

COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE GUIDE

When implementing any procedures or policies which I would elect to use to use as 'working documents', rather than something put away in a Manual to be used when you need it only to find it does not 'fit'. As an organisational guideline, an outline or skeletal policy may assist in managing the situation, however at a local level each workplace should have a sub-policy which has been put together collaboratively on site through consultation with the wider community. This is the 'best practice' in action.

I invite you to take a quick look at this overview and read 'A Good Practice Guide for Effective Complaint Handling' from the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office.'

PLANNING

- Organisational support
- Consultation
- Training
- Reference materials
- Working environment

DO YOU HAVE?

- Commitment
- Fairness
- Access
- Responsiveness
- Effectiveness
- Openness & Accountability

CONSULTATION PROCESS

Management – colleagues – other staff – clients

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STRUCTURE

All avenues of redress internally and externally

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TIERED OR STAGES APPROACH

Complaint Entry Point

- rights and responsibilities (clients/staff)
 - fair treatment
 - timely, accurate advice
 - privacy and safety
 - reasons for decisions
 - service standards
- clear complaints procedures and guidelines
 - removal of barriers to access
 - meeting special needs

Front line complaint handling

- clear lines of accountability and authority
 - rights and responsibilities
 - minimal contact people in process
 - clear, unbiased documentation
- transparent communication and data collection

Internal investigation

- as outlined in front line complaint handling
 - details
- where, when and how the complaint was received
 - description of complaint
 - how it was dealt with and by whom
 - what the outcome was and
 - when the client was informed
 - any further action / follow up as required

External referral

- rights and responsibilities

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RESOURCES

Trained, impartial staff

Relevant legislation

Up to date, clear and unbiased documentation

Organisational support

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CHECK LIST

Do you have?

Clear documentation

Clear guidelines and standards

Environment where staff feel empowered

Training and resourcing

Continuity and competence

System of collection of data and information

Identification of systemic weaknesses / strengths

Review and Feedback

Accountability

Continuous improvement

Staff satisfaction

Client satisfaction

No agency or organisation will ever be free of complaints or grievances as they are tools for measuring effectiveness and responsiveness. The community sector has an added responsibility, in that not all clients will agree with the action taken by the worker. That is absolutely acceptable and an acceptable way for managing that situation is where a good complaints handling system can be worth it's weight in gold.