CS_11 Client Complaint Policy

Policy Statement

Dealing well with complaints and appeals helps us to maintain and improve our service quality and ensure clients have their issues resolved. Complaints and appeals processes give clients a way of expressing any dissatisfaction with our services and of having their concern dealt with quickly and effectively. It also provides us with the opportunity to improve our service delivery. The procedures guide us in responding appropriately and fairly to complaints and to appeals.

DBNC is committed to facilitating our clients' right to make a complaint about our service, to appeal a decision we have made that directly concerns them, and to ensuring that their complaint or appeal is fairly assessed and responded to promptly.

DBNC recognises the importance of complaints in improving the way it delivers its services and is committed to providing a safe environment in which clients can make a complaint and to ensuring that the complaints process is fair and culturally sensitive to the needs of individual clients.

DBNC treats all complaints seriously. The confidentiality of the complainant will be always maintained, except in circumstances where there is an immediate threat to the complainant or to a person being accused, or as required by legislation. Any client making a complaint will not be treated differently or disadvantaged as a result of lodging a complaint.

DBNC recognises the need for some clients to be supported during the complaints process and will assist them by recommending external agencies/advocacy groups that can provide professional advice and support.

Information relating to the DBNC Client Complaint Procedure is available in an accessible location at Reception and is included in the DBNC Client Handbook.

Scope

Clients have the right to complain about the service they are receiving, or have received, without fear of retribution. All information and feedback from clients, including complaints, can be opportunities to improve the quality of service provided. This policy will apply to all clients, staff, and management committee members.

References

Human Services Quality Framework

Standard 5: Feedback, complaints and appeals

Indicator 1: The organisation has fair, accessible and accountable feedback, complaints and appeals processes.

Indicator 2: The organisation effectively communicates feedback, complaints and appeals processes to people using services and other relevant stakeholders.

Indicator 3: People using services and other relevant stakeholders are informed of and enabled to access any external avenues or appropriate supports for feedback, complaints or appeals processes and assisted to understand how they access them.

Indicator 4: The organisation demonstrates that feedback, complaints and appeals processes lead to improvements within the service and that outcomes are communicated to relevant stakeholders.

Other Standards – DSS Standards

Standard 11: Managing Client Feedback and Complaints

Forms or other organisational documents

- Deception Bay Neighbourhood Centre Strategic Plan
- Operational Plan
- Evaluations
- Organisational Structure

Procedure

Informing clients

We want our clients to feel safe and to feel able to voice their dissatisfaction with any aspect of our service and to be confident that our Organisation will manage their complaints well and respond quickly and appropriately.

All clients are informed of their rights and responsibilities at the earliest possible stage of their involvement with our service. All service users are offered a copy of the DBNC Client Handbook on their first appointment with a program staff member. We give clients access to all policies that further explain and support their rights and responsibilities. We tell clients how to take action if they feel that their rights have not been respected.

How clients can make a complaint or appeal a decision

Clients may register a complaint in a variety of ways: verbally, over the telephone, or in writing. All complaints will be treated professionally and consistently.

1. If a staff member or volunteer receives a verbal complaint and cannot resolve it immediately, it is to be referred to the Director. The Director may be able to resolve the matter informally. If this cannot be done, the complainant is to be given the option of proceeding to a formal (written) complaints process.

2. If the client decides to proceed to a formal complaint, the Director will ask the client to complete a Client Complaint Form, and will:

- Reassure the complainant that all complaints are treated confidentially and that they will suffer no loss of service because they have made a complaint.
- Explain the complaints procedure.
- Remind the complainant that they have the right to use a support person of their choice and refer them to appropriate client advocacy services.

3. The Director will acknowledge receipt of the written complaint to the client within five working days of receipt of the written complaint.

4. If the written complaint is of a serious nature or is about the Director, the Director will inform the President of the DBNC Management Committee immediately.

5. In assessing and responding to complaints, the Director will act fairly and justly and ensure that the process remains transparent. The following questions should guide the Director in deciding what actions are to be taken to respond to the complaint:

What is the nature of the complaint?

- Is it about dissatisfaction with the Organisation's services?
- Is it about the treatment that the client has received from staff/volunteers?
- Is it about discrimination, harassment or abuse?

Who is involved?

- Is the complaint about a staff member or volunteer?
- Is the complaint about another client?
- Is the complaint about the Director or the Management Committee?
- Is the complaint about an external contractor?

Is there sufficient information to make a fair judgment about what happened?

- When was the complaint made in relation to when the incident occurred?
- Where did the incident take place?
- Were there any witnesses?
- Were the parties involved in a clear physical and psychological state, free from any alcohol, drug or medical influences when the incident occurred?

If the complainant alleges serious discrimination or sexual harassment by a worker or volunteer, the Director will advise the complainant that they have the right to lodge a complaint with the Anti-Discrimination Commission of Queensland (Tel: 1300 130 670). If the complaint relates to other illegal activity the client may choose to report it to the police.

If the Director needs additional information beyond what is on the complaint form, further clarification is to be sought from the complainant. This information should be recorded in writing. The Director will decide the course of action based on the information provided. It is preferable that grievances are resolved by negotiation and discussion between the parties, in particular by facilitated discussion between the person making the complaint and the person against whom the complaint has been made.

6. The Director will contact the complainant within 21 working days of receiving the written complaint to discuss what action is proposed/has been taken and will seek feedback on the complainant's satisfaction with the action.

7. If the complaint is not resolved to the complainant's satisfaction, the complainant may request a review of the complaint by the Management Committee. The Management Committee will take all steps possible to address the complaint. The complainant will be kept fully informed of the process towards resolution.

8. If the complaint is about the Director or the Management Committee, the Management Committee itself will address the complaint, following steps 3-6 above.

9. If, after following the above process, the complaint remains unresolved, the client is to be advised that s/he may take the complaint to an external authority, such as the

- Qld Human Rights Commission 1300 130 670
- Queensland Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy 1800 491 467
- Family and Relationship Services Clients: Department Social Services, National Office Complaints Team,
  Ph: 1800 634 035, Fax: (02) 6133 8442, Email: complaints@dss.gov.au,
  Post: DSS Complaints, GPO Box 9820, Canberra ACT 2610

10. If a complaint against a staff member, volunteer or Management Committee member requires disciplinary action, the relevant procedures, such as Discipline Procedure or Sexual Harassment Procedure, will be followed.

11. The complaints process, including the actions taken by the Organisation to respond to the complaint, must be recorded by the Director and stored securely in the Client Complaints file. All documents must be kept for the period stated in the Archiving and Disposal Procedure. Where relevant, knowledge gained through the complaints procedure will be used to improve service delivery within the Organisation.

12. The complainant may withdraw the complaint in writing to the Director at any time. The Director will seek to ensure that the complainant is satisfied with the decision to withdraw the complaint and, where appropriate, refer them to counselling or support services.

13. As far as possible, the fact that a client has lodged a complaint and the details of that complaint will be kept confidential amongst the people directly concerned with its resolution. The client's permission is to be obtained before any information is given to other parties whom it may be desirable to involve in order to resolve the complaint satisfactorily.