

Protecting children, protecting you – Plan UK’s Child Protection Policy

Plan exists to help children and we therefore take the issue of child protection very seriously. A sad reality is that children worldwide are potentially at risk from abuse or exploitation. Although only a minority intend harm, we know that child-focussed organisations have been and can be a target. It’s impossible to guard against the risks unless we have robust procedures and policies that are applied consistently with all those that may come into contact with children or their details. In this way child protection becomes everybody’s responsibility, and each supporter can help us counteract the risks by familiarising themselves with and closely following the steps outlined below, and any other practical and reasonable measures that may be identified from time to time. It is also intended to protect supporters from actions that could be misconstrued and lead to false accusations.

Giving child protection priority

- We have comprehensive child protection policies and work nationally and internationally with other child sponsorship and child-focussed organisations to reduce risk and ensure a consistent approach
- Board members, staff, long-term volunteers and, where appropriate, suppliers, undergo Criminal Records Bureau background checks and receive training in child protection issues.

Building safe relationships

Helping to build positive global links between our various supporters and children and their communities overseas is a major strength of our approach. To ensure we do not put children at risk through such contact, we have the following safeguards in place:

Visiting children and communities – protecting them and you

We encourage and arrange one-day visits for supporters to see our programmes, and for sponsors to meet their sponsored child and family within their community. To ensure that all visits are as safe and enjoyable for all concerned as possible:

- Clear guidance on visiting is given in sponsors’ Welcome Packs, on our website, and on request by trained staff, who are happy to chat through any queries and provide advice.
- All visits must be arranged in advance through Plan’s UK office with at least 2-3 months’ notice. This allows us to make the necessary arrangements including obtaining a background check via the Criminal Records Bureau and/or other relevant bodies. Satisfactory clearance is required before the visit. Checks show if someone has been convicted or cautioned for inappropriate behaviour and go some way towards minimising the possibility of child-related offences. Plan may decline visits for any reason including concern for the safety or well-being of children or their families.
- Visitors sign a statement, which says that they understand and agree to the policy before visiting and we also ask supporters to provide us with their passport details as identification.
- Plan staff must be present throughout each visit.
- Children, including sponsored children and their siblings, must not be invited or taken away from their communities. This includes both local invitations and any invitation by visitors to visit their own country. Taking children out of their communities can be disorientating and/or create suspicion of motives, and it significantly increases child protection risks.
- Sponsors and sponsored families should not exchange contact details during visits; visitors and staff or other community members are also asked not to exchange contact details during visits.
- After visits a report is sent to Plan UK. All visits are monitored.
- We ask sponsors not to visit more than once a year. This is a standard child protection step and avoids strain on resources.

Ongoing contact

- Since supporting Plan gives direct and indirect opportunities for contact with children, we consult with external bodies, including the police, if we have any serious doubts about a specific individual or group supporting Plan or sponsoring a child. We may decline support for any reason including concern for the safety or well-being of children or their families.
- We fully understand that supporters can be keen to share their experiences of Plan with others and we're always happy to talk to you about the best way to do this. We do ask you to bear in mind the privacy of children, including sponsored children, and their families. **Details and images of children and their families, which you may receive via Plan or obtain yourself through a visit, are intended only for your own use unless you specifically ask for permission to use them otherwise.** Sharing them via the internet or in a way in which they can be scanned could actually put children at risk. The internet in particular is an uncontrolled and unregulated media. We ask you to avoid making images of individual children public and never to supply information that could enable children and families to be identified and located. You could, for example, change community and/or children's names (particularly surnames), and avoid giving too much detail.
- When children leave the sponsorship programme some sponsors naturally are keen to stay in touch. Contact details may only be exchanged if the child and their parents, as well as the sponsor, all agree. Child and data protection issues then become the responsibility of the parents and sponsor.
- Correspondence between sponsors and sponsored children comes via Plan. All communications from sponsors to sponsored children are screened for inappropriate written or visual material that may raise child protection concerns; this may include political or religious comments that could inadvertently cause offence or be illegal. Where the sponsor writes in a child's local language that cannot be screened by someone at Plan UK, this is clearly marked and we ask local colleagues to check content.

Taking action if necessary

The vast majority of our supporters follow our measures to protect children. But, occasionally, some do not. Plan takes all such incidents very seriously and reserves the right to bring a sponsorship or other form of support to a close without giving a reason.

We are particularly concerned about unannounced visits to children, which have been reported by local communities. In many areas where we work abduction of children is a real threat, so parents are naturally concerned if someone visits without the normal arrangements. In most cases this is due to a lack of awareness by the supporter rather than any harmful intent. However, we investigate every case thoroughly. Where supporters go against our policies we may decide to bring their support to a close or, occasionally, liaise with external bodies because:

- We have a duty to protect all children and cannot knowingly continue to put a child at risk, or at potential risk – and in making this decision we must err on the side of caution.
- For our development work to achieve results it is vital that we retain the trust and confidence of the children and families that we work with.
- We could not continue to facilitate a relationship knowing that it did not respect basic human rights of privacy and protection from harm.
- We cannot commit to long-term additional monitoring of 'potential risk' individuals, as the resources needed for this reduces the amount that we can spend on our work for children.

Thank you for your support

As a Plan supporter you are a vital part of our work to help children in some of the world's poorest countries. Thank you also for your support in our efforts to protect children. If you have any questions please contact us on 020 7482 9777 or email us at supporterrelations@plan-international.org.uk

Instructions for applying for your Criminal Records Bureau check

Plan exists to help children, which is why we take the issue of child protection very seriously. We ask each supporter to work with us so that we can make sure the systems we have set up to protect children are as robust as possible. As a key part of this we ask every adult visiting children and projects overseas to obtain a valid Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) background check, which will give details of any convictions or cautions. We are only concerned with any history that may represent a risk to the safety or well-being of children or others. Your cooperation is much appreciated.

Please apply for your CRB check 2-3 months before your visit, to allow time for the procedure to be completed. Also note that the check is only considered valid by Plan for up to 6 months, so please be aware that you may have to do the check again for repeat visits.

1. Phone the disclosure application line on **0870 90 90 844**
2. You will be asked for the following general information:
 - The registered body name and reference number: **Plan International (UK), 20636100004**
 - The type of disclosure required: **standard** disclosure as a **volunteer** (this will mean that the check is processed for free)
 - The reason you need the CRB check: **visiting Plan sponsored child/project as a volunteer**
3. You will then need to provide your full name, address (including how long you have been at this address) and date of birth
4. An application form will be sent to you along with a guidance booklet. Please do read the booklet carefully and complete the form in **BLACK** pen; several sections no longer need to be filled in and the CRB frequently send back incomplete/incorrectly completed forms.
5. As soon as you have completed the form please send it to **Visit Co-ordinators**, Plan UK (5-6 Underhill Street, London, NW1 7HS), clearly marked "CRB application – Confidential", together with 3 or 5 pieces of original ID (identified in the guidance booklet). We strongly recommend that you send your form and ID to us by registered/Special delivery.
6. We will then use the ID you provide to verify your form and send it on to the CRB on your behalf. We will return your ID by registered/Special delivery. The CRB do not charge for checks for volunteers, but we do ask that you kindly enclose a cheque for £5.50, made payable to Plan UK, to cover the cost of returning your ID.
7. Two copies of your CRB check will be issued: one will be sent to your home address and one will be sent directly to us.

For further information about the CRB check, you can view their website at www.crb.gov.uk. You can also monitor the progress of your application using the CRB online tracking service (www.crb.gov.uk/tracking)

Please do not hesitate to contact the Supporter Relations Visit Co-ordinators on 020 7482 9777 for any further enquiries.