



# Safeguarding and Protecting Children and Vulnerable People

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## Safeguarding and Protecting Children and Vulnerable People

### I. **Purpose:**

1. The International and National Society of St. Vincent de Paul are committed to protecting the rights of all people, and to ensuring that children and vulnerable persons are protected from physical and mental violence, injury, abuse and exploitation, including sexual abuse.
2. This policy outlines the standards for safeguarding children and vulnerable people with whom the Society of St Vincent de Paul, Diocesan Central Council of Greensburg, (DCCG) volunteers and employees might come into contact through their Vincentian works.

### II. **Application:**

1. This policy, in part, applies to all DCCG Conference Members and all volunteers assisting with DCCG Conference Special Works, who may have direct volunteer contact with children through the performance of their volunteer activities.
2. This policy also, in part, applies to all employees and volunteers of Special Works existing under the guidance of the DCCG.

### III. **References:**

1. SVdP National Resolution number: **06-11-2021 189 Safeguarding Policy  
National Safeguarding Policy for all Member Councils  
For Adoption by the National Council in August 2021  
Approved by Board of Directors June 11, 2021**
2. Greensburg Diocese (dioceseofgreensburg.org):
  - 3.1 [Child Protection & Clearances](#)
  - 2.2 [Code of Pastoral Conduct for Church Personnel of the Diocese of Greensburg](#)
3. State of Pennsylvania DOMESTIC RELATIONS CODE (23 PA.C.S.) - OMNIBUS AMENDMENTS  
Act of Jul. 1, 2015, P.L. 94, No. 15 Cl. 23  
Session of 2015  
No. 2015-15  
HB 1276

### III **Definitions:**

1. Direct volunteer contact --- The care, supervision, guidance or control of children and routine interaction with children.
2. Routine interaction --- Regular and repeated contact that is integral to a person's employment or volunteer responsibilities.



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3. Vulnerable Person --- Someone who is sixty-five or older who is unable to protect themselves from abuse because of age or a mental or physical condition, or an adult of any age with a disability.
4. Safeguarding --- A set of policies, procedures and practices employed to ensure our Lay Ministry remains safe for the vulnerable persons and the children of those we serve.
5. St Vincent de Paul Conference Members --- Active and Associate members of DCCG who are Catholic and those volunteers and associate members of our Lay Ministry who are not Catholic.
6. Special Work --- An activity where a Conference or Council devotes a special location, and people resources all year around. A Conference or Council run store or monthly food distribution/food pantry are examples of Special Works. Normal Conference activities related to “direct aid to those we serve” (such as home visits, paying rent and utilities, delivering groceries, etc.) is not a Special Work.

### **IV. Implementation of the Diocese of Greensburg policy:**

DCCG Conference members and conference volunteers, including those volunteering for Conference sponsored Special Works or other Conference sponsored activities on Diocesan property, are considered “Church Personnel,” and must adhere to the Code of Pastoral Conduct for Church Personnel of the Diocese of Greensburg (Code of Pastoral Conduct) accessed on the Greensburg Diocese Web Site ([dioceseofgreensburg.org](http://dioceseofgreensburg.org)), to first prevent harm and abuse, and then report and respond whenever concerns arise.

### **V. Implementation of the National Council Society of St. Vincent de Paul policy:**

1. Creating safe environments – All DCCG volunteers and employees will respect the dignity of those we serve, to include but not limited to positive and respectful language and interactions, the protection of personal information, and obtaining written consent before sharing personal likeness, stories or information with anyone beyond the Vincentian direct service providers.
2. Participation – This policy includes the protocols and practices that include input from individual adult family members of those whom we serve. An oversight committee consisting of staff, Vincentians, and volunteers shall meet periodically to review policies, protocols and services and to offer written feedback and suggestions.
3. Prevention – All new DCCG volunteers and employees shall be screened to ensure, as far as possible, that we do not admit into the Society persons who are known or reasonably suspected of posing a risk to the vulnerable persons and the children of those we serve, due to their past conduct or criminal history.



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4. Risk management – Ensure all DCCG volunteers and employees, that even if dangerous or inappropriate people enter our ranks, they are not in a position to do harm because we have supervision, checking and reporting processes in place, e.g., members must visit in pairs, and personnel must know what to look out for and how to report suspicions of abuse, and the importance of speaking up.
5. Training – Training will be provided for all DCCG volunteers and employees both upon a person's entry into the Society and on an annual basis, instilling in all members, volunteers, and employees the importance of safeguarding, not just as a legal/policy requirement but also as a reflection of our Society's values.
6. Awareness – Our safeguarding program will inform all members, volunteers and staff about the warning signs of potential abuse, the safety measures that are in place to protect others, and the means by which boundary violations and abuse are to be reported. The DCCG Council safeguarding program is implemented in conjunction with the Code of Pastoral Conduct.
7. Audio or visual recording – While interviewing those we serve, audio or visual recording is **not** permitted. Do **not** publish any story or image that might put a vulnerable person or their family at risk. This is the case even when identities are changed, obscured, or not used. Use only the first name of those we serve and provide a general location such as a city or county to avoid their being identified.
8. Still Photography – Photographs of those we serve must never be demeaning, or disrespectful of the dignity of the persons portrayed. The rights, safety, and wellbeing of the persons being portrayed are always to be protected. The gratuitous portrayal of extreme suffering is always to be avoided. Editing should maintain the integrity of the photographic and video images' content and context. No changes should be made that distort the context of the image, or that make a situation look worse than it actually is. Those we serve should never be portrayed in poses that could be regarded as sexually suggestive, erotic, or obscene.
9. Reporting and responding – The DCCG acts with compassion to victims and those who come forward with concerns or reports, while also showing compassion to those accused, will put the necessary measures in place (such as suspensions) while matters are investigated.

### **VI. Member and Volunteer Screening:**

1. As of March 1, 2025, individuals applying for membership into the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, DCCG, and non-member volunteers, any of whom will be supporting a Conference operating under the umbrella of a parish, supporting a Conference Special Works operating under the umbrella of a parish or supporting a DCCG Special Works, must be interviewed to assess their attitudes and understanding of the Mission of Svdp.
  - 1.1. The District Leader or the associated Conference President should conduct and document this interview, following the guidance outlined in the [Guidelines for](#)



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### [conducting the initial discussion with a prospective volunteer or candidate for membership in the Society of St Vincent de Paul](#)

- 1.2. Any concerns resulting from the interview that may prohibit a candidate from becoming a member or non-member volunteer, must be brought to the attention of the DCCG Board of Directors. The DCCG Council Board of Directors will decide as to accept or not accept the candidate for the position to which they are applying.
2. As of March 1, 2025, individuals applying for employment at a DCCG entity or Special Works or applying to volunteer at a DCCG entity or Special Works, must be interviewed to assess their attitudes and understanding of the Mission of DCCG Special Works.
  - 2.1. The District Leader or the associated DCCG Special Works President should conduct and document this interview, following the guidance outlined in the [Guidelines for conducting the initial discussion with a prospective volunteer or candidate for membership in the Society of St Vincent de Paul](#)
  - 2.2. Any concerns resulting from the interview that may prohibit a candidate from becoming an employee or volunteer, must be brought to the attention of the DCCG Board of Directors. The DCCG Board of Directors will decide to accept or not accept the candidate for the position to which they are applying.
3. An acceptable candidate or employee must then follow the process outlined in Section VII, of this policy.
4. Records of these interviews will be retained in accordance with Section XI (Records and Record Retention) of this policy.

### **VII. Training and Awareness:**

1. *No fewer than two Vincentians must always be present during any meeting with those we serve, and a Vincentian should not be involved with a child or a vulnerable person in the course of the Vincentian work without another adult being present.*
2. Before being assigned to work or volunteer at a Special Work (e. g. St. Vincent de Paul Thrift Stores) or any DCCG entity, a DCCG St Vincent de Paul prospective employee or volunteer must successfully complete one of the clearance steps listed below.
  - 2.1. Complete the steps outlined in the [DCCG Employee and Volunteer Clearance and Reporting Requirements for Safeguarding and Protecting Children and Vulnerable People](#), or
  - 2.2. Complete the Greensburg Diocese clearance requirements.



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### **VIII. Reporting and Responding:**

1. An alleged violation of this policy, by any conference member with clearances obtained through the Diocese, must be reported in accordance with the *"Code of Pastoral Conduct for Church Personnel of the Diocese of Greensburg"*, which can be found on the [Greensburg Diocese Website](#), under *"Child Protection Clearances"*.
2. An alleged violation of this policy, by any employee or volunteer with clearances obtained through the DCCG must be reported in accordance with the [DCCG Employee and Volunteer Clearance and Reporting Requirements for Safeguarding and Protecting Children and Vulnerable People](#).

### **IX. SVdP partner and vendor organizations:**

Partners and Vendors will operate under their effective safeguarding procedures. If DCCG receives a safeguarding concern about a partner or vendor organization, DCCG will inform the partner/vendor, and expect the partner/vendor to respond quickly and appropriately. DCCG will assist the partner/vendor to ascertain its obligations under the current PA State Law. Where appropriate, DCCG may work with the partner/vendor to address the issue through an appropriate independent investigation which should not interfere with any criminal investigation being conducted by legal authorities. If the outcome is that abuse or exploitation has occurred, ongoing work with the partner/vendor cannot involve the perpetrator(s) concerned. If there is reason to believe that an allegation of abuse has been dealt with inappropriately by a partner/vendor, then the partner/vendor organization risks withdrawal of funding and/or ending the working relationship. DCCG will expect partners/vendors to inform them of any safeguarding incidents they are dealing with where these have not come to the attention of the Society.

### **X. Communicating the Safeguarding Message:**

1. A hard copy or electronic copy of the safeguarding policy is made available to and acknowledged by members, employees, and volunteers at each Conference location, each Conference owned Store, each Council owned Store and the Council Office.
2. Copies will be provided to the general public in hard copy or through email upon request.
3. Visual posters, including language and imagery appropriate to children and other vulnerable persons, may be displayed about the existence of this policy in appropriate locations throughout our premises and special works where possible.
4. Safeguarding should be maintained for employees, members and volunteers by including short sessions on the policy or related safeguarding matters during meetings, other trainings and via regular communications.
5. All material will include clear information about whom a vulnerable person or witness should report to, or seek advice from, if they feel that they or another person has been violated or offended in any way.

### **XI. Records and Record Retention:**



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1. Beginning March 1, 2025, the DCCG will maintain lifetime records of the following:
  - 1.1. Interviews with individuals conducted under paragraph VI (Member and Volunteer Screening)
  - 1.2. Individual attendance and dates of orientation and training provided in safeguarding
  - 1.3. All safeguarding concerns and disclosures reported, including details of all follow-up action
  - 1.4. Any employee, member or volunteer found to have breached safeguarding, committed abuse, or who failed recruitment processes because of risks/issues flagged about their conduct, so that those people are not inappropriately engaged in some other role where they might do harm
  - 1.5. Job descriptions and postings/ads, in order to confirm that they all contain the commitment to the safeguarding policy.
2. Initially, once collected by the Conference, a copy of the clearance records should be submitted to the parish safe environment coordinator for recording in the Virtus database.
3. Once documents have been recorded, they will be returned to the conference designee, for retention by the conference.
4. Clearance records for the DCCG employees and volunteers, completed under section VI and VII of this policy will be stored at the Council location.

### **XII. Monitoring Compliance:**

On-going monitoring and evaluation will indicate the extent to which safeguarding is being effectively implemented and any need in training for employees, members and volunteers.

### **XIII. Policy Review:**

The safeguarding policy will be reviewed by the DCCG at least every three years, with new processes, changes in legislation and guidelines and practices to be incorporated in accordance with lessons learned.