



# Putting our people first

*Wellness and safety at WE*



# Message from our Chief People Officer



Since joining WE in 2017, I've been focused on continuously building a best-in-class HR team and processes, drawing on more than two decades of experience. I'm proud to say that our People Operations and Culture team possesses more than 50 years of collective experience in human resource management.

It's meaningful that, in their independent review, workplace advocates Singh Lamarche LLP stated that WE's policies are the "gold standard" in promoting accessibility, transparency and protecting employees from discrimination and harassment of any kind.

WE has multiple avenues for employees to report concerns. They can do so anonymously via our WE Connect portal, through their manager or their HR Business Partner. WE also has an active Health and Safety committee with representation from both our employee and management groups. This group is highly visible in the organization and employees can feel they can report to this group as well. All concerns are brought to my attention and an investigation is completed. It is my accountability to ensure that these issues are dealt with in line with the Occupational Health and Safety Act regulations.

Our team has had issues raised to us—and in each of those cases we dealt with the matter to the highest standards possible. This means conducting full investigations, documenting appropriately and ensuring, where required, the appropriate disciplinary action. I can confidently say that every attempt is taken to ensure that WE's employees are safe at work.

- Victoria MacDonald

*Victoria MacDonald brings more than 20 years of experience in Human Resources to WE Charity. She has been a certified member of the Human Resources Professionals Association (HRPA) since 1996 and carries the organization's Certified Human Resources Leader (CHRL) credentials. Before arriving at WE in 2017, Victoria spent a decade working with AstraZeneca Canada and Takeda Canada, two industry-leading multinational pharmaceutical companies. These organizations earned recognition for their workplace culture and employee engagement. Victoria also led teams at the Canadian technology-based entrepreneurial firms Marketwired/Sysomos and Flight Network, developing foundational people-management strategies that allowed these organizations to see tremendous growth.*

# Executive Summary

As a youth empowerment group of 12-year-old activists that has grown into an international social purpose organization with more than 1,000 employees, we have consciously worked to protect and advocate for our staff with best-in-class human resources, safety and accessibility policies, which are externally reviewed and updated on a regular basis. The #metoo movement factors into our employee training, policies and the culture of respect we engender. At WE, the safety of our staff, volunteers, youth participants and all stakeholders is our top priority. Our organization does not tolerate inappropriate, offensive or violent behaviors in the workplace or in any of our programming locations. We have strict policies on misconduct, discrimination and harassment designed to protect our employees, volunteers and participants.



We have well-established policies and procedures that ensure it is clear to all employees the standard of conduct WE expects. All employees are required to sign off on the policies at time of hire. Our three-day Orientation shares all of these resources with our new employees. Expectations, policies and procedures are detailed in our Employee Handbook, which is accessible to all employees through our internal communications portal.

Throughout our more than 20 years of operation, we have prioritized the wellness and safety of our staff, and that of the children, youth and adults who take part in our programming, both domestically and abroad.

- Employment law and workplace investigations specialists Singh Lamarche LLP call the WE employee protection policies they reviewed "gold standard" (see "Third-Party Commendation and Reviews," p. 8).
- We provide staff with multiple avenues, including anonymously, for reporting any behavior or activity they find uncomfortable or inappropriate (see "Reporting Issues of Concern," p. 16).
- WE has received 16 national and international awards for our culture and impact—recognized twice by Waterstone Human Capital as one of Canada's Top 10 Most Admired Corporate Cultures and selected three times as a Top Employer for Young People (see "Recognition and Awards," p. 9).
- As proud as we are of our achievements, we recognize that every organization can strive for improvement. For that reason, we have sought out independent assessments, working exhaustively with leading experts in human resources management, to provide us with research, feedback and recommendations (see "Third-Party Commendation and Reviews," p. 8).
- Women rise through the ranks of WE at an exceptional rate, with 84 percent of our senior leadership positions being held by females. In addition, women lead all but three of our organization's departments, and earn 16 of the top 20 salaries (see "Empowered Women, Empower Women," pp. 4-5).

Through Onboarding procedures and internal communications, we work to ensure that all employees, regardless of tenure or title, are aware of the multiple ways they can report any issue that causes them concern, and that they feel absolutely safe in doing so. Employees can choose the reporting option that is most comfortable and convenient for them:

- report to their manager;
- report to another manager;
- report directly to the Chief People Officer;
- report anonymously through our secure online WE Connect internal communications portal.

# Empowered women, empower women

*At WE, female executives, department heads and directors make up 84 percent of our leadership. Meet two of our extraordinary leaders.*

## Michelle Douglas, Chair, WE Charity Board of Directors, Canada

For the past three decades, Michelle Douglas has worked as a federal public servant in Canada. In her current role as Director of International Relations at Canada's Department of Justice, she provides policy support to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada.

A celebrated champion for social justice and equality, in 1989 she was honorably dismissed by the Canadian military due to her sexual orientation. She launched a landmark lawsuit that resulted in ending the military's discriminatory policy against gays and lesbians.

She has served as the Chair of WE Charity's Board of Directors for more than 10 years. She has also served as Chair of the 519 Community Centre and the Foundation for Equal Families.

In 2012, Michelle was awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal for her volunteerism. She resides in Ottawa.



## Dalal Al-Waheidi Executive Director, WE Charity

As Executive Director of Executive Leadership at WE Charity, Dalal Al-Waheidi has been integral in shaping the success of the WE movement into an international charity and educational partner. She joined the organization in 2002, and has held a variety of pivotal roles, including WE Villages Director, Chief Operations Director and Executive Director of WE Day.

Dalal's outlook was shaped by her experience of growing up in the Middle East. As a refugee and war-affected child, her education was interrupted; yet, at 17, she was invited to attend college in Norway, and went on to graduate from Canada's Trent University, having studied political science and international development on a full scholarship.

Dalal's exemplary leadership at WE has been recognized by the Women's Executive Network with Canada's Top 100 Most Powerful Women Award in the "Future Leaders" category, and by her former alma mater, Trent University, with the Distinguished Alumni Award for demonstrating extraordinary leadership early in her career.

In 2014, Dalal was selected as one of RBC's Top 25 Canadian Immigrant Award winners for her passion and desire to make the world a better place, especially for the lives of youth around the world.

"Much of my life has been spent in countries where women's rights are a daily struggle," says Dalal, who grew up in Palestine and Kuwait. "While I was fortunate to be supported in my wish to pursue an education and work abroad, I saw friends married off or forced to stay home as caregivers. Looking back, I can see these difficult events are what established my commitment to advocating for women and youth, fighting racism and advancing education."

"Through our sustainable development projects in Kenya, India, Ecuador and other countries abroad, WE works with women in their communities, helping them develop marketable skills, knowledge and financial independence," Dalal says. "The same is true here at home. WE has always offered exceptional opportunities for mentorship, growth and development among our employees, both male and female."



### All but three of WE's departments are led by women:

- People Operations and Culture
- Donor Engagement
- WE Schools
- MARCOM360 (Marketing Agency)
- Trips Operations/Sales
- Retail
- Storytelling (Content)
- PR
- Digital Media
- WE Villages (International Development)
- Strategy
- Regional Offices
- Facilities
- WE Day



# Policies, Procedures, Trainings

*WE's programs go far beyond safety in the physical space, but rather focus on ensuring that our employees are all working in an environment that is free from discrimination and harassment of any kind. Our three-day Orientation shares all of these resources with our new employees. Leaders in the organization are the stewards of employee conduct and, as such, WE has policy and procedures update meetings with people managers.*



## Employee conduct

WE has a zero tolerance policy for all forms of workplace harassment, misconduct or discrimination in the workplace. We have a formal employee handbook that clearly outlines the expectations for all employees on:

- Code of Conduct;
- Workplace Harassment and Discrimination;
- Dealing with Employee Misconduct;
- and Investigation process.

All employees are required to sign off on our wellness and protection policies at time of hire. Our Employee Handbook is accessible to all employees through our internal communications portal.

WE believes in the prevention of workplace discrimination and harassment, and promotes a workplace in which all people respect one another and work together to achieve common goals. All employees are responsible for maintaining a respectful workplace free of discrimination, and all types of harassment and violence. Discrimination and harassment are strictly prohibited by applicable human rights and other legislation, and will not be tolerated, condoned or ignored at WE.

Employees are required to report any existing discriminatory, harassing or violent behavior in the workplace, as well as any potential threats of violence or harassment that become known to an individual. Reported incidents will be investigated and, if verified, any breach of this policy will result in disciplinary action that may include the termination of employment for just cause. Where appropriate, WE will report violent incidents to local law enforcement authorities, as required by law.

Our policies and culture also provide for the protection of employees who come forward with any kind of concern: WE is a safe space. Employees may speak to their manager, or to another manager, go directly to the Chief People Officer or report anonymously through our secure online WE Connect internal communications platform. They may do so without fear of reprimand and with the knowledge their concerns will be taken seriously and acted upon swiftly.

This policy applies at every level of the organization and to every aspect of the workplace environment and employment relationship, including recruitment, selection, promotion, transfers, training, salaries, benefits and termination. This policy also applies to business travel, work-related social occasions and other locations where the prohibited behavior may have a subsequent impact on the work relationship, work environment or employee performance. It is also unacceptable for WE employees to engage in harassment, discrimination or violent behavior when dealing with clients, or with others with whom they have professional dealings, such as suppliers or service providers.

WE takes a broad definition of harassment. Guided by the Occupational Health and Safety Act, our definition consists of comments or conduct that is known, or ought reasonably to be known, to be unwelcome. It can involve words or actions that are known or should be known to be offensive, embarrassing, humiliating, intimidating, demeaning or unwelcome. Harassment can occur on any of the grounds of discrimination identified by this policy. Harassment can consist of a single incident or several incidents over a period of time.

## Diversity and Accessibility

We are proud to foster diversity in our workforce, and believe diversity is a business priority fundamental to our success. WE Charity is compliant with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), which serves to “develop, implement and enforce standards for accessibility related to goods, services, facilities, employment, accommodation and buildings.” Our WE Global Learning Center headquarters is a fully accessible facility, and it includes a prayer room in recognition of the many faiths that are practiced among our staff. The Center has been recognized with Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™. Equally, our inclusive culture provides a safe space for our staff and visitors who identify as LGBTQ+, including weekly staff-led Thursgay celebrations. Through our policies and employee trainings, we make it crystal clear that harassment is not tolerated. Full stop.



*“I joined WE 10 years ago, knowing I had found my dream job. What I didn’t know is I would also find a family. WE attracts the most extraordinary, like-minded people, many of whom I now call best friends and family.”*

*~ Spencer West, Motivational Speaker, WE*

# Third-Party Commendation and Reviews

*WE has been described as the “gold standard” in regards to the policies we have put in place for the protection and accommodation of our employees. As proud as we are of our achievements, we recognize that every organization can strive for improvement. For that reason, we have sought out independent assessments, working exhaustively with leading experts in human resources management, to provide us with research, feedback and recommendations.*

- **Singh Lamarche LLP**, a law firm specializing in employment law and workplace investigations, found that the specific WE policies they reviewed—promoting accessibility and protecting employees from discrimination, harassment and violence—**“represent the ‘gold standard’ in terms of demonstrating a commitment by WE to ensure the protection and accommodation of their employees. The Policies were clear, comprehensive and thorough.”**
- **Knightsbridge**, a leading HR management firm, reported in their 2018 review of Human Resources culture: **“Employees appreciate that WE’s organizational norms and cultural attributes are collaborative, and describe a culture of generally high appreciation of employees.... WE has a vibrant, purpose-driven culture that continues to attract top talent.... The initiatives laid out in [WE’s] People Plan demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement in the employee experience.”**
- **Appiah Law LLP** reviewed the implementation of our workplace policies themselves and stated that **“WE applied its policies, investigative procedures, and remedial steps in a careful, consistent and fair manner.”**
- **Organizational psychologist Dr. David Baum** noted in his 2018 case study reviewing WE’s HR strategy, policies and employee experience: **“I believe that WE has become one of the best and most effective organizations in its sector, with a robust HR infrastructure.”**
- **Jason Saul, CEO of Mission Measurement**, a leading research firm that measures and evaluates social impact, notes: **“In my experience, many charities struggle to attract the best talent and secure the resources to support that talent and to create a culture of excellence. [WE Charity] has been able to attract young, top talent and to retain that talent by establishing a high-performance culture and at the same time providing a stable and nurturing environment for staff to thrive.”**

## What employees say about working at WE

We conduct regular pulse surveys to check in with our 1,000+ employees, partnering with **TemboStatus**, an external organization that provides us with aggregated results and ensures that all the data is anonymous. Based on years of organizational survey research, the surveys capture how well we do in terms of employee engagement. The verdict? According to our 2018 survey:

- **98** percent of WE employees believe they are making a positive change in the world because of their work
- **96** percent believe we are making a difference in the world
- **90** percent of staff say they are personally connected to our organization’s mission
- **78** percent of WE team members say they love their job
- **80** percent of WE team members see themselves staying with WE for the foreseeable future

Importantly, we also use the results of these anonymous annual surveys to ensure we are continuously improving in our service to staff. Comparing results year-over-year since 2015, our employee surveys have noted:

- **2.85 x** improvement in the area of work-life balance
- **5.33 x** improvement in providing adequate compensation
- **1.22 x** improvement in overall employee recognition
- **1.73 x** improvement in the effectiveness of our internal employee communications efforts

## Recognition and Awards

Continuously striving to be a world-class employer, WE has been recognized with 16 national and international awards for impact and culture—recognized twice by Waterstone Human Capital as one of Canada’s Top 10 Most Admired Corporate Cultures, and selected three times as a Top Employer for Young People. Our ME to WE social enterprise is a Certified B Corporation, recognized for our positive impacts when it comes to governance, our workers, community, environment and our customers.

In receiving these awards, along with many others, the organization has undergone a variety of culture, HR, financial and management evaluations in a rigorous, independent and non-biased manner.



Interbrand Iconic Canadian Brands 2017



Good Housekeeping Humanitarian Seal 2017



MoneySense 2017 “The Charity 100” 2017



Canada’s 10 Most Admired Corporate Cultures 2016



Canada’s Most Admired CEO 2015



B Corp Certification 2015



Canada’s 10 Most Admired Corporate Cultures 2013



Notable – Canada’s Top 5 Charities Run by Young Professionals 2013



Canada’s Top Employers for Young People 2013



Canada’s Top Employers for Young People 2012



Canada’s Top Employers for Young People 2011



Ernst and Young Entrepreneur of the Year, 2008



World Economic Form, 2008



Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship, 2007



Roosevelt Freedom Medal, 1998



State of the World Forum Award, 1997

# What does inappropriate behavior look like?

WE upholds all 17 of the prohibited grounds for discrimination, as defined by the Occupational Health and Safety Act and the Ontario Human Rights Commission, including those listed below.

**Discrimination** is the act of treating individuals differently, negatively or adversely based on any one or combination of these and other grounds:

- ✘ age
- ✘ creed (religion)
- ✘ sex
- ✘ sexual orientation
- ✘ gender identity and expression
- ✘ family status
- ✘ marital status
- ✘ ethnic origin

**Harassment** consists of comments or conduct that is known, or ought reasonably to be known, to be unwelcome. It can involve words or actions that are known or should be known to be offensive, embarrassing, humiliating, intimidating, demeaning or unwelcome. Harassment can occur on any of the grounds of discrimination identified by this policy. Harassment can consist of a single incident or several incidents over a period of time.

Examples of harassment, sexual harassment and psychological harassment include, but are not limited to, the following:

- ✘ Unwelcome labels, nicknames, remarks, jokes or innuendos
- ✘ Display or circulation of offensive pictures, graffiti or materials, whether in print form or via e-mail or other electronic means
- ✘ Singling out an individual for humiliating or demeaning “teasing” or jokes because they are a member of a protected group
- ✘ Unwelcome remarks or jokes about a person’s body, attire, sex or sexual orientation
- ✘ Unwelcome sexual flirtations, advances, propositions and comments about a person’s sex life
- ✘ Excluding or isolating someone socially
- ✘ Undermining or deliberately impeding a person’s work
- ✘ Stalking, intimidation or bullying

# What happens next?

*In the case where an issue is raised, WE acts promptly to investigate. Our process to investigate is as follows:*

- Employee expresses their concern to either their manager, member of the HR team or an Executive, or anonymously through our secure WE Connect online portal.
- A member of the HR team is appointed as the investigator.
- A full investigation is completed—this means that we meet with the person who is making the complaint, any other employees who may have been witness to the incidents and the person whom the complaint is about.
- All accounts of the incidents are documented.
- Once completed, the investigation notes and assessment are provided to the Chief People Officer, who works with relevant groups to determine if any disciplinary action is required.
- The process is completed to the highest standards of confidentiality and all parties are protected in the process.





## Child and youth protection

Although this Guide focuses on the HR and Culture practices at WE that promote a safe and comfortable workplace environment for all team members, given the nature of what we do—WE is a youth-empowerment organization—it’s also important to highlight our Child and Youth Protection Policy. It has been drafted with the assistance of the renowned organization [Plan to Protect®](#), which is recognized as having the highest standard of abuse prevention and vulnerable sector protection. Our policy ensures that WE is honoring its responsibilities as an organization entrusted with the safety and well-being of children and youth involved in its programming. We are proud to hold ourselves to the highest standard of child protection and to work toward becoming the safest organization for youth to engage with.

The WE Charity Child and Youth Protection Committee consults with independent third party experts to support further policy development and to develop recommendations in the event of an incident.

### How is WE implementing its Child and Youth Protection Policy?

All frontline representatives of WE—including staff, executives and key volunteers—were required to take a mandatory training course on the Child and Youth Protection Policy when it was implemented in 2017. All incoming new WE team members are required to read and sign our Code of Conduct, and to complete the mandatory Child and Youth Protection Training Course during their first week with WE. This training covers the proper policies and procedures necessary to ensure the safety of children and youth enrolled in WE programming. Subjects include, but are not limited to:

- how to identify signs of abuse;
- how to mitigate risk at WE Day, Take Action Camp and on Trips;
- when and to whom one should report a safety issue;
- what constitutes appropriate conduct when engaging with youth enrolled in WE programming.

To ensure ongoing awareness of the policy, all WE representatives must re-certify annually by re-completing the mandatory training.

Staff who will be in contact with child and youth program participants undergo a rigorous screening process prior to employment, including reference checks, police background and vulnerable sector checks, and signing WE’s Code of Conduct.

The WE Child and Youth Protection Committee meets quarterly to review the policy and training, and ensure implementation. The Child and Youth Protection Policy is reviewed every two years by the WE Charity Board of Directors.

### Third-Party Commendation

*“WE.org deeply cares about the vulnerable sector that they serve and at Plan to Protect® we have observed that they want to do everything they can to protect the children and young people in their events, trips and programs!*

*“Partnering with Plan to Protect® is one way that WE.org demonstrates their commitment to protection, show care to their volunteers and staff, prevent abuse, and demonstrate accountability, transparency, and integrity. We have partnered with WE.org to establish policies, training and screening protocols. WE.org is making great strides to achieve the HIGHEST STANDARD of abuse prevention and protection.”*

*~ Melodie Bissell, President, Plan to Protect®*



WE is a certified member of Plan to Protect®, which provides the highest standard of abuse prevention and protection to organizations serving the vulnerable sector globally.

# WE is committed to the highest standards

Our People Operations and Culture team ensures that WE is not only in compliance with labor laws and industry standards for compensation and benefits, but also strives every day to exceed those standards and to provide a rewarding work environment for our incredible team of change-makers. We strive to cultivate a safe space for each and every one of our employees to live and work.

We are constantly looking for ways to create a two-way dialogue between our leaders and employees. Employees can send through any concerns anonymously through our WE Connect secure online portal. This mailbox is monitored by our Internal Communications team and concerns are answered promptly. Employees are encouraged to also share concerns with their manager, Executive or a member of the People Operations and Culture Team. WE has an open door policy. The Chief People Officer is the point of escalation for any concerns.

Every year, we listen to and learn from our employees in order to improve the experience and make our culture even better through our company-wide anonymous employee engagement survey—managed by an external third party. We survey our employees after three months of employment, and with quarterly pulse surveys and annual engagement surveys.



## Reporting issues of concern

WE seeks to create a safe space for our staff to come to us with any concern, from workplace bullying, inappropriate dialogue, bigotry and intolerance of all kinds, to harassment.

Our policies provide for employees' ability to raise concerns about health and safety, or any issue, in any one or combination of these ways:

- by reporting to their manager
- by reporting to another manager
- by reporting directly to the Chief People Officer
- by reporting anonymously through our secure online WE Connect internal communications platform



WE.org