

## CHILDFUND AUSTRALIA CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN

Potential crises affecting image and credibility of a company or organisation must be considered and planned for. Each organisation defines a 'crisis' differently, but a common element of all crises is that the media play a crucial role in either exacerbating the issue or helping to alleviate negative results.

Any media crisis has the potential to harm ChildFund Australia's reputation and credibility, as well as our ability to raise public funds to fulfil our mission.

Crises (affecting image and credibility) for ChildFund Australia may include:

- public allegations of poor practice in ChildFund projects (including program activities harming beneficiaries, staff misconduct, service provision not reaching the intended source, negative stories from projects);
- sponsor/donor complaints or allegations in regards to sponsorships or ChildFund's use of donations (eg, child change problems, inappropriate use of funds);
- problems arising from a sponsor visit (eg, poor conduct towards children, inadequate staff supervision).

General crises involving the entire aid sector (and the Australian charity sector generally) also need to be planned for. These potential crises need to be managed and have as much importance placed on them as specific ChildFund Australia crises.

ChildFund crises on a global scale also need to be considered by ChildFund Australia so that steps can be taken to manage the issue at a local level if necessary. It is highly possible that negative practices in a ChildFund Affiliate or National Office could be picked up by Australian media and given a local angle.

### Responding to a crisis

- In any crisis, ChildFund Australia's primary obligation to children and communities served by the organisation should be the overriding consideration driving the crisis management plan.
- The most important element in managing crises is to communicate clearly and openly with ChildFund Australia's key public audiences, particularly with ChildFund Australia supporters. It is also extremely important that the organisation does not react to the crisis defensively and that information is disseminated regularly and as quickly as possible.
- Those primarily involved in dealing with any ChildFund Australia crisis, and also as the initial contact points, will include ChildFund Australia's:
  - Chairperson
  - Chief Executive Officer
  - Communications and Marketing Director
  - Communications Manager
  - Any addition BSLT member holding responsibility for the area related to the crisis.

*These key people will also need to be readily accessible throughout the management of the crisis.*

- It is important that in a crisis ChildFund Australia have one spokesperson throughout, so that the organisation 'speaks' with one voice. This spokesperson will usually be the CEO.
- In dealing with a major crisis, ChildFund Australia's PR agency Edelman will be asked to assist the organisation in developing a plan to manage the issue.
- All ChildFund Australia staff will play a crucial role in assisting to manage any crisis, primarily in their daily communication with ChildFund Australia supporters. If a large proportion of sponsors and donors withdrew their support, the financial impact to the work of ChildFund Australia could be devastating, therefore communication with supporters must be of utmost importance.

### **Crisis action plan**

*To follow is a general crisis management action plan, which details the steps required to minimise any potential detrimental impact to the organisation. It is important that each crisis, depending on its level and expected impact, be dealt with promptly and individually based on circumstances and those involved.*

- After notification (or early warning) of the issue to the primary ChildFund Australia contacts, an initial management plan is to be developed by key ChildFund Australia staff (as set out above) in partnership with the PR agency. This will include ChildFund Australia's agreed response to the crisis.
- If the crisis is significant, the ChildFund Australia Board of Directors will be immediately briefed on the crisis and the management plan.
- Depending on how ChildFund Australia is notified of the crisis (ie, internal/external, pre-warning/post-event), it is important that ChildFund Australia first verify the information provided to confirm and validate the details.
- The management plan will detail the steps to be taken by ChildFund to resolve the problem/issue.
- If the crisis involves harm or loss experienced by aid beneficiaries, the management plan must consider appropriate response and/or restitution to those aid beneficiaries affected.
- ChildFund Australia's proposed media plan regarding the crisis will be decided (ie, proactive or reactive). Media releases, response or comment will be prepared as required, ChildFund Australia spokespeople briefed, etc. It is important that in all media communications that they are not seen as the enemy, that information is not withheld and that they are responded to promptly and efficiently.
- The ChildFund Australia Communications Team is to be the first point of contact for all media enquiries and the CEO will usually be the designated spokesperson.
- ChildFund Australia employees will be promptly notified of crises and informed of ChildFund Australia's response, which will in turn be conveyed to ChildFund Australia supporters if necessary.

- In responding to a high level crisis, specialised communication pieces will be distributed to ChildFund Australia supporters detailing the issue and ChildFund Australia's response. This will be done as quickly as possible post-crisis.
- Evaluation will also take place after the crisis to determine numbers of media enquiries, media coverage, ChildFund Australia supporter response and general key public attitudes towards the organisation. Depending on the level of the crisis it may be necessary to carry out 'recovery' communications campaigns aimed at improve the image and credibility of ChildFund Australia among key public audiences.

*The following table details examples of potential crises and the primary media comment/communication ChildFund Australia would need to carry out – following steps above and dependent on level and specifics of crisis.*

Issue	ChildFund Australia's Primary Response/Action
General adverse publicity relating to inappropriate use of charitable funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This issue is focused upon by the media quite regularly and in most cases ChildFund Australia should make no specific comment and let the industry bodies speak on behalf of the sector.</li> <li>• If ChildFund Australia is directly implicated or is specifically mentioned, then comment will definitely need to be made. This comment will need to focus on the organisation's effective use of sponsorship contributions (annual independent audits, ACFID member, DFAT accreditation, etc). Copies of ChildFund Australia annual reports are also to be made available to anyone who requests a copy.</li> </ul>
Child sponsorship criticised as an effective means of running an overseas aid program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ChildFund Australia supporters know what a difference child sponsorship makes and are comfortable with how the system operates, therefore it is more likely that the general public will need to be convinced of its effectiveness.</li> <li>• For the general public, the main risks are in decreased levels of acquisition of new sponsors, rather than losing existing ChildFund Australia supporters. ChildFund Australia will need to communicate how effectively child sponsorship works and how the organisation's programs offer real and practical solutions to the problems facing children and families in developing countries.</li> </ul>

Issue	ChildFund Australia's Primary Response/Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A public communications campaign may need to be conducted if public opinion is severely affecting acquisition of new sponsors.</li> </ul>
Public allegations by sponsors/donors in regards to how sponsorships/donations are handled by ChildFund Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initially it is important to discover why the allegation was made and why it had not been already dealt with appropriately. Another attempt will then need to be made to resolve the problem direct with the sponsor/donor.</li> <li>• If a media response is required the ChildFund Australia spokesperson (CEO in this situation) will need to explain ChildFund Australia's processes and why they are handled this way.</li> <li>• It is beneficial to highlight happy and long-term sponsors as it helps to put a positive light on the sponsorship process.</li> </ul>
Inappropriate conduct by ChildFund Australia staff or a Board Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This issue needs to be dealt with by senior members of staff at ChildFund Australia.</li> <li>• The decision to provide a media response depends on the specific details of the issue. At the least, the organisation will be required to say that the matter is being taken seriously and is under investigation.</li> <li>• Action against the staff member or Director needs to be taken to assist in resolving any negative publicity particularly among ChildFund Australia's existing supporters and the general public.</li> </ul>