

Complaints Policy The Family Works 2024/25

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1. Introduction

We recognise that our clients and all those who work with The Family Works or take part in any of our work or activities have the right to expect high quality services. However, we also appreciate that from time to time there may be occasions when users of our services feel that the quality or level of service provided falls short of what they could reasonably expect.

Your continued goodwill is greatly valued by us and we would expect to resolve any day to day difficulties or complaints informally and as quickly as possible. In the first instance we would ask you to raise any complaint directly with the Link Worker concerned. If their response does not meet expected standards, then you have the right to complain.

A complaint is a written or verbal expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet about an action, or lack of action by a person acting on behalf of The Family Works, or about the policies and procedures of The Family Works.

We will consider any complaint using the procedures set out below.

The complaint could be about:

- conduct of our staff/volunteers,
- the standard or sort of service we provide,
- discrimination,
- provision of inaccurate information, or
- poor administration including delays in responding to enquiries.

2. Scope of this policy

- To protect the interests of all families working with The Family Works
- To protect the interests of all agencies working in partnership with The Family Works
- To improve the quality of services we provide by responding to the views and needs of people affected
- To enable clients/partners to propose improvements to our ways of working
- To protect staff/volunteers of The Family Works
- To provide a means of monitoring our performance.

The staff/volunteers and all Trustees should be familiar with the process.

If a complaint or grievance relates to or includes an allegation that a child or adult who may be vulnerable has been harmed or is at risk of harm, or that an adult or another child may have caused harm to a child or adult who may be vulnerable, it must be responded to through safeguarding procedures set out by The Family Works.

All complaints should be recorded by the Chief Executive Officer in the appropriate file, and kept with the Trustees minutes. Details should include the nature of the complaint and the date received, the process followed and the action taken and the outcomes including further follow-up.

The CEO will keep the Trustees informed of the number and nature of complaints, and the outcomes. She will report to the Trustees on this at least annually.

3. When this Policy does Not Apply

Anonymous communications will be disregarded as concerns received by the CEO and anyone else connected in any way with the Trustees and The Family Works.

At each Trustees meeting, a standing agenda item of Correspondence will enable the Chair of Trustees to report any concerns received from the CEO. If the CEO considers any of those concerns to be abusive, malicious, vexatious or frivolous, the Trustees and CEO together will decide if any are to be disregarded. Even if that happens, the concern has still been reported and minuted as part of the Trustee meeting. For these (or such) sensitive matters, the Trustees can declare items as a 'confidential minute', which means they are minuted in a separate document. While both the Minutes and the Confidential Minutes are filed together in the Family Works electronic system, only the Minutes are publicly available.

Minuting such matters is important because it may later show a pattern either for the Trustees or the CEO, or for the pastoral care of individual or individuals concerned, which may require further work if any are to be disregarded.

4. Raising Your Concern Informally

Step 1 - Informal Procedure

The aim always, when responding to complaints and grievances, is to enable them to be resolved informally, speedily and fairly by mutual discussion.

- The person making the complaint should in the first instance speak to the person(s) deemed responsible for the area of dissatisfaction or disquiet, which will hopefully be resolved in this way.
- A note should be agreed at the end of the discussion, summarising the complaint, the date and who was involved and the agreed outcome, and passed to a Link Worker/Senior Link Worker to ensure lessons are learned by The Family Works.
- Up to four weeks from the event giving rise to your concern will be regarded as a reasonable period of time.
- No more than four weeks should be allocated to trying to find a solution, and wherever possible we would seek to resolve the concern within two weeks.
- If the complainant is still not satisfied, they should move to Step 2: The Formal Procedure.

5. Raising Your Concern Formally

Step 2 - Formal Procedure

- The complaint should be made in writing (or by email), marked 'confidential', to the CEO who will acknowledge, in writing (or by email), within ten working days, the receipt of the complaint. If the complaint is about the CEO, the complaint should be addressed to the Chair of Trustees.
- Provide your full name and address.
- State that you are raising a Formal Concern.
- Set out your concern with details to include names of people, places and dates relevant to the nature of the concern. Any supporting documents should be attached.
- State what steps have been taken to resolve the concern informally.
- State what you would regard as a satisfactory resolution to your concern.
- The receiver of the complaint will investigate the circumstances leading to the complaint and will communicate the results of the investigation to the complainant within a reasonable time – normally within 20 working days of the complaint being received. If the investigation includes a meeting with the complainant, s/he may be accompanied or supported by a friend, but not a legal representative.
- If the complaint is found to be justified, the investigator will agree any necessary further action with the complainant.
- A note should be agreed at that point, summarising the complaint, the date and who was involved and the agreed outcome to ensure lessons are learned by The Family Works
- If the complainant is still not satisfied, they should move to Step 3: Appeal.

6. Appeal

Step 3 - Appeal.

- If the complainant is still dissatisfied at the end of stage 2 they will defer to a panel of Trustees who have not been involved in the earlier stages of the complaint process. It's important to ensure that those involved have no conflicts of interest and can objectively evaluate the appeal.

7. Right of Reply

The person or persons about whom the concern has been raised must be permitted a right of reply. In order to provide for such a right of reply, that person or persons must have a copy of the communication containing the Formal concern.

If the communication includes your postal address, email address or other communication details, these will be blanked out from the copy the person(s) sees. The Trustees file will be the official record of proceedings.

The procedures, dates and time frames set out above shall apply to and be provided for that person or persons.

8. Initial Contact

If you have a complaint, contact:

Andrea Liversidge
Chief Executive Officer
The Campus,
Packhorse Lane,
High Green,
Sheffield,
S35 3HY

Email: andrea@thefamilyworks.co.uk

When your complaint cannot be resolved

Where we have exhausted all avenues and the complainant is still dissatisfied, they may contact the Charity Commission as follows:

<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-charity>

Signed.....

Appendix 1

Mediation

What is mediation?

Mediation is a well-established process for resolving disagreements in which an impartial third party (the mediator) helps people in dispute to find a mutually acceptable resolution.

(HM Court Services definition)

Reconciliation involves clarification of what has happened, how it is perceived by the other person and acknowledgement of the depth of anger and hurt. Reconciliation, for

both parties, involves the rebuilding of damaged relationships.

Agreeing to participate in mediation does not deprive the office holder of the right to pursue a matter further via the grievance procedure.

Principles

- Mediation should not be seen as committing people in advance to whatever the outcome of the process is, but does require willingness by all concerned to participate in trying to find a mutually acceptable solution
- The emphasis is on collaborative problem solving between those in dispute - 'win/win'
- Mediation is a voluntary process
- Unlike arbitration, the third party has no power to impose or even formally recommend a solution
- The focus is on the future - rebuilding relationships rather than apportioning blame
- It acknowledges feelings as well as facts, in order to allow participants to let go of anger/upset and move forward.

Mediation works by

- giving those involved an opportunity to step back and think about how they could put the situation right
- encouraging participants to be aware of the need to look at their own behaviour as well as that of other people
- enabling participants to come up with their own practical solution
- allowing people to rebuild relationships as they work together to find an agreement.

Mediation is most likely to work when

- it is used early on
- those in dispute are willing to take part and want it to work
- those in dispute are prepared to be open and honest
- those in dispute are willing to consider continuing to have a relationship in the future.

Mediation should not be used to divert an office holder into accepting a compromise in a situation where their grievance takes the form of a specific accusation of unacceptable conduct (such as bullying or discriminatory behaviour) and where disciplinary examination of that person's actions would be appropriate.

Mediation works less well when

- people feel coerced into taking part
- there has been a low level of trust over a long period of time
- there is an abuse of power
- the mediator is not seen by the parties as impartial
- where there are systemic problems.

Resources

- Bridge Builders – Mennonite Model
- Church Disputes Mediation by James Behrens (Gracewing 2003)
- trained mediators already available
- www.acas.org.uk

Appendix 2

Suggested checklist for holding a stage three hearing

1. Written submission of case and witness statements should be made available to the parties as soon as reasonably possible and in good time before the meeting.
2. The office holder and the person accompanying him or her should state his/her case and call any witnesses. Witnesses will remain outside the meeting room unless they are giving evidence.
3. The person or group conducting the hearing ('the adjudicator(s)'), and the respondent and the person accompanying him or her may question any witnesses.
4. The office holder and the person accompanying him or her may re-examine his/her witnesses on any matters referred to in their examination by the adjudicator(s) or the respondent.
5. The respondent and the person accompanying him or her shall be entitled to reply to the office holder's case and may call witnesses.
6. The adjudicator(s), the office holder and the person accompanying him or her may question the respondent's witnesses.
7. The respondent and the person accompanying him or her may re-examine his/her witnesses on any matters referred to in their examination by the adjudicator(s) or the office holder.
8. The adjudicator(s) may at any time in the hearing ask either party to elucidate or

amplify any statement made. The adjudicator(s) can also call other witnesses or persons to give evidence or clarify a point.

9. The adjudicator(s) may, at their discretion, adjourn a hearing in order for either party to produce further evidence.

10. The adjudicator(s) shall fully consider the grievance in private in the light of any relevant conditions of service and any further advice which they may seek on questions of interpretation of conditions of service etc.

11. The decision shall be communicated in writing to both parties and, where appropriate, representatives as soon as possible and in any event normally within seven working days after the hearing.

12. If the office holder or the respondent to the grievance fails to attend the hearing, the adjudicator(s) may consider the appeal in the absence of that party, except where there is an adjournment by consent, or the adjudicator(s) decide in their discretion that it would be reasonable to adjourn. In the event of such an adjournment, the adjudicator(s) should, in fixing a new date, as far as practicable, have regard to the convenience of the office holder.