be requested to provide a detailed, written statement. You will need to provide the following information:

- the nature of your concern and why you believe it to be true
- the background and history of the concern (giving relevant dates)

Although you are not expected to prove beyond doubt the truth of your suspicion, you will need to demonstrate to the person contacted that you have a genuine concern relating to suspected wrongdoing or malpractice within Fields of Dreams and that there are reasonable grounds for your concern.

You may wish to consider discussing your concern with a colleague first and you may find it easier to raise the matter if there are two (or more) of you who have had the same experience or concerns.

You may invite your trade union, professional association representative or a friend to be present for support during any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns you have raised.

What Fields of Dreams will do

Fields of Dreams will respond to your concerns as quickly as possible. Do not forget that testing your concerns is not the same as either accepting or rejecting them.

The overriding principle will be the public interest. To be fair to all employees, including those who may be wrongly or mistakenly accused, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take.

The investigation may need to be carried out under terms of strict confidentiality, i.e. by not informing the subject of the complaint until (or if) it becomes necessary to do so. In certain cases, however, such as allegations of ill treatment of others, suspension from work may have to be considered immediately. Protection of others, particularly students and including animals, is paramount in all cases.

Where appropriate, the matters raised may:

- be investigated by management
- be referred to the police
- be referred and put through established child protection/abuse procedures as per the Safeguarding Policy
- form the subject of an independent inquiry

Within ten working days of a concern being raised, the person investigating your concern will write to you:

- acknowledging that the concern has been received
- indicating how Fields of Dreams proposes to deal with the matter
- supplying you with information on staff support mechanisms
- telling you whether further investigations will take place and if not, why not.

The amount of contact between you and senior leaders considering the issues will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of your information. It is likely that you will be interviewed to clarify and confirm your disclosure.

Any meeting can be arranged away from your workplace, if you wish, and a union or professional association representative or a friend may accompany you in support.

Fields of Dreams will do what it can to minimise any difficulties that you may experience as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if you are asked to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings, Fields of Dreams will arrange for you to receive appropriate advice and support.

You need to be assured that your disclosure has been properly addressed. Unless there are any legal reasons why this cannot be done, you will be kept informed of the progress and outcome of any investigation.

Please note that This policy **does not** prevent you from taking your own legal advice.

Fields of Dreams will review this policy annually.

Kerry Fisher – Education, Training & Creative Director, June 2021