



## **Feedback and Complaints Policy**

### **Policy Statement**

Christians Together Calderdale (CTC) welcomes positive and negative feedback, recognising that it not only enhances our ability to provide an effective service, but also enables us to build and maintain relationships with people and groups on whom the charity depends.

CTC will proactively collect feedback about our services and work in creative and varied ways appropriate to our client groups. This allows us to listen to and learn from their experiences, helping to shape future development and planning. CTC is committed to dealing with complaints in a fair, transparent and timely manner recognising the benefit of having a clearly defined process. Details on how feedback can be given and the process for making a complaint should be provided to new service users.

This policy covers complaints made by service users, funders, supporters, partners and other third parties. It does not cover complaints made by volunteers or staff members who are covered in the Volunteer and Staff Grievance Policies. This policy is based on the good practise recommended in Charities Commission RS11 Cause for Complaints (How charities manage complaints about their services) Report.

### **Responsibilities**

**The Trustees** have the ultimate responsibility for managing feedback and complaints, but the responsibility may be delegated to others within the charity. Specific responsibilities should be detailed on role descriptions. Trustees may get involved with dealing with complaints if they have not been resolved within projects.

**Project management** teams are responsible for collecting and reporting feedback and complaints to the trustees as required and it should be included on management team meeting agendas on a routine basis. Management teams are responsible for dealing with any complaints made in writing to them.

**Each member of staff and volunteer** has the responsibility of handling any complaints in line with the steps outlined in this policy and reporting to their management team.

### **Feedback**

As a charity it is vital that we listen to those who use our services and give them the opportunity to feed back to us their views and opinions (both positive and negative) on the services that we provide. This gives us the opportunity to engage in a constructive and effective way, allowing service users to have a voice in shaping our services and planning future provision. It may also be necessary to collate feedback for funders or other bodies requiring information about our service provision.

There are many different and creative ways of obtaining feedback and each project is encouraged to find ways that suit them, their users and their current requirements. Some suggestions are:

- Surveys
- User forums or focus groups
- Collecting anecdotes/stories
- Informally asking for opinions
- Happy/sad face charts

### **Complaints**

A complaint is described as “an expression of dissatisfaction about the standards of service provided by a charity, which an individual user or group of users claim has affected them.” It should be recognised that in some instances complaints aren’t always described as such and it may be that if someone asks for a quiet word or chat about a concern or worry, it should still be dealt with as a complaint.

Any complaint made should follow the stages below, escalating if unable to resolve:

- 1. Informal complaint given verbally or in writing to a staff member or volunteer**
- 2. Complaint in writing/email to the management team of the project**
- 3. Formally in writing to the Secretary to the Trustees**

### **1. Informal initial complaint**

Complaints should ideally be dealt with where they have first arisen and in most cases can be resolved informally by the member of staff or volunteer to whom the complaint is made. It should be recognised that feelings can run high with people who are in need or feel passionate about a cause and volunteer/ staff members should remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation and if necessary allow another member of staff or volunteer to get involved.

The following steps should be taken:

- Listen and show an interest in what is being said - allow the person to talk about the complaint in their own words. Sometimes a person just wants to "let off steam"
- Don't debate the facts in the first instance, especially if the person is angry
- Obtain details about the complaint first then any personal details
- Ask for clarification wherever necessary and show that you have understood the complaint by reflecting back what you have noted down
- Acknowledge the person's feelings (even if you feel that they are being unreasonable) - you can do this without making a comment on the complaint itself or making any admission of fault on behalf of CTC e.g. "I understand that this situation is frustrating for you"
- If you feel that an apology is deserved for something that was the responsibility of CTC, then apologise
- Ask the person what they would like done to resolve the issue
- Be clear about what you can do, how long it will take and what it will involve. Don't promise things you can't deliver
- Give clear and valid reasons why requests cannot be met
- Make sure that the person understands what they have been told
- If they feel that the complaint has not been resolved advise on next steps i.e. to put it in writing to the Management team. If they are unable to do this themselves, someone could do it on their behalf (this could be another volunteer).
- Pass on your notes to the management team whether resolved or not, detailing what action has already been taken to ensure any changes in procedures are undertaken by the rest of the team.

### **2. Complaint in writing to Management Team**

Where a complaint has not been able to be resolved in the first stage or the complainant thought it was serious enough to complain in writing to the management team of a project, it should be dealt with as follows:

- Swift acknowledgement in writing of the complaint advising on what the next steps are and the timescales involved
- An investigation into the events leading to complaint, this may include interviews with the person making the complaint, the person who the complaint is about and others who may know about the situation. It may be appropriate at this stage to provide some support to those making the complaint and those being complained about.
- Findings from the investigation should be discussed with other members of the management team and the outcome determined

- Put any changes to procedures into place and communicate to the team. If necessary deal with any volunteer or staff member in line with the Volunteer/Staff disciplinary policy
- A written (and if appropriate verbal) response should be provided to the person making the complaint, apologising if necessary and advising them about any changes in procedures following their complaint. If feelings are running high this should be done by someone not immediately involved in the complaint.
- It is recognised that some people like to complain and will never be satisfied. If it is felt that after investigation there is no case to answer or the complaint has been resolved, the official response in writing can state that no further action will be taken.
- If the complaint has not been fully resolved the complainant can be advised that they can put their complaint in writing to the Secretary to the Trustees. Any background information and action taken so far at stages 1 and 2 should be sent to the Secretary to the Trustees.
- Records of complaints should be logged and discussed at management team meetings and reported to trustees as required

### **3. Formal Complaint to the Trustees**

- Swift acknowledgement in writing of the complaint advising on what the next steps are and the timescales involved
- A review of the information already provided from stage 1 and 2 with additional information gathered as appropriate. It should not be necessary at this stage to repeat the investigation already carried out
- Findings from the review should be determined by one or more trustees depending on the seriousness of the complaint and any action required undertaken including dealing with any volunteer or staff member in line with the appropriate disciplinary policies.
- An official response from the trustees should be provided in writing to the complainant detailing the outcome of the review, an apology if necessary and any changes implemented as a result of the complaint. In some cases this may just state that the complaint was not justified and no further action will be taken.
- In exceptional cases at the trustee's discretion where a complaint is unresolved, a third party unconnected with CTC may be asked to get involved.

### **Redress**

Where it is found that CTC has been at fault in some way we need to look at how we can make up for any inadequacies, which may be one or more of the following:

- An apology either verbally or in writing
- An explanation of how it happened
- A commitment to changing how we work so it doesn't happen again
- An additional offer of help if this was previously not provided and it should have been i.e. a food parcel or a free meal (this would need to be agreed by a member of the management team).

### **Other positive outcomes**

Complaints can be viewed positively and seen as an opportunity to engage with users and others to build relationships.

- After a complaint has been resolved it may be appropriate to ask the complainant how they felt the complaint was managed.
- It's a good opportunity to engage in a different way and for users and others to understand some of the difficulties/constraints faced by charities, sometimes not always being able to provide the service they require
- A chance to review our procedures and see if we can work differently
- Good way of gauging user perception
- An opportunity to review volunteer/staff training

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- If managed well there may be an opportunity to involve the person making the complaint in working with us to help provide a solution and for them to feel like their voice has really been heard

### **Working in partnerships with other organisations**

Where working in partnerships with other organisations, it is important to be clear at the outset where boundaries lay and how complaints will be managed.

For service users accessing services by other providers either on our premises or by referral, it should be made clear that any resulting issues or complaints arising from the relationship with the other provider will be directed to the other organisation, who will be expected to respond to the individual and CTC. The arrangement will then be reviewed.