



# Case study: Adopting a survivor-led approach

The International Rescue Committee's approach to responding to disclosures

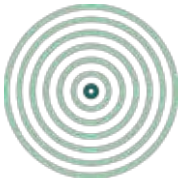


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# Adopting a survivor led approach



Survivor support and enhanced accountability



## Safeguarding Commitment 2:

We ensure victims and survivors of safeguarding breaches are at the heart of our safeguarding response. [Read the commitments.](#)

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### Safeguarding challenge:

- How can organisations prioritise the safety and well-being of survivors?
- How can we do so whilst upholding our wider safeguarding responsibilities?

**Organisation:** International Rescue Committee (IRC)

**Date:** January 2020

### Key recommendations:

- Start by believing survivors and taking the time to listen to them
- Empower survivors to make decisions that will affect their lives. This includes thinking through the impact of reporting outside your organisation
- Always make sure other children and vulnerable adults are safe – your organisation can still do this whilst taking a survivor-led approach. For example, you can report concerns about an individual without naming the survivor(s).

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**The International Rescue Committee (IRC) responds to the world's worst humanitarian crises and helps people to survive, recover, and gain control of their future. They use a survivor-led approach to responding to disclosures. Director of safeguarding, Megan Nobert, explained why it is important.**

The IRC believes that good safeguarding is key to good programming – it's a cornerstone to ensuring everyone is safe, treated with respect, dignity, and, most importantly, humanity.

It's important that beneficiaries' vulnerabilities aren't further exploited, that they can come to the IRC and trust that action will be taken. A survivor-led approach means listening to what actions the survivor wants to take. Exploitation and abuse is about taking away someone's power to say yes or no, so part of a survivor-led approach is giving someone back that power to say yes or no, which can be incredibly healing.

After concerns are reported internally, key stakeholders in the IRC work with survivors to understand their support service needs (medical, psychosocial, and legal) and assist them in accessing those services. It's important to have clear operating procedures in place for safeguarding

so teams on the ground have all the guidance and contact information they need before a safeguarding concern is reported.

The IRC takes a survivor-centred approach to decisions around internal and external reporting, working with survivors to make a decision that best addresses their emotional and safety needs, balanced with local regulations and laws about reporting to the police and other authorities. Taking a survivor-centered approach creates space for survivors to feel empowered, which can have positive effects on their healing or recovery process.

A key challenge is to support all staff to understand what a survivor-led approach really means, how to be more trauma-informed, and not to victim blame. Responding to a survivor is a skill that needs to be learned so that no further harm is caused. Megan said: "It's so important that people understand that recovery as a survivor is not linear – it's like a roller-coaster and that can last for years. When someone has been abused by a representative from an aid organisation, their trust has been broken, so they may be reluctant to get food aid or go to a doctor – the ripples are difficult to anticipate and shouldn't be underestimated. Being able to say sorry and thank someone for coming forward is a key starting point. Then we need to ask ourselves what can we do now to ensure someone else doesn't have to wait that long to feel safe to come forward. As organisations, we have to start by believing survivors and taking time to listen to them."

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