



Society of St. Vincent de Paul

North Texas Council

Safeguarding Policy

Introduction

As Christian adults, we have a responsibility for the spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of minor children and vulnerable adults with whom we come in contact. It is our responsibility to provide an environment that is safe and nurturing. This Safe Environment program provides information on procedures to promote a safe environment for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul Diocesan Council of North Texas and its conferences.

Purpose

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul of North Texas (“SVDP”) Council is committed to adhere to a Safeguarding Program to reduce the risk of abuse and to:

- Provide a safe and secure environment for minors and vulnerable adults in connection with SVDP programs and activities.
- Assist SVDP in evaluating a person’s suitability to work with minors or vulnerable adults.
- Listen and investigate the claims of parents and staff members.
- Provide a system to respond to victims and their families, as well as the accused.
- Protect against the possibility of false accusations against SVDP employees, members and volunteers and reduce the risk of exposure to SVDP.

Our Mission

We are a network of friends, inspired by Gospel values, growing in holiness and building a more just world through personal relationships with and in service to people in need.

Our Values

Empathy — to listen to and understand those we assist and to work together as members to support those in need.

Simplicity and Humility — treating each other, and those we assist, as equals in a fraternal relationship.

Justice — respecting people's convictions and beliefs and helping them to regain and retain their autonomy and human dignity.

Safeguarding

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is committed to protecting the rights of all people, and to ensuring that vulnerable persons of all ages are protected from physical and mental violence, injury, abuse, and exploitation, including sexual abuse.

Requirements

The SVDP North Texas Council shall:

- Appoint an employee to oversee and manage the Safeguarding Program
- Implement a Safeguarding Program following the guidelines found in the Council Safeguarding Policy and Procedures
- Establish and maintain a Safeguarding Committee to monitor and insure all SVDP North Texas entities comply with the Program.
- Establish a response team to investigate any incident, should an incident be reported. This team shall consist of the Vincentian Support Leader and Senior Director of Operations, along with appropriate Conference President(s) and District President(s).
- Ensure that all SVDP staff, board members, Vincentians and volunteers are safe environment trained according to the policy, curriculum and schedule established by the Council.

Screening Procedures

Release Form - Prior to employment or volunteering, all potential staff and volunteers must complete the SVDP release form, giving permission for a

background check (Appendix A). All collected information is to be treated as confidential and secured accordingly.

Disqualifying Offenses

No person may serve with minors and vulnerable adults if he or she has ever been convicted of any disqualifying offense, been on probation or received deferred adjudication for any disqualifying offense or has presently pending any criminal charges for any disqualifying offense until a determination of guilt or innocence is made, including any person who is presently on deferred adjudication.

Disqualifying offenses are:

1. A **felony or misdemeanor** classified as an offense against the person or family or involves an offense against the person or family.
2. A **felony or misdemeanor** classified as an offense against public order, safety, or decency.
3. A **felony** violation of any law intended to control the possession or distribution of any substance included as a controlled substance in the Texas Controlled Substance Act.
4. Two or more **misdemeanors** within the past five years.
5. A **felony or misdemeanor** classified as an offense against property, to the extent that those offenses are related to threats or risk of harm or violence.
6. A **felony** Computer Crime of online solicitation of a minor or vulnerable adult.
7. A **felony or misdemeanor** offense against public health, safety and morals, involving illegal possession or use of weapons.

The preceding list of offenses describe categories from the Texas Penal Code. In summary, any offense which would impact the health and safety of members, vulnerable adults and minors - at the discretion of SVDP - would be a disqualifying offense.

The Appeal Process

Any person who applies and is not accepted as a member of the Society or is released as a member of the Society, an employee or a volunteer, for any reason under these guidelines, will have a right of appeal as set forth in the Appeal Process.

If non-acceptance is based on the criminal background check for employees or volunteers, the applicant shall be given the name and address of the agency reporting the criminal history of such applicant, so that he or she will have the opportunity to obtain a similar report from such agency.

In the event that such report is obtained by the applicant and he or she reasonably believes that an error has been made by the reporting agency or independent agent, then, upon written request, a second criminal background check shall be obtained by the Society and the application reconsidered.

An appeal for reconsideration should be made to the conference president in writing, with an explanation for requesting the appeal. The conference president shall then engage their respective District President, who will bring the appeal request with their recommendation to the Council President and Chief Executive Officer for a final decision.

Training Procedures

All SVDP members, staff and volunteers must renew their safeguarding certification annually to remain active members of the Society.

To renew training, one of the following two options may be selected:

Option 1:

If safe environment training required for a parish-based ministry within the last 12 months has been completed through the Diocese of Dallas and you know how to access your certificate of completion, please forward it to: membership@svdpdallas.org.

Option 2:

SVDP offers online training options which can be reviewed in Appendix B.

Each new staff member or volunteer will be provided with a copy of the Safeguarding Policy. Each staff/volunteer is required to read the policy, sign the Acknowledgment Form (Appendix C) and return it to the SVDP Council Office at membership@svdpdallas.org. Redistribution, review and acknowledgement of the Safeguarding Policy will be administered to all Staff members, board members, Vincentians and volunteers.

The SVDP Council will monitor and maintain training completion records to ensure all staff and volunteers are following the Safeguarding Policy on-going training requirements.

If an individual is suspended from participating in Society activities for failure to follow these Policies and Procedures, the applicant will have the right to be reactivated as a member / volunteer after 12 months from the date of suspension, upon written request.

Reporting Procedures

The Council, through its various entities and Conferences, has numerous contacts with minors and vulnerable adults. It is, therefore, most important that all persons, specifically all Council staff and Vincentians, protect the rights of minors and vulnerable adults and be alert to the possibility of abuse. It is the policy of the SVDP, not only to fulfill the reporting law, but to cooperate fully with the investigating civil authorities.

Individuals must report incidents of abuse or suspicions of sexual misconduct or sexual harassment within 48 hours of the incident. Situations involving abuse of minors must be reported to **the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services** at **1-800-252-5400** (<http://www.txabusehotline.org>) or in emergency if there is imminent danger to the appropriate police authority, usually by calling 911.

As a member of the SVDP, if you experience or observe any person or persons being subjected to physical or mental violence, injury, abuse, exploitation, including sexual harassment, you are required to notify your Conference President or District President of the incident. Conference Presidents

and /or District Presidents will assist in completing the Safeguarding Incident Report (Appendix D) and forward a copy to the Safeguarding Incident Reporting email at the SVDP Council at reportabuse@svdpdallas.org.

If you are an employee or member of any other SVDP entity or a member of the Board, your incident report should be sent to the Safeguarding Incident Reporting email at the SVDP Council at reportabuse@svdpdallas.org.

If you are a neighbor and victim of abuse by a member of SVDP and wish to report an incident of abuse, please email the SVDP Council at reportabuse@svdpdallas.org. Your report will be kept confidential and a member of the Safeguarding Committee will contact you for further details.

Note: A report to the Council does not relieve the individual from reporting abuse as required by the Texas State Law.

Mandate to report under state law:

The Texas law is very specific on reporting suspected abuse:

261.101. Persons required to report; time to report, the Texas Family Code, states:

- a) A person having cause to believe that a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect by any person shall immediately make a report.
- c) The requirement to report under this section applies without exception to an individual, whose personal communications may otherwise be privileged, including an attorney, or a member of the clergy.

261.106 Immunity

- a) A person acting in good faith who reports or assists in the investigation of a report of alleged abuse or who testifies or otherwise participates in a judicial proceeding arising from a report petition or investigation of alleged child abuse or neglect is immune from civil or criminal liability.

Recruitment

When engaging members, volunteers, or staff, there must be processes in place to ensure that risks to vulnerable persons are identified and addressed. In compliance with local diocesan and legal requirements, this will include requiring all adults to have background checks and complete Safe Environment training prior to commencing with volunteer activities.

Position Description

When advertising, promoting, or documenting roles within SVDP, it will be made clear that SVDP upholds safeguarding principles and practices and that all personnel must adhere to said safeguarding policy and procedures.

All position descriptions are to include information explaining what the responsibilities are regarding safeguarding, including the need to complete annual training.

Formation and Training

Without exception, all staff and adult volunteers are required to receive annual safeguarding training in alignment with SVDP requirements.

Two Adult Rule

The Confederation International of Society of St. Vincent de Paul's "two adult rule" (Rule Part III, Statute 8) serves to keep vulnerable persons safe, and to protect against false/malicious allegations being made against Vincentians and others providing services. No fewer than two Vincentians should be always present during any meeting with those we serve, and a Vincentian should not be involved with a vulnerable person in the course of the Vincentian work without another adult being present.

Volunteers and Visitors

All non-Vincentian individuals who participate in volunteer opportunities and / or visitors to SVDP locations must be made aware of the SVDP Safeguarding Policy either prior to or upon their arrival. They must verbally acknowledge they understand the

policy and will comply with the policy. This includes volunteers, visitors, consultants, donors, vendors and partners.

If a non-Vincentian individual volunteers more than five times a year or a non-Vincentian individual visits more than five times a year, a background check will be authorized and written acknowledgement of the Safeguarding Policy will be required.

Media, Audio, & Visual Recordings

If any audio or visual recordings involve interviewing a family or individual, always ensure that there is no risk to them of being endangered, or adversely affected. This includes ensuring their privacy and not disclosing identifying information about a child or a vulnerable person, i.e., their full names, addresses or identifying their home, host community, or general location and being vigilant of street signs, advertising boards or any other background information that will indicate to a viewer where the person may live. Always have the individuals in the photo formally give permission, by signing a release, for SVDP to use their photo (see Appendix E).

Expectations of our Partners and Vendors

We expect that SVDP partner and vendor organizations will operate effective safeguarding procedures. If a Council receives a safeguarding concern about a partner or vendor organization, the Council will inform them and expect the partner/vendor to respond quickly and appropriately according to local law.

Communicating the Safeguarding Message

The Council ensures that a hard or electronic copy of the safeguarding policy is provided or made available in each office or headquarters within their jurisdiction and available to and acknowledged by members, employees, volunteers, and people being served.

Copies will be provided to the public in hard copy or through email upon request. The policy will be translated into necessary local languages.

All material will include clear information about whom a vulnerable person should contact, if they feel they or another person has been violated or offended in any way.

The Safeguarding Policy can be accessed online at <https://www.svdpdallas.org>.

Monitoring Compliance

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

Council records will be kept tracking the process of:


- safeguarding policy orientation, background checks and Safe Environment training certification
- safeguarding concerns and disclosures reported, including details of all follow-up action.
- job descriptions and postings/ads, to confirm that they all contain the commitment to the safeguarding policy.

Policy Review

The Safeguarding policy will be reviewed and validated by the Council committee annually. All staff, board members and Vincentians must affirm their understanding of and commitment to the Safeguarding policy.

Appendixes

A. Background Check Release Form



Society of
St. Vincent de Paul
NORTH TEXAS

VOLUNTEER RELEASE/SCREENING FORM

As a condition for volunteer consideration with the above organization, I understand a background investigation may be performed.

I authorize the Society of St. Vincent de Paul Council of Dallas, Accutrak Investigative Services and any other agent to verify my background prior to, or at any time during my service, which may include: criminal records, driving records, educational verification, and any other consumer reports or required information.

I release the Society of St. Vincent de Paul Council of Dallas, Accutrak, and any other agent from liability or damages whatsoever for the obtaining of any background information prior to, or at any time during my service. This is not a part of any employment application and is used for verification only.

PLEASE PRINT

Full Name: _____	Social Security #: <u>(Last 4 digits only)</u> _____
Date of Birth: _____	Driver's License #: _____ ST. _____
Email: _____	
Current Address: _____	
City, State, Zip: _____	
Home Phone: _____	Cellphone: _____
Conference or Program Name: _____	
Applicant Signature: _____	Date: _____

All parties agree to keep all applicant background information in strict confidence, will use the information for lawful purposes, and will adhere to the Fair Credit Reporting Act and all other applicable laws.

Mail or email this completed form to:

SVDP Council of Dallas
Attn: Safe Environment
3826 Gilbert Ave.
Dallas, TX 75219

e-mail: mvega@svdpedallas.org

ACCUTRAK P.O. Box 260 Allen, TX 75013 Phone (972) 390-2109 Fax (972) 390-2195

B. Online Training Options

Online training is available through the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services and can be accessed at the following link.

<http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Training/Reporting/default.asp>

Upon completion of the course, the certificate should be sent to membership@svdpdallas.org.

C. Acknowledgment of Safeguarding Policy Form

Acknowledgement

This Safeguarding Policy has been prepared as a guide to assist you when working with minors and vulnerable adults in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul of North Texas council, conference, or affiliated entities. The SVDP North Texas Council reserves the right to make changes in the content or application of this policy and to implement those changes with or without notice.

I have received a copy of the Safeguarding Policy of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul of North Texas Council. I understand it is my responsibility to become familiar with and adhere to the policies and procedures contained therein. If you have any questions, before signing this acknowledgement, please contact your Conference President or contacting the Council at membership@svdpdallas.org .

Print Name

Signature

Date

D. Safeguarding Incident Report Form

Safeguarding Incident Report Form

I, _____, made a report to the Texas Department of Family and
Protective Services (DFPS) on _____, at _____
(Date) (Time)

I am an employee/volunteer at _____, an entity in
(Name of entity/conference)

the St. Vincent de Paul Diocesan Council of Dallas.

The DFPS person who took my call was _____

The case number given to the call was _____

The call concerned (name of child/individual and circumstances; date and place of
alleged incident).

Signed _____
Employee/Volunteer who made the call

Signed _____
Safeguarding Coordinator or Conference / District President

The Safeguarding Coordinator (SC) or Conference President will mail a copy of this form to DFPS
confirming the call.

The SC or Conference President will keep a copy of this form on file.

The SC or Conference President will send a copy of this form to the SVDP Diocesan Council Office, Attn:
Safeguarding Policy, 3826 Gilbert Avenue, Dallas, TX 75219

These reports will be mailed within three working days of the actual phone call.

Mailing address of DFPS: Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
2355 North Stemmons Freeway
Dallas; TX 75207
1-800-252-5400

E. Media Release Form



Society of

St. Vincent de Paul
NORTH TEXAS

3826 Gilbert Ave
Dallas, TX 75219

214 520 0650
www.svdpdallas.org

CONSENT AND RELEASE FORM FOR PHOTOGRAPHY AND INTERVIEWS

Subject: _____

Location: _____

I hereby give Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Diocesan Council of Dallas, Inc. and its employees, officers, volunteers, and representatives the absolute right and permission to take and/or publish, and to allow any news organization access to take and/or publish, at any time, photographs, video, or other media containing my [child's] likeness or in which my [child's] likeness may be included in whole or part, with or without name, for any editorial, promotional, advertising, Web/Internet, fundraising, news, or trade purposes of Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Diocesan Council of Dallas, Inc. or of such news organization. I hereby waive any right to inspect and/or approve the finished product or advertising copy that may be used in connection therewith, or the use to which it may be applied. I release Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Diocesan Council of Dallas, Inc. and its employees, officers, volunteers, and representatives from any liability whatsoever arising from the taking, processing, composing, editing, reproducing, publishing or displaying said photographs, video, or images.

I have read and understand the above:

Signature _____

Printed name _____

Organization Name (if applicable) _____

Address _____

Date _____