

Safeguarding Policy

Version 1

April 2026



Policy Statement

Open Voice Lab Ltd is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all people who come into contact with our work. This includes adults and children at risk of harm, and anyone who may be present in an incidental capacity during community engagement, public outreach, or event-based activity.

We believe that every person has the right to be safe, to be treated with dignity and respect, and to be protected from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Safeguarding is not a separate activity - it is embedded in how we plan, deliver, and review all of our work.

Scope

This policy applies to:

- Rachel Richardson and Alexia Mitton, as directors of Open Voice Lab Ltd
- Any associates, freelancers or contractors engaged to work on behalf of Open Voice Lab

It covers all Open Voice Lab business activities where contact with members of the public may occur, including:

- Workshops, training sessions and engagement events
- Community outreach and street-based consultation activity
- Online engagement and digital consultation programmes
- Visits to client premises, community venues or public spaces
- Any other activity involving direct contact with participants or the public

Key Definitions

Safeguarding

Safeguarding means protecting people's health, wellbeing and human rights, and enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect. It includes both child protection and the protection of adults at risk.

Child

For the purposes of this policy, a child is anyone under the age of 18, in line with the Children Act 1989.

Adults at Risk

An adult at risk is a person aged 18 or over who has needs for care and support, and who is experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect, and as a result of those care and support needs is unable to protect themselves. This is defined in the Care Act 2014.

Abuse

Abuse can take many forms. In the context of Open Voice Lab's activities, relevant types include:

- Physical abuse - including assault, hitting, or inappropriate restraint
- Emotional or psychological abuse - including threats, humiliation, or coercive control
- Sexual abuse - including unwanted contact, exploitation, or exposure to sexual acts
- Financial or material abuse - including theft, fraud, or exploitation
- Neglect - including failure to provide appropriate care or support
- Discriminatory abuse - including abuse based on protected characteristics
- Institutional or organisational abuse - including poor practice within services

In relation to children specifically, the four main categories of abuse are: physical, emotional, sexual abuse, and neglect, as defined in Working Together to Safeguard Children (HM Government, 2023).

Legislative and Policy Framework

This policy has been developed in line with current legislation and statutory guidance, including:

- Children Act 1989 and 2004
- Care Act 2014
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 (HM Government)
- Mental Capacity Act 2005
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Equality Act 2010
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018

This policy should be read alongside Open Voice Lab's Health and Safety Policy, Code of Practice, and Data Protection arrangements.

Roles and Responsibilities

Alexia Mitton - Designated Safeguarding Lead

Alexia Mitton holds overall responsibility for safeguarding within Open Voice Lab and will:

- Maintain, implement and review this policy
- Act as the first point of contact for any safeguarding concerns raised
- Make decisions about escalating concerns to statutory agencies
- Maintain records of all safeguarding concerns and actions taken
- Ensure that safeguarding considerations are built into the planning of all activities
- Keep her safeguarding knowledge and training current

Rachel Richardson – Deputy Safeguarding Lead

Rachel Richardson acts as the deputy safeguarding lead and will:

- Assume the responsibilities of the Designated Safeguarding Lead in Alexia's absence
- Support the planning and delivery of safe engagement activity
- Receive and hold safeguarding concerns where Alexia is unavailable
- Keep her safeguarding knowledge and training current

All Associates and Contractors

Anyone working on behalf of Open Voice Lab must:

- Read and comply with this policy before undertaking any engagement activity
- Be alert to signs of abuse, harm or neglect during the delivery of work
- Report any safeguarding concerns promptly to the Designated Safeguarding Lead
- Behave professionally and in accordance with the Code of Practice at all times
- Not investigate concerns themselves or make promises of confidentiality

Training and DBS Checks

Safeguarding Training

Both directors of Open Voice Lab have completed safeguarding training within the last 12 months as part of previous NHS professional roles. This training covers the recognition of abuse and neglect, responsibilities for reporting, and working with

vulnerable groups. This training is considered current and valid for the purposes of this policy.

Open Voice Lab is committed to ensuring that both directors refresh their safeguarding training at least every three years, or sooner if there are significant changes to legislation or guidance. Any associates engaged to deliver direct engagement activity will be expected to confirm that they hold current and appropriate safeguarding awareness.

DBS Checks

Open Voice Lab recognises the importance of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks as part of a safe recruitment and deployment approach. At the time of this policy, Rachel Richardson holds a current DBS check obtained in connection with a voluntary role. Both directors will have a DBS check for Open Voice Lab ahead of delivering any engagement work.

Safe Practice in Delivery

Planning Activity Safely

Before delivering engagement activity, Open Voice Lab will consider the safeguarding implications of the work, including:

- Whether vulnerable adults or children are likely to be participants or present
- The appropriateness of the venue and environment
- The nature of the engagement topic and any associated sensitivities
- Whether lone working is involved and whether this is appropriate
- What emergency and escalation arrangements are in place

Behaviour Towards Participants

All those working on behalf of Open Voice Lab will at all times:

- Treat all participants with dignity, respect and sensitivity
- Maintain appropriate professional boundaries
- Avoid physical contact unless it is clearly appropriate, expected, and consented to (e.g. a handshake)
- Not be alone with a child or vulnerable adult in a closed or isolated space
- Not share personal contact details with participants or communicate with them outside of formal, work-related channels
- Not take photographs or record individuals without explicit informed consent

- Not discuss participant information with others unless required for safeguarding or delivery purposes

Online and Digital Engagement

Where Open Voice Lab delivers engagement activity through digital platforms, online tools, or virtual events, we will:

- Ensure that platforms used are appropriate and secure
- Consider the vulnerability of participants in online environments
- Not engage privately or one-to-one with participants through personal messaging outside of formal delivery channels
- Be alert to safeguarding risks that may arise or be disclosed in an online context
- Follow our data protection obligations in relation to personal data collected through digital engagement

Recognising Concerns and Responding

Signs to Look Out For

Those working on behalf of Open Voice Lab should be alert to possible signs of abuse or safeguarding concern, including but not limited to:

- Unexplained injuries, bruising or physical marks
- A person appearing frightened, withdrawn, or distressed
- A person disclosing that they are being harmed or are afraid
- Signs of neglect, poor physical condition, or unmet care needs
- A person appearing to be controlled or accompanied by someone in a concerning way
- Concerning behaviour by another professional, member of staff, or person in a position of trust

If a Person Discloses Abuse or Harm

If a participant or member of the public discloses abuse, harm or a safeguarding concern during Open Voice Lab activity:

- Listen carefully and remain calm
- Do not promise confidentiality - explain that you may need to share what you have heard with others who can help
- Do not probe, question or investigate - only gather information that is freely offered

- Reassure the person that they have done the right thing by speaking up
- As soon as possible, report the disclosure to the Designated Safeguarding Lead
- Record what was said, in the person's own words, as soon as practicable - do not rely on memory

If You Observe or Suspect a Concern

If you observe something that gives rise to a safeguarding concern, even without a disclosure:

- Do not ignore it or assume someone else will act
- Report your concern to the Designated Safeguarding Lead as soon as possible
- Record what you observed, when, and in what context
- Do not confront the person you believe may be responsible

Reporting Procedure

Internal Reporting

Any safeguarding concern must be reported to Alexia Mitton (Designated Safeguarding Lead) as soon as possible. If Alexia is unavailable or is herself the subject of the concern, it should be reported to Rachel Richardson (Deputy Safeguarding Lead).

Reports should include:

- The name, age and any relevant details of the person concerned
- A factual account of what was observed or disclosed
- The date, time and location of the incident or disclosure
- Any immediate action already taken

Escalation to Statutory Agencies

The Designated Safeguarding Lead will assess all concerns and determine whether referral to a statutory agency is required. Open Voice Lab will refer concerns to the appropriate agency where:

- A child appears to be at risk of significant harm - refer to Children's Social Care or contact Greater Manchester Children's Advice and Support
- An adult at risk appears to be experiencing abuse or neglect - refer to Adult Social Care in the relevant local authority
- There is immediate risk to life - contact emergency services on 999

- A crime has been, or may have been, committed - contact Police or 999 in an emergency

Referrals will normally be made with the knowledge and consent of the person concerned, except where doing so would place them or others at further risk, or where the person lacks capacity to consent.

Referral Contacts - Greater Manchester

As Open Voice Lab is based in Wigan, the following contacts are relevant as a primary reference, though referrals should always be made to the local authority area where the concern arises:

- Wigan Adult Social Care: 01942 828777
- Wigan Children's Social Care: 01942 828300
- Emergency / out of hours: 01942 828777
- NSPCC Helpline (adults with concerns about children): 0808 800 5000
- Emergency services: 999

Record Keeping and Confidentiality

All safeguarding concerns, disclosures and actions taken will be recorded in writing by the Designated Safeguarding Lead. Records will include:

- The nature of the concern and who it relates to
- The date, time and circumstances in which it arose
- What action was taken and by whom
- Any referral made to a statutory agency and the outcome

Records will be stored securely, in line with Open Voice Lab's data protection obligations under UK GDPR. Safeguarding records will be kept separately from general business records and access will be restricted to those with a need to know.

Safeguarding information will only be shared with those who need it to protect a person from harm, in line with the principle that the duty to safeguard may override the duty of confidentiality where there is serious risk.

Allegations Against Staff or Associates

If a safeguarding concern relates to the conduct of a director, associate, or contractor working on behalf of Open Voice Lab, the following steps will be taken:

- The concern will be taken seriously and treated with urgency

- If the concern relates to Alexia Mitton, Rachel Richardson will take the lead, and vice versa
- The individual against whom the concern is made will be stood down from relevant activity pending investigation
- Advice will be sought from the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) where the concern involves regulated activity with children
- The concern will be reported to the appropriate statutory agency as required

Open Voice Lab has zero tolerance for abuse, exploitation or harm caused by those working on its behalf.

Safer Engagement of Associates

When engaging associates or contractors to deliver work involving contact with the public, Open Voice Lab will:

- Verify identity before commencement of work
- Ask for confirmation of relevant safeguarding training
- Require evidence of an appropriate DBS check where the work involves regulated activity or contact with vulnerable groups
- Ensure that associates are aware of and agree to comply with this policy before beginning any engagement activity

Whistleblowing

Open Voice Lab supports a culture of openness and transparency. Anyone working on its behalf who has concerns about unsafe or inappropriate practice - including concerns about a director - is encouraged to raise those concerns without fear of detriment.

Concerns can be raised with either director. Where the concern relates to both directors, or where raising it internally does not feel safe, the person may contact the relevant statutory agency or the NSPCC directly.

Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner in the event of:

- A safeguarding incident or near miss
- A change in legislation or statutory guidance
- A significant change in the nature of Open Voice Lab's activities

The Designated Safeguarding Lead is responsible for ensuring this policy remains current and that all those working on behalf of Open Voice Lab are aware of it.

Approval and Review

Alexia Mitton and Rachel Richardson, Directors, Open Voice Lab Ltd

Date: April 2026

Review Date: April 2027