

West End Refugee Service Policy Statement

Complaints

Background

The Charity Commission report 'Cause for Complaint' states: 'an effective complaints management system is a proven way of maintaining and building relationships with the people on whom the charity depends.'

Handling complaints well:

- Demonstrates the charity's commitment to its clients and other stakeholders.
- Demonstrates the charity's commitment to providing the best possible service.
- Helps the charity to find out about things that have gone wrong so the charity can fix them.
- Helps the charity to prevent things going wrong again in future.

General policy statement

West End Refugee Service (WERS) is committed to providing a high-quality service to everyone we deal with. We view complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future, as well as a chance to put things right for the person (or organisation) that has made the complaint.

Our policy is to:

- Provide a fair complaints procedure that is clear and easy to use for anyone wishing to make a complaint.
- Publicise the existence of our complaints procedure so that people know how to contact us to make a complaint.
- Make sure everyone at WERS knows what to do if a complaint is received.
- Make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way.
- Make sure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired.
- Gather information which helps us to improve what we do.

A complainant can expect to be treated with courtesy, respect and fairness at all times. WERS expects that its staff dealing with a complaint will be treated with the same courtesy, respect and fairness.

WERS will endeavour to avoid a conflict of interest in handling a complaint by ensuring that complaints are investigated by someone who is independent of the event complained about. A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of WERS. This policy covers complaints about:

- The standard of service that WERS provides.
- The behaviour of its staff or volunteers in delivering that service.
- Any action or lack of action, by staff or others engaged on WERS business.
- WERS' awareness-raising activities.
- WERS' fundraising activities.

This complaints policy does not cover:

- WERS policies or policy decisions.
- Matters that have already been fully investigated through this complaints procedure.
- Anonymous complaints.

Complaints may come from any person or organisation that has a legitimate interest in WERS including clients, volunteers, members, supporters, or members of the local community. This policy does not cover complaints from staff, who should use WERS' Discipline and Grievance policies.

WERS will not treat a complainant less favourably because of their:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender identity
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sexual orientation
- Any other unjustifiable factors

If a complainant feels that they need help in putting their point of view across, they may ask a representative (an advice agency, Support Worker, family member or friend) to be present to help them explain the issue they are raising.

If they need an Interpreter, WERS will endeavour to provide one.

A complaint can be made in person, by phone, by email or in writing.

Confidentiality

All complaint information will be handled sensitively, telling only those who need to know and following any relevant data protection requirements.

Responsibilities

WERS trustees are responsible overall for setting the complaints policy and ensuring its implementation. However, all employees and volunteers have a duty to do everything they can to ensure that the policy works in practice.

The Director is responsible for ensuring that staff know of and adhere to the policy, as well as maintaining a confidential record of complaints received. The Volunteer Manager and Co-ordinators are responsible for ensuring that existing and potential volunteers are aware of and adhere to the policy. After their induction at WERS, staff and volunteers sign to say that they have read, understood and agree to abide by this policy.

Supporting guidelines

Publicised information about complaints

This complaints policy should be available (and easy to find) on the WERS website. There should be a copy that clients can easily refer to on the WERS premises.

Written complaints may be sent to:
West End Refugee Service
St Philip's Vicarage
St. Philip's Close
Arthurs Hill
Newcastle Upon Tyne
NE4 5JE

Complaints may also be made by e-mail at complaints@wers.org.uk or by phone to 0191-2737482.

Complaints may also be made in person to any of West End Refugee Service's staff, volunteers or trustees at St Philip's Vicarage, St. Philip's Close, Arthurs Hill, Newcastle Upon Tyne NE4 5JE or at any of its events or activities.

Receiving complaints

Complaints may arrive through channels publicised for that purpose or through any other contact details or opportunities the complainant may have.

Complaints received by telephone or in person should be written down by the person who receives them who, if possible, should check with the complainant that their complaint has been correctly understood and recorded.

Any staff member or volunteer who receives a complaint should refer the matter immediately to the Director. If they are not available, the Finance and Operations Manager will act on their behalf. The Director should:

- Write down the facts of the complaint.
- Take the complainant's name, address and telephone number.

- Note down the relationship of the complainant to WERS for example: client, member.
- Give the complainant a copy of this complaints procedure.
- Tell the complainant what will happen next and how long it will take.
- Where appropriate, ask the complainant to send a written account by post or by email so that the complaint is recorded in the complainant's own words.

The complaint will be recorded in a centralised, confidential file which will record the information listed above.

Resolving complaints

Stage One

On receiving the complaint, the Director records it in the complaints log. They may delegate an appropriate person to investigate it and to take appropriate action.

If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a fair opportunity to respond.

Complaints should be acknowledged by the person handling the complaint within a week. The acknowledgement should say who is dealing with the complaint and when the person complaining can expect a reply. A copy of this complaints procedure should be attached.

Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within four weeks. If this is not possible, because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.

Whether the complaint is justified or not, the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

Stage Two

If the complainant feels that the problem has not been satisfactorily resolved at Stage One, they can request that the complaint is reviewed at Board level. At this stage, the complaint will be passed to the Chair of Trustees.

The request for Board level review should be acknowledged within a week of receiving it. The acknowledgement should say who will deal with the case and when the complainant can expect a reply.

The Chair of Trustees will investigate how the complaint was dealt with at Stage One by reviewing the paperwork of the case and speaking with the person who dealt with the complaint at Stage One.

If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a further opportunity to respond.

The person who dealt with the original complaint at Stage One should be kept informed of what is happening.

Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within four weeks. If this is not possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.

Whether the complaint is upheld or not, the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

The decision taken at this stage is final, unless the Board decides it is appropriate to seek external assistance with resolution.

External stage

The complainant can complain to the Charity Commission at any stage. Information about the kind of complaints the Commission can involve itself in can be found in their guidance document CC47, available online.

Variation of the complaints procedure

The Board may vary the procedure for good reason. This may be necessary to avoid a conflict of interest, for example, a complaint about the Chair should not also have the Chair as the person leading a Stage Two review.

Monitoring and learning from complaints

Complaints should be reviewed annually by the Director to identify any trends which may indicate a need to take further action, and the review and subsequent action should be reported to the board of trustees.

Patrons: **Hari Shukla CBE | The Revd Professor Nicholas Sagovsky**

Registered Charity Number: **1077601**

