

## **Appendix J: Dealing with complaints, accusations and whistle-blowing**

### **Reporting suspicions or allegations of abuse**

It is not the role of Rotarians to interview, investigate or make decisions when an accusation of abuse is made. The role of the District Safeguarding Officer (DSO) and the Club Safeguarding Officer (CSO) is to act as a point of contact to report such accusations and to have in place a robust procedure for handling accusations and onward transmission to the appropriate agencies. In a case of alleged or suspected abuse the person receiving the information is not responsible for deciding whether abuse has occurred. That is the task for the professional child/vulnerable adult safeguarding agencies (such as Police, Social Services) and it is the role of the professional agencies to undertake interviews, investigation and any other actions as they find appropriate.

Taking into account the advice given by the appropriate agency, the parent/guardian of the child or vulnerable adult will be contacted as soon as possible by the person given approval by the appropriate agency.

Upon appointment to the role, DSOs and CSOs should make contact with the local agencies to become familiar with the local arrangements for dealing with allegations or suspicions of abuse and take guidance from those agencies as to how they wish to interface with Rotary should an incident arise. The appropriate agency may be the Social Services Department (in England), the Social Work Department (in Scotland), the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (N. Ireland), the Health Service Executive (in the Irish Republic) and the local Police. The agencies dealing with vulnerable adults may not be the same as those dealing with children. To agency contact list should be reviewed annually and kept up to date.

**Confidentiality is paramount in all cases and information received should not be shared with anyone other than the local agencies, the RIBI Compliance Officer, the RIBI General Secretary and Lead Countersignatory for Rotary (Head of Club & District Support).**

### **Receiving the information**

When dealing with a complaint, accusation or whistle-blowing whether it is from a child or an adult, the approach is the same:-

- Stay calm and listen carefully to what is said.
- Avoid any demonstration of anger or revulsion.
- Reassure the person that to tell is the right thing to do.
- Find an appropriate and early opportunity to explain that the information will be shared, but only with the appropriate agencies. Do not promise to keep secrets even if the person threatens 'only to tell' if it is a secret.
- Allow the person to dictate the pace.
- Ask questions only to seek clarification for the purposes of recording and passing on to the appropriate agency, make sure they are not leading questions.
- Explain what will happen next, who will be told.
- If the accusation is made to the CSO, the CSO should report the details to the local agencies as per their local agreement. The CSO should also notify the DSO that there has been an incident reported and the action taken (no specific information should be given such as names so that all parties remain anonymous). The CSO should also notify one of the following immediately: the RIBI Compliance Officer, the RIBI General Secretary or the Lead Countersignatory for Rotary (Head of Club & District Support).
- If the accusation is made to the DSO, the DSO should report the details to the local agencies as per their local agreement immediately (the same day). The DSO should also notify one of the following as soon as possible: the RIBI Compliance Officer, the RIBI General Secretary or the Lead Countersignatory for RIBI (Head of Club & District Support).
- Use 'Form A – Reporting suspicions of allegations of child or vulnerable adult abuse' as a means to record information.

## **Recording**

Immediately record in writing what was said using the person's own words whenever possible. Include any dates, times, names, name of person making the record and make sure it is dated and signed. Record the names of the people who were present and who have or may have witnessed the occurrence. Also record the person or persons with whom the information will be shared. For ease of recording, see Form 'E' Referral Form for Suspicious or Allegations of Abuse of a Child or Vulnerable Adult. DSO/CSO should discuss and agree with the local agencies the arrangements for keeping and destroying records of reported incidents at the club and district level.

In a case of alleged or suspected abuse the person receiving the information is not responsible for deciding whether abuse has occurred. That is the task for the professional child/vulnerable adult safeguarding agencies (such as Police, Social Services).