## Zest4Kidz Child Protection Policy

**Zest4Kidz Child Protection Policy Statement:**

The Trustees of Zest4Kidz acknowledge the rights of children to be protected and treated with respect and have their views taken into account.  The nature of our work means that these rights may not be adequately protected in the setting in which we find them.  Our work involves us attempting to get these issues addressed within their current context.

However it is essential that in any interaction with leaders and volunteers of Zest4Kidz children have the right to be protected and to be treated with respect and have their views taken into account.

Many of the children we work with have been badly abused and brutalised and that this makes the particularly vulnerable to being further abused by people in positions of trust, this includes leaders and volunteers working with Zest4Kidz.

 Any abusive or risky behaviour by leaders or volunteers of Zest4Kidz will not be tolerated, and will be reported to the relevant authorities in accordance with this policy.

This policy aims to set out safe working practices for leaders and volunteers of Zest4Kidz and to outline the reporting procedure should abuse be suspected.

This policy is based on the advice and guidance contained in “Our Duty to Care: The Principles of good practice for the protection of children & young people”, it also takes into account the guidance contained in “Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children”

 It is the responsibility of all Team Leaders and Team Members to ensure that this policy is complied with.

 **Recognising child abuse:**

Training provided by Zest4Kidz will ensure that leaders and volunteers will be clear about what abuse is and know how to respond to it.

**What is Abuse?**

All workers should be aware that child abuse occurs when the behaviour by someone in a position of greater power than a child causes harm.  Because children can be abused in a number of ways, sometimes at the same time, it is not always easy to categorise it, but four broad definitions can be considered: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse.

 While all children can be vulnerable to abuse, Zest4Kidz acknowledges that the children it is involved with may be particularly vulnerable to abuse.  Many of the children visited by Zest4Kidz projects have been abused and/or brutalised, this makes them especially vulnerable to abuse by adults particularly by people who are in a caring or helping position.

**Suspecting child abuse:**

 Leaders and volunteers may come across actual or suspected child abuse in a number of different contexts:

· A child may give an account of what has happened to them in the past

· A concern may arise that a child is being abused by a current carer

· A concern or an allegation may arise concerning a Team Member or Team Leader of Zest4Kidz

Children will sometimes confide that they are being harmed, and sometimes other people witness incidents with suggests that children are being harmed.  However, it is often necessary to rely on signs or suspicious behaviour on the part of the child or adult.  It is not always easy to accept that children can be deliberately harmed or abused, especially by people who volunteer for humanitarian work.  Reluctance to think badly of such people, or a lack of understanding of abuse can lead to a resistance to hear or recognise abuse.

 It is essential that concerns no matter how small, are discussed with the relevant personnel as outlined within this policy.

**Reporting Procedure:**

Any Team Member or Team Leader who has a suspicion or concern about child abuse should report this to the Zest4Kidz Child Protection Officer. If the concern is about a child’s current local carer, or a concern about past abuse, this will be passed to the Zest4Kidz Team Leader, who will pass this information on to the appropriate authorities in the country in which the project is taking place.

 If the child protection allegation concerns a Team Leader or Team Member, the Child Protection Officer will inform the Zest4Kidz team leader who will make immediate arrangements to have the allegation investigated.

In such circumstances the Team Leader will inform the Chair of the Board of Directors of Zest4Kidz.

While the matter is being investigated the Child Protection Officer and the Team Leader will ensure that the leader/volunteer is suspended from all contact with children.

The Child Protection Officer will conduct and initial screening to establish if there is a concern.  If a concern is established the Child Protection Officer in conjunction with the Team Leader and Chair of the Board of Directors will establish contact with the authorities in the country hosting the project.

The leader/volunteer against whom the allegation is made must be advised as soon as possible of the allegation and given an opportunity to respond.  Any response from the leader/volunteer must be noted and forwarded where necessary to the relevant authorities.  It must be noted that and allegation may be erroneous or malicious and therefore should be dealt with sensitively and support provided for the worker, including counselling where necessary.

Consideration should also be given to support/counselling of volunteers/leaders involved in the project, in the event of such an allegation being made.

The Team Leader will also make all necessary arrangements to support the leader/volunteer throughout any investigation process in the host country. This will also include contacting the Irish Embassy.

On returning to Ireland the Child Protection Officer will make a formal report to the Health Services Executive and the Gardaí if necessary.

Volunteers, leaders, and team leaders are advised that they are legally protected under the Protections for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998.

The Chair of the Board of Directors should be kept informed at all stages of this process.

It is the duty of all volunteers to report their concerns promptly and in accordance with this policy, failure to do so potentially puts children at further risk as well as damaging the reputation of Zest4Kidz or other voluntary humanitarian organizations.

**Volunteer Declaration**

I have read and understand the Zest4Kidz Child Protection Policy. I agree to act in accordance with this policy during my volunteer trip.

Signed:

Date: