

Safeguarding children in museums

Recently there have been changes to the law and to the way local authority departments are structured to improve the protection and safety of children and vulnerable people. All those who work in museums, both paid staff and volunteers, need to be confident that they are acting professionally, within the law and according to best practice. The aim of this briefing note is to add to the information museums need to develop appropriate policies and procedures to ensure that they provide a welcoming and safe environment for people of all ages, including children.

The need for museums to have policy documents and procedures to meet their legal obligations is highlighted in the Museum Accreditation Standard, Section 3.3.2.

MLA South East supports the philosophy of **Every Child Matters: Change for Children**: an approach to the well-being of children and young people from birth to age 19. The government's aim is for every child, whatever their background or their circumstances, to have the support they need to:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being

This briefing sheet is intended as a starting point for a process which is likely to involve research, discussion, training and risk assessment. Each museum will be making decisions about its own policies and procedures in this context and separate assessments should be carried out for specific activities and individual sites.

Children and their families are a significant audience for museums across the South East. Children and young people are the museum visitors, staff, trustees and volunteers of the future. It is important for museums to balance consideration of the safety of children and vulnerable people with the need to be welcoming and accessible to them. Many other local organisations will be working with similar objectives and within the same legal framework. As part of our communities, we all have shared responsibilities for keeping children safe.

Government guidelines

The Government has given guidance setting out the requirements in: *Working together to safeguard children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*. HM Government, 2006.

All organisations that provide services or work with children and young people should:

- 1 Have senior managers that are committed to children's and young people's well-being and safety
- 2 Be clear about people's responsibilities to safeguard and promote children's and young people's welfare
- 3 Have effective recruitment and human resources procedures, including checking all new staff and volunteers to make sure they are safe to work with children and young people
- 4 Have procedures for dealing with allegations of abuse against members of staff and volunteers
- 5 Make sure staff get training that helps them do their job well
- 6 Have procedures about how to safeguard and promote the welfare of young people
- 7 Have agreements about working with other organisations

Local Authorities

If a museum is within a local authority, it must follow its policies and procedures. Independent and voluntary run museums can expect support from local authority partners.

“Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is the responsibility of the local authority, working in partnership with other public organisations, the voluntary sector and children and young people, parents and carers and the wider community”. (HMG 2006)

The new integrated approach to child safety means that it is important to identify contacts both within the local authority and the wider community who can share up to date and practical advice. Through the local authority, museums can contact their Local Safeguarding Children Board (these have replaced Area Protection Committees).

Surestart

Another way to make useful community contacts would be through local Sure Start Children's Centres. These are at the heart of the government's strategy to deliver better outcomes for children and families, building on successes of Sure Start local programmes, early excellence centres and neighbourhood nurseries and mainstreaming the lessons learned to extend the benefits to all families. The government is committed to delivering a Sure Start Children's Centre for every community by 2010. To find your nearest centre, see www.surestart.gov.uk

Frequently asked questions

1. How does Child Protection affect us?

We are all part of the community with responsibilities for children. Museums also have responsibilities towards their staff and volunteers, to ensure that they have confidence dealing with children and young people and can follow appropriate procedures if a difficult incident occurs. Just as a museum should have an emergency plan in place, policies and procedures on child safety should enable a professional approach to be taken even in a distressing situation.

2. Do we need to be registered with Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education)?

There are national standards for the day care and childminding of children under 8 years old and these are regulated by Ofsted. The service a museum provides will count as day care if it operates for **more than two hours a day** and **6 or more days per year** and it will therefore need to be registered. It is good practice to follow the national standards even when this is not required by law and including children over 8 years old. The standards cover staff-child ratios, risk assessment and health and safety. There is information, including the details of national standards on www.surestart.gov.uk.

3. What are the rules about unaccompanied children?

Each museum is expected to develop its own policies and procedures (rules) for dealing with unsupervised children, following best practice and in the light of its own risk assessments. For legal purposes, someone is a child until their 19th birthday. Children are the legal responsibility of their parents and carers **even when they are not present**. Museums may wish to display reminder notices explaining their policy e.g. Parents and carers are advised not to leave children unsupervised in the museum. Children under 8 (*or whatever age the museum considers appropriate*) should never be left unsupervised in the museum. There should also be procedures for staff to follow, for example, if a child is lost or is not picked up at the end of an organised activity.

Problems anticipated by staff or volunteers in connection with the behaviour of unaccompanied children should not be confused with the need to ensure their safety.

4. Who needs CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) checks?

The Criminal Records Bureau has been established to improve access to information on criminal records held by the police. This service enables criminal conviction checks to be undertaken at the time of recruitment for candidates selected to work with vulnerable people, including children. There are different levels of Disclosure:

Standard

This is for staff and volunteers, who are in regular contact with children or vulnerable people. Contact could be virtual or face to face. Regular could mean more than once.

Enhanced

This is for staff and volunteers with regular unsupervised contact with children or vulnerable people.

Museums should consider which levels of Disclosure would be appropriate for staff and volunteers, taking into account a risk assessment of factors such as the layout of the site and working practices. A museum requiring only a few checks may be unable to register with CRB and will then need to look for an Umbrella Body to process its Disclosures. Any Registered Body can also act as an Umbrella Body. This means that as well as accessing the Disclosure service for its own purposes, it may also countersign Disclosure applications on behalf of others. For example, if a local authority is acting as a Registered Body for recruiting its own staff, it may also act as an Umbrella Body for local voluntary organisations or small employers in the area.

For more information, see the CRB website www.crb.gov.uk.

Obtaining Disclosures should be seen as one part of a wider programme, as described in the guidelines listed above. It is important to carry out effective recruitment, training and supervision of staff and volunteers. There should also be procedures and policies in place to ensure that everyone is aware of their responsibilities.

For further information:

Every Child Matters www.everychildmatters.org.uk

Criminal Records Bureau www.crb.gov.uk

Children Act 2004 (section 11), Education Act 2002 (section 175)

www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2004/20040031

Surestart www.surestart.gov.uk

NSPCC www.nspcc.org.uk

Volunteering England www.volunteering.org.uk

Keeping the arts safe, Arts Council 2003 www.artscouncil.org.uk

Voluntary Arts Network www.voluntaryarts.org

Do you have problems accessing websites for information? Contact your Museum Development Officer for help with documents mentioned in this sheet or ask about internet access at your nearest library.

Please note: The information in this paper is for guidance only and is not a statement of law. It is intended to assist organisations and provide information where appropriate. MLA South East is not liable for action taken, or not taken, as a result of reading this notice.