Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

1.0 Introduction

Assist Community Services is a registered NDIS provider dedicated to delivering high-quality, person-centred disability supports to people of all ages, including children and young people under 18. We recognise that child participants who live with a disability face increased vulnerability to harm, abuse, and systemic neglect. This policy establishes our absolute commitment and operational rules to safeguard our young NDIS participants, ensuring their human, disability, and cultural rights are fiercely protected in strict alignment with the NDIS Practice Standards, the NDIS Code of Conduct, and the Queensland Child Safe Standards under the *Child Safe Organisations Act 2024* (Qld).
By working with, or providing disability services to children on behalf of, Assist Community Services, all personnel acknowledge and agree to the following frameworks:

2.0 Scope and Eligibility

1. Applies to all Directors, managers and team leaders.

2. Covers all full-time, part-time, and casual disability support workers, including our current workforce.

3. Extends to all sub-contractors and consultants.

4. Includes all volunteers and student placements across all participant homes, community access points, and service hubs.

3.0 Commitment to Child Safe Disability Support

1. Safeguarding Priority: The safety, emotional wellbeing, and happiness of child NDIS participants are the absolute priorities driving our service delivery.

2. Zero Tolerance: We maintain a strict zero-tolerance approach to child abuse, neglect, human rights violations, or harm of any kind within our services.

3. Vulnerability Recognition: We actively acknowledge that communication barriers, isolation, and complex care needs increase a child's vulnerability, and we tailor our safety protocols accordingly.

4. Advocacy and Choice: We deeply commit to listening to child participants, supporting their communication systems, respecting their choices, and maximizing their control over their own NDIS supports.

5. Core Service Slogan: Our core guiding slogan is: *"Every child safe, every voice heard."*

6. Child Safe Nominee: Aalden Pennington (Director / General Manager) is our Child Safe Nominee and is responsible for receiving child safety concerns, leading our response, and overseeing this policy. All personnel share responsibility for keeping children safe.

4.0 Child Participation, Control, and Empowerment

1. Verbal and Non-Verbal Consent: Personnel must always seek the verbal or non-verbal consent of the child participant before performing physical care tasks, assistance with daily living, or therapeutic interventions.

2. Co-Designed Support Plans: NDIS Support Plans must be co-designed directly with the child, incorporating their unique goals, personal interests, and preferred communication methods.

3. Accessible NDIS Resources: Participant Welcome Packs, Service Agreements, Privacy Policies, and Complaints Guides must be provided in child-friendly, Easy Read versions (including “Keeping Kids Safe”, “My Voice Matters”, “How To Tell Us If You Are Unhappy Or Feel Unsafe” and “My Service Agreement: A Guide for Me”) using simple language and clear visual symbols.

4. Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC): Personnel will utilise Child-Friendly Feedback Forms (“How Was Your Day With Us?”) featuring visual emoji scales, audio inputs, and drawing options during routine post-shift check-ins.

5. Safety Alert Triage: The selection of a "sad" or "not safe" emoji by a child on a tablet or communication board is treated as a safety alert and must be escalated the same day to our Child Safe Nominee for immediate triage – Aalden Pennington.

6. Continuous Quality Improvement: Direct feedback, gestures, and quotes from child participants are explicitly used to drive service quality changes, which are logged in our Continuous Improvement Register.

5.0 Family, Carer, and Community Partnerships

1. Collaborative NDIS Planning: We openly collaborate with families, nominees, and informal carers to plan disability supports, manage environmental risks, and review service delivery models.

2. Participant Safety Surveys: We actively gather feedback regarding service safety through anonymous annual satisfaction surveys tailored to evaluate cultural, physical, and psychological safety.

3. Transparent Governance: We openly publish child-safe initiatives and service improvements using a transparent "You Said, We Did" reporting framework in social media and web updates.

4. Allied and Educational Networks: Trusted partnerships with schools, special education units, cultural centres, and disability advocacy groups.

5. Collaborative Case Consultations: Stakeholder meetings are conducted to ensure robust, holistic safeguarding frameworks remain integrated across the child's entire support network.

6. Information for Families: Every family receives our Parents & Carers Guide: Our Child Safe Boundaries, which explains what staff will and will never do, and how to raise a concern.

6.0 Diversity, Equity, and Disability Inclusion

1. Inclusive Everyday Practice: Personnel must accommodate complex dietary requirements, adjust communication styles (e.g., using AAC devices, PECS, or Auslan), and respect preferred pronouns and gender expressions.

2. Cultural and Capability Matching: Roster placement will actively match child participants with support workers possessing the specific language capabilities, disability experience, or cultural training required.

3. Visual Environment Inclusivity: Physical and digital service spaces will incorporate translated resources, high-contrast interfaces, Acknowledgements of Country, and symbols of inclusivity like Pride graphics.

4. Cultural Safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children (Universal Principle): We provide an environment where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families feel welcome, valued, safe, included and respected. We support children's connection to culture, family, community and Country, consult families about cultural needs when planning supports, and do not tolerate racism or cultural harm.

7.0 Workforce Suitability, Screening, and Development

1. Mandatory Pre-Employment Screening: No worker may engage in child-facing disability support without a verified NDIS Worker Screening Check, an active Queensland Blue Card, two authenticated reference checks assessing suitability, and a signed Code of Conduct.

2. CRM Clearance Tracking: All personnel clearances are tracked continuously via our Visual Care CRM system, which provides automated management alerts 60–90 days prior to document expiration to ensure uninterrupted compliance.

3. CRM Training Verification: Mandatory training tracks are recorded and monitored directly through our Visual Care CRM system, verifying that all personnel complete the NDIS Commission *Worker Orientation Module* and the *Supporting Effective Communication* module prior to service delivery.

4. Child Safety Training: All personnel complete child safety training at induction and refresher training at least annually. Training covers this policy, the Code of Conduct, recognising grooming and abuse, the L.A.S.T. disclosure framework, cultural safety, and how to report concerns.

8.0 Identifying, Escalating, and Reporting Concerns

1. Disability-Specific Distress Indicators: Personnel must remain highly alert to child-focused indicators of distress, trauma, or dissatisfaction, including sudden behavioural withdrawal, uncharacteristic aggression, physical pulling away, routine refusal of support, or regression.

2. The L.A.S.T. Disclosures Framework: Personnel must handle child disclosures using the mandatory four-step protocol:
    - *L – Listen Actively:* Drop to eye level, do not interrupt, and utilise the child's preferred communication tools.
    - *A – Accept and Reassure*: Do not judge, doubt, or correct. Reassure the child they did the right thing by communicating with you.
    - *S – Safety First*: Immediately remove the child from danger or the presence of the suspected support worker or individual.
    - *T – Take Notes*: Record exact observations, physical signs, and verbatim words or gestures within 2 hours, avoiding subjective adult interpretations.

3. Whistleblower Protection Pathway: A clear, psychologically safe, and retaliation-free pathway exists for personnel to blow the whistle regarding any colleague or manager under our Whistleblower Policy.

4. Incident Management Logging: All internal complaints, safety flags, or participant concerns must be logged directly into our secure, audited internal Incident Management System (IMS) (Visual Care), within 24 hours, under our Incident Management Policy and Procedure.

5. NDIS Commission Reportable Incidents: Management will notify the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission via the NDIS Commission Portal (accessed through the PRODA portal) within 24 hours for reportable incidents,

including death, serious injury, abuse, neglect, unlawful sexual or physical contact, and sexual misconduct. Unauthorised use of a restrictive practice is notified within 5 business days, or within 24 hours if it caused harm.

6. Mandated External Notifications: Suspicions of child abuse, harm, or criminal conduct will be reported immediately to Queensland Child Safety Services (Regional Intake Service, or the Child Safety After Hours Service Centre on 1800 177 135) and, where a crime may have occurred, the Queensland Police Service (000 in an emergency, Policelink 131 444).

7. Queensland Reportable Conduct Scheme: Allegations or convictions of reportable conduct by personnel (including sexual offences, sexual misconduct, physical violence, significant neglect, or behaviour causing significant emotional or psychological harm to a child) will be notified by the Director to the Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) within the timeframes set by the Child Safe Organisations Act 2024 (Qld), investigated, and the outcome reported to the QFCC.

8. Clearance Unit Alerts: Management will notify the NDIS Worker Screening Unit and Blue Card Services regarding any staff stand-downs or terminations due to suitability misconduct.

9. Concerns About the Child Safe Nominee: If a concern involves the Child Safe Nominee, personnel and families may report it to the Operations Manager or Quality Manager, or directly to the QFCC, the NDIS Commission (1800 035 544), Child Safety Services or the Queensland Police Service.

10. Complaints from Children and Families: Complaints and concerns can be made by phone on (07) 4401 5706, by text on 0474 119 638, or by email to quality@assistcommunity.com.au, and are acknowledged within 2 business days and resolved under our Complaints and Feedback Policy. Complaints involving a child are prioritised, handled in a child-focused way, and the child and family are kept informed of the outcome.

11. Record Keeping: All child safety concerns, disclosures, reports and actions are recorded accurately and stored securely and confidentially in line with our Privacy and Confidentiality Policy and record-keeping obligations.

9.0 Governance, Auditability, and Review

1. Public Accountability: This policy is a living document, publicly accessible via our corporate website and pinned permanently inside our internal staff communication apps.

2. Annual Audit Cycle: Reviewed at least annually by management, or immediately following an unexpected risk event, legislative update, or direct

feedback trigger, to ensure ongoing compliance for our NDIS mid-term and recertification quality audits.

3. Risk Management: Child safety risks in the home and community are identified and managed using the Risk Mitigation Plan (Child) and the In-Home Child Safety Risk Assessment, completed before services start, reviewed at least annually, and updated whenever the child's needs or circumstances change. Online safety risks are managed under the Code of Conduct, which prohibits personal photography of, and private online contact with, child participants.

4. Related Documents: Code of Conduct; Service Charter; Whistleblower Policy and Procedure; Complaints and Feedback Policy; Incident Management Policy and Procedure; Freedom from Abuse and Neglect Policy; Privacy and Confidentiality Policy; Behaviour Support and Restrictive Practices Policy and Procedure; Risk Management Policy; Staff Grievance Policy and Procedure; Conflict of Interest Policy; Parents & Carers Guide: Our Child Safe Boundaries; Risk Mitigation Plan (Child); In-Home Child Safety Risk Assessment; Easy Read child safety resources.

5. Legislation and Standards: Child Safe Organisations Act 2024 (Qld) and the Queensland Child Safe Standards and Universal Principle; Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000 (Qld); Child Protection Act 1999 (Qld); National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013 (Cth); NDIS Practice Standards and NDIS Code of Conduct.

Record of policy development			
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