



MercyWorks

SISTERS OF MERCY
IN AUSTRALIA & PAPUA NEW GUINEA

INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Policy Number:	33	Version:	3
Updated by:	Paul Taylor	Approved by Board on:	4 September 2024
Reason of Review:	Scheduled Review	Scheduled review date:	September 2026

INTRODUCTION

Established in 2000, Mercy Works Limited (MWL) is the development arm of the Sisters of Mercy in Australia and Papua New Guinea.

We work in partnership with vulnerable communities and local organisations domestically and in the Asia Pacific region. We work with the people of these communities and organisations to build capacity, dignity and self-reliance.

1. SCOPE

This policy applies to MWL board directors, committee members, employees, volunteers, partners and other stakeholders who operate under the auspices of MWL.

2. PURPOSE

The vision of Mercy Works Limited (MWL) is **“Mercy in Action - Partnering with the most vulnerable toward opportunity, dignity and self-reliance”**.¹

In fulfilling this vision MWL has committed to working **“in partnership with local community organisations to support the most vulnerable, both within Australia and elsewhere in the Asia Pacific region, with a particular focus on women and children”** and developing programs that **“strive to build capacity and self-reliance and to foster environmental sustainability”**.²

A part of this process are MWL’s priorities³ that:

- MWL’s relationships with communities, partners and stakeholders are mutual, productive and celebrated
- MWL’s program and project design and delivery are inclusive, professional and values driven.

The values of MWL are – mutuality, integrity, compassion and justice.⁴

¹ MWL -Strategic Plan (2021-2022)

² MWL -Strategic Plan (2021-2022)

³ MWL -Strategic Plan (2021-2022)

⁴ MWL -Strategic Plan (2021-2022)

The purpose of this policy, then, is to confirm MWL’s commitment to building partnerships, workplaces and systems that actively seek to promote the wellbeing of all, particularly women and children (including non-binary and transgender women and girls -those with a gender identity that is different from the sex they were assigned at birth⁵), in the programs that it supports in Australia and the Asia Pacific region.

In affirming its commitment to fostering opportunity, dignity and self-reliance for the most vulnerable, MWL recognises that the drivers of discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion intersect. Acknowledging that these complex social factors impact significantly on the most vulnerable, particularly women and children, MWL supports programs that prioritise First Nations people, especially women and children as well as refugee women, men and children in Australia and the Asia Pacific region.

MWL seeks to provide opportunities for the most vulnerable to engage in processes to change their lives and their circumstances, and to support individuals and communities in their efforts to address their own development priorities into the future. Sensitivity to local knowledge, cultures and traditional practices is a strength in developing partnerships with primary participating stakeholders and MWL is committed to the inclusion of a diverse range of voices in analysing the context in which MWL operates. Importantly MWL encourages the development of a culture that enables the most vulnerable to share experiences of exclusion to better inform MWL in its decision-making, project design and evaluative processes.

Accordingly, MWL seeks to build local partnerships characterised by:

- a shared commitment to inclusion and a dedication to promoting the wellbeing of the most vulnerable, particularly women and children
- the practice of mutuality, integrity, compassion and justice in organisational relationships
- a shared wish to strengthen and sustainably grow their organisations and build their technical and management capacity
- a determination to improve the effectiveness of their work and its impact in poor and marginalised communities.

In developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or program agreement with a local partner, MWL affirms its mission: “in partnership with local community organisations to support the most vulnerable, both within Australia and elsewhere in the Asia Pacific region, with a particular focus on women and children.”

MWL is an active member of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and adheres to the ACFID Fundraising Charter and ACFID Code of Conduct which define minimum standards of communication, governance, management and accountability of development for member agencies, particularly in relation to inclusion development:

ACFID Quality Principle 1. Rights, Protection & Inclusion

This quality principle recognises the centrality of individual and collective human rights, inclusive participation, equity and protection for those who are vulnerable and those who are affected by the intersecting drivers of marginalisation and exclusion, which include but are not restricted to race, religion, ethnicity, indigeneity, disability, age, displacement, caste, gender, gender identity, sexuality, sexual orientation, poverty, class and socio-economic status.

Commitment 1.2 We respect and respond to the needs, rights and inclusion of those who are vulnerable and those who are affected by marginalisation and exclusion.

ACFID Quality Principle 2. Participation, Empowerment & Local Ownership

⁵ United Nations Free and Equal-Transgender- unfe.org/wp-content/2017/05/UNFE-Transgender.pdf – accessed 26 July 2022.

This quality principle focuses on participation, empowerment and local ownership, and recognises the importance of communities and individuals being fully empowered actors in their own development process.

Commitment 2.3 We promote gender equality and equity.

Commitment 2.4 We promote the empowerment of people with disabilities.

Any exemption to this policy must be applied for in writing, for approval by the Executive Director. Any exemption granted by the Executive Director must be in writing.

3. DEFINITIONS

First Nations People: A name that recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the first peoples of Australia and the sovereign people of this land.

Gender equality: Equal opportunities and outcomes for women and men, girls and boys.

Gender equity: Fairness in access to resources and in the distribution of benefits from development, according to the different needs of women, men, girls and boys.

Inclusion: the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people regardless of their race, religion, ethnicity, indigeneity, disability, age, displacement, caste, gender, gender identity, sexuality ((including non-binary and transgender people -those with a gender identity that is different from the sex they were assigned at birth⁶), sexual orientation, poverty, class, socio-economic status or any other characteristics.

Marginalisation: A state in which individuals are living on the fringes of society because of their compromised or severely limited access to the resources and opportunities needed to fully participate in society and to live a decent life. Marginalised people experience a complex, mutually reinforcing mix of economic, social, health and early-life disadvantage, as well as stigma.

Persons with disabilities: Those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Vulnerable persons: People who may be unable to take care of themselves or are unable to protect themselves against abuse or exploitation; or who, due to their age, gender, gender identity mental or physical health, disability, ethnicity, religious identity, sexual orientation, economic or social status or as a result of disasters and conflicts, are deemed to be at risk.

4. APPLICATION

MWL is committed to fostering opportunity, dignity and self-reliance for the most vulnerable, particularly women and children, through the work of its project partners and programs that enhance the wellbeing of women and children while promoting gender equality and equity as well as non-discrimination in regard to gender identity.

4.1 Gender

MWL acknowledges that engaging men and boys as key stakeholders and allies is critical to the success of its projects and will endeavour to ensure that its local partners do so appropriately. Recognising, influencing and addressing interpersonal, social, economic and political power dynamics is critical to many of the MWL projects that aim to enhance the wellbeing of women and children.

Specifically, MWL supports community development projects and programs in Australia and the Asia Pacific region.

- prevent and respond to gender-based violence
- increase women's economic development and capacity

⁶ United Nations Free and Equal-Transgender- unfe.org/wp-content/2017/05/UNFE-Transgender.pdf – accessed 26 July 2022.

- improve local health services [including maternal and child health and support for disabled children and their families]
- enhance educational and training opportunities for mothers, women who have experienced gender-based violence and young people, particularly females, seeking to complete secondary education and vocational training
- encourage female leadership
- value women and children’s involvement in decision-making and promote inclusion as the responsibility of all primary stakeholders including parents, caregivers, government officials, religious leaders and the local community
- provide an inclusive educational component which helps to reintegrate children back into their local schools, bringing back some routine back into the lives of those students and greater opportunities for learning
- allow children to have a voice in the development of projects that directly affect them.

In committing to projects that promote the wellbeing of women and children, MWL

- conducts an analysis of the local social, economic, political, cultural and religious contexts, with findings informing project design. In many of the communities that MWL works women are prevented from contributing to decision-making because of prevailing power structures. In these communities, for a variety of social, religious, economic, political and cultural reasons, men dominate over women, women’s opinions are not heard or valued, and decision-making structures exclude women.

In analysing the context of its projects, MWL will consult both women and men and consider their different needs and perspectives to ensure that MWL projects

- build a culture based on the premise that activities that foster the wellbeing of women and children also benefit men
- do not harm or exclude women
- consider the needs of children and the disabled
- help to redress existing gender imbalances in a sensitive and constructive way.

- identifies and designs strategies to overcome barriers to the participation of women and children. MWL supports programs that provide needed safe accommodation for young women who would otherwise not be able to commute to and from school safely due to living in remote and often isolated villages, enabling female students to complete secondary education and vocational training courses.

- considers and seeks, wherever possible and appropriate, to address systemic and structural barriers to improving the wellbeing of women and children. MWL endeavours to build stronger relationships with local city and province officials to start a dialogue to help women access education, employment and a range of health services in partnership with local organisations.

- identifies potential risks to women and children during project planning, devises appropriate mitigation strategies and monitors these risks throughout the life of the project. MWL collaborates with other local community development organisations to provide care and support for the girl children of females working in prostitution and young women who have been caught up in human trafficking. Such projects offer appropriate emotional and psychological assistance to overcome painful abuse experiences and support in the transitioning back into the mainstream community and education system.

- identifies, monitors and evaluates outcomes that foster the wellbeing of women and children. Specifically

Capacity building activities for women and children that foster leadership skills and build confidence

- provide mentoring to refugee and asylum seeker students that nurtures well-being and self-esteem and improves students’ literacy and numeracy skills

- support refugee and asylum seeker women through adult classes providing them with the opportunity to improve their spoken and written English.

Training activities for women to enable them to return and add value to their communities

- train women to become literacy teachers in remote villages
- grant the opportunity to learn how to read and write to women and young girls in those villages
- provide training to local community to upskill staff and put in place processes that will ultimately help make good health and wellbeing a sustainable goal for women and children.

Supporting women's leadership in the workplace through greater inclusion in senior positions

- work with Aboriginal Elder women who have formed committees that provide outreach support to Aboriginal mothers as they deal with child protection issues, including access to legal advice, case management, court support, and links to support services and other organisations
- offer First Nations women the opportunity to undertake leadership training to learn skills in mentoring and peer support for other First Nations women.

Ensuring that there are safe transport and specific opportunities for women and children to access training and learning

- provide transport for students to get to school and home again safely each day
- offer workshops focusing on gender-based violence and parenting skills training, to minimise violence in families and communities.

Establishing a culture in educational settings that empowers children to articulate their concerns and recount experiences of abuse, exclusion and marginalisation

- provide one to one mentoring enabling children, especially girls, to speak openly of experiences of trauma, exploitation and abuse
- enable access to educational opportunities where children can play and explore actively learn and critically think, safe and confident in their environment and with the knowledge that they will be listened to and treated with respect
- establish an effective, compliant reporting procedure that ensures the wellbeing and safety of children is the highest priority and all concerns are investigated thoroughly and acted upon appropriately.

- collects project data, disaggregated by age, gender, language background, inclusion barriers.

MWL will collect data via regular reports and maintain records which quantify and qualify collected data (where possible observing appropriate privacy protections and with the permission of each educational setting) according to age, gender, language background of the students as well as any potential barriers to inclusion including disabilities.

At an organisational level MWL is committed to improving gender equity and equality by

- ensuring all our human resources policies and practices are developed with a gender lens. addressing gender and diversity balance in staffing and governance structures along with average pay levels
- implementing targeted strategies to redress any evidence of gender inequality in gender and diversity balance and pay levels
- recruiting and retaining staff with a commitment to gender equality
- building staff and Board capacity and skills in gender equality and diversity
- ensuring all strategic plans, job descriptions including leave conditions performance plans reflect MWL's commitment to gender equality

- taking measures to prevent and respond to all forms of sexual harassment and violence in the organisation, and sexual exploitation and abuse of children and vulnerable adults
- promoting staff awareness and training, and effective systems for reporting and monitoring. ensuring external marketing, fundraising, advocacy and communications use inclusive and positive language and images and avoid stereotypes based on gender.

In responding to the needs, rights and inclusion of those who are vulnerable and those who are affected by marginalisation and exclusion, MWL recognises that there is often an intersection of vulnerabilities that prove to be additional barriers to inclusion, particularly for women and children.

4.2 First Nations People

While **First Nations people** are statistically more likely to be imprisoned, MWL's contextual analysis has indicated that **First Nations** women who have been in prison experience greater disadvantage, often caught in a cruel cycle of incarceration and release then homelessness, re-offending and re-incarceration. Untreated physical and mental health, addiction and a loss of skills and financial independence increases the risk of First Nations women reoffending and severely impacts their self-esteem.

Accordingly, MWL acknowledges that respect for **First Nations Peoples'** knowledge, cultures and traditional practices is integral to sustainable and equitable development especially for **First Nations women**. In developing strategies designed to overcome barriers to inclusion for First Nations women and their children, MWL

- recognises and fosters the inherent rights, dignity and well-being of the First Nations peoples involved in its projects
- recognises First Nations peoples' right to self-determination and in doing so consult with them on decisions that affect them
- identifies, analyses and works to overcome barriers that may prevent First Nations peoples from accessing sustainable and equitable development opportunities
- recognises the importance of providing First Nations peoples with leadership training to mentor and support other First Nations peoples.

Specifically, MWL provides

- crucial pastoral support and assistance to homeless First Nations homeless women and assist women leaving prison as they face significant barriers to improve their capacity and confidence, establish a home and integrate back into their chosen community;
- opportunities to develop better living skills, help with cultural healing, community connectedness and building financial and personal resilience
- culturally sensitive programs to help improve mental health and confidence through a cultural exploration of different artistic media
- early learning services to help to prepare First Nations children for transition into the next stage of their educational journey.

4.3 Disability

MWL also supports projects that **promote the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities**.

In the communities that MWL works, women and girls with disabilities experience discrimination and stigma based on their gender, the nature and severity of their disability and other perceived and actual markers of identity. They are also more likely to experience violence and significant health issues than women without disabilities and men with disabilities in their communities.

Overwhelmingly, women take responsibility for caring for the disabled, impacting on their capacity to work and contribute to the incomes of their families and denying them opportunities to engage in training and education.

Working in partnership with local organisations to include people with disabilities in all projects as well as supporting specific projects for people with disabilities, MWL

- supports local projects that seek to develop the capacity of people with physical and mental disabilities
- engages people with disabilities in the development, implementation and evaluation of projects designed to improve their quality of life
- acknowledges that enhancing accessibility to a range of support services will significantly contribute to better quality of life for persons with disabilities
- listens to the voices of the carers of the disabled. These carers (mostly women and usually a family member) are often strong advocates and can clearly articulate the services that would most benefit the person in their care.

Specifically MWL

- provides a safe place in projects for the disabled and their families to
- come together to interact with one another
- speak openly of the barriers to providing adequate care for their disabled child or family member
- get counselling support and guidance in obtaining government assistance from trained providers
- access health services such as physiotherapy and speech therapy
- receive respite care
- build critical support networks.
- arranges transportation to and from support services for those who cannot access public transport
- provide accommodation for disabled students to facilitate attendance in schools,
- support accessible communications and active relationships with disabled people's organisations in MWL's countries of work.

4.4 Isolation

In acknowledging that there is often an intersection of vulnerabilities that prove to be additional barriers to inclusion, MWL recognises isolation is a significant factor impacting on the capacity of the most vulnerable to access support. Specifically, in the context of MWL projects in Australia and the Asia Pacific region, social and geographic isolation has significant impact on the most vulnerable, particularly women and children, First Nations People and the disabled.

Research has demonstrated that the groups that are most commonly identified ⁷as being vulnerable to, or most at risk of, social or geographic isolation include:

- older people
- people with a disability
- culturally and linguistically diverse people
- First Nations people

Accordingly, MWL is committed to overcoming the social and geographic barriers that prevent those in its care, especially women and children, accessing education, healthcare, social services, accommodation and employment.

Working in partnership with local organisations, MWL has developed strategies to overcome barriers to inclusion caused by social and geographic isolation, supporting people who

- are homeless
- have fears for their physical safety
- experience educational disadvantage

⁷ <https://www.qld.gov.au/community/getting-support-health-social-issue/avoiding-social-isolation>
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- are suffering the effects of trauma
- lack supportive family and social networks
- being ignored and not accepted by others and the wider community
- have limited community facilities and opportunities to engage in betterment opportunities
- experience transport and financial issues which can decrease access to education, healthcare, social services, accommodation and employment.

Specifically MWL

- offers adult conversation classes in local schools for refugee and asylum seeker women in **Australia who are socially isolated** because of language difficulties, limited transport and child-minding responsibilities. These classes enable the women and, in some cases, men, to
 - come together to interact with one another
 - engage in English conversation classes with support from MWL volunteers,
 - speak openly of the barriers to their inclusion in the community
 - obtain information about their child's schooling
 - get counselling support and guidance in obtaining government assistance from trained providers
 - access information about health and further education services
 - build social networks.
- gives pastoral support and assistance to assist First Nations women leaving prison to **overcome their isolation** from country and navigate the transition from prison to everyday life by
 - providing the crucial support system for these women as they face significant barriers to improve their capacity and confidence, establishing a home and reconnecting with their chosen community
 - offering First Nations women in the post-prison release program, the opportunity to undertake leadership training to learn skills in mentoring and peer support for other First Nations women leaving prison
 - enabling young First Nations mothers and their children access to services they would not have due to their lower economic status and social isolation.
- establish **outreach programs in remote areas** of Papua New Guinea and Timor Leste that
 - offer therapy, assessments and referrals to other critical services such as health care to those who seek help
 - provide an inclusive educational component which helps to reintegrate children back into their local schools, bringing some routine into the lives of those students and greater opportunities for learning
 - address the lack of opportunities in remote areas for young people, and associated problems such as drug and alcohol abuse, social and cultural breakdown including family breakdown, gender-based violence and child abuse.

5. REVIEW

The Board is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the implementation and effectiveness of this policy as required. Review of this policy, related forms and resources will be undertaken every two years by the Executive Director and approved by MWL Board.

6. CONTACT

Executive Director
 Mercy Works Ltd
 Level 3, 6 Victoria Road
 Parramatta NSW 2150
 02 9564 1911
mercyworks@mercyworks.org.au

7. AUTHORITY

This policy is approved and reviewed by the Board.

8. RELATED POLICY DOCUMENTS

Other MWL organisational policies, legislation, and codes of practice that should be read in conjunction with this policy and with MWL’s ethical value principles include:

- Code of Conduct Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Management of Concerns, Complaints and Commendations Policy
- Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Policy
- Risk Management Framework for MWL
- Child Safeguarding Policy
- One to One Interactions with Children Policy
- Transparency and Accountability Policy
- Human Rights Policy
- Ethical Decision-Making Framework
- Whistle Blowing Policy

And all relevant codes of practice

9. REVISION/MODIFICATION HISTORY

Date	Version	Current Title	Summary of Changes	Approval Date	Commencement Date
8 September 2021	1.	Inclusion Development Policy	New	8 September 2021	9 September 2021
31 August 2022	2	Inclusion Development Policy	Update to include transgender and non-binary people	31 August 2022	31 August 2022

27 May 2024	3	Inclusion Development Policy	Standardisation, typographical change, revised introduction	4 September 2024	4 September 2024
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10. APPROVAL DATE/REVISION SCHEDULE

Approved by: Board, Mercy Works Limited

Date: 4 September 2024

To be revised: September 2026

Board Chair Signature:	<i>Joseph Babar</i>
Date:	09 October 2024