



Shotts St. Patrick's Amateur Opera Group

Child Protection Policy

Shotts St. Patrick's Amateur Opera Group recognises its duty of care under the Children and Young Persons Act 1963, the Child (Performances) Regulations 1968, the Protection of Children Act 1999 and the Protection of Children (Scotland) Act 2003.

The group recognises that abuse can take many forms, whether it be physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse or neglect. The group is committed to practice which protects children from harm. All members of the group accept and recognise their responsibilities to develop awareness of the issues which cause children harm.

The group believes that:

- the welfare of the child is paramount;
- all children, whatever their age, culture, disability, gender, language, racial origin, religious beliefs and/or sexual identity have the right to protection from abuse;
- all suspicions and allegations of abuse should be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately;
- all members and employees of the group should be clear on how to respond appropriately.

The group will ensure that:

- all children will be treated equally and with respect and dignity;
- the welfare of each child will always be put first;
- a balanced relationship based on mutual trust will be built which empowers the children to share in the decision-making process;
- enthusiastic and constructive feedback will be given rather than negative criticism;
- bullying will not be accepted or condoned;
- all adult members of the group provide a positive role model for dealing with other people;
- action will be taken to stop any inappropriate verbal or physical behaviour;
- it will keep up-to-date with health & safety legislation;
- it will keep informed of changes in legislation and policies for the protection of children;
- it will undertake relevant development and training;
- it will hold a register of every child involved with the group and will retain a contact name and number close at hand in case of emergencies.

The group has child protection procedures which accompany this policy. This policy should also be read in conjunction with group's constitution, recruitment of ex-offenders policy and Secure handling, Use, Storage and Retention of disclosure information policy.

The group has a dedicated Child Protection Officer, who is in charge of ensuring that the child protection policy and procedures are adhered to. That person's name is PAUL LEONARD and he can be contacted on 01555 759998 or 07920 095680.

This policy will be regularly monitored by the Committee of the group and will be subject to annual review.

Date: 15/11/2006.

Responsibilities of the Group

At the outset of any production involving children the group will:

- undertake a risk assessment and monitor risk throughout the production process;
- identify at the outset the person with designated responsibility for child protection;
- engage in effective recruitment of chaperones and other individuals with responsibility for children, including appropriate vetting (if necessary in consultation with the local education authority);
- ensure that children are supervised at all times;
- know how to get in touch with the local authority social services, in case it needs to report a concern.

Parents

- The group believes it to be important that there is a partnership between parents and the group. Parents are encouraged to be involved in the activities of the group and to share responsibility for the care of children.

All parents will be given a copy the group's Child Protection Policy and procedures.

- All parents have the responsibility to collect (or arrange collection of) their children after rehearsals or performances. It is NOT the responsibility of the group to take children home.

Unsupervised Contact

- The group will attempt to ensure that no adult has unsupervised contact with children.
- If possible there will always be two adults in the room when working with children.
- If unsupervised contact is unavoidable, steps will be taken to minimise risk. For example, work will be carried out in a public area or in a designated room with a door open.
- If it is predicted that an individual is likely to require unsupervised contact with children, he or she may be required to obtain a criminal record disclosure.

Physical Contact

- All adults will maintain a safe and appropriate distance from children.
- Adults will only touch children when it is absolutely necessary in relation to the particular activity.
- Adults will seek the consent of the child prior to any physical contact and the purpose of the contact shall be made clear.

Managing sensitive information

- The group has a policy and procedures for the taking, using and storage of photographs or images of children.
- Permission will be sought from the parents for use of photographic material featuring children for promotional or other purposes.
- The group's web-based materials and activities will be carefully monitored for inappropriate use.
- The group will ensure confidentiality in order to protect the rights of its members, including the safe handling, storage and disposal of any sensitive information such as criminal record disclosures. For this purpose the group has a separate Secure handling, Use, Storage and Retention of disclosure information policy.

Suspicion of abuse

- If you see or suspect abuse of a child while in the care of the group, please make this known to the person with responsibility for child protection. If you suspect that the person with responsibility for child protection is the source of the problem, you should make your concerns known to the President.
- Please make a note for your own records of what you witnessed as well as your response, in case there is follow-up in which you are involved.

- If a serious allegation is made against any member of the group, chaperone, venue staff etc., that individual will be suspended immediately until the investigation is concluded. The individual will be excluded from the theatre; rehearsal rooms etc. and will not have any unsupervised contact with any other children in the production.

Disclosure of abuse

If a child confides in you that abuse has taken place:

- Remain calm and in control but do not delay taking action.
- Listen carefully to what has been said. Allow the child to tell you at their own pace and ask questions only for clarification. Don't ask questions that suggest a particular answer.
- Don't promise to keep it a secret. Use the first opportunity you have to share the information with the person with responsibility for child protection. Make it clear to the child that you will need to share this information with others. Make it clear that you will only tell the people who need to know and who should be able to help.
- Reassure the child that 'they did the right thing' in telling someone.
- Tell the child what you are going to do next.
- Speak immediately to the person with responsibility for child protection. It is that person's responsibility to liaise with the relevant authorities, usually social services or the police.
- As soon as possible after the disclosing conversation, make a note of what was said, using the child's own words. Note the date, time, any names that were involved or mentioned, and who you gave the information to. Make sure you sign and date your record.

Recording

- In all situations, including those in which the cause of concern arises from a disclosure made in confidence, the details of an allegation or reported incident will be recorded, regardless of whether or not the concerns have been shared with a statutory child protection agency.
- An accurate note shall be made of the date and time of the incident or disclosure, the parties involved, what was said or done and by whom, any action taken to investigate the matter, any further action taken e.g. suspension of an individual, where relevant the reasons why the matter was not referred to a statutory agency, and the name of the persons reporting and to whom it was reported.
- The record will be stored securely and shared only with those who need to know about the incident or allegation.

Rights & Confidentiality

- If a complaint is made against a member of the group he or she will be made aware of his rights under the group's disciplinary procedures.
- No matter how you may feel about the accusation, both the alleged abuser and the child who is thought to have been abused have the right to confidentiality under the Data Protection Act 1998. Remember also that any possible criminal investigation could be compromised through inappropriate information being released.
- In criminal law the Crown or other prosecuting authority has to prove guilt and the defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

Accidents

- To avoid accidents, chaperones and children will be advised of "house rules" regarding health and safety and will be notified of areas that are out of bounds. Children will be advised of the clothing and footwear appropriate to the work that will be undertaken.
- If a child is injured while in the care of the group, a designated first-aider will administer first aid and the injury will be recorded in the group's accident book. This record will be counter-signed by the person with responsibility for child protection.
- If a child joins the production with an obvious physical injury a record of this will be made in the accident book. This record will be counter-signed by the person with responsibility for

child protection. This record can be useful if a formal allegation is made later, and will also be a record that the child did not sustain the injury while participating in the production.

Criminal Record Disclosures

If the group believes it is in its best interests to obtain criminal record disclosures for chaperones or other personnel it will inform the individual of the necessary procedures and the level of disclosure required. A Standard disclosure will apply for anyone with supervised access to children. An Enhanced disclosure will be required for anyone with unsupervised access.

- The group will have a written code of practice for the handling of disclosure information.
- The group will ensure that information contained in the disclosure is not misused.

Chaperones

- Chaperones will be appointed by the group for the care of children during the production process. By law the chaperone is acting *in loco parentis* and should exercise the care which a good parent might be reasonably expected to give to a child. The maximum number of children in the chaperone's care shall not exceed 12.
- Potential chaperones will be required to supply photographic proof of identity (e.g. passport, driving licence) and two references from individuals with knowledge of their previous work with children, unless already well known to the group. They will also be asked to sign a declaration stating that there is no reason why they would be considered unsuitable to work with children.
- Chaperones will be made aware of the group's Child Protection Policy and Procedures.
- Chaperones will not usually have unsupervised access to children in their care. If unsupervised access is unavoidable, or if this is a requirement of the local authority, a criminal record disclosure will be sought.
- Where chaperones are not satisfied with the conditions for the children, they should bring this to the attention of the producer. If changes cannot be made satisfactorily the chaperone should consider not allowing the child to continue.
- If a chaperone considers that a child is unwell or too tired to continue, the chaperone must inform the producer and not allow the child to continue.
- Under the Dangerous Performances Act no child of compulsory school age is permitted to do anything which may endanger life or limb. This could include working on wires or heavy lifting. Chaperones should tell the producer to cease using children in this way, and should contact the local authority.
- During performances, chaperones will be responsible for meeting children at the main entrance and signing them into the building.
- Children will be kept together at all times except when using separate dressing rooms.
- Chaperones will be aware of where the children are at all times.
- Children are not to leave the theatre unsupervised by chaperones unless in the company of their parents.
- Children will be adequately supervised while going to and from the toilets.
- Children will not be allowed to enter the adult dressing rooms.
- Chaperones should be aware of the safety arrangements and first aid procedures in the venue, and will ensure that children in their care do not place themselves and others in danger.
- Chaperones should ensure that any accidents are reported to and recorded by the group.
- Chaperones should examine accident books each day. If an accident has occurred, the producer is not allowed to use that child until a medically qualified opinion has been obtained (not just the word of the parent or child).
- Chaperones should have written arrangements for children after performances. If someone different is to collect the child, a telephone call should be made to the parent to confirm the arrangements.
- Children should be signed out when leaving and a record made of the person collecting.
- If a parent has not collected the child, it is the duty of the chaperone to stay with that child or make arrangements to take them home.