Brotherhood of St Laurence
Code of Ethical Behaviour

Foreword

I am pleased to present you with the Brotherhood of St Laurence's (BSL) Code of Ethical Behaviour.

This Code of Ethical Behaviour (Code) is an important document for *everyone* in this organisation. It applies to all relationships—between managers and non-managers, staff and clients, volunteers and students, board members, and the executive team, service delivery partners, suppliers and contractors.

The process of developing a Code is as important as the Code itself. That is why in 2003 an extensive consultation process was undertaken to give everyone in the organisation an opportunity to offer advice, have their say, and contribute to its development. This feedback has helped strengthen our Code, and make it relevant for our diverse organisation.

This Code supports the organisation's legal requirements such as the Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Act 2000, Equal Opportunity Legislation and Occupational Health and Safety Act 1985. Many areas of the BSL also have their own Codes, such as the Australian Early Childhood Association Code of Ethics. There are also policy and procedures manuals for individual work areas, and the BSL Human Resources Policy and Procedures manual for the organisation as a whole. Although Victoria does not have specific whistleblower protection legislation, the BSL is committed to ensuring all staff are able to express their opinions in an open and supportive environment. For information on legal expectations and policy and procedures that apply to your daily work, please see your manager or contact Human Resources.

The purpose of the Code

This Code goes beyond legal and regulatory requirements. It not only illustrates the spirit of the law and culture of the organisation, but it also identifies the key principles and values that will guide our day-to-day activities and decision-making. It attempts to provide a framework for examining our behaviours through private reflections and in discussions with others. The structure emphasises key principles and values that are to be honoured by the individual and the organisation as a community. The Code encourages self-evaluation and taking responsibility for our own behaviours, how we treat each other as individuals, how we treat our clients, our relationship with external groups, and the policies and procedures we develop as an organisation.

Why it is necessary

In an organisation committed to an Australia free of poverty, achieved through innovative and creative service delivery, advocacy and research, the Code provides an avenue for shared understanding of how we achieve our goals.

The Code also strengthens our ongoing commitment to ethical business practices (both externally and internally) and activities that take a 'whole of society' approach, such as Triple Bottom Line reporting. It will assist with decision-making processes around service delivery, tendering processes and corporate engagement.

How to use the Code

The Code is designed to be used as a *process* to guide decision-making, actions and activities. It does not provide rules on how to behave in every situation. It aims to get us thinking about the broad range of issues in our workplace, and develop an understanding of what constitutes acceptable behaviour at work. It encourages consideration of all options and opinions. We hope it contributes to a culture where staff feel free to disagree, and promotes transparency of actions and decisions. We regard every staff member's experience as a valuable contribution to the ongoing review and design of our organisational structures.

The example behaviours may express any or all of the key values or principles we seek to uphold. The Code can be read as a collection of behaviours that demonstrate a range of values and principles. It may help to recognise that our values and principles do not always exist harmoniously. They are often experienced as being in opposition to each other, and this is the essence of an ethical dilemma. For example, we may value *justice* but we may also value *compassion*, and in a particular situation these two values may compete in their influence over our actions.

Implementing the Code

Implementing the Code will be the most important aspect in ensuring its success. The Human Resources and Organisational Development teams will support the organisation in this, as well as providing means for individuals and groups to work with ethical conflicts. Processes will be established that build people's capacity to explore, examine and improve the ethical nature of behaviour through reflection and discussion. This will take courage, a willingness to ask difficult questions, and recognition that cultivating wisdom in our choices is a lifelong journey.

Various mechanisms will be used to implement and monitor the Code's effectiveness. These will include workshops for all staff, inclusion in induction and orientation processes, inclusion in position descriptions, integration in performance appraisal processes, and by becoming a standing item on all staff meeting agendas. A 'user friendly' and workplace appropriate version will be developed to contribute to the visual day-to-day awareness of the Code. Most importantly, an independent mechanism to allow staff to raise ethical issues for discussion and resolution will be established. This document will be evaluated and amended as necessary one year after its implementation, and then biannually.

What will happen if there is a 'breach' of the Code?

Identifying a breach of the Code can be difficult. Various steps and avenues have been established to ensure that you have the opportunity to raise concerns in a non-threatening environment. If you have an issue you would like to raise, I urge you to try to resolve it initially through discussion with the person concerned. If that is unsatisfactory then talk to your manager and raise it at a staff meeting. There will be times when this is difficult and it may be necessary to contact Human Resources for additional support. Finally, an Ethics Committee has been established as an independent forum to contact when all other avenues have been exhausted.

I thank you all for your hard work and commitment to the Brotherhood of St Laurence. Ensuring ethical behaviour in all our actions, activities and decision-making is an important part of working effectively together, and for achieving our vision of an Australia free of poverty.

Father Nic Frances
Executive Director

August 2003

BE INCLUSIVE

Integrity ✚ Honesty ✚ Dignity ✚ Respect

Principle 1

Treat each other, and all BSL clients, with integrity, honesty, dignity and respect.

Example behaviours

- Respect each other's customs and differences—for example, language, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, preferred music and foods.
- Respect each other's feelings, work needs and privacy.
- Treat others as you would like to be treated.
- Demonstrate integrity in all communication and action by avoiding malicious gossip and undermining behaviour, and by raising any concerns through the appropriate channels.

Principle 2

Treat the organisation in a way that encompasses integrity, honesty, dignity and respect.

Example behaviours

- Treat organisational property and equipment in a way that maintains its usefulness to others.
- Be professional and fair in any conversations and actions (internal and external) when representing the BSL.
- Do not use any information or your position or connection with the BSL for improper advantage or private gain.
- Apply yourself diligently during the hours of work (e.g. keep personal phone calls, correspondence and conversations to a minimum).

Principle 3

Ensure that all BSL clients and individuals are treated by the organisation with integrity, honesty, dignity and respect.

Example behaviours

- Share information and resources to ensure that staff have equal opportunity to participate.
- Ensure that policies and procedures are designed not only in accordance with legislative requirements, but also to capture the culture and values of the organisation (e.g. the Vision statement and this Code of Ethical Behaviour).

Ethical dilemma

You notice your colleague has taken a dislike to one of the BSL's clients. They treat this client differently from others, often being abrupt, at times quite hostile and generally unhelpful. It has reached the stage where you feel uncomfortable to be around them at the same time. However, you have a good personal relationship with your colleague and do not want to jeopardise it. What do you do?

ACT COMPASSIONATELY
Justice ⊕ Equity ⊕ Fairness ⊕ Empathy

Principle 4

Treat each other and all BSL clients with justice, equity, fairness and empathy.

Example behaviours

- Value and acknowledge each other's contribution, provide positive feedback and encouragement.
- When expressing constructive criticism of others, focus on the behaviour and not the individual.
- Ensure that many perspectives are considered in decision-making, in order to develop a balanced and non-judgmental view.
- Show understanding, empathy and support in times of personal difficulty.
- Treat all clients fairly and provide all possible and appropriate assistance.

Principle 5

Demonstrate consistent employment practices that embrace justice, equity, fairness and empathy.

Example behaviours

- Follow organisational policies regarding work practices.
- Encourage different and creative ways of approaching work situations to ensure people have the opportunity to balance personal and private needs and work in ways that suit them best.
- Ensure BSL staff at every level are able to participate in organisational activities.
- Ensure that individuals are given the support they need, including training and opportunities to de-brief.

Principle 6

Ensure that all suppliers and contractors are treated with justice, equity, fairness and empathy.

Example behaviours

- Ensure existing and potential suppliers and contractors are treated equally and fairly.

Ethical dilemma

A new person has just started working at the BSL. You soon discover that they have a lot to contribute to the organisation. However, it becomes apparent that the proper HR procedures were not followed and the job was not advertised. This has caused some ill-feeling amongst colleagues in your work area. In addition you then find out that the new person is a relative of another staff member. What do you do?

BE CONNECTED

Shared responsibility ⊕ Equality ⊕ Accountability

Principle 7

Have a shared sense of responsibility and accountability.

Example behaviours

- Take responsibility for ensuring you work in ways that ensure the safety and well-being of yourself and others.
- Recognise that you are part of a broader organisation by working collaboratively with others, sharing information and being accountable.
- Ensure that decision-making processes encourage consultation and shared responsibility.

Principle 8

Develop and maintain relationships with individuals and organisations external to the BSL based on a commitment to a shared responsibility and accountability.

Example behaviours

- Be willing to share information and resources when working with other organisations, but with respect to privacy issues.
- Seek out relationships with other organisations in the spirit of collaboration and co-operation, as opposed to competition.
- Ensure that clients' needs, strengths and interests are acknowledged and used to focus BSL projects.
- Be accountable for the use of funds from private, corporate and government sources.

Principle 9

Seek relationships with ongoing suppliers, contractors and corporate partners who share our understanding of a shared responsibility and accountability.

Example behaviours

- Commit to processes that encourage socially responsible supply chain management (suppliers and contractors), with a focus on the impact on the environment and employment conditions.
- Be aware of who supplies the goods and services in your area, and the labour and environment conditions under which they may be produced or delivered.
- Discuss BSL values with potential ongoing suppliers, contractors and corporate partners in order to ascertain common ground and difference.

Ethical dilemma

The BSL has been invited to join a consortium of other organisations in submitting a combined tender for government funding. You feel that the combined effort of all the groups would mean much greater outcomes for clients. However, you have been informed (by a government employee working on the tender), that the government department involved prefers to work with individual organisations, rather than large complex groups. You realise that the BSL would have a greater chance of winning the tender if they put in a submission alone. What do you do?

WORK SUSTAINABLY
Sustainability ✛ Harmony

Principle 10

Work in ways that foster sustainability and harmony with the wider environment.

Example behaviours

- Ensure that the environmental and social implications of decisions and activities are considered and acknowledged.
- Ensure the appropriate use of resources and reduce/reuse/recycle when possible.
- Investigate the use of sustainable alternatives, e.g. energy providers who have demonstrated their commitment to 'green' practices.

Ethical dilemma

You discover that the paper your area buys is made by a company that uses trees from rain forests in Indonesia. Although this activity is illegal, the manufacturers manage to maintain their supply through corruption and bribery. You check out other paper suppliers and discover that the environmentally friendly alternative is more expensive. Your area uses a lot of paper, and has an extremely tight budget. What do you do?

This Code of Ethical Behaviour has been developed in consultation with staff, volunteers, clients and Board members, and completed in June 2003.

How to use this Code
What to do if you have an ethical concern

If you have an ethical concern in your workplace you can choose to:

- Discuss the issue with the person concerned.
- Discuss the issue with your manager or supervisor.
- Raise the issue at a staff or team meeting.
- Speak to a General Manager.
- Contact Human Resources regarding grievance and/or disciplinary procedures.
- Contact Organisational Development and the Ethics Counsellors.

The Ethics Committee
- If the matter is still unresolved you can raise the issue with the Brotherhood of St Laurence Ethics Committee.

Contact
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