



Policy Number	Review Date	Next Review Date
18	March 2026	March 2027

Little Village Referrals Policy

Little Village's vision is for every child to have the essentials they need to thrive.

Our mission is to bring about change for children and families through the power of sharing, reusing and connecting.

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 and cash 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.

Safeguarding and duty of care

Little Village is committed to safeguarding children, adults at risk, volunteers and staff. While our role is to provide practical support, our contact with families and Referral partners means we may sometimes become aware of welfare or safety concerns.

All referral activity is carried out in line with Little Village's Safeguarding Policies and related policies and procedures. Referral Officers and related staff are trained to recognised safeguarding concerns and understand how to respond appropriately and escalate proportionately.

Who can make an online referral

Referrals will be accepted from any established professional organisation including but not limited to 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.

Families must live in one of the boroughs listed on the referrals page on our website and 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.

Referral Partners 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 such as gmail.com

New Referral Partners will be provided with an introductory email and access to documents detailing our services. New Referral Partners will also be invited to attend an induction session run by the Referrals Officer covering our referrals pathway, safeguarding and how families are supported on an ongoing basis.

We ask that all Referral 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 to learn more and to foster strong collaborative working.

Referral Partners are expected to act within their own organisation's safeguarding and information sharing policies when making a referral. This includes informing families that a referral is being made, explaining what information will be shared, and ensuring this is appropriate and necessary to support access to the service.

Referral criteria

Little Village supports families facing economic hardship and 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.

Self-referrals or referrals made by family or friends of the family will not be accepted.

Where families are facing economic hardship, Referral Partners are asked to provide further context for this by selecting relevant reasons for the referral:

- Unemployment: not being in paid employment or self-employment but currently available for work
- Benefits sanctioned/delayed benefits: where some benefits are stopped or reduced due to not carrying out what has been agreed in the family's claimant commitment; or appointments and/or meetings are missed. Late payment of a benefit such as Universal Credit or delay waiting for an appeal.
- Debt: where money is owed to creditors, such as banks, credit card companies, or other lenders. This includes, having more debt than the family can afford, the debt is costing more than it should and /or the debt is causing emotional stress. Illness or acute debt such as experiencing a house fire or large overpayment of benefits.
- Temporary accommodation: accommodation secured by a local authority in order to meet its duty under a homelessness application.
- Experiencing homelessness or about to become unhoused: 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. This also includes circumstances such as experiencing fire/flood in the home.

- Seeking 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.
- Refugee: families who are unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion
- No recourse to public funds: formal status for non-UK nationals who have no entitlement to most welfare benefits
- Domestic abuse/ history of 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. This includes abuse between intimate partners but also extends to other family members, such as children, parents and siblings
- Gender based violence (GBV)/history of GBV: violence directed at an individual based on their gender, gender identity or perceived gender. This includes but not limited to physical/sexual violence, intimate partner violence, human trafficking, female genital mutilation (FGM)
- Victim of human trafficking or modern slavery: those experiencing, or being victim to, force, deceit, fraud or coercion for the purpose of commercial sex, abuse, crime, forced labour, debt bondage or inhumane treatment.
- Disabled child: child with a physical impairment which has a long-term adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.
- Disabled parent/carer /family member: individual/s with a physical impairment which has a long-term adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.
- Mental ill health: parent/carer experiencing distress or mental impairment which has a long-term adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.
- Physical ill health: parent/ carer or child affected by illness, injury, or a health condition that significantly impact day to day activities. This includes both acute and chronic conditions
- Affected by 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.
- Affected by alcohol misuse: either current use of, or dealing with the impact of recent use of, alcohol 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.
- Carer: individual who is also providing unpaid care and support to a family member, friend or neighbour who is disabled, has an illness or long-term condition, or who needs extra help as they grow older
- Young parent (under 25).
- Parent is care leaver/ previously looked after child: parent who was once in the care of a local authority but is no longer e.g. adopted, placed under a special guardianship order, or a child arrangements order
- Child under Child Protection Plan: where there is a formal agreement in place designed to safeguard the child and support the family as the child has been identified as being at risk of significant harm.
- Child in Need: defined under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. A child is considered "in need" if they are unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision of services, or if their health or development is likely to be significantly impaired without such services. This can also include children with disabilities

- Multiple births: where multiple births such as twins, triplets significantly increase economic /or emotional strain
- Sudden change in family circumstances: recently experienced a significant life event, such as bereavement, separation, or other major family changes, impacting well-being and stability
- Social isolation/lack of support network: families who have minimal social contact and/or have an absence of support networks who can provide emotional, practical or financial support

We ask that Referral Partners make reasonable efforts to see evidence of a family's status under these categories. This could include (but not restricted to):

- Home Office status letters / ID cards
- Universal Credit letter or other benefit letters
- Housing letter

Please also refer to the section on **Guidance on providing a referral** below

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 for on-line referrals

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

Brent, Camden, City of Westminster, City of London, Greenwich, Haringey, Hackney, Hammersmith and Fulham, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Merton, Southwark, Tower Hamlets and Wandsworth.

Little Village operates a daily cap on the number of referrals that can be submitted using the online referral form. When we reach our daily quota for the day, access to the referrals form is closed. The form will reopen again on the next working day at 9:30am.

During certain times throughout the year, where our operations are impacted, we may be forced to temporarily halt the submission of referrals. If this situation occurs, 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 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.

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.

In the absence of evidence of the family's situation, the judgement of the Referral Partner can be used to put a family forward, to ensure that families are seen without a high barrier to entry.

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 boroughs or are unable to attend an appointment on site. Current eligible boroughs are listed on our website).

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

- Apply a safeguarding sense-check to referral information and any communication received, and follow internal safeguarding escalation processes where concerns are identified
- 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.
- Contact the family to seek further clarification over items such as accurate clothes sizes; larger kit items such as beds, buggies, additional children on the referral, and further items required that have not been included on the initial form
- Consider contacting the family to discuss attending a shop appointment as an alternative to a courier if the family's address and/ or circumstances suit this option better
- 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 if larger kit items are not available to send.
- Contact the family after they have received their items 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 boroughs that fall within close proximity to our main operating sites. Current eligible boroughs are listed on our website).

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

- Apply a safeguarding sense-check to referral information and any communication received, and follow internal safeguarding escalation processes where concerns are identified
- Send an automated text and email appointment confirmation to the family, confirming their address, date and time 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 if larger kit items are not available to deliver
- 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.
- Contact the family after they have received their items from their shop appointment for a follow up and to offer any additional support.

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.

Safe communication with families

Communication with families will remain focused on arranging and delivering practical support. Referrals staff and volunteers do not provide casework and do not investigate safeguarding. Where wider needs or risks become visible, families will be signposted back to their Referral Partner, where appropriate escalated to statutory services for immediate protective measures and to support with multi-agency information sharing and/or appropriate specialist services where possible.

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 – all kit (including nappies) are dependent on stock availability at the time of packing/ shop appointment.

Larger kit items (defined as beds including moses baskets, cribs, cots, cot beds and toddler beds; 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 including bunkbeds, formula milk or baby food. Everything is pre-loved i.e. 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 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.

We are unable to swap or provide additional items on request after the referral has been fulfilled. The Referrals Officer will instruct the family to seek an additional referral in line with our **Frequency of referral** section noted below.

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 an overseas trip.

Due to unprecedented demand (and the daily quota set for the submission of referrals), requests for single or limited items such as nappies or wipes or just toys and books will unfortunately not be accepted.

We ask that Referral Partners make reasonable efforts to set the expectations of the family regarding the availability and condition of the items Little Village provides (as detailed above).

Where our operations are impacted, we may be forced to tighten our kit offerings to only clothing, beds and 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. This helps further 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 stage of travel equipment. 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 (or three months after their baby has been born) for kit and clothing. The three months period refers to the date the family receives their items (either via a shop appointment or confirmed delivery), not the date that the referral was submitted.

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 in previous referrals. 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 another child. We would, however, request that where possible the family swap back the original item provided.

Partnership arrangement

Where Referral Partners work with a defined group of families who are eligible for support from Little Village, a partnership arrangement may be established to support multiple families at once. In such cases, bespoke referral arrangements will be agreed between Little Village and the partner organisation. To maximise access to our services, these partnerships are not limited to the boroughs listed above and may operate across any London borough.

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 need (including any additional needs due to extenuating circumstances) could be reasonably met by the family.
- Failure to meet the referral criteria (listed above on pages 2-4)
- 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.
- Families have recently visited a Little Village site / or received a delivery within last three months.

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; or they are welcome to have a referral after the 3 month window
- 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.

If a family approaches another Referral Partner to secure the referral, (one who may not be as familiar with the family situation), we may ask that the original Referral Partner, within the bounds of data protection, supports Little Village in communicating the grounds for refusal to the second Referral Partner.

Grounds for refusal of referral by Little Village

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

- The family do not reside in one of the boroughs listed above in current levels of support.
- The family is less than 30 + pregnant or has a child 6 years plus
- The family's last referral was made less than three months prior or less than three months after the baby was born.
- There is a current referral on the system for the same family submitted by another Referral Partner
- The family is requesting just nappies/toys & books.

- 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.
- The family's conduct toward Little Village staff during a previous site visit was unacceptable; as a result- depending on the exact circumstance we may limit support to delivery-only

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

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 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.

In all cases, Little Village reserves the right to pause, amend, or decline a referral where safety, safeguarding, fraud risk, or serious conduct concerns are identified. Decisions will be recorded and reviewed internally. 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. 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).

Safeguarding

Little Village is committed to safeguarding everyone we come into contact with, including children, adults at risk, staff and volunteers. All referrals and partnership activity must be carried out in line with safe and appropriate safeguarding practice.

Referral partners remain responsible for following their own organisational safeguarding procedures and for taking necessary safeguarding action. A referral to Little Village is not a safeguarding referral and does not replace statutory safeguarding processes. Where there is immediate risk of harm, Referral Partners should contact the appropriate statutory service without delay and inform Little Village of any ongoing risks to support with safety planning and risk awareness.

Little Village staff are trained to recognise and respond to safeguarding concerns. If safeguarding or welfare concerns become visible through the referral or delivery process, these will be recorded and escalated internally in line with Little Village's safeguarding policies and procedures.

Little Village volunteers supporting referrals, deliveries or on-site activity must not investigate safeguarding or welfare concerns themselves or attempt to resolve situations directly. Any concerns should be passed promptly to a member of staff or reported through the safeguarding escalation pathway and handled through the appropriate reporting process.

For further information on Little Village's safeguarding responsibilities, procedures and reporting routes, please refer to our Child Safeguarding and Adult Safeguarding policies available on our website. These policies set out the safeguarding standards that must be followed at all times.

Information sharing and confidentiality

Information shared through referrals will be limited to what is necessary to assess eligibility and provide support. Personal information is handled in line with Little Village's Data Protection and Retention Policy.

Where safeguarding concerns arise, relevant information may be shared internally with the Safeguarding Manager and, where appropriate, externally with statutory or specialist services, in line with safeguarding and data protection guidance

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 Manager
Hinda Omar, Safeguarding and Families Insights Manager

Kate Moon, Head of Families & Partnerships

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