

Complaints Handling Policy

Purpose

This policy is intended to ensure that we handle complaints fairly, efficiently and effectively. This policy provides guidance to our employees/contractors/volunteers and people who wish to make a complaint on the key principles and concepts of our complaint management system. It aims to ensure that complaints and subsequent outcomes of associated investigations are used to drive continuous improvement activities and the organisation’s ongoing commitment to quality.

Introduction

Communities at Work welcomes client/customer complaints as important feedback on the organisation’s performance. The information collected through the complaints management system is used by the organisation to identify, monitor, and facilitate continuous improvement opportunities and ultimately improve the quality of services and outcomes for its clients.

Communities at Work provides a range of services through our Program Areas:

1. Children’s Services including:
 - a. Early Childhood Education and Care
 - b. Out of School Hours Care (OSHC)
 - c. School Holiday Programs (SHP)
 - d. Family Day Care, and
 - e. In Home Care
2. Galilee Special Assistance Independent School
3. Seniors and Transport Services
4. Disability Services
5. Housing and Community Services
6. Centre for Professional Learning – Registered RTO

This range and diversity of services and functions brings Communities at Work, its employees, volunteers and contractors into contact with large sections of the ACT community. Despite intentions and aspirations of excellence in practice, customer service and service delivery, it is inevitable that the various programs of Communities at Work will from time to time receive complaints from individuals within the community.

This policy supports The National Quality Framework, Standards for RTOs 2015, National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) (Complaints Management and Resolution) Rules 2018, Aged Care Quality Standards – Standard 6, Education Act 2004, and was developed in accordance with AS 10002:2022 provides a compliance point of reference for the reader.

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Authorisation

This policy shall be endorsed and issued under the authority of the Chief Executive Officer.

Policy

Guiding Principles

Our complaint handling system is modelled on the principles of fairness, accessibility, responsiveness, efficiency and integration into organisational culture.



Enabling Complaints

People focus

We are committed to seeking and receiving feedback and complaints about our services, systems, practices, procedures, products and complaint handling.

Any concerns raised in feedback or complaints will be dealt with within a reasonable time frame (as in AS/NZ 10002).

People making complaints will be:

- provided with information about our complaint handling process and how to access it
- listened to, treated with respect by employees/volunteers/contractors and actively involved in the complaint process where possible and appropriate, and
- provided with reasons for our decision/s and any options for redress or review.

No detriment to people making complaints

Complainants have the right to be without fear of judgment, punishment or service diminution as a consequence of lodging a complaint. We will take all reasonable steps to ensure that people making complaints are not adversely affected because a complaint has been made by them or on their behalf.

Anonymous complaints

We accept anonymous complaints if there is a compelling reason to do so and will carry out a confidential investigation of the issues raised where there is enough information provided. Whilst action may be taken dependent on the investigation, anonymous complaints will not be provided with a response.

Accessibility

We will ensure that information about how and where complaints may be made to or about us is well publicised on our website. We will ensure that our systems to manage complaints are easily understood and accessible to everyone, particularly people who may require assistance.

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If a person prefers or needs another person or organisation to assist or represent them in the making and/ or resolution of their complaint, we will communicate with them through their representative if this is their wish. Anyone may represent a person wishing to make a complaint with their consent (e.g. advocate, family member, legal or community representative, member of Parliament, another organisation).

No charges

A complainant will not be charged a fee to complain.

Guiding principles

In managing its complaints, Communities at Work will ensure the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness are met in the process of addressing the complaint

Managing Complaints

Early resolution

Where possible, complaints will be resolved at first contact with us.

When appropriate we may offer an explanation or apology to the person making the complaint.

Responsiveness

All complaints received will be recorded and tracked via the Complaints Management System

We will promptly acknowledge receipt of complaints.

We will assess and prioritise complaints in accordance with the urgency and/or seriousness of the issues raised. If a matter concerns an immediate risk to safety or security the response will be immediate and will be escalated appropriately.

We are committed to managing people’s expectations, and will inform them as soon as possible, of the following:

- the complaints process
- the expected time frames for our actions
- the progress of the complaint and reasons for any delay
- their likely involvement in the process, and
- the possible or likely outcome of their complaint, if appropriate to do so.

We will advise people as soon as possible when we are unable to deal with any part of their complaint and provide advice about where such issues and/or complaints may be directed (if known and appropriate).

We will also advise people as soon as possible when we are unable to meet our time frames for responding to their complaint and the reason for our delay.

Where Communities at Work considers more than 60 calendar days are required to process and finalise the complaint or appeal, Communities at Work:

- a) informs the complainant or appellant in writing, including reasons why more than 60 calendar days are required; and
- b) regularly updates the complainant or appellant on the progress of the matter.

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Objectivity and fairness

We will address each complaint with integrity and in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner.

We will ensure that the person handling a complaint is different from any employee/volunteer member whose conduct or service is being complained about.

Conflicts of interest, whether actual or perceived, will be managed responsibly. In particular, internal reviews of how a complaint was managed will be conducted by a person other than the original decision maker.

Complaints about employees/volunteers

If a complaint involves allegations about a member of the Communities at Work workforce including employees, volunteers or contractors:

- The complaint will be acknowledged and referred to the appropriate area of Communities at Work for action. Several options will be considered depending on seriousness of the complaint
- Primary consideration will be given to ensuring compliance with the current Communities at Work Enterprise Agreement arrangements relating to management of employee misconduct complaints and application of relevant disciplinary procedures
- Communities at Work will investigate the complaint in accordance with the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness and in a manner that promotes the values of Communities at Work
- Any other issues identified in the complaint will be considered separately from the employee/contractor or volunteer complaint and a response about those issues will be provided within the required timeframe
- It is possible that the complainant may be contacted and asked to provide additional information by an investigator appointed by Communities at Work
- In recognition of privacy requirements, it may not be possible to advise the person making the complaint of the specific outcome of the complaint about the employee, contractor or volunteer
- Communities at Work employees/contractors/volunteers implicated/named in complaints have the right to respond to allegations made against them and be notified of the outcome of the complaint.

Responding flexibly

Our employees are empowered to resolve complaints promptly and with as little formality as possible. We will adopt flexible approaches to service delivery and problem solving to enhance accessibility for people making complaints and/or their representatives.

We will assess each complaint on its merits and involve people making complaints and/or their representative in the process as far as possible.

Confidentiality

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We will protect the identity of people making complaints where this is practical and appropriate.

Personal information that identifies individuals will only be disclosed or used by us as permitted under the relevant privacy laws, secrecy provisions and any relevant confidentiality obligations.

Manage the parties to a complaint

Complaints involving multiple agencies

Where a complaint involves multiple organisations, we will work with the other organisation/s where possible, to ensure that communication with the person making a complaint and/or their representative is clear and coordinated.

Subject to privacy and confidentiality considerations, communication and information sharing between the parties will also be organised to facilitate a timely response to the complaint.

Where a complaint involves multiple areas within our organisation, responsibility for communicating with the person making the complaint and/or their representative will also be coordinated.

Where our services are contracted out, we expect contracted service providers to have an accessible and comprehensive complaint management system. We take complaints not only about the actions of our employee/contractor/volunteer but also the actions of our service providers.

Empowerment of employees

All employees managing complaints are empowered to implement our complaint management system as relevant to their role and responsibilities.

Employees are encouraged to provide feedback on the effectiveness and efficiency of all aspects of our complaint management system.

Managing unreasonable conduct by people making complaints

We are committed to being accessible and responsive to all people who approach us with feedback or complaints. At the same time our success depends on:

- our ability to do our work and perform our functions in the most effective and efficient way possible
- the health, safety and security of our employees/contractors/volunteers, and
- our ability to allocate our resources fairly across all the complaints we receive.

When people behave unreasonably in their dealings with us, their conduct can significantly affect the progress and efficiency of our work. As a result, we will take proactive and decisive action to manage any conduct that negatively and unreasonably affects us and will support our employees to do the same in accordance with this policy.

Unreasonable conduct includes:

- **Unreasonable persistence** – This includes refusal to accept a final decision and persisting with issues despite advice they have been fully considered and no further action will be taken.
- **Unreasonable demands** – This includes insisting outcomes that are unattainable, changing the objectives of the process or demanding to have a matter dealt with in a particular way.

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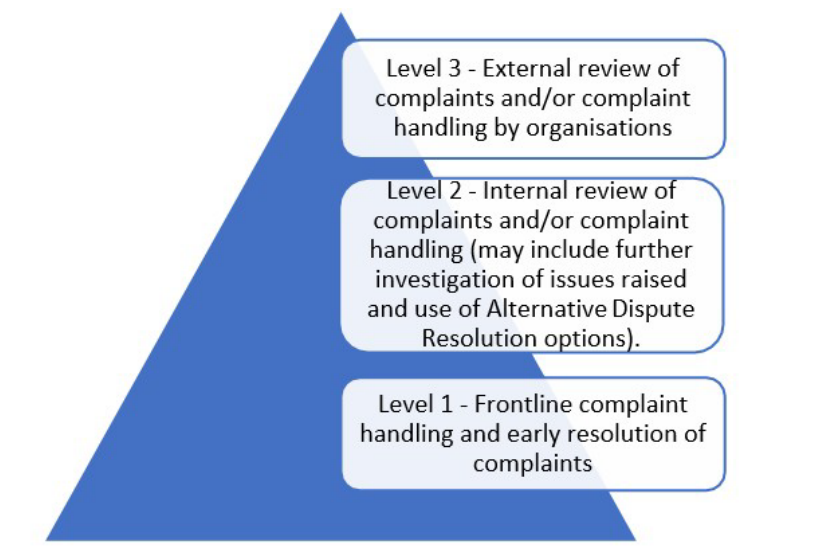
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- **Unreasonable lack of cooperation** – This includes providing disorganised, excessive or irrelevant information, an unwillingness to consider other viewpoints, or a refusal to define issues of concern.
- **Unreasonable arguments** – This includes irrational cause and effect arguments, holding conspiracy theories unsupported by evidence or illogically interpreting facts or laws.
- **Unreasonable behaviour** – This includes extreme anger, aggression, threats or other violent conduct.

Alternative avenues for dealing with complaints

We will inform people who make complaints to or about us about any internal or external review options available to them (including any relevant Ombudsman or oversight regulatory bodies).

The three levels of complaint handling



Level 1

We aim to resolve complaints at the first level, the frontline. Wherever possible employees will be adequately equipped to respond to complaints, including being given appropriate authority, training and supervision. Depending on the nature of the complaint and the relevant program area, reporting to regulatory authorities may be required.

Level 2

Where this is not possible, we may decide to escalate the complaint to a more senior officer within our organisation. This second level of complaint handling will provide for the following internal mechanisms:

- assessment and possible investigation of the complaint and decision/s already made, and/or
- facilitated resolution (where a person not connected with the complaint reviews the matter and attempts to find an outcome acceptable to the relevant parties).

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Level 3

Where a person making a complaint is dissatisfied with the outcome of our review of their complaint, they may seek an external review of our decision.

In the event a complaint cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant, Communities at Work will provide the complainant with contact information for external complaints processes.

Accountability and learning

Analysis and evaluation of complaints

We will ensure that complaints are recorded in a systematic way so that information can be easily retrieved for reporting and analysis by the Executive and the Board of Directors.

We will run regular reports on:

- the number of complaints received
- the outcome of complaints, including matters resolved at the frontline
- issues arising from complaints
- systemic issues identified, and
- the number of requests we receive for internal and/or external review of our complaint handling.

Regular analysis of these reports will be undertaken to monitor trends, measure the quality of our customer service and make improvements.

Both reports and their analysis will be provided to our CEO, senior management and to our Board of Directors for review, at least annually.

Monitoring of the complaint management system

We will continually monitor our complaint management system to:

- ensure its effectiveness in responding to and resolving complaints
- identify and correct deficiencies in the operation of the system, and
- monitoring may include the use of audits, complaint satisfaction surveys and online listening tools and alerts.

Continuous improvement

We are committed to improving the way our organisation operates, including our management of the effectiveness and efficiency of our complaint management system. To this end, we will:

- support the making and appropriate resolution of complaints
- implement best practices in complaint handling
- recognise and reward exemplary complaint handling by employees
- regularly review the complaint management system and complaint data, and
- implement appropriate system changes arising out of our analysis of complaints data and continual monitoring of the system.

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Definitions

Complaint	<p>An expression of dissatisfaction made to or about us, our services, employee/volunteer or the handling of a complaint where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required. (AS/NZ 10002:2022)</p> <p>As well as complaints being made directly to our organisation, remember that some complaints (or at least negative comments) made be made on social media.</p>
Complaint handling/ management system	All policies, procedures, practices, employees/volunteers, hardware and software used by us in the management of complaints.
Dispute	An unresolved complaint escalated either within or outside of our organisation.
Feedback	Opinions, comments and expressions of interest or concern, made directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, to or about us, about our services or complaint handling system where a response is not explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.
Grievance	A clear, formal written statement by an individual employee/volunteer about another employee/volunteer a work-related problem.
Policy	A statement of instruction that sets out how we should fulfil our vision, mission and goals.
Procedure	A statement or instruction that sets out how our policies will be implemented and by whom.
Natural Justice	Natural justice requires that a person receive a fair and unbiased hearing before a decision is made that will negatively affect them
Procedural Fairness	Procedural fairness is about providing a person who might be adversely affected by a decision a 'fair hearing' before the decision is made.
Unreasonable conduct	Any behaviour by a complainant which, because of its nature or frequency, raise substantial health, safety, resource or equity issues for people involved in the complaint process

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Responsibilities

Communities at Work expects employees/contractors/volunteers at all levels to be committed to fair, effective and efficient complaint handling. The following outlines the nature of the commitment expected from employees/contractors/volunteers and the way that commitment should be implemented.

CEO and Executive:

- Report to the Communities at Work Board on our complaint handling.
- Provide adequate support and direction to key employees responsible for handling complaints.
- Regularly review reports about complaint trends and issues arising from complaints.
- Encourage all employees/contractors/volunteers to be alert to complaints and assist those responsible for handling complaints to resolve them promptly.
- Encourage employees/contractor/volunteers to make recommendations for system improvements.
- Support recommendations for service, employees/contractors/volunteers and complaint handling improvements arising from the analysis of complaint data.

Line managers or delegate:

- Treat all people with respect, including people who make complaints.
- Assist people to make a complaint, if needed.
- Comply with our policy and associated procedures.
- Provide regular feedback to management and/or the governing body on issues arising from complaints.
- Provide suggestions to management on ways to improve our complaints management system.
- Implement changes arising from individual complaints and from the analysis of complaint data as directed by management.

Employee/Contractor/Volunteer:

- Treat all people with respect, including people who make complaints.
- Be aware of our complaint handling policies and procedures.
- Assist people who wish to make complaints access our complaints process.
- Be alert to complaints and assist employees handling complaints resolve matters promptly.

Related Documents:

1. ORG-QMS-POL-001 Purpose, Mission and Values
2. ORG-QMS-POL-006 Quality Management System Policy
3. ORG-QMS-POL-009 Records Management Policy
4. ORG-QMS-POL-010 Management Responsibilities, Review and Planning
5. ORG-QMS-POL-023 Continuous Improvement Policy
6. ORG-QMS-POL-025 Risk Management Policy
7. ORG-QMS-POL-029 Governing Legislation Listing Policy
8. ORG-QMS-PRO-001 Complaints Management Policy
9. ORG-QMS-POL-060 Grievance Management Policy
10. ORG-QMS-PRO-004 Corrective and Preventative Action Procedure
11. ORG-QMS-PRO-007 Incident Reporting Procedure
12. ORG-QMS-PRO-001 Complaints Management Procedure

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References

1. AS 10002:2022 Guidelines for complaints handling in organizations
2. ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management System
3. ISO 3100: 2018 Risk Management
4. ISO 45001: 2018 Occupational Health and Safety
5. AS ISO/IEC 27004:2018 Information Security Management
6. Human Rights Act 2004 (ACT)
7. National Quality Framework (NQF)
8. National Quality Standard (NQS)
9. Education Act 2004 (ACT)
10. Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015
11. National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) (Complaints Management and Resolution) Rules 2018
12. Aged Care Quality Standards – Standard 6 Feedback and Complaints

Document Contact

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Review Specifications

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Written/reviewed by	Authorised for release by	Version number
Michelle Colefax	Michelle Colefax	5.1
SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZING PERSON		
VERSION HISTORY		
Version:	Date of Effect:	Brief Summary of Change:
V1	01/12/2012	Initial policy draft - KM
	08/01/2013	Draft reviewed and updated with extensive revisions - LG
	11/04/2013	Updated to align with CCS ad NQF standards - KJ
	24/05/2013	Draft for circulation, comment Early Childhood and ADO Programs
V2	10/10/2013	Document format changed to facilitate document control procedures e.g. traceability
V3	23/07/2015	Review of Document
V4	01/08/2018	Review and reissued
V4.1	16/02/2021	Annual review, typos fixed
V5	05/05/2023	Full policy rewrite in accordance with AS 10002:2022

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