

# **Model policies**

**on**

## **working with young people**

**for**

### **non-residential youth services in NSW**

**by Nick Manning**

**Youth Action & Policy Association (NSW)**

**2004**

# **Part 1**

## **How to use these policies**

### **Activities and Services**

# Model policies on working with young people for non-residential youth services in NSW

by Nick Manning

published by

## **Youth Action & Policy Association (NSW) Inc**

146 Devonshire Street SURRY HILLS NSW 2010

(02) 9319 1100 or 1800 627 323

info@yapa.org.au

http://www.yapa.org.au

### **© Copyright 2004 Youth Action & Policy Association (NSW)**

You can copy and use extracts of text from this document. Please acknowledge the source. You can copy the entire document if you make no changes and include every page including this page.

### **How to get, view, print or copy this publication**

The model policies are available from <http://www.yapa.org.au/youthwork/modelpolicies>, as:

- PDF files for easy printing and reading
- web pages for quick viewing of particular policies
- Word files for easy copying + pasting into your own policy documents.

### **Warning!**

These are model policies for agencies to adapt to suit their circumstances. We have done the best we can within our resources, but it is not possible to write a single policy which meets the requirements of the wide range of youth services in NSW. You should not rely solely on the information here, but should refer to other publications and authorities and if necessary get qualified advice for your specific situation.

We have attempted to include all the relevant legal requirements as at 2004. However the law is sometimes complex and open to interpretation, and applies to different youth agencies in different ways. If necessary you should get legal advice about your own policies. The information here is not legal advice. If there is a real possibility of legal action, you should talk to a lawyer before you decide what to do.

These policies reflect law which applies in NSW, which may be quite different to law in other states and territories of Australia. Using these policies outside NSW without checking the law, may put your agency, staff and volunteers at risk of breaking the law.

### **Acknowledgements and thanks**

**Author:** Nick Manning, consultant (nmanning@pnc.com.au)  
**Project Manager:** Courtney Innes, YAPA Western Sydney Project  
**Editorial review:** Louise Sutherland, Macquarie Legal Centre  
**Reference group:** Kristy Delaney, Kim McLoughry, Liam O'Sullivan, Stan Small, Mark Townsend.

### **Other contributors:**

Many people contributed policies, ideas, and feedback, far more than we can list here. However, we would especially like to thank: Rebecca Bernard, YWCA; Vanessa Ford, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, Karen Hewitt, FaCS; Yvette Middleton, Burnside Campbelltown; Jane Miller, Fairfield Community Resource Centre, Sussan Omar, FLYHT, Mia Prodigalidad, YAPA Board of Management, Jane Sanders, Shopfront Youth Legal Centre.

# Contents

## Part 1

### How to use these policies

#### Activities and services

- 9 Drop-in & use of centre facilities
- 14 Young people's use of computers
- 16 Street work
- 18 Holding mail for young people
- 19 Excursions and camps

**The other parts of this publication (below) are available from  
<http://www.yapa.org.au/youthwork/modelpolicies>**

## Part 2: Casework

### Part 3: Rights and responsibilities

- Young people's rights to their personal information
- Keeping and destroying records
- Code of conduct for staff
- Complaints
- Rules and consequences

### Part 4: Inclusiveness

- Developing an inclusive youth service
- Expression of religion, culture and lifestyle
- Eliminating harassment, vilification and excluding behaviour

### Part 5: Privacy and confidentiality

- Privacy essentials
- Collecting personal information
- Privacy statement & privacy consent form

- Using personal information within the team
- Security of personal information
- Disclosing personal information with consent
- Disclosing personal information without consent

## Part 6: Child protection

### Part 7: Safety

- Duty of care statement
- Individual risk assessment about a young person
- Report risks and serious incidents to the Manager
- Medications and medical treatment
- Vehicles
- Home visits
- Smoking
- Alcohol and illegal drugs
- Crime and police
- Suicide
- Non-violence
- Critical incident response

---

Model Policies on Working with Young People, for Non-residential Youth Services in NSW  
© Copyright 2004 YAPA. See the complete set of policies including any updates, and  
copy + paste the text, at [www.yapa.org.au/youthwork/modelpolicies](http://www.yapa.org.au/youthwork/modelpolicies)

# How to use these policies

These policies are designed for generalist non-residential youth services in NSW. They reflect the requirements of:

- NSW and Commonwealth law (as at 2004) (as far as we reasonably know)\*
- NSW Department of Community Services (CSGP) Service Agreement 2004-2005
- NSW Department of Community Services (CSGP) Service Standards 2004 draft
- Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services Youth Program Guidelines for JPET, YAS/FLW and Reconnect (draft June 2004)

as well as incorporating common practices in the NSW youth sector.

\* Note that NSW law is sometimes quite different to law in other states and territories of Australia. If you use these policies outside NSW without checking the law, you may be putting your agency, staff and volunteers at risk of breaking the law.

**These are not standards.** They are not intended to set a standard in the non-residential youth work sector, or to create uniformity among youth services. The rich variety of activities, approaches and styles among youth services and youth workers is one of the strengths of youth work in NSW.

Implementing these policies as they are, will not bring about effective and inspiring youth work. At the very least you need to add some policy material of your own, reflecting the goals, ideals and practices of your agency.

But policies and procedures by themselves do not lead to great youth work. Policies by their nature are usually dull and uninspiring. They tend to focus on narrow legal and safety issues. They tell you more about what you *must do* and *must not do*, than about what you *can do*, or *might achieve*. These model policies are no exception!

To bring about effective and inspiring youth work you need much more than good policies: you also need to train, resource, support, nurture and believe in your staff!

## Feedback

YAPA would like any feedback you have on these model policies. Feel free to phone or email to let us know what you think. (02) 9319 1100 or 1800 627 323 (NSW only), [info@yapa.org.au](mailto:info@yapa.org.au)

If we have made a factual error, we will fix it as soon as possible. If you have suggestions for other changes or improvements, we will develop a list of these and try to get funding to revise the policies in future years.

## Copying and adapting these policies

YAPA owns the copyright to this document, and gives permission for you to use as little or as much as you need in your own documents (policies, training resources etc) as long as you acknowledge the source. You can freely copy and paste sections or whole policies into your agency's policy manual. (You can do this most easily by downloading the Microsoft Word version of this document from the website.

However each agency and service is different and you must decide what is appropriate in your circumstances, and modify and add to these policies to suit. While reasonable care has been taken with the development of these model policies, your agency must take responsibility for drafting and approving its own policies.

### Information boxes

#### Information in boxes like this one

These info boxes, scattered throughout the policies, are not necessarily intended to be included in your policy. They are for the person who is drafting your agency policy, and contain things like:

- an instruction to insert agency-specific information
- background information about the model policy
- further issues to consider.

In some cases you may decide to leave this information in your finished policy to inform frontline staff.

### Words and meanings

Some words are used in particular ways in these policies.

*Activity or service* Any form of youth work eg. a video course, a counselling session, street work, etc.

*Agency* The organisation (incorporated body or auspice) providing activities and services. (You may wish to replace this word with the actual name of your agency).

*Young person/young people* A person/people aged about 12 years old or over, except where a policy specifies a narrower age range. (Some legal requirements reflected in some policies do not apply to younger, primary school aged children. If you work with

## How to use these policies

younger children you should get your own advice on legal requirements which may apply).

### **Translating the positions in the policies into the positions in your agency**

#### ***Staff***

The policies refer to *staff* as the main people who should comply with the policy. *Staff* primarily means paid workers (youth workers, administration staff, managers etc) but in some contexts it also includes:

- volunteers
- management committee members
- students on placement
- contractors

when they are interacting with young people, exercising authority or sometimes just when they are on the premises. (For example, privacy policies require the compliance of all staff and even contractors such as cleaners and external computer people).

#### ***Volunteers***

*Volunteers* includes management committee members, parents, young people and other volunteers who are helping out with an activity or service without being paid.

#### ***The Manager***

Most policies refer to *the Manager*, as the key position of authority in the agency. In your agency *the Manager* might be:

- the Community Services Manager in a small council
- the Youth Development Officer in a large council
- the Regional or State Manager in a large charity
- the Coordinator/Director/Manager in a medium non-government organisation
- the Chairperson or Management Committee/Board in a small non-government organisation.

You may need to replace *the Manager* with different positions in different policies. For example you might replace the Manager with *the Coordinator* in most policies and with *the Chairperson* in a few policies.

#### ***Management***

A few policies refer to *management*. *Management* is more senior than the Manager. Management might be:

- the Director of Community Services in a council
- the State Manager or Director in a large charity
- the Chairperson or management committee in a non-government organisation.

## Policy waiver

You need a way that your policies can be waived when necessary. You might say something like this:

*These policies can be waived by the Manager in exceptional circumstances. The Manager must report any waiving of a policy requirement in their next report.*

## Developing your agency policies

### Who should draft your policies?

The person who drafts your policies can be a staff member, management person, consultant or someone else. What is important is:

- they must be a clear communicator in plain English (written and spoken)
- they must consult with all affected staff, and at least some volunteers, young people and other affected people
- management must take the time to carefully approve all policies.

### Process for developing your policies

Policy development has a number of stages:

#### Planning

- identify the issues and what needs to be achieved
- identify who will use the policies
- appoint someone to write or review the policies

#### Research

- collect similar policies to build on
- consult with staff and others
- identify the aims to be met by the policies

#### Development

- prepare draft policies and circulate for comment or discuss at a meeting
- modify the drafts

#### Implementation

- formally adopt the policies
- set a date for implementation and a date for review and write this on each policy
- train your paid and volunteer staff

#### Evaluation

- regularly monitor the policies
- review the policies to ensure that they are complete, accurate, up-to-date and appropriate.

## Further advice and assistance

For further advice and assistance on what to include in your policies, contact your peak body, eg:

- **NSW non-residential youth services:**  
Youth Action & Policy Association (YAPA) (02) 9319 1100 or 1800 627 323, [info@yapa.org.au](mailto:info@yapa.org.au)
- **NSW youth SAAP services:**  
Youth Accommodation Association (YAA) (02) 9698 5833 [yaa@yaa.com.au](mailto:yaa@yaa.com.au)
- **NSW residential care services:**  
Association of Childrens Welfare Agencies (ACWA) (02) 9281 8822 [acwa@acwa.asn.au](mailto:acwa@acwa.asn.au)
- **NSW Out of School Hours (OOSH) services:**  
Network (02) 9212 3244 [network@netoosh.org.au](mailto:network@netoosh.org.au)

### Youth service peak bodies in other states:

- Youth Coalition of ACT [www.youthcoalition.net](http://www.youthcoalition.net)
- Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) [www.yacvic.org.au](http://www.yacvic.org.au)
- Youth Network of Tasmania [www.ynot.org.au](http://www.ynot.org.au)
- Youth Affairs Council of South Australia (YACSA) [www.yacsa.com.au](http://www.yacsa.com.au)
- Youth Affairs Council of WA (YACWA) [www.yacwa.org.au](http://www.yacwa.org.au)
- Northern Territory Youth Affairs Network (NTYAN) [ntyan@darcity.nt.gov.au](mailto:ntyan@darcity.nt.gov.au)
- Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ) [www.yanq.org.au](http://www.yanq.org.au)

### Advice or assistance on how to develop your policies:

- NCOSS Management Support Unit (02) 9211 2599 [www.ncoss.org.au/msu](http://www.ncoss.org.au/msu)
- Paul Bullen, a consultant, has some good resources on his website [www.managementsupportonline.com.au](http://www.managementsupportonline.com.au)
- YAPA can provide names of consultants in NSW.

# Drop-in & use of centre facilities

## Aims

This policy aims to ensure that drop-in and use of centre facilities is:

- equally accessible to everyone in the target group
- accessible to young people who may be alienated by a more formal approach to service provision
- safe, stimulating and enjoyable for everyone.

### Special projects and activities

The agency may decide to provide special activities and services to meet the needs of particular groups of young people (eg. young women or young gays), if it is not possible to meet those groups' needs within mainstream activities and services. If this is necessary, the agency should not wait until it can gain additional funding, but should divert existing resources to address this need.

If possible, such special activities and services should be a temporary measure. The agency should work towards meeting the needs of these particular groups within mainstream activities and services. However this may not always be achievable. For example, you may need to run certain activities for young women only because of some religious beliefs.

## Procedure

### General principles

Take active steps to ensure that all young people within the target group can access the service. See the policy Inclusiveness: Developing an inclusive youth service.

Staff should conduct regular evaluation and planning activities including:

- collating and reviewing statistics on attendance
- reviewing written and verbal comments and complaints by young people
- discussing their own experiences and their perceptions of young people's experiences
- surveys and focus groups with young people.

Staff should encourage young people's involvement in the process of evaluating, planning and running drop-in and centre activities. Staff should be familiar with resources and examples of good practice in youth participation.

More information about youth participation:  
• *NSW Commission for Children & Young People* <http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au>

## 1. Activities and services: Drop-in and use of centre facilities

Evaluation and planning strategies should also gather information from young people who have not been using the centre, and youth participation strategies should increase rather than restrict the range of young people who access the centre. See the policy Inlusiveness: Developing an inclusive youth service policy.

### **Privacy and personal information**

#### **Recording young people's names**

Young people do not have to provide their name or address to attend drop-in or use the facilities.

However staff may require a young person to give their name and contact details:

- for structured activities such as counselling, group work or excursions
- if they break the rules
- in an emergency.

At the time that you record a young person's name and other details, make them aware of the Privacy Statement (see the Privacy policies).

#### **Security of personal information**

Protect personal information about young people, employees, volunteers and management, including their address and phone number:

- lock away documents containing personal information
- computers used by young people must not contain (or be networked to other computers containing) personal information unless the information has password protection
- do not allow young people unsupervised access to staff mobile phones or electronic equipment containing personal information (eg. music players, portable memory, portable computer devices etc).

### **Rules & consequences**

Display the agency rules and consequences prominently. All staff must assist in enforcing the rules. New staff should discuss the rules and consequences with experienced staff so that all staff are consistent in applying the rules.

#### **Students in school hours**

A young person under the compulsory school attendance age of 15 years can attend drop-in or use the centre facilities during school hours:

- as part of a program approved by the school, or
- while they are suspended from school, or
- to discuss their school attendance, progress or problems (or underlying issues), or
- to deal with a serious and urgent issue such as having nowhere to sleep that night, being assaulted, going to court that day, etc.

## 1. Activities and services: Drop-in and use of centre facilities

Otherwise staff should not allow them to drop-in or use the centre facilities during school hours. This does not apply to casework services.

### Numbers

#### Staffing for drop-in and use of facilities

For drop-in and use of centre facilities (ie. where the number and identity of young people is not known in advance), only keep the centre open when there are at least 2 staff present:

1. a paid or volunteer staff member responsible for running the centre or activity, and
2. a paid or volunteer staff member, a staff member of another agency, or a student on placement who is over 18.

If you cannot maintain this minimum staffing level for any reason, immediately close the centre until you can restore the minimum staffing level.

#### Other staffing considerations:

- Always consider the risk assessment before deciding on staffing levels.
- If a large number of young people attend the Centre, consider having more staff, eg. 1 youth centre staff member per 30 young people.
- You may need an additional staff member with young people with high support needs or challenging behaviour.
- For facilities or activities in 2 or more non-adjacent areas, consider having at least 1 youth centre staff member present in each area.
- Maintain safe staffing levels while locking up after the centre closes, especially at night or after any conflict or dispute at the centre.
- Where there is a choice of who to roster on, have at least one male staff member and one female staff member.

#### Number of young people

The Manager will set a maximum number of young people allowed at the centre at any one time, taking into account:

- the nature of the activities
- the size of the spaces
- exits and fire safety
- noise
- equipment
- staffing
- risk assessments.

#### Risk assessment

The Manager must ensure that the following risk assessments occur.

## 1. Activities and services: Drop-in and use of centre facilities

### **Quarterly Risk Assessment**

Inspect:

- all inside and outside areas
- fire extinguishers and smoke detectors
- first aid kits
- electrical equipment
- other equipment
- any security devices
- any food preparation areas.

All centre staff and volunteers should meet to discuss and identify hazards and steps to take to minimise risks. This discussion should cover:

- physical hazards
- fire safety
- food safety
- risk of violence
- risks in travelling to and from the centre
- other risks,

in relation to the sorts of young people who are using the centre.

### **Weekly Risk Assessment**

Inspect all inside and outside areas. Inform all other staff and volunteers of new or increased hazards and the steps to take to minimise risks.

Discuss risks and risk management as a regular item at team meetings.

### **Ad hoc hazard identification and reporting**

All staff and volunteers must stay alert at all times to new hazards including:

- newly broken equipment, railings, windows etc
- new ways that young people use the space and facilities which create new risks
- too many people in the space
- lack of stimulating activities leading to boredom or frustration
- tension, threats or actual violence among young people who use the centre
- intoxicated young people (alcohol or other drugs)
- possible drug dealing or other crime.

All paid and volunteer staff must report all hazards and comply with all safety directions.

### **General safety measures**

Keep on you, at all times that the centre is open, your:

- keys to the building and vehicle
- mobile phone
- security alarm buzzer (if you have one).

## 1. Activities and services: Drop-in and use of centre facilities

### **Crime, violence, threats or aggressive behaviour**

The staff member in charge must close the centre if they believe that there is a significant risk to the safety of staff or young people which cannot be minimised in any other way. See also these policies:

- Non-violence
- Crime and Police.

### **Accidents & first aid**

Ensure there is a first aid trained person on the premises at all times that the centre is open to young people. Maintain first aid kits according to WorkCover requirements.

Report accidents and injuries (see the agency's OH&S policy).

See the Medications and Medical Treatment policy.

### **Fire safety**

Maintain a fire safety plan based on advice from experts, covering:

- maximum number of people allowed in the building
- maintaining safe exits
- extinguishers and training in how to use them
- kitchen fire safety
- electrical safety.

Ensure that staff and young people are familiar with evacuation procedures.

### **Food & kitchen safety**

Staff must ensure that fresh food is stored, prepared and served according to food safety standards.

Keep any knives and other potential weapons locked away when not in use.

#### **More information on food safety standards:**

Food Standards Australia New Zealand  
<http://www.foodstandards.gov.au>

### **HIV & other infectious diseases**

Staff must follow "universal infection control" procedures (contact YAPA for more information).

Under the NSW *Public Health Act 1991*, staff must not record or disclose to anyone else including team members, the HIV AIDS status of a young person or staff member, regardless of the need to protect other people from infection. (See the Privacy policies).

#### **Noise safety: more information:**

- *The code of practice: Noise management and protection of hearing at work*  
WorkCover NSW  
<http://www.workcover.nsw.gov.au>
- For noise regulations, contact your local council and the Department of Environment and Conservation 131 555 or <http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au>

### **Noise safety**

Music and other noise must comply with safety rules and guidelines.

# Young people's use of computers

## Aims

This policy aims to ensure that young people's use of computers is safe, legal and does not impact negatively on the agency or other people.

### Sexual harassment

For more on sexual harassment, see the policy Inclusion: Eliminating harassment, vilification and excluding behaviour.

## Procedure

Take all appropriate steps to inform and educate young people about the *Computer rules* (see below) and to enforce them.

Maintain awareness of the sorts of activities young people are using the computers for.

### Hazards on the internet

At the time of writing, there is some concern about older people using chat rooms to impersonate younger people or the opposite sex in order to make contact with young people. Some agencies don't allow young people to use chat rooms for this reason. On the other hand, there may be particular chat rooms that provide important support to some young people. You need to weigh up the risks and benefits, and put in place appropriate safety.

In the future, there may be other risks for young people using computers. Keep up to date on these hazards. You may need to revise the *Computer rules*.

## Computer rules

### Your safety

There are older people who use the internet to communicate with, and possibly to meet, younger people. Some of these people pretend to be your age or sex and like the things you like. They may be dangerous. Be careful!

- Do not give your full name, address, phone number or other information which could identify you (eg. your photo and the name of your school) to any person you meet on the internet.
- Do not arrange to physically meet a person you met on the internet. (Ask a staff member if you need permission to do one of these things).

### Annoying behaviour

Do not:

- send people stuff they don't want (eg. bulk emails or spam)
- hoax people

## 1. Activities and services: Young people's use of computers

- use or transmit someone else's email address without their permission (eg. sign them up for a subscription, put their address in the TO or CC field of a bulk email, etc)
- use computers to annoy people in other ways.

### **Inappropriate behaviour & crime**

Do not use the computer (including peer-to-peer software, games, messaging, chat, email, the internet or other technology) for:

- illegal use of copyright material (music, video etc): downloading, copying, swapping, storing, burning/ripping etc
- crime-related activities
- gambling
- porn
- racism, homophobia or vilification (eg. in games, emails etc)
- to harass, intimidate, stalk or threaten someone (this is a crime).

### **Technical restrictions and offences**

Do not:

- load software (eg. download from the internet, bring it in on a disk etc)
- download very large files or access streaming audio or video without checking with staff first
- change the settings, preferences, folders etc on our computer equipment
- attempt to access agency documents or other stuff which isn't yours on our computer equipment
- spread viruses, or disrupt or break into any computer, server or network.

Do not do anything else with the computer equipment that a staff member has told you not to do.

A staff member might check on what you are doing, during or after you use a computer. Do not attempt to stop them finding out what you are doing.

### **Consequences**

If you break these rules, then depending on how serious it is, staff might:

- Warn you
- Not let you use the computer for the rest of the day
- Not let you use the computer for 1 or more weeks
- Not let you use other equipment or take part in other activities
- Not let you use the centre at all for a period of time.

# Street work

## Aims

This policy aims to:

- ensure that the agency's street work activities are safe for staff and young people
- ensure that staff have a professional and consistent approach to street work.

### ***Street work? Outreach?***

Street work is sometimes called *outreach*. But *outreach* can also mean youth work at another agency or school. This policy only covers youth work in a public place.

### **Related policies**

Also comply with these policies:

- Child Protection policies
- Medications and Medical Treatment
- Vehicles
- Crime and Police
- Alcohol & Illegal Drugs
- Smoking
- Code of Conduct for Staff
- all agency OH&S policies.

## Procedure

### **Recording young people's personal details**

Young people do not have to provide their name or address in street work services.

If the young person wants a follow-up service at a later date, you can either:

- not record their name, but instead inform them how to contact you or other agency staff
- record their first name or nickname and phone number only
- record their full name and contact details on a Privacy Consent Form, and make them aware of the Privacy Statement (see Privacy policies).

### **Statistical information**

Record only the statistics the agency requires. Don't let this interfere with an informal and youth-centred approach (eg. keep a tally in a notebook and fill in statistics forms back at the agency).

## 1. Activities and services: Street work

### Appropriate behaviour

- Identify yourself, your role and agency to all young people and other service providers you speak to (eg. police).
- Only engage in recreational activities (eg. play games, listen to music, socialise) to the extent necessary to do your job.
- Do not mind young people's possessions (eg. their bag, phone etc) because of the risk of loss or unintentional involvement in crime.

#### Out-of-pocket expenses for young people

The agency should provide a small monthly budget for expenses relating to young people. Staff can spend this budget at their own discretion on young people's minor needs such as a drink or snack, bus fare etc. The budget would not be sufficient to buy these things for all young people, or to pay for their bills or groceries, so staff must spend it sparingly.

Staff must not spend this budget on staff needs.

### Staffing and safety

- Ideally you should do street work in teams of 2 or more with at least one female and one male.
- Each staff member must carry a fully charged and fully credited mobile phone on their person at all times. (Use this phone only as allowed under internal agency policies).
- Dress appropriately for the situation, eg. no open-toed shoes.
- You must use sunscreen, wear a hat and/or follow other measures to prevent skin damage.

#### Staffing for daytime street work

If you are working alone you must:

- notify another staff member of your intended movements and time of return, before you go
- notify that staff member when you return.

#### In the sun?

For daytime work outdoors, the agency should provide sunscreen or reimbursement for personal sunscreen.

#### Staffing for night time street work

At night you must work in teams of 2 or more. You must at all times stay within sight or hearing of another staff member, except when you are in a reasonably safe place such as a shop or busy street.

# Holding mail for young people

## Aims

This policy aims to assist young people to manage their lives despite the lack of long-term accommodation or the lack of privacy at home, by providing a confidential mail-holding service.

## Procedure

The agency holds mail for clients who:

- have no fixed address, or
- have reason to be concerned about the privacy of their mail at their home.

The young person should not put the name of their caseworker or the agency name in their address, as this might breach their privacy. Instead just put:

Jo Smith Confidential mail 999 Smith Street SMITHSVILLE NSW 2999
---

Staff who open agency mail:

- should keep a list of young people who use the agency as a mailing address and the name of the respective caseworkers
- must not open young people's mail, but should date stamp the envelope, and record and file the mail according to agency procedures.

Staff, including the caseworker, must not open or read this mail or give it to any other person without the young person's written consent (see the policy Privacy: Disclosing personal information with consent).

If the young person does not collect their mail within 6 weeks, return it to sender unopened.

When the young person no longer needs the agency to hold their mail, or when the casework relationship ends, the caseworker should:

- ask the young person to update their address at all relevant agencies
- check that the file records the young person's latest address
- tell the young person that we will forward their mail for a limited time, and after that we will return it to sender.

# Excursions and camps

## Aims

Excursions and camps can be a valuable part of the work of the agency. This policy aims to ensure that these events are also safe, harmonious and enjoyable.

### What is an excursion? a camp?

In this policy:

- *excursion* is not overnight
- *camp* is overnight.

This policy applies to:

- Excursions: all supervised day-only trips involving young people, except short trips in the immediate area such as to the park, café or local agencies.
- Camps: all supervised overnight trips involving young people, whether actually a camp or some other form of supervised overnight trip involving young people (eg. going to a conference).

## Procedure

### Planning

Develop a written project plan for your excursion (or series of related excursions) or camp, which includes:

- program outline including travel plan, destination and activities
- risk assessment
- action plan to prepare for the event
- expectations, rules and consequences (see Rules and Consequences policy)
- staffing and roles during the event
- budget and participant fees (if any)
- the agency policies which apply to the event
- other relevant documents.

Involve young people as much as possible in the planning of the excursion or camp.

Get approval for all parts of this project plan from the Manager.

Evaluate the excursion or camp and use evaluations of past events to inform planning of future events.

## 1. Activities and services: Excursions and camps

### Risk assessment

Conduct a risk assessment for the excursion or camp, identifying risks and detailing strategies to eliminate or minimise the risks, including for example:

- risk factors specific to the young people who will attend, including behaviour, medications, disabilities etc (see *Which young people* below)
- the journey there and back
- if a young person leaves the group or fails to return
- the venue or location of the activities (including buildings, bushland, etc)
- other organisations or individuals providing services such as chartered buses, accommodation, guides, instructors etc
- sexual activity, drug use, conflict, violence
- fresh food preparation (if supervisors or young people will be preparing food)
- specific activities (eg. swimming, bushwalking, etc)
- adverse weather, flooding, bushfire etc
- supervisors (accidents, misconduct etc)
- other people around on the journey or at the destination
- other miscellaneous hazards.

For camps, consider getting input into this risk assessment from:

- supervisors
- young people
- external organisations and individuals providing services (eg. the venue)
- a youth worker who is not involved in this camp (to get a fresh perspective).

### Location factors

- For locations with unknown or variable conditions (eg. bushland), get input into the risk assessment from someone who has recently been to the location.
- For rural or isolated areas check the mobile phone coverage.
- Check the latest weather forecast and bushfire danger immediately before entering bushland, creeks and rivers, boating out at sea etc.

### Insurance

Check that the agency's public liability and volunteers insurance (if applicable) cover the event. You may need to provide details to the insurer or broker.

#### External organisations and individuals providing services

Where other organisations or individuals provide services such as transport, accommodation, activities, instructors etc, those organisations or individuals are responsible for identifying and managing risks associated with the services they provide.

It is reasonable to assume that another organisation manages risks adequately if it is a government agency (eg. railways, Sport and Rec, National Parks), a local council (eg. a swimming pool), a reputable business (eg. cinemas, fast food cafés etc), or a major charity (eg. Uniting Church, Salvation Army).

Where the other organisation or individual is not known to you, and they will have a significant safety responsibility, you should satisfy yourself that they:

- hold any licence, registration or qualification required by law (ask them)
- have public liability insurance covering young people and supervisors (ask them)
- are aware (if they need to be) of both the general age range and skill level of your group, and any particular risks associated with particular young people or supervisors (tell them)
- carry out child protection screening of the staff or volunteers, if required by law
- take their safety responsibilities seriously (judge this as best you can).

## 1. Activities and services: Excursions and camps

### Vehicle safety

See the Vehicles policy for travel in a vehicle driven by the supervisors.

### Which young people attend

As much as possible young people who could benefit should not miss out on these opportunities just because they have personal problems or would require extra supervision or support. It is preferable to take fewer young people with a higher supervisor ratio, than to exclude young people who may need the opportunity most.

Encourage young people with disabilities to participate and develop strategies to include them. When taking young people with disabilities on excursions and camps, have the same number of supervisors but add any extra support people the young people with disabilities need.

See the policies:

- Inclusiveness: Developing an Inclusive Youth Service
- Individual Risk Assessment about a Young Person.

#### Which young people on a camp?

Carefully select the target group or the specific young people to attend, taking into account factors such as:

- age range and maturity
- potential to benefit (motivation for participating? currently in crisis? etc)
- current mood, behaviour and drug use
- physical health and abilities in relation to the activities which will occur.

If you decide to exclude a particular young person from the trip, consider the possible effect this might have on them, explain the decision to them sensitively and explore possible alternative activities which they might participate in.

Remember that by law you must provide the same services and activities to young people with disabilities, unless this would cause **unjustifiable** cost or inconvenience.

### Supervisors

A *supervisor* is a person responsible for the running of the event including the supervision of young people, and can be:

- a paid staff member
- a volunteer
- a paid or volunteer staff member of another agency.

Base all decisions about supervisors on your risk assessment. What follows is a guide only.

### Volunteer supervisors

All volunteers must:

- be selected carefully by the agency, including any child protection screening checks required by law (see Child Protection policies)
- understand, agree to comply with, and agree to enforce, the policies and rules of the excursion or camp.

## 1. Activities and services: Excursions and camps

See the agency's own volunteer policy.

### **Risky activities on excursions and camps**

Higher risk skilled activities (eg. abseiling, swimming, bushwalking in isolated areas etc) require an appropriate number of skilled supervisors. These people might be supervisors from the agency, guides and instructors contracted by the agency or employed by the venue, or public officials or volunteers such as surf life savers at a beach. You must ensure that the number of skilled people is adequate for the activity.

### **Supervisors for excursions**

An excursion should have a ratio of one supervisor for every 10 young people (adjust this figure up or down according to your risk assessment).

One supervisor only, with a group of up to 10 young people, may be sufficient if:

- the young people are well known to the supervisor and assessed as not posing any special risk or needing extra support, and
- it is a reasonably low risk journey to a reasonably low risk location (eg. minibus or train to the movies)
- your risk assessment does not indicate otherwise.

Otherwise for an excursion:

- two supervisors as a minimum
- consider having at least two supervisors per vehicle who are drivers, if driving.

An excursion should have at least one supervisor who is first aid qualified.

### **Supervisors for camps**

- two supervisors as a minimum
- one supervisor for every five young people (adjust this figure up or down according to your risk assessment)
- an extra supervisor if there are more than four supervisors, to be the camp coordinator (this also allows supervisors to take breaks)
- at least 2 supervisors should be first aid qualified
- at least half the supervisors should be experienced working with young people (paid workers or volunteers).
- consider having at least two supervisors per vehicle who are drivers, if driving
- for a mixed sex camp: at least one male and one female supervisor
- for a single sex camp: at least half the supervisors should be the same sex as the young people.

**Sleeping arrangements:** Accommodate young women separately from young men. Where possible, accommodate staff separately to young people. If staff must share with young people:

- staff and young people must be of the same gender
- at least two staff in each room if possible.

## 1. Activities and services: Excursions and camps

**Coordinator and acting coordinator:** Agree in advance who is the camp coordinator, and who will be the acting coordinator in the absence of the coordinator, during the camp, for fast decision-making in a crisis and to resolve conflict among supervisors.

**Breaks:** The supervision level and program of activities must allow all supervisors to take sufficient breaks (away from young people and other responsibilities) each day. Supervisors must take these breaks.

**Employment conditions:** Check employment laws and policies regarding hours of work and sleepovers. The budget must include funds for any extra wages. Time in lieu policy and rostering in the weeks after the camp must allow staff to take all time in lieu accrued during the camp.

### Consent

Get written consent for all camps, and for all excursions except for short trips in the immediate area such as to the park, café or local agencies.

A valid consent can cover one trip or a series of related trips, as long as it meets the requirements below.

Each young person must provide a consent form signed by the young person. The exception is if the young person cannot understand what they are consenting to (eg. because of an intellectual disability), in which case another person must provide consent regardless of the person's age.

For young people aged 16 or over who have a guardian appointed by the Guardianship Tribunal (because of a disability), that guardian should also sign the consent form.

#### **Additional consent for excursions for under 16s**

For young people **aged under 16:**

- if the young person is living with a parent or guardian, the parent or guardian should also sign

#### **Consent**

With very low risk activities, such as short trips in the immediate area of your agency (eg. to the local park or café), written consent is usually not needed.

The greater the risks, the more thorough your consent procedures should be. So longer excursions and all camps will usually need written consent.

There is no set legal age below which you must get a consent from the parent and not the young person themselves, for any youth work activity. You can accept a young person's consent if the young person understands the issues involved and the implications of their consent. Most young people of high school age would probably understand the issues and implications of consenting to most excursions and camps.

Therefore youth services which seek consent from parents usually do this as part of their relationship with families and for practical reasons, not out of legal necessity. The consent section here is a guide rather than a precise description of legal requirements.

A written consent does not change your duty of care: to take reasonable care in the circumstances.

## 1. Activities and services: Excursions and camps

- if the young person has an adult in a carer role or with formal or informal responsibility for the young person, that adult should also sign
- if the young person is under 16 and living independently, nobody else needs to sign.

### **Additional consent for camps for under 18s**

For young people **aged under 18**:

- if the young person is living with a parent or guardian, the parent or guardian should also sign
- if the young person has an adult in a carer role or with formal or informal responsibility for the young person, that adult should also sign
- if the young person is under 18 and living independently, nobody else needs to sign.

### **Wording of consent form**

The consent form should say:

I ... (young person's name) agree to participate in INSERT NAME OF ACTIVITY and follow the rules and expectations. I have read the INSERT NAME OF ACTIVITY information sheet and I have provided all the information you need to help keep me safe including health, medication, and physical abilities and disabilities.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I ... (name) give permission for ... (young person's name) to participate in INSERT NAME OF ACTIVITY. I have read the INSERT NAME OF ACTIVITY information sheet and I have provided all the information you need to help keep him/her safe including health, medication, and physical abilities and disabilities.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Disclaimers**

A consent form or activity information sheet **should not say** things like:

*This agency takes no responsibility for any injury which occurs.*

or

*The agency and its officers, employees, and agents will not be liable for any death, personal injury, damage to property, or economic loss suffered by me.*

Disclaimers like these, sometimes inserted by risk managers, insurers or legal people in larger organisations such as local councils, do not change your duty of care to take reasonable care in the circumstances. Nor do they exclude you from liability. They are a legal bluff and therefore unethical.

### **Informed consent and activity information sheets**

The consent is only legally valid if the person or people consenting have the information they need to make the decision. The consent form must be attached to an activity information sheet when it is given out for signing.

An activity information sheet must provide all details relevant to the decision to give consent, including eg:

## 1. Activities and services: Excursions and camps

- name and contact details of the agency (and any other agency which is part of the activity)
- mode of transport and approximate timetable for the trip
- details of where you are going
- names of other organisations or individuals providing services such as chartered buses, accommodation, venues (eg. swimming pool, ten pin bowling), guides and instructors etc
- activities to take place
- accommodation arrangements for camps
- expectations and rules
- what you will do if a young person leaves the group or fails to return (don't promise something if you may not be able to do it)
- any particular risks which the people consenting are not likely to be aware of
- level of supervision and other safety strategies in place
- limitations on safety and supervision
- a statement that first aid trained supervisors will provide first aid if necessary
- a statement that supervisors will call an ambulance and seek medical treatment if necessary (though you can and should do these things regardless of consent)
- how to contact the young person or the supervisors during the event in an emergency
- a statement that all information the agency records about the young person is generally kept private and you can ask for a copy of the agency's privacy statement if you wish
- who to contact for more information.

**Alternative activities:** If there are alternative activities planned in case the intended activity cannot go ahead, provide these details for the alternative activities too.

### **Information required by the agency**

The consent form should ask for whatever relevant information you need, such as:

- contact person in case of emergency: name, day and night phone numbers
- Medicare number
- special requirements: dietary, disability support etc
- all necessary information relevant to safety: medical conditions, medications, disabilities, allergies (see Medications and Medical Treatment policy)
- year of last tetanus injection (for bushwalking etc)
- level of physical fitness (eg. for difficult bushwalks)
- swimming ability: strong swimmer/ average swimmer/ weak swimmer/ non-swimmer.

Record these details on an risk assessment form for each young person (see the policy Individual Risk Assessment about a Young Person).

### **Discuss expectations, rules and consequences**

Meet with all young people before the trip to discuss expectations, rules and consequences. Preferably all supervisors including volunteers should be at this meeting.

## 1. Activities and services: Excursions and camps

Give everyone a copy to keep of the expectations, rules and consequences in easy to understand language. You can require young people can sign an agreement (eg. on the consent form) that they will comply with the rules. This is not likely to have any legal effect but can be useful as a sign that everyone takes the rules seriously.

- Excursions: This meeting can be immediately before you leave.
- Camps: This meeting should be a week or two in advance.

### During the excursion or camp

#### Young person leaves the group or fails to return

If a young person leaves the group, or fails to turn up as expected, you must judge what to do depending on the circumstances. Your response should be based on factors such as these.

Factors about the young person:

- did the young person intend to do this or is it a mistake?
- can the young person get themselves home safely?
- does the young person have a working mobile phone with them?
- is the young person alone?
- how old and mature is the young person, and how skilled are they in that environment?
- is the young person seriously angry, upset, depressed, manic or drug-affected?
- is there any reason to suspect the young person is suicidal?
- might the young person be having a psychotic episode?

Factors about the place:

- how safe is the place the young person might be in or might go to?
- how likely is it that the young person would have an accident or be attacked?
- would emergency services be appropriate, able and willing to find the young person?

Factors about the supervisors and the rest of the group:

- how many people are needed to safely go after the young person?
- what effect would this have on supervision and safety for the rest of the group?
- is there a young person who could go with a supervisor to find the young person?

#### Young person leaves the group...

##### ... on excursions

Often on an excursion to a relatively safe urban area you will not go after a young person (unless the young person is probably unsafe) but you might notify an emergency contact person depending on the circumstances.

##### ... on camps

Usually on a camp you will go after a young person, except that in isolated bushland you must be very cautious about dividing up the group. In some cases you might instead notify emergency services.

## 1. Activities and services: Excursions and camps

- What, if anything, did your activity information sheet (see above) say you would do in this situation?

### **Excluding, sending home**

The camp coordinator can decide to exclude a young person from further participation in activities if there is a serious breach of the rules.

If there is a serious safety risk if a young person stays on the camp, the coordinator must take appropriate steps, eg:

- call the police (see Non-violence policy)
- call mental health services
- send the young person home.

If you send a young person home, document in writing the reason and the procedures you follow.

Arrange their travel in consultation with their emergency contact person. Ask the emergency contact person to arrange, if possible, for someone to come and get the young person.

If nobody can come and get the young person, then in deciding whether a supervisor should travel with the young person, balance:

- the young person's safety if they travel alone
- the safety of the supervisor if they travel with the young person
- the safety of the rest of the group if the supervisor travels with the young person.

If it is not possible to achieve reasonable safety for everyone including the young person, then do not send the young person home.

If you do not send the young person home, but it is not possible to achieve reasonable safety for everyone with the young person staying on the trip, you should end the trip early and bring the whole group home.

### **Emergencies and accidents**

See these policies for specific types of accidents and emergencies:

- Medications and Medical Treatment
- Vehicles
- Non-violence
- Alcohol and Illegal Drugs.

See the Critical Incident Response policy for what to do after the emergency or accident.

General steps:

- Don't panic. Avoid panicking other staff or young people.
- Take immediate steps to protect the safety of all people.
- Inform the excursion/camp coordinator.

## 1. Activities and services: Excursions and camps

- If the incident is serious the excursion/camp coordinator must contact the agency Manager as soon as possible. If necessary the Manager will decide how to manage the aftermath of the incident, including decisions like whether to come home early or not. The Manager is also responsible for any necessary communication with families and the media.
- Fill in an agency accident form and comply with all other WorkCover requirements (see the agency OH&S and workers compensation policies). Notify insurers if required.