

United Community Center, Inc.

Child Protection Policy

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Introduction

The **United Community Center** is committed to providing a healthy, nurturing environment for children and youth under 18 years of age. The United Community Center (UCC) has served the Milwaukee community since 1970 and is a nonprofit, community-based agency located in the Walkers Point neighborhood of Milwaukee that has provided a wide range of services to generations of Latinos over the past 41 years. The mission of the United Community Center is to provide programs to Hispanics and near south side residents of all ages in the areas of education, cultural arts, recreation, geriatric, community development and health and human services. UCC assists individuals to achieve their potential by focusing on cultural heritage as a means of strengthening personal development and by promoting high academic standards in all of its educational programs.

Throughout UCC's history, the agency has developed programs and approaches with the aim of improving the overall quality of life of current and future Walker's Point residents; providing a future of opportunities and prosperity for Latino children; and changing the cultural stigma, barriers, and disparities that limit Latinos at both local and national levels. The agency collaborates with community agencies, schools, universities, law enforcement, and others to provide coordinated services and participate in research studies, some of national significance, to better understand Latinos and develop programs and services that are attuned to their unique needs.

The Center strives to enrich family life by helping youth develop socially, emotionally and academically. These goals are achieved through structured programs including organized athletic activities, chaperoned field trips, and ongoing mentoring and homework assistance. As youth caretakers, the Center partners with parents in the role of committed stewards. This child protection policy and procedures are integral to the UCC employee and volunteer policies and procedures adopted to ensure the well being of the youth in our community.

Defining Child Abuse

Child abuse is any form of physical, emotional or sexual mistreatment or lack of care that leads to injury or harm. There are four main types of abuse: **physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect.**

Physical Abuse: where adults physically hurt or injure a young person e.g. hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning, biting, scalding, suffocating, and drowning. Giving young people alcohol or inappropriate drugs would also constitute child abuse.

Sexual Abuse occurs when adults (male and female) use children to meet their own sexual needs. This could include full sexual intercourse, masturbation, oral sex, anal intercourse and fondling. Showing young people pornography or talking to them in a sexually explicit manner are also forms of sexual abuse.

Emotional Abuse: the persistent emotional ill treatment of a young person, likely to cause severe and lasting adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve telling a young person they are useless, worthless, unloved, inadequate or valued in terms of only meeting the needs of another person. It may feature expectations of young people that are not appropriate to their age or development. It may cause a young person to be frightened or in danger by being constantly shouted at, threatened or taunted which may make the young person frightened or withdrawn.

Emotional abuse in sports may occur when the young person is constantly criticized, given negative feedback, or expected to perform at levels that are above their capability. Other forms of emotional abuse could take the form of name calling and bullying. **Bullying** may come from another young person or an adult. Bullying is defined as deliberate hurtful behavior, usually repeated over a period of time, where it is difficult for those bullied to defend themselves. Bullying can occur in face-to-face encounters as well as others means such as email, blogging or other social media.

- **Neglect** occurs when an adult fails to meet the young person's basic physical and/or psychological needs, to an extent that is likely to result in serious impairment of the child's health or development. For example, failing to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing, failing to protect from physical harm or danger, or failing to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

Refusal to give love, affection and attention can also be a form of neglect.

Neglect could occur when a parent or guardian, volunteer, or staff member does not keep the young person safe, or exposing them to undue cold/heat or unnecessary risk of injury.

United Community Center Child Protection Policy

The Child Protection Policy has been established to protect the child/youth in our care from incidences of negligence and abuse. The purpose of this policy is to empower UCC staff members and volunteers to prevent, recognize, and react responsibly about child sexual abuse. United Community Center's programs take place in safe, nurturing atmospheres that foster healthy relationship building between adults and youth and between youth and youth. All youth, their parents or caregivers, including UCC staff members and volunteers, must be confident that such a positive environment exists.

The Child Protection Policy includes procedures that ensure effective screening and selection of all employees and volunteers. In order to prevent child abuse from taking place, the policy presents guidelines for interactions between individuals at the United Community Center at all sponsored activities as well as off-program hours. The policy identifies concrete methods to ensure safe environments and offers training in prevention strategies to staff, volunteers, and all others involved in the caretaking of youth served by the Center. The policy provides instruction on monitoring the behavior of the youth, staff and volunteers. Additionally, written directives are provided for responding to inappropriate behavior, breaches in policy, and allegations and suspicions of child sexual abuse if they should occur.

1. Screening and Selecting United Community Center Staff and Volunteers

Goal: to select the best possible individuals for staff and volunteer positions and to screen out individuals who have sexually abused youth or are at a risk to abuse.

Volunteer Management Process:

A volunteer is anyone who comes to help at UCC, or participate in a UCC program or activity and is not a paid employee. UCC has many volunteers who engage in both on-going or one-time events. Volunteers who commit to an ongoing volunteer position at UCC will do the above activities: Applications, background check, reference check, and interview/orientation. Volunteers coming as a group for one-time events and activities sign a Volunteer Waiver where they commit to adhering to UCC Standard policies, which is provided at an introduction and orientation before project begins. All volunteers must complete either the application process or the Volunteer Waiver.

Written Application (for employment and volunteer positions)

The written application includes the name, address, phone number, social security number, birthdate, prior experience working with minors, educational background, and three year residential history of the applicant. No individual within five years of age of the youth being served can work or volunteer without adult supervision. If the applicant does not fulfill this requirement but is 18 years or older, he or she is allowed to work with the youth under direct adult supervision.

Professional Reference Checks

The applicant must complete the References section in the employment or volunteer application that includes permission for the Center to conduct reference checks. Reference information is strictly confidential and Center staff will take appropriate measures to ensure that the information is not accessible to unauthorized individuals. The United Community Center requires that references come from a variety of objective sources, and therefore excludes close friends and family members.

Criminal Background Checks

Permission must be obtained from applicants before completing the criminal background check. The Center has developed a BACKGROUND INFORMATION DISCLOSURE to be completed by all applicants and volunteers. Written responses give information to the Human Resources Department regarding the criminal background of applicants.

Employment with the United Community Center is contingent upon successfully passing the background check within the first week of employment. Volunteers are not permitted to work independently with youth until they have passed the background check.

Criminal background checks typically include name, sex offender registries, social security number, and are conducted at the county and state level unless extra measures are necessary. The Center will keep results of criminal background checks confidential. As with all personnel records for volunteers and staff, background checks are maintained in the Human Resources Office with access by the Human Resources Staff.

In-person Interview

The United Community Center staff interviewer is encouraged to ask follow-up questions from previous steps in the screening and selection process including the applicant's written application. Interview questions may address the applicant's experience working with children/youth, his or her reasons for wanting to work with children/youth, his or her beliefs about disciplinary techniques, and his or her interpersonal relationships.

Job applicants and volunteers are informed about the Child Protection Policy and procedures as well as all policies and procedures for protecting youth and clients. Applicants and volunteers will be required to sign a document verifying that they have received and read the UCC's Policies and Procedures Handbook and agree to abide by the policies and procedures set forth.

The United Community Center maintains records of applicants who are disqualified during the screening process or those employees or volunteers who are dismissed because of an offense. This assists in the screening of future applicants.

2. Guidelines on interactions Between Individuals

Goal: to ensure the safety of youth in their interactions with United Community Center staff or volunteers and with each other.

United Community Center provides a nurturing environment by supporting positive youth development, helping youth to feel valued, and providing the caring connections that serve as protective factors for youth. Guidelines are provided to ensure positive and appropriate interactions among youth and between staff and volunteers. In promoting and ensuring such positive interactions, the Center identifies behaviors that fall into the categories of appropriate, inappropriate and harmful.

- **Verbal Communication**

- Appropriate: praise; positive reinforcement for good work or behavior.
- Inappropriate/harmful: sexually provocative or degrading comments or put downs; risqué jokes; or use of obscene language.

- **Physical Behavior**

- Appropriate: pats on the back or shoulder or "high fives." Note that the use of any physical contact should be used with discretion.
- Inappropriate/harmful: patting the buttocks; intimate/romantic/sexual contact; corporal punishment (involving physical contact or inflicting pain or discomfort); or involving youth in any pornographic activities.

- **Additional Interaction Guidelines**

- UCC promotes activities that help youth develop socially and emotionally and has written policies and procedures for responding to actions (or allegations) of bullying and other abuse. Staff and volunteers are trained in these directives.

- The youth must also be clearly instructed on how to promote positive interactions and what constitutes inappropriate or harmful interactions.
- The United Community Center requires that, whenever possible, more than one adult is present with one or more youth. The policy discourages one-on-one interactions.
- In the event that one of the two adults temporarily leaves a room in which there are youth, the door must be fully open and, when possible, an extra “floater” adult will be made available. Appropriate choices would be the Administrative Assistant, Human Resources Coordinator, or another youth worker.
- Similarly, the organization requires that two (or more) youth will not be left without adult supervision. This helps to reduce the risk of unsupervised youth sexually or physically abusing other youth.
- UCC incorporates a “buddy system” to help prevent isolation of youth with staff or volunteers. Additionally, this system is monitored by Center staff to prevent youth-on-youth abuse.
- As with all organization programming, adults (including staff, volunteers, and parents) are encouraged to drop in unannounced. The unscheduled visits are known to help safeguard youth from all types of inappropriate situations.

3. Ensuring Safe Environments

Goal: to keep youth from situations in which they are at increased risk for sexual abuse.

- The United Community Center encourages staff and volunteers to engage in ongoing, active interaction with youth. This ensures a higher level of youth supervision and monitoring. The Center conducts periodic, unscheduled observation of these interactions as a “quality control” measure. When warranted, unusual or questionable behaviors will be reviewed and recorded in the UCC’s personnel files (Human Resources Office).
- UCC evaluates the level of risk by considering the location and time of day of each activity. Whenever possible, activities and programs will take place in open, visible, and well-lit buildings and outside areas in which multiple people can view activities. The United Community Center employs a “no closed doors” policy or requires windows in the doors to promote such visibility.
- On-going, extended year academic (homework) assistance is offered. All academic assistance will be conducted onsite at UCC unless authorized by the UCC’s Program Director. Off-site meetings, even those held in public areas, are discouraged to avoid at-risk situations.
- United Community Center provides academic tutoring. UCC’s computers are kept in an open lab area. Staff and volunteers will closely monitor youth’s use of the Internet. As a minimum, youth will be:
 - instructed on not sharing personal information with strangers, posting on websites, and cautioned about the use of social networking
 - required to advise Center staff or volunteer if he or she receives sexual emails or other online messages
 - required to sign an agreement that they will comply with all Internet safety guidelines established by the Center.
- Privacy is essential when youth, employees, and volunteers are toileting, showering, and changing clothes, unless youth require special supervision for such activities.

- In the case of an organized athletic activity or fieldtrip, two or more adults will be required for chaperoning youth. Ideally, the ratio of adult to youth will be at least 1:8, based on the activity, ages of youth, and the level of risk.
- If the class or program is in an isolated location, designated solely for the staff, volunteers, and youth of the organization, ascertain that individuals from outside the program are excluded or monitored.
- When sharing space with individuals from outside UCC's program, staff will request, when possible, a sign-in/out procedure and ongoing monitoring for outside individuals. The same adult-youth ratios apply when sharing space.
- Transportation policies and procedures limit one-on-one situations. Specific directives for transporting children to and from regular activities and special events are provided in the Employee and Volunteer Handbooks.

Critical Strategies for Ensuring Safe Environments

The United Community Center ensures safety through enhanced visibility of spaces that are open and visible to multiple people, along with the assurance of privacy, when appropriate. Strategies employed to provide youth a safe environment:

- Center is landscaped to ensure open, visible spaces with no concealment.
- Areas not used for programming are secured to prevent youth from being isolated.
- All doors in UCC program areas have windows.
- UCC has an absolute "no closed doors" policy.
- Bright lighting is available in all areas.
- Privacy is provided for toileting, showering, and changing clothes to reduce risk.
- Off-site adult supervision is enforced with an assigned staff coordinator.
- Staff will establish access control for admitting and releasing youth.

4. Monitoring Behavior

Goal: to prevent, recognize, and respond to inappropriate and harmful behaviors and to reinforce appropriate behaviors.

The United Community Center uses formal and informal supervision to observe, monitor, and document staff and volunteer interactions with children/youth. For such supervision and documentation to take place, staff and volunteers are made aware of their defined roles and responsibilities. Staff and volunteers will follow UCC's protocol in promptly responding to and reporting of inappropriate or harmful behavior, potential risk situations, and boundary violations. Further directives are provided in the training section.

5. Responding to Inappropriate Behavior, Breaches in Policy, and Allegations and Suspicions of Child Abuse

Goal: to respond quickly and appropriately to inappropriate or harmful behavior, infractions of child abuse prevention policies and procedures, and evidence or allegations of child abuse.

United Community Center staff and volunteers are required to know the policies and procedures for reporting suspected sexual abuse, including to whom and in what format reports are made. This is covered in the 3-day required orientation for new employees and volunteers and is provided annually for ongoing employees and volunteers. A 90-minute Mandated Reporting workshop is offered annually.

According to Wisconsin state law, professionals that work with children, including Center staff and volunteers, are mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect. Refer to: <http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/law-policies>.

- United Community Center staff and volunteers must know the inappropriate/harmful behaviors that require internal response. Examples of verbal communication and physical behavior are presented in this document in the *Guidelines on Interactions Between Individuals* section.
- Inappropriate/harmful behaviors, regardless of the severity, must be reported on an *Incident Report* form by the staff or volunteer who first learn of the abuse. The staff member or volunteer will not investigate

allegations or conduct their own investigations. The Incident Report must include the nature and extent of the abuse, the alleged perpetrator, and other relevant information.

- Staff or volunteer reporting the initial allegation will submit the Incident Report form to the UCC's Program Director prior to reporting to authorities.
- The Incident Report and related documentation will be kept confidential and maintained in the UCC's locked personnel cabinet with limited access.
- The United Community Center recognizes that child sexual abuse is a crime and most reported incidents are substantiated. If an allegation appears justified, a formal report will be completed by the UCC's Program Director, who is professionally and legally accountable for ensuring that all cases of abuse are reported to the proper authorities.
- Prior to submitting the report of suspicion or allegation to authorities, the Program Director may ask for clarification using open-ended comments such as *"Tell me more about what happened."* or *"What happened next?"* Center staff and volunteers are requested to minimize contaminating the child's memory and have the investigation conducted by a trained professional. Always support the child and reassure that it is not the youth's fault and that the Center's job is to protect youth.
- Direct-line is required to help expedite the process and minimize the number of times a youth has to repeat allegations. The Program Director will write a summary and submit a copy to the United Community Center's Director or, if school related, to the guidance counselor. This copy will be maintained in the locked personnel file cabinet.
- Specifically, the formal report will be made to authorities of the appropriate outside agency. The United Community Center reports:
 - child abuse cases to the:
Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare - 414/220-7233
 - sexual assault cases to the:
Milwaukee County Police Department - 414/935-7405

CONFIDENTIALITY is crucial in cases of child sexual abuse. The United Community Center's confidentiality policy is consistent with state legal requirements which includes withholding the names of potential victims, the accused perpetrator, the individual who made the report to authorities, and reporting the case only on a "need to know" basis to the appropriate individuals.

Responses to Cases of Child Abuse

- An allegation does not equate to guilt. However, the United Community Center must take steps to protect the youth in its care. Immediately after the report of the case to external authorities, if the alleged offender is an employee, he/she will be placed on suspension until the case is resolved legally. The United Community Center holds an appeal process in which individuals found not guilty of abusive behaviors may apply to return to their former program.
- The United Community Center, when appropriate, provides referrals for victims and their families to child sexual abuse organizations, counselors or therapists. Additional referrals include support groups for sexual abuse survivors and parents/caregivers of youth who have been sexually abused.
- The Center also offers referrals for agencies that deal with a restorative justice approach. Southeastern Wisconsin centers include:
 - **Wisconsin Community Services, Inc.** at 414/290-0400
 - **Marquette University Law School** at 414/288-7090

➤ **Community Conferencing Program at 414/278-4644**

6. Training for Child Abuse Prevention

Goal: to provide program staff and volunteers information and skills to help them prevent and respond to child sexual abuse.

The United Community Center sexual abuse prevention training includes education on rights and responsibilities of staff, volunteers, and youth that provides specific guidelines and offers opportunities to problem-solve potentially risky situations. The objective is to equip adults and youth with the knowledge and skills to be proactive. UCC strives to create a safe, healthy, and respectful environment. Accordingly, trainees are required to follow the child abuse protection policies and procedures in order to protect youth from abuse.

Training is conducted by the Human Resources Department, Program Director, the Coordinator of Youth Services or school Guidance Counselor. Training is conducted in an interactive approach, in which trainees are encouraged to ask questions and request clarifications relevant to the training materials or their experiences. In addition to the initial formal training session, questions or concerns can be raised at any time. All staff and volunteers will participate in a required special services training session.

Summary of Training Content for Staff and Volunteers

As caretakers and protectors of youth at the United Community Center, staff and volunteers will participate in abuse prevention training. Training includes:

- A definition of child abuse and a continuum of appropriate, inappropriate and harmful behaviors.
- Information about the prevalence of child abuse, making clear that the majority of cases of child abuse involve an abuser with whom the child is familiar, such as a previously well-trusted caregiver.
- A description of risk and protective factors for victimization and perpetration.
- Addressing common myths about offenders, such as the belief that most people who sexually abuse are strangers to the youth.
- Rules for personal conduct, dealing with risky or compromising situations, and the responsibility of staff and volunteers to act when they learn about inappropriate or harmful behavior.
- Education on the healthy development of youth, including sexuality development and current health trends (i.e.; incidence of oral sex).
- Developing a balance between providing a nurturing environment and working to prevent child abuse.
- Handling disclosures of inappropriate/harmful behaviors, reporting child sexual abuse allegations, and dealing with the alleged perpetrator.

Training Youth

All youth participating in the United Community Center's Youth Volunteer Corp Program will participate in a child protection training that will teach youth the importance of reporting and the procedure for reporting child abuse. The training will include advising youth on how to seek assistance or report abuse of another child. Youth Volunteer Corp. members will be strongly encouraged to immediately report abuse or suspicion of abuse of another child or youth to a United Community Center full time staff member. When seeking assistance, youth will be encouraged to talk to a: United Community Center staff member, another youth at the Center, or to someone at an outside organization. The training will also include information about child abuse and all that it encompasses including appropriate versus inappropriate/harmful behavior. It will also cover the importance of setting personal physical boundaries, being treated with respect and treating others with respect and how child abuse offenders, not their victims, are responsible for their behavior. During the training, youth will also be given a policies and procedures guide that will contain a section regarding the UCC Youth Volunteer Corp's Child Protection Policy.

SUMMARY

Child abuse is a complex issue that can have devastating consequences. The United Community Center is privileged in the role of nurturing and caretaking of youth. In that role we strive for healthy environments for every young person in our care and beyond.

While not a substitute for effective practices and strong monitoring, the United Community Center maintains professional liability insurance covering the actions of all employees and volunteers.

If there is a recommendation or concern that we can further address to ensure the well-being of these children/youth, please contact the Program Director or Human Resources Director at extension 2818 or email lramos@unitedcc.org.