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**Complaints Policy and Procedure for Users**

**Introduction**

The complaints policy and procedure is part of a wider process of raising professional standards and is an integral part of the policies and practices of Seeds4Success which will help monitor and improve the quality of service provision.

All complaints and the proceedings that may result are to be considered confidential and should not be divulged by either party.

While the final authority for resolving complaints lies with the Chair and the Board of Trustees of Seeds4Success, if a particular matter is of sufficient gravity, at any point in the procedure the Board may seek the assistance of an outside mediator or arbiter in the search for a satisfactory resolution.

**Purpose**

The aim of the complaints procedure is to reach a resolution satisfactory to both the complainant and Seeds4Success.

The complaints procedure seeks to protect the rights of all parties in the execution of their duties or responsibilities and from the consequences of actions, policies and procedures considered to be arbitrary or unfair.

Whilst it is intended to ensure that any complaint is justly handled, the Complaints Procedure also ensures that the Charity and its assets are protected.

“Complainant” may refer to any individual or organisation but does not include members of staff for whom there is a separate grievance procedure set out in their contract of employment.

**Procedure**

The following Complaint Procedure is available for the use of any complainant who considers they have been unfairly treated by a representative of Seeds4Success.

Seeds4Success will seek to facilitate the resolution of complaints at the earliest possible point to the satisfaction of the complainant and of Seeds4Success and its associated companies and staff.

The outcome of any action at each step will be recorded and the complainant will be notified in writing promptly within the specified time of the incident occurring.

Whilst every effort will be made to find a mutually acceptable resolution of the complaint, in the event a satisfactory resolution is not found after following all two steps in the complaint procedure, the matter will be considered closed by Seeds4Success.

Any complaint will be handled according to the following procedure.

Step 1

If a complaint is received from a service user (or their representative), the member of staff concerned will record the matter in a manner that properly captures the facts of the complaint as perceived by the complainant and any suggested outcomes from their point of view. The expectations of the complainant are important in seeking early resolution. Where the complaint is of a demonstrably minor nature and relates to service recovery; the staff member recording may take immediate steps to resolve the matter satisfactorily. Action taken and any outcomes must be recorded at this early stage. Complaints of this nature may be notified to the Charity Director and Trustees via established standing meetings.

Step 2

Where the matter is felt to be more serious or complex or it is clear that the complaint may amount to misconduct (as defined in the staff handbook) or criminality; the recording staff member ought to bring the matter to the attention of the Charity Director as soon as practicable. The Charity Director will assess the matter as follows: (a) a matter below the conduct threshold where the matter complained of relates to service delivery, perceived fairness and even if proved would not amount to any misconduct; (b) A matter above the conduct threshold where, if proved, there may be staff misconduct, criminal matters or serious shortcomings in the operation of the charity disclosed.

In the case of (a) the Charity Director (or their nominee) may investigate the matter locally and seek to arrive at a satisfactory outcome. Typically, these outcomes will be informal and may include actions such as: review of current working practises or policy; reflective practise or learning for staff member/s concerned; reasonable action taken to resolve the matters rising. There is an expectation that matters of this nature ought to be resolved promptly in a manner agreed with the complainant and in any event within 4 weeks.

Step 3

In all cases at (b) the Charity Director will inform Chair of Trustees as soon as practicable and he or she will consult with HR Lead or other trustees as appropriate. The Trustees will appoint an investigator to establish the facts of the matter at hand. Parties in the complaint will receive written notification of the assessment at Step 2 and the name of the person appointed to investigate. The trustees reserve the right to seek appropriate independent advice and support as necessary in these more serious cases, it is important that standards of professional behaviour and public confidence are considered in this decision making. The Chair of the Board of Trustees will attempt to clarify the nature and accuracy of the complaint and facilitate a satisfactory resolution. There will be a more detailed report completed that fully explores findings and outcomes. This will include detail of any additional processes necessary to deliver those outcomes, such as: staff disciplinary; organisational learning or onward referral to other agencies as appropriate. It is recognised that enquiries of this nature will be more extended but a target resolution timescale of 8-12 weeks will be adhered to. At conclusion, all parties will receive a formal written notification that summarises the investigation, conclusions and outcomes.

**Recording and Monitoring**

All complaints should be recorded in a complaints file, with details of the complainant, the nature of the complaint, the process followed and the action taken.

All written notes, letters and evidence recorded in the complaints file will remain the sole property of Seeds4Success and be made available only to its representatives.

This procedure is designed to record a prompt, proportionate and satisfactory outcome on behalf of the complainant with due regard to standards of professional behaviour and fairness.

**Signed: Andrew NOBLE Trustee**

**Date: 25/03/21**

**Review date:** March 2022