Monte Cecilia Housing Trust - Child Protection Policy

1. Purpose

This policy sets out Monte Cecilia Housing Trust (MCHT) commitment to protecting children and young people who engage with its services. MCHT provides community housing and wraparound support to whānau, and every interaction with a household influences the wellbeing, safety and future opportunities of the children within it. Child protection is a core responsibility of MCHT and is embedded across all practice.

This policy ensures that children are safe, supported and protected from abuse, neglect and harm. It provides clear guidance for staff, volunteers, contractors and Board members on how to identify concerns, respond appropriately and work collaboratively with statutory agencies.

2. Alignment with Catholic Safeguarding

MCHT is a Catholic social service agency. As such, MCHT aligns its child protection responsibilities with the Catholic Diocese of Auckland Safeguarding Framework. This includes:

- Commitment to creating safe environments for children
- Safe recruitment and vetting
- Clear behavioural expectations
- Transparent reporting pathways
- Accountability for Safeguarding practice
- Ongoing training and formation

MCHT adopts the principles of the National Safeguarding Policy of the Catholic Church in Aotearoa New Zealand, applying them in a manner appropriate for a Community Housing Provider (CHP) rather than a Parish or Ministry setting.

The Catholic Safeguarding Framework establishes expectations for organisations that work with children. MCHT incorporates these expectations into its own policies, procedures and practice systems.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all MCHT Board members, employees, volunteers, contractors and partner organisations working under MCHT supervision. It applies to all children and young people under 18 years who engage with MCHT services.

4. Policy Statement

MCHT ensures that all children and young people who have contact with its services are afforded care, protection and support to thrive within their whānau and community. The safety and wellbeing of the child is the paramount consideration in all decisions and actions.

MCHT recognises the primary role of whānau in caring for their children. MCHT supports whānau to strengthen capability, build resilience and create safe environments. When concerns arise, MCHT acts promptly, professionally and in accordance with legal, ethical and Catholic Safeguarding obligations.

5. Principles

Child Safety

Children have the right to feel safe and be safe. Their safety and welfare are the first and paramount consideration.

Child Centred Practice

All decisions consider the lived experience of the child. MCHT's Child Centred Practice Philosophy and Operational Practice Framework guide assessment, analysis and intervention.

Whānau Partnership

Whānau are partners in the change process. MCHT works respectfully and collaboratively with families while ensuring child safety remains paramount.

Catholic Safeguarding Principles

MCHT adopts the Safeguarding principles of the Catholic Diocese of Auckland, including:

- Safe people
- Safe environments
- Safe processes
- Clear reporting pathways
- Accountability and transparency
- Formation and training

These principles are applied in a way that fits MCHT's role as a Community Housing Provider.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi

Practice honours whakapapa supports Māori whānau to exercise rangatiratanga and recognises the cultural identity of each child.

Professional Boundaries

Staff always maintain clear professional boundaries.

Collaboration

MCHT works closely with Oranga Tamariki, Police and specialist agencies to ensure children are protected.

Evidence Informed Practice

Professional judgement is supported by observation, assessment, supervision and reflective practice.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

Chief Executive

The Chief Executive ensures child protection is embedded across MCHT operations. The Chief Executive

maintains relationships with Oranga Tamariki, Police and the Catholic Diocese of Auckland Safeguarding Office. The Chief Executive ensures staff training, supervision and quality assurance systems are in place.

Senior Leadership and Service Managers

Senior Leadership provides guidance and oversight for child protection practice. The Service Manager will support staff to identify and respond to concerns and maintains current contact information for statutory agencies and the Catholic Safeguarding Office.

Staff, Volunteers and Contractors

All staff; volunteers and contractors must follow this policy and associated procedures. They must identify and report concerns promptly, maintain professional boundaries and participate in required training and supervision.

7. Safe Recruitment and Vetting

MCHT follows the Catholic Diocese of Auckland Safe Recruitment Guidelines and the MCHT Recruitment Policy. All staff and volunteers working with children must be:

a. Police vetted
b. Reference checked
c. Interviewed using child safety focused questions
d. Assessed for suitability to work with vulnerable whānau No person may work with children until vetting is complete.

8. Safe Practice and Professional Boundaries

All Staff must:

a. Maintain professional relationships with whānau
b. Avoid personal, financial or social relationships with clients
c. Inform their manager of any potential conflicts of interest
d. Follow MCHT's Code of Conduct and Catholic Safeguarding behavioural expectations
e. Ensure interactions with children are visible and appropriate
f. Avoid situations where they are alone with a child unless necessary and risk assessed

9. Behaviour Management

MCHT staff, volunteers and contractors must never use physical punishment, emotional or psychological abuse, humiliation, intimidation, threats, isolation as punishment or deprivation of basic needs. Appropriate behaviour guidance is positive, respectful, age appropriate, calm, consistent and focused on teaching and reinforcing positive behaviour.

10. Information Sharing

MCHT complies with the Privacy Act 2020, Oranga Tamariki Act 1989, Family Violence Act 2018 and Children's Act 2014. Information may be shared when necessary to protect a child from harm, contribute to a family

violence risk or needs assessment or support a decision or plan related to family violence.

Staff must ensure information is relevant, accurate and recorded appropriately.

11. Identifying and Responding to Concerns

Concerns may arise through observation, disclosure, behavioural changes, environmental factors or professional judgement. Staff must record the concern factually, consult with the Service Manager, Senior Leadership or Chief Executive and report to Oranga Tamariki or Police when required.

Staff must not investigate concerns themselves. Staff continue to support the whānau while ensuring child safety.

MCHT follows the Catholic Safeguarding reporting expectations, including notifying the Catholic Diocese of Auckland Safeguarding Office when concerns involve staff, volunteers or contractors.

12. Collaboration with External Agencies

MCHT maintains strong relationships with Oranga Tamariki, New Zealand Police, specialist family violence and child protection services and the Catholic Diocese of Auckland Safeguarding Office. Concerns are reported promptly to ensure professional investigation and support.

13. Training

All staff who work with children must complete child protection training. All new staff complete an induction that includes this policy and Catholic Safeguarding expectations. Staff participate in regular refreshers through supervision and team training.

14. Record Keeping

All child protection concerns must be documented clearly, stored securely, accessible only to authorised staff and recorded in accordance with MCHT's privacy and information management procedures.

15. Review

This policy is reviewed annually or earlier if required by legislative change, Safeguarding updates or organisational learning. The review includes consultation with the Catholic Diocese of Auckland Safeguarding Office.

Next Review Date: 4 /11 / 2027

Effective Date: 4 / 11 / 2026
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Approved By: Markerita Poutasi, Chief Executive