



Policy Number	Review Date	Next Review Date
18	March 2023	March 2024

## Little Village Referrals Policy

Little Village’s vision is of thriving communities where families share their pre-loved kit and every child under five has the start in life they deserve.

Our mission has three parts:

1. To ensure families on low incomes with children under five have the support and essentials they need
2. To work together with parents to fix the systems that trap families in poverty
3. To inspire families to both choose and share pre-loved children’s clothes and kit

### Purpose of a referrals policy

Our referrals policy is designed to ensure that:

- we can support as many families as we can, with love and dignity.
- there is trust from families that they will be treated with transparency and fairness.
- there is trust from donors that kit given to Little Village will meet an identified need.

This policy is designed to guide the work of our Referral Officers within the organisation, and our network of trusted and highly valued Referral Partners.

### Who can make a referral

Referrals will be accepted from any established professional organisation including council services, children’s centres, NHS services such as midwifery and health visitors, schools, nurseries and tutors, civil society groups such as other charities e.g. foodbanks, refugee & asylum seeker support groups, faith-based organisations, community groups and Councillors or MPs. Referrals can only be submitted for families with children aged five years and under (including mothers 30+ weeks pregnant) that meet the criteria set out below.

Referrers may be volunteers or employees of the referring organisation, but must have authority to refer from a senior manager. Referrals should be made using an organisational email, not a personal account.

New referrers will be provided with an introductory email and access to documents detailing services on offer, the referral process and how families are supported on an ongoing basis. Personal referrals and self-referrals will not be accepted.

We ask that all partners, irrespective of the nature of the partnership, make referrals through the formal channels.

Where a referral partner is new to Little Village, we may request more information about the nature of their organisation in order to learn about each other's organisations and to foster strong collaborative working.

### **Referral criteria**

Referral Partners are requested to make an assessment of need on behalf of Little Village. We request that Referral Partners make all reasonable effort to understand the family situation to enable them to make a fair and informed decision.

Potential criteria are provided on the referral form and detailed here for clarity:

- Low income: the household has had persistently low income, at 60% of the median income or less, for at least 3 out of 4 years, or are experiencing immediate crisis such as loss of job/ change in employment status, illness or acute debt such as experiencing a house fire or large overpayment of benefits
- No recourse to public funds: formal status for non-UK nationals who have no entitlement to most welfare benefits
- Temporary accommodation: accommodation secured by a local authority in order to meet its duty under a homelessness application
- Asylum: those seeking asylum and awaiting a decision, appealing an asylum decision, or who have been denied asylum but cannot immediately leave the UK; as such entitled to health care and other support, such as education for children
- Homeless: families without a home, and who may be staying with friends or family, in a hostel, night shelter or B&B, or are street homeless
- Disabled or disabled family member: individual or family member with a physical or mental impairment which has a long-term adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities
- Domestic abuse: either personally or an immediate family member dealing with the impact of abuse including, but not limited to, physical or sexual, psychological and/or emotional, financial or economic, coercive control and/or honour-based
- Dealing with substance misuse: either current use of, or dealing with the impact of recent use of, drugs in an amount or method which is harmful to the individual or to others
- Single parent/carer: a family with only one parent/carer involved in the upbringing of any children.

We ask that Referral Partners make reasonable efforts to see evidence of a family's status under these categories. This could include seeing evidence of:

- Home Office status letters / ID cards

- Universal Credit letter or other benefit letters
- Housing letter

A category of 'other' is included for use at the discretion of Referral Partners. We would encourage Referral Partners to provide details on the family situation if using 'other' as a criteria, to aid us with any needs analysis.

### **Levels of support**

We are currently able to provide clothing and kit for children of five years and under living in the following London boroughs:

Brent, Barnet, Bromley, Camden, City of Westminster, Croydon, City of London, Greenwich, Haringey, Hackney, Hammersmith and Fulham, Hounslow, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Kingston Upon Thames, Lambeth, Lewisham, Merton, Richmond Upon Thames, Southwark, Sutton, Tower Hamlets, Wandsworth.

During certain times throughout the year, where our operations are impacted, we may be forced to either (a) apply a cap to the number of referrals submitted weekly, (b) temporarily halt the submission of referrals, (c) tighten\* our referral criteria in order to prioritise those families in greatest need. If these situations occur, we will aim to either communicate this clearly on our website or via an email to all Referral Partners and clarify the situation on the referral form.

If the decision is made to temporarily halt the submission of referrals or limit the submission of referrals by a weekly cap (by de-activating the referrals link on the website), we will do our best to limit this to a short period of time and will endeavour to include additional signposting to alternative support providers.

\*Tightened referral criteria may mean we are only able to fulfil referrals for families meeting the following status:

- Newborn babies (mothers 30+ weeks pregnant, or with a newborn under three months);
- Families with nothing (i.e. those recently rehomed due to domestic violence or recent migrants seeking asylum or refugee status).

### **Guidance for providing a referral**

We appreciate that we are asking Referral Partners to make a substantial assessment of need on behalf of Little Village. If a Referral Partner is unsure whether a family qualify for support, we would always recommend discussing this with the Little Village Referrals Officers. To ensure that families are seen without high barriers to entry we are happy for Referral Partners to use a 'reasonable doubt' assessment of need, meaning that in the absence of evidence of the family's situation, the judgement of the referrer can be used to put a family forward.

### **Providing and delivering the items requested**

We currently provide two main methods for families to receive their items.

***Delivery service to a family's address*** (Please note families are eligible for delivery if they live in certain postcodes or they are unable to attend an appointment on site)

On receipt of the referral, the Little Village team will:

- Confirm via automated email to the Referral Partner that they have submitted a referral on behalf of the family.
- Confirm via automated email to the family that we have received a referral submitted on their behalf.
- Only contact the Referral Partner again if there are any questions relating to the referral. Otherwise, there will be no further contact by the Little Village team relating to that referral.
- Only contact the family (i) if larger kit items such as beds, buggies need clarifying or (ii) to seek further clarification over items such as accurate clothes sizes, additional children on the referral.
- Confirm the delivery time window and address with the family via text the day before the delivery.
- Deliver via courier to the family on the agreed day.
- Deliver any larger kit items such as beds and buggies approx. 2 weeks after the first delivery via a volunteer driver. This will be dependent on stock availability.
- Contact the family via text/SMS if larger kit items are not available and signpost on to other resources to source alternatives.
- Contact the family approximately 2-3 weeks post-delivery to welcome them to Little Village and offer any additional support.

**Please note:** if (post submission of referral) the family has subsequently moved or been re-located outside one of the delivery boroughs, Little Village will either: (a) request that the items are delivered to an alternative address within one of the boroughs we operate – this for example could be, but not limited to, a relative or close friend's address or the referral partner's place of work, or (b) deliver to the new address only in exceptional circumstances and with prior discussion with the Referrals Officers. In this case, larger kit items such as beds and buggies will not be included in the delivery.

***Pre booked on site appointments*** (Please note families are eligible for appointments if they live in certain postcodes that fall within close proximity to our main operating sites)

On receipt of a referral made for an on-site appointment, the Little Village team will:

- Send an automated SMS and email an appointment confirmation to the family, confirming their address and time window to attend.
- Send an automated email appointment confirmation to the Referral Partner.
- Request that the family are responsible for transporting small items home themselves (eg they will be advised to bring their own suitcase/ wheelie case and any cost incurred for transportation home will be down to them).
- Deliver (post appointment) any larger kit items such as beds and buggies that can't be taken home by the family approx. 2 weeks after the appointment via a volunteer driver.

- Contact the family via SMS if larger kit items are not available and signpost on to other resources to source alternatives.
- Make every reasonable attempt to accommodate no-shows or appointment cancellations – in these circumstances Little Village will contact the family to reschedule. The referral will be either rescheduled, re-directed to delivery or closed depending on discussions with the Referrals Officer. The Referrals Officer will inform the Referral Partner if the decision is made for the referral to be closed.
- Welcome and offer the family additional support if needed when they come in for their appointment.

*By prior arrangement, it may be possible for referral partners to collect items from our sites on behalf of the family. Please discuss this with the Referrals Officers.*

### **Kit provided**

Families are provided (free of charge) with approximately 5-7 days' worth of clothing items per child up to the age of five plus any essential kit, and nappies.

Larger kit items (defined as beds including moses baskets, cots, cot beds and cribs; buggies including singles, strollers and doubles/ triples) are limited to one type per child, i.e. a newborn baby will be offered a crib or a moses basket but not both; an older child will be offered a cot, cot bed or toddler bed.

We are unable to provide car seats, maternity or breastfeeding clothing, large items of nursery furniture, formula milk or baby food. Everything is second-hand (apart from mattresses, nappies, toiletries, bottle teats and breast pumps which are supplied new). Little Village will ensure all kit is in great condition and will have been checked for safety and cleanliness prior to redistribution.

We may not have everything the family need as we rely on donations from the local community. Equipment such as cots, highchairs, buggies and breast pumps are in high demand and unfortunately, we can't operate a waiting list for these popular items. We will do what we can to fulfil these requests; however, alternatives may be offered if the original request can't be fulfilled e.g., a single newborn buggy and sling or buggy board may be offered if no double buggy is available.

Where items are in limited supply and the family already have an item that is safe and fit for purpose, a second item will not be offered. For example, families with a buggy looking for a second lightweight buggy to take on holiday.

Where our operations are impacted, we may be forced to tighten our kit offerings to only clothing, beds, mattresses, nappies and wipes. If this is the case, we will communicate clearly on the referral form; inform existing referral partners and ensure families are also made aware during their delivery confirmation communication.

### **Donating back items**

We do encourage families to donate back any items that are no longer needed, ensuring they are clean and in good order, so that they can be re-gifted out to more families, thereby furthering our mission of bringing local families together to support one another.

In order to facilitate supporting as many families as possible, families may be requested to donate back any major items they have been given by Little Village which they no longer need if they are moving on to the next format. For example, a family who have been provided a buggy suitable from birth and who now need a double buggy for a toddler and newborn will be asked if they are able to bring the original buggy back.

Whilst we encourage the regifting to another family of items which have been provided by Little Village, we do understand that families may need, or want, to sell on items that have been provided by Little Village once those items are no longer needed.

### **Frequency of referral**

If a family's need continues, they are welcome to visit Little Village again for further support. We ask that families leave at least three months in between referrals for kit and clothing. They will be provided enough kit from their first referral to last three months at least.

If, and when, families return to Little Village for subsequent visits, we are unable to provide the same type of equipment again if they have already been provided.

The exception to this would be where a family has outgrown the original item or their needs have changed for example they require a different type of buggy due to the arrival of a another child. We would, however, request that if possible the family swap back the original item provided.

### **Partnership arrangement**

Where Referral Partners are working with a specific group of families who all qualify for support from Little Village, we may develop a partnership arrangement to support those families in the partner organisation. In that instance, bespoke referral arrangements will be made between the two organisations.

### **Grounds for refusal of a referral by a partner**

Whilst we encourage Referral Partners to make the Little Village service as accessible as possible for families, we do support Referral Partners in the event they decide not to grant a referral. Grounds for this may be:

- Family income is deemed to be such that the family's needs (including any additional needs due to extenuating circumstances) could be reasonably met by the family
- Families are requesting items which have previously been sourced from Little Village
- Families are requesting items which have been provided by another supporting organisation
- Families have been evidenced to be repeatedly selling on items supplied by Little Village and requesting replacements for these or similar items.

In these situations, Little Village would ask that:

- The reasons for refusal of a referral are clearly explained to the family
- The family is made aware that if their circumstances change, they are welcome to discuss a new referral with either the Referral Partner or Little Village directly
- The occurrence of a refusal, the name of the family, and the reasons for the refusal are communicated with the Referrals Officer at Little Village.

We would also welcome Referral Partners' refusals if they know a family have recently visited a Little Village site (within three months). As noted above, they would then be welcome to have a referral after the three-month window. Again, we would ask that the Referral Partner fully explain the reason for deferring the referral.

In the event that a family approach another Referral Partner to secure the referral; one who may not be as familiar with the family situation, we ask that the original Referral Partner, within the bounds of data protection, support Little Village in communicating the grounds for refusal to the second Referral Partner.

### **Grounds for refusal of referral by Little Village**

In very rare situations, Little Village may be in possession of wider information on a family than the Referral Partner. If that information enables the Little Village Referral Officer to assess that the family fall into any of the categories detailed above for refusal of a referral, Little Village reserves the right not to accept a referral.

In this instance Little Village will:

- Communicate clearly to the Referral Partner what the grounds for refusal are
- Communicate directly with the family to explain why the referral has been rejected
- Communicate clearly with the family that if their circumstances change, they are welcome to discuss a new referral with the Referral Officer.

All families attending Little Village on site appointments are requested to have a referral. If a family arrives at a Little Village site without a referral they will be asked to return when they have a full referral. This is because we do not have the capacity to safely look after families at our sites if we become overcrowded by families without appointments. The exceptions to this will be if:

- A family present in a state of extreme distress
- Where they are carrying a newborn in arms with no appropriate means to transport the baby (where a buggy will be provided if possible and the family will be asked to secure a referral for any further items).

In some circumstances we will request that a family seek support from another provider, rather than from Little Village. This may be because:

- Little Village has implemented a temporary tightening of criteria and can no longer accept the referral due to their status
- The family do not reside in our current delivery area
- The family's last referral was made less than three months prior
- The family is requesting a single item we do not have in stock

- There is provision for support geographically nearer to the family's location.

In these circumstances, Little Village will advise the family and original referrer of alternative local support,

### **Policy reviews**

We are happy to discuss the referrals policy at any time with our Referral Partners and welcome their feedback on our processes, in the interests of making them as accessible and welcoming as possible for the families we support.

This policy will be reviewed annually.

Signed:

Sophie Livingstone,  
CEO, Little Village

Reviewers:

Claire Ellaway, Referrals Officer  
Caley Eldred, Trustee

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