



OPENING THE DOORS FOUNDATION

Keeping Koorie Kids in an Education of their Choice

Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Opening the Doors Foundation

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Opening The Doors Foundation

The Opening The Doors Foundation (OTDF) is a First Nations-led community organisation supporting educational choices and opportunities for First Nations children¹. It provides First Nations children from regional, remote and urban communities across Australia with educational opportunities within Victorian non-government schools. The cultural safety within OTDF, instilled by the majority First Nations trustees, upholds the spiritual and cultural wellbeing of students and their families and supports relationships based upon trust and security which are necessary in continuing to support the wellbeing of students.

The OTDF supports families to make their own choices about their children's future for their entire education journey from foundation to Year 12, ensuring they are able to choose the quality education they deserve and have the same opportunities as any other Australian children, thereby reducing inequalities. It achieves this with the strong support of Victoria's FIRE Carrier schools, established in 2009 as an initiative of the Victorian Aboriginal Catholic Ministry to support reconciliation and the OTDF.

Educational opportunities are realised by meeting the costs of uniforms, schoolbooks, IT equipment, stationary and more. By providing support and being led by the wishes of families and on-the-ground First Nations support networks, students can attend the school of their choice, with correct uniform and equipment. The achievement of a successful and culturally appropriate academic experience allows the potential to radically alter the systemic and generational disadvantage currently experienced by First Nations people.

The OTDF is an approved organisation under the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC). The Foundation is governed by a Board of Trustees, has several part-time employees and contractors, and is supported by volunteers.

1.2 Policy Context

This Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy demonstrates the commitment of the OTDF to supporting and upholding safe and welcoming environments for all children – including First Nations children, children from multicultural and multifaith backgrounds, children with disability and gender diverse children.

Maintaining a positive environment and active participation of those who work with us is essential in building supportive relationships. While the OTDF is not an educational institution, our partnership with schools requires a commitment to and compliance with the safeguarding regulations of schools, in particular Victoria's *Ministerial Order No. 1359 – Implementing Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools and School Boarding Facilities* (2022). Other legislation and regulations relevant to the policy are outlined in Section 4 of this policy (p. 5).

¹ In this policy, the term 'children' is inclusive of young people up the age of 18 years.

All OTDF personnel² are bound by the requirements of this policy and by the safeguarding policies of the schools and dioceses in which they provide services.

² In this policy, the term 'personnel' refers to and includes the Trustees, staff, contractors, co-workers and volunteers who work with or for the OTDF, either onsite or in outreach activities.

OUR SAFEGUARDING POLICY – STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

The Opening the Doors Foundation (OTDF) places the highest priority on the care, wellbeing and protection of all children. This includes paying attention to the inherent dignity of children and their fundamental right to be respected, nurtured and safeguarded by all.

We recognise that cultural safety and inclusion serve as protective factors in relation to safeguarding, particularly for First Nations children and those from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, children with a disability, and children of diverse sexuality. We remain committed to maintaining safe and inclusive environments that celebrate diversity and that are free from any forms of discrimination and abuse.

As a First Nations organisation, the OTDF understands that the wellbeing and protection of First Nations children and communities is our primary priority. We also recognise that protecting children from harm is a shared responsibility of families, the general community, community agencies, professionals working with children and adults, faith and school communities, the police and governments. We will work in partnership with these groups to promote and support the safeguarding of children and to prevent harm from occurring.

We will strive to ensure that the First Nations children we serve are safe and feel safe, and that their voices are heard about decisions that affect their lives. Engagement with children's families and carers, with local communities and with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations will be undertaken when required to ensure a culturally safe response to abuse, or an allegation of abuse, against a First Nations child.

When child safety concerns are raised or identified, we will treat these seriously and respond promptly and thoroughly. Anyone who brings forward to the OTDF a suspicion, concern, knowledge or allegation of current or past abuse of a child will be responded to sensitively, respectfully, actively and in a timely manner. In line with our lawful obligations, we will share information and report concerns, allegations and incidents to the appropriate authorities, as required. Where there is immediate risk of harm, the police will be notified.

The active participation of those who work with us is essential in building and maintaining a secure and positive environment for all. Every person associated with the OTDF is expected to establish safe and supportive relationships. **We will monitor and uphold this expectation through Trustee and team meetings where periodic reference to this policy and associated practices will be discussed.**

2. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 Safe and Suitable Personnel

The OTDF is committed to recruiting and engaging personnel who are suitable to have contact with children. We make all reasonable efforts to ensure that they are appropriately credentialled and have relevant working with children certification as required by legislation.

If an employee or volunteer does not pass the check that is issued and assessed by the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety (the Department), they will be given an Interim Negative Notice by the Department and provided with an opportunity to explain why they should not be given a Negative Notice. The person will be given a reasonable period of time to make a written submission and/or provide further information they wish to be considered before a final decision is made.

In such instances, the Chair of OTDF will require the employee/volunteer to not commence or continue any direct duties with children until the matter is resolved with the Department. Redeployment to a suitable alternative position and modification of work processes or duties associated with the child will be considered.

3.2 Cultivating Welcoming and Culturally Safe School Environments

We work with FIRE Carrier schools and associated schools for which we provide services to provide a culturally sensitive, competent and responsive service for the First Nations children and families in their communities.

We support each school's efforts to build welcoming and inclusive environments where the strengths of First Nations culture, values and practices are respected. We do this by education and awareness raising programs pertaining to:

- An understanding of First Nations peoples' history and their connection to culture;
- An understanding of the impact of intergenerational trauma in the lives of First Nations individuals, children, families and communities;
- Working in respectful partnership with First Nations organisations and local communities;
- A commitment to enculturation and reconciliation and the sharing of culture and spirituality.

In assisting schools with these matters, the OTDF intends to draw on and promote recently published materials (August 2024) of the Commission for Children and Young People:

Understanding cultural safety for Aboriginal children and young people – A resource for implementing Child Safe Standard 1

<https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards/cultural-safety>

3.3 Student Empowerment and Family Engagement

The OTDF aims to involve children when making schooling decisions, especially about matters that directly affect them. Our personnel will listen to their views and respect what they have to say.

We recognise that our First Nations families and carers have an important role in monitoring and promoting children's safety and wellbeing and in helping children to raise any concerns. We will encourage them to speak up and act on concerns relating to themselves or their children and, if required, direct them to the appropriate people and agencies who can support them in this process.

3.4 Reporting Obligations

Anyone who brings forward to the OTDF a suspicion, concern, knowledge or allegation of current or past abuse of a child will be responded to sensitively, respectfully, actively and in a timely manner. In line with our lawful obligations, we will share information and report concerns, allegations and incidents to the appropriate schools, agencies and authorities, as required.

These agencies and authorities may include:

- **THE ORANGE DOOR REFERRAL SERVICES**

The Orange Door Referral Service is a family information, referral and support team run by a registered community service in a local area that can receive confidential referrals about a child of concern. It does not have any statutory powers to protect a child, but can refer matters to relevant services.

A report to The Orange Door would normally be made if a child's immediate safety is not compromised but there are significant concerns for the child's wellbeing.

Locations and phone numbers are listed on The Orange Door website.

W: <https://orangedoor.vic.gov.au>

- **DFFH CHILD PROTECTION**

A report to DFFH Child Protection is necessary when a reasonable belief has formed that a child is in need of protection due to child abuse, or that they have been, are being or are at risk of being harmed due to any form of abuse, including family violence.

Locations and phone numbers are as follows:

Eastern **1300 360 391** Northern **1300 664 977**

Southern **1300 655 795** Western **1800 075 599**

Western **1300 664 977** After hours **13 12 78**

- **COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE (CCYP)**

The CCYP is the reporting authority for allegations of child abuse (and other child-related misconduct) made against employees and volunteers who work with children and young people.

T: 1300 78 29 78

W: <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au>

NOTE: Within the CCYP, Meena Singh is the dedicated Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People

- **VICTORIA POLICE**

Victoria Police is the reporting authority when the source of the abuse comes from within the school and/or where a suspicion, belief or disclosure relates to grooming.

Where the source of suspected or actual abuse comes from within the family or community, both DFFH Child Protection and Victoria Police are notified.

T: 000 if a child is in imminent danger.

NOTE: Victoria Police have locally-based Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Teams (SOCITs). Locations and phone numbers listed on Victoria Police website

W: <https://www.police.vic.gov.au/sexual-offences-and-child-abuse-investigation-teams>

3.5 Record Keeping, Privacy, Confidentiality and Information Sharing

The OTDF maintains current knowledge of, and complies with, our legislative obligations to maintain confidentiality and protect personal information and privacy. Information and records relating to incidents, complaints, responses and decisions are treated as confidential, except where the sharing or distribution of information and/or records is mandated by legislation, statutory requirements or principles of natural justice.

3. RELATED LEGISLATION

- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic.)
- Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic.) and the Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 (Vic.)
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic.)
- Child Wellbeing and Safety (Information Sharing) Regulations 2018 (Vic.)
- Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic.)
- Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) and Australian Privacy Principles 2014 (Cth)
- Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic.)
- Crimes Act 1958 (Vic.)
- Worker Screening Act 2020 (Vic.)
- Ministerial Order No. 1359: Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools and School Boarding Premises 2022 (Vic.)