

## **Heartfulness Institute Australia – Policy for Dealing with Vulnerable Adults**

### **Purpose**

Heartfulness Institute Australia is committed to creating a safe, respectful, and supportive environment for everyone, including vulnerable adults who participate in Heartfulness activities. This policy outlines how trainers, volunteers, and coordinators should interact with vulnerable adults to ensure their dignity, rights, and wellbeing are safeguarded at all times.

### **Definition of Vulnerable Adults**

A vulnerable adult is a person aged 18 years or older who may be at increased risk of harm, exploitation, or abuse due to factors such as:

- Age, illness, or disability (physical, intellectual, or sensory).
- Mental health challenges.
- Dependence on others for care or support.
- Social isolation or disadvantage.

### **Guiding Principles**

1. **Respect and dignity:** All adults must be treated with respect, kindness, and without discrimination.
2. **Empowerment:** Vulnerable adults should be supported to make their own choices and decisions wherever possible.
3. **Boundaries:** Trainers and volunteers must maintain professional boundaries at all times. Heartfulness practices should never cross into counselling, therapy, or personal advice.
4. **Confidentiality:** Personal information shared by vulnerable adults must remain confidential, except where disclosure is required to protect them or others from harm.
5. **Zero tolerance of abuse:** Any form of abuse, neglect, exploitation, or discrimination will not be tolerated.

### **Practical Guidance**

- **No 1:1 sessions at home:** As far as possible, avoid private one-on-one sessions with vulnerable adults in homes. Prefer group sessions or center-based sessions.

- **Safe communication:** All communication (phone, online, in person) must remain professional. Do not engage in excessive personal messaging or discussions outside the scope of Heartfulness.
- **No personal, medical, or financial advice:** Trainers and volunteers must not provide counselling, medical, professional, financial, or lifestyle advice.
- **Signposting:** If a vulnerable adult requires support, they should be directed to appropriate professional services (healthcare providers, counsellors, social services).
- **Data protection:** Do not collect or store personal details without consent. Records must be handled in line with Heartfulness Institute's Data Protection Policy.

### **Participation and Suitability**

Trainers have a responsibility to assess the suitability of vulnerable adults for participation in Heartfulness practices. If, in the trainer's view, a vulnerable adult is unlikely to benefit from some or all Heartfulness practices, or if participation may pose risks to their wellbeing, the trainer has an obligation not to provide those practices. Instead, the trainer should respectfully guide the individual towards alternative options or supportive services where appropriate.

### **Responding to Concerns**

If a trainer or volunteer becomes concerned that a vulnerable adult:

- Is at risk of harm, neglect, or exploitation, or
- Discloses abuse or unsafe situations,

then they must:

1. **Act immediately to ensure safety:** If the person is in immediate danger, call emergency services (000 in Australia).
2. **Report promptly:** Notify the local Heartfulness secretary and submit a written safeguarding report within 48 hours.
3. **Escalation:** Concerns will be reviewed under Heartfulness Institute's Complaints Handling Policy, and referred to authorities where required.

### **Responsibilities**

- **Trainers/Volunteers:** Uphold this policy, follow safeguarding guidelines, and act promptly if concerns arise.
- **Administrators:** Ensure trainers/volunteers are aware of and trained in safeguarding responsibilities.
- **Institute:** Provide clear reporting channels, ensure compliance with Australian law, and take disciplinary action if this policy is breached.

### **Disciplinary Action**

Failure to follow this policy may result in disciplinary action, including referral to the principal Guide for Heartfulness for further direction, suspension, or removal of trainer/volunteer status.