



POLICY REGARDING VISITORS AND VOLUNTEERS IN RESIDENTIAL CARE PROJECTS

APPLICABILITY: ACCI Staff, Kinected Strategic Partners, Career and Fixed Term Field Workers

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INTRODUCTION

PREAMBLE

ACC International (ACCI) stands by a strong conviction that children belong in families. We believe families are the natural and God ordained environment for the care of children. Families are important for the holistic care, development and wellbeing of children and play a crucial role in imparting life skills and social skills critical for successful transition into adulthood and independence.

Although we believe that every effort should be made to preserve families, in cases where children are unable to reside with their biological family, other family based alternative care options should be made available to the child and residential care should be both last resort and temporary. We affirm that decisions pertaining to a child's alternative care arrangements should never be made to meet the needs of an organisation, but rather should be made in the best interests of the child as outlined in the Alternative Care guidelines by a competent, qualified and authorised person in consultation with the child and his or her family (where appropriate).

Where residential care is deemed to be in the best interests of a child for a period of time, such care should be provided in a small family-like facilities, which adhere to high standards of care, have comprehensive and well functioning child protection policies and have adequate procedures to safeguard children from harm, abuse and any form of exploitation as well as protect and uphold their broader rights.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The UN convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is a legally binding international treaty that outlines the rights of children and is a formative instrument in child protection.

The UN Alternative Care Guidelines were developed and adopted by the UN general assembly to expand upon the UNCRC and guide implementation in regards to children deprived of parental care or children at risk of being so. The Alternative Care Guidelines recognises the family as the fundamental social unit and the natural environment for the growth and wellbeing of children. It calls for the development of comprehensive child welfare and protection policies and frameworks, which prevent family separation, preserve the family unit, and ensure children's rights to a family are upheld and actualised. This is inclusive of the development of family-based care options for children who are unable to reside within their biological family.

OUR COMMITMENT

As a result of the above conviction, ACCI is committed to:

- Ensure our missions and development initiatives support, strengthen and preserve families
- Seek to identify and proactively address any areas within the scope of our organisation's direct or indirect interaction with children and communities that could inadvertently cause, encourage or unnecessarily prolong family separation to the detriment of children or result in harm to children.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Visitors and Volunteers in Residential Care Policy is to address the issue of ethical engagement within projects that have a residential care component in order to:

1. Demonstrate ACCI's commitment to ensure the rights and welfare of children residing in residential care are respected, protected and upheld.
2. Demonstrate ACCI's commitment to the preservation, protection and strengthening of families by addressing 'voluntourism' within orphanages which can inadvertently encourage family separation and the overuse of residential care.
3. Educate staff, field workers, Kinnected strategic partners, representatives and volunteers about the risks, dangers and adverse effects of orphanage tourism on both children and families.
4. Provide a clear policy to guide all staff, field workers, associates, Kinnected strategic partners and volunteers.
5. Provide recommendations regarding ethical volunteering in which the needs of children are paramount.

SCOPE

This policy applies to:

- All ACCI **Staff**; herein including employees, contractors, consultants and volunteers;
- All ACCIM **Field Workers**; herein including career, fixed-term, volunteers and associates;
- All ACCI **Kinnected Strategic Partners**; herein including those working in Australia or abroad;
- All other ACCI **Representatives**; herein including board members and state representative

For the purpose of this policy a key stakeholder includes:

- ACCI field workers, Kinnected strategic partners or approved specialised volunteers (clarification in section 12) who are working within an approved project or ministry that involves residential care.
- ACCI staff responsible for project oversight, monitoring, evaluation or capacity building of staff within the residential care program.
- Key long-term committed partners/donors/funding bodies.

Note:

This policy does not apply to ACCIM Associate Field Workers operating an approved residential care project through another ACFID accredited organisation holding its own OAGDS status. All matters of policy and compliance in regards to that associate's residential care project are the responsibility of their ACFID accredited organisation.

1.1 DEFINING VOLUNTOURISM AND ORPHANAGE TOURISM

The term voluntourism refers to volunteer placements, short-term visits or holidays that incorporate a volunteering component or a visit to a local development or welfare project, usually run by private organisations. Orphanage tourism refers specifically to voluntourism that occurs within orphanages or any form of residential care by someone who is not a key stakeholder or staff member of that specific residential care facility.

WHO IS INVOLVED IN ORPHANAGE TOURISM

Volunteering within residential care centres has become increasingly popular within secular and Christian communities.

From a sending side it can include:

- Travel agencies,
- Tour companies,
- Mission agencies,
- Church groups,
- Corporate groups and
- Non-Government Organisations facilitate orphanage tourism.

From a receiving side, opportunities to volunteer are organised by

- Local NGO's,
- Field personnel of missions' organisations and
- Orphanages themselves.

Orphanage tourism can range from one or more people spending a couple of hours in an orphanage to a group working within the orphanage for several weeks or months.

BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

The vast majority of people who volunteer within or visit an orphanage or any form of residential care, do so out of good intentions and a desire to show love and concern for vulnerable children. As Christians, whilst we have a clear mandate to care for people who are vulnerable and demonstrate love to others, doing so in the context of orphanage tourism can be harmful, expose children to unnecessary risks and create incentives that effectively encourage the separation of children from their families or prolong the period of time they are institutionalised.

Some of the risks and concerns related to orphanage tourism include:

- Exposing children to potential predators by allowing visitors easy access to children.
- Exacerbating attachment disorders as volunteers develop 'bonds' with the children, which are broken once the volunteer leaves. This exposes the child to experiencing repeated attachment-rejection cycles, which can be extremely damaging.
- Exacerbating children's trauma by facilitating contact with untrained visitors who are not equipped to interact with traumatised children with complex issues.
- Invading children's privacy by turning their 'home' (and often their trauma) into a tourist attraction.
- Although many people who visit orphanages express a desire to connect relationally with the children, it is virtually impossible for these relationships to be equitable and truly meaningful for the child.

- Fuelling misconceptions surrounding the orphan crisis and the number of orphans in need of out-of-parental care or adoption. Although the majority of children in residential care are not orphans, visitors are often unaware of this and seeing children separated from their families and communities perpetuates their misunderstandings.
- It creates incentives for unscrupulous orphanage directors to recruit and exploit children as a way of extracting donations from well meaning tourists. It has been found that some orphanage directors keep their children malnourished and 'pitiful' in order to increase donations from visitors.
- Perpetuates unhealthy mindsets related to colonialism, western superiority, and 'saviour complexes'. Children are labelled and objectified and visitors engage with them on the basis of a traumatic aspect of their lives (being orphaned, abandoned, HIV+ or poor). This can be damaging to their self-esteem and can further negatively impact their identity.
- It is not driven by the needs or best interest of the child, rather is primarily concerned with the experience of the volunteer.
- In many cases children in residential care centres are required to perform for tourists, which is an unethical and exploitative practice.

1.2 POLICY FOR ALL ACCI STAFF, FIELD WORKERS, ASSOCIATES, KINNECTED STRATEGIC PARTNERS, AND VOLUNTEERS

In recognition of the adverse effects orphanage tourism can have on both children in residential care and on family preservation, ACCI seeks to outline clear guidelines for all ACCI stakeholders to ensure we uphold the rights and best interests of children and their families. These guidelines are divided into two sections. The first section is a general policy for all field workers, ACCI staff, Kinnected strategic partners and volunteers. The second section will specifically address all Kinnected projects and related personnel who may be working within residential care under the Kinnected guidelines and commitment and give specific guidelines for 'stakeholder' interaction within residential care programs.

GENERAL COMMITMENT

Out of a respect for the children living in residential care and a concern for their wellbeing, no ACCI staff, field worker, associate, Kinnected strategic partner, contractor or volunteer will participate in orphanage tourism. In practical terms this means that any personnel who is not a key stakeholder in a residential care program (as defined in section 6) will refrain from visiting or volunteering in a residential care centre and refrain from facilitating orphanage tourism through sending, organising or receiving teams (of non-stakeholders) for the purpose of volunteering or visiting a residential care centre. This applies to both ACCI and non-ACCI residential care programs.

KINNECTED SPECIFIC PROJECTS AND RELATED PERSONNEL

For the purpose of ACCI Kinnected projects that have a residential care program as a part of the project, it is necessary to make a clearer distinction between stakeholders and non-stakeholders and also introduce two other categories; personal visitors and potential donors.

Non-Stakeholders

Non-stakeholders include any individual, team, agency, tour company or organisations that are neither authorised Kinnected project staff, ACCIR staff (with a role relating to the program) or long-term committed donors or funding bodies. These non-stakeholders will not be permitted to visit or volunteer within Kinnected residential care centre as doing so would constitute orphanage tourism.

STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders can be divided into the following categories:

ACCI field workers, Kinnected strategic partners and local staff working specifically with a Kinnected project.

- Such personnel have a long-term commitment to the project. Their interaction with the children is bound by their role descriptions, child protection policy and code of conduct.

ACCIR Staff whose role requires them to visit residential care centres are considered stakeholders.

- Their interaction with the children should be limited to the requirements of their role and is further governed by the ACCI child protection policy and code of conduct.

Non- ACCI specialist volunteers who have an approved role within a Kinnected project (approved by the project manager).

- Such personnel's interaction with the children is bound by their role description, the ACCI project's child protection policy and the code of conduct. The criteria for their selection are outlined in section 12 under specialist volunteers and as such they are not permitted to replace the role of permanent local staff or assume the role of a direct caregiver.

Long-term key donors or representatives of funding organisations of Kinnected projects are considered stakeholders. As such they are permitted to visit Kinnected residential care centres under the following conditions:

- Any donor who wishes to visit must contact the project manager ahead of time and undergo an application and screening process. At minimum this must include:
 - A police check
 - A working with children's card
 - A completed and approved application form (references may be requested)
- All donors intending to visit must undergo pre-field and on-field orientation prior to visiting the centre. At minimum this must include:
 - Reading and signing the project's child protection policy and code of conduct. The signed copy must be provided to the project manager prior to visiting the centre
 - Reading the ACCI ethical volunteering document. ACCI field workers, Kinnected strategic partners or project managers should discuss this document during on-field orientation. This will help prevent visitors from misunderstanding their visit as an endorsement of orphanage tourism and seeking further volunteer opportunities in other residential care centres of which they are not stakeholders.
 - Reading the ACCI or project specific media and promotions guidelines and agreeing to abide by the stipulations regarding photography, social media and the protection of the children's identity or stories.
 - An explanation of the broader vision and goals of the project. Visitors should be aware that each Kinnected project seeks to reunify children with their families, strengthen and preserve families where possible, and provide access to a continuum of care options of which residential care is the last resort and temporary.

This is specifically to prevent reinforcing common misconceptions around residential care and rather reinforce best practice in regards to out of parental care.

- Field workers, Kinnected strategic partners and staff of Kinnected projects are to:
 - Limit the number of total donor visits per year to a maximum of three.
 - Ensure that donors are never used in the capacity of caregivers of children, nor are permitted to replace long-term staff in any aspect of their normal activities.
 - Ensure all donors are given adequate orientation prior to visiting the centre.
 - Limit the amount of time donors are in the residential care centres and engage the donor in community based activities, tourist activities or expose them to other organisations and programs to help them gain a broader understanding of the issues that the project seeks to address.
 - Ensure that when donors are directly engaging with children it is in the context of appropriate and organised activities, which are properly supervised by staff.
 - Ensure that all donors abide by the child protection policy and code of conduct at all times
 - Ensure that children are given counsel and advised of appropriate interaction with donors, how to raise any concerns they have, and their right to choose not to participate in any activities organised with donors.
 - Where possible, ensure that when donors engage in maintenance, refurbishments, painting or other activities that do not involve the children, they are conducted during times when the children are not in the centre such as during school hours or holiday periods when some children return home to their families.

Donors who are not long-term and ongoing are not considered stakeholders and will not be permitted to visit Kinnected residential care programs. Such donors are welcome to visit the field workers or strategic partners and get involved in community-based activities or participate in an exposure trip at the field workers discretion.

PERSONAL VISITORS

Where field workers, Kinnected strategic partners or their staff live on site at a residential care facility, with their own separate living quarters, they are permitted to have personal visitors such as family and close friends on-site. These visitors must read, sign and abide at all times by the child protection policy and code of conduct and are there to primarily visit the staff or field worker, not the children.

POTENTIAL DONORS

In some cases potential donors or funding bodies may wish to visit prior to committing to funding the project. This may be for the purpose of conducting a due diligence check or to see if the donor 'connects' with the project vision and management. It is reasonable to accept such visits providing the field worker or project manager ensures:

- Prospective donors read and sign the child protection policy and code of conduct
- Prospective donors abide by the media and promotions policy
- Prospective donors are accompanied by the project manager at all times
- Any onsite visit to the residential care facility is limited to sighting the centre and facilities and not directly engaging in activities with the children.

A potential donor will not be permitted to volunteer or engage with the children directly nor bring a team to do so during such a visit.

It is also recommended that where a potential donor wishes to see the centre and ensure that the project adheres to good standards, that site visits are conducted whilst the children are at school or out where possible. In some instances entering the premises may not be necessary, but a drive by or seeing the premises from the outside may suffice. This is up to the discretion of each program manager but effort should be made to limit site visits in order to protect the privacy and well being of the children. If prospective donors are permitted to enter the centres, project managers must ensure that the personal details of the children are not visible or accessible during such a visit.

GENERALIST AND SPECIALIST VOLUNTEERS

For the purpose of this policy, a generalist volunteer refers to a volunteer seeking to fulfil non-skilled roles within a residential care program or skilled roles that can be easily sourced and fulfilled by local people. Examples of generalist volunteers might be English teachers, sewing teachers or volunteers who facilitate games and activities with the children. Such generalist volunteers will not be permitted to volunteer within Kinnected residential care projects, as permanent staff should fill these roles.

A specialist volunteer is someone who has a specific expertise required by the project, which may be difficult to source locally. Examples might be clinical psychologists, social workers with experience in assessments or reintegration, therapists or professional photographers or videographers. Specialist volunteers can be permitted to volunteer within residential care centres when the program requires their skills and where attempts to find local people with adequate skills and experience to fulfil those roles have not been successful. In such cases specialist volunteers should undergo all of the screening, reference checks and pre placement orientation of a fixed term field worker. The emphasis of such volunteer placements should be to transfer skills to long-term local staff and clear role descriptions or parameters must be drawn up stipulating the nature of their work, level of appropriate engagement with the children and supervision arrangements.

ETHICAL VOLUNTEERING- POSITIVE ALTERNATIVES

When well-meaning people contact ACCI, staff, field workers, Kinnected strategic partners or associates to request to volunteer or visit a residential care program, it is important that we are able to respond by (a) providing them with information to educate them as to why orphanage tourism can be harmful to children and therefore discouraged and (b) redirecting them towards ethical alternatives.

Alternatives may simply be suggestions of the kinds of volunteer placements that are ethical and in the best interests of children and families such as volunteering in a community project, a church-based program or an English program run in the community. It could be recommending ethical organisations that facilitate volunteer placements within your country or area, or it could be by providing alternative volunteer placements within your own project that are not based within the residential care centre and do not expose the children in your care to risk. Some examples of alternatives might be:

1. Instead of running a sports program in an orphanage, run a sports program in the local community, where children and families from the community can come and participate. It may be appropriate that children from the residential care centre could also attend along with children from the community. This same principle could apply to other activities such as English classes, special events

or celebrations, which could be held in the community and accessed by all rather than held in the residential care centre.

2. Assist children by assisting their families and communities in preparation for reintegration or assisting in communities where families are vulnerable to separation due to poverty. This might involve renovating a local school or a family home, helping a family set up a small business or subsistence food initiative to ensure the family is able provide adequately for their children.
3. Assist a local church to engage with families and provide services to families in their local community.
4. Utilise the specific skills of volunteers or teams to build the capacity of families or primary duty bearers within the community (such as teachers, child care workers, health station personnel, community leaders etc). This could include activities such as basic budgeting and savings skills, small business or agricultural skills for families, providing training to local teachers and child care workers.

EDUCATING OTHERS

Changing practices regarding residential care and orphanage tourism is a challenging and sizeable task, which will require all of us to be advocates for the rights and best interests of children and their families. We encourage you all to share your knowledge with those in your circle of influence and engage people in meaningful conversations that challenge perceptions in a positive way and steer well-meaning people towards positive action and ethical volunteering that preserves families and protects children.