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Updated 12th July 2021

**Client Complaints Policy**

At Breaking the Silence (a Meridian Centre Project) we’re committed to providing an excellent service, and welcome all comments and feedback about the way we work. If you have a complaint about us, or something we’ve done, we aim to resolve it as quickly and efficiently as possible in a personal, fair and confidential way.

We regard complaints as an opportunity to reflect on our practice and processes to see if there are ways we can strengthen and improve them. This policy details how we handle complaints to make sure we learn from a negative experience and that we are open about the improvements we have made as a result.

**What this policy covers**

This policy covers complaints about the services that we provide, and about the staff and volunteers involved in delivering them. Complaints regarding discrimination and victimisation will also be investigated using this process.

Wherever possible we will try to resolve complaints made without the intervention of external bodies. If that’s not possible after going through all stages of this procedure, we will seek intervention from an appropriate external body.

Our objectives when handling a complaint

We aim to ensure that:

1. Making a complaint is as easy and transparent as possible.
2. We treat a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction with our service, or organisation, which calls for a response.
3. We deal with complaints appropriately, respectfully, and within the agreed timeframe.
4. We respond in the right way – for example, with an explanation, an apology where we have got things wrong, and, if relevant and appropriate, information on any action taken.
5. People who are mentioned in or affected by complaints receive support.
6. When a complaint identifies that something has gone wrong or has fallen below standards, it is seen as an opportunity to improve and avoid a recurrence, and it allows for systems, policies, practices or procedures to be amended or put in place as appropriate.
7. We offer complainants recourse to someone more senior/more independent if they wish.

We reserve the right to refuse a complaint that is clearly vexatious, malicious, motivated by racist, sexist, homophobic or other discriminatory attitudes, or if the complainant threatens or abuses our staff or volunteers.

We will consider a complainant as vexatious if they persist in making a complaint or demand when all reasonable attempts to resolve their concerns have been made.

What to do if you want to complain

Complaints can be made by e-mail and post. E-mail is preferred, and will enable us to respond more quickly.

* By email to Shamim Khan at merdiancentre@hotmail.co.uk
* By post to our registered address: Meridian Centre, 61 St Paul’s Road, Bradford, BD8 7LS

We can’t accept complaints by text or via social media, as these don’t allow for sufficient detail to be submitted. Please e-mail your complaint as described above.

We will acknowledge all complaints in writing within two working days of receipt. We will allocate an ID number and review the complaint to consider what investigation is needed and who is the appropriate person to lead on the investigation and response.

Investigating your complaint

When investigating your complaint, we will ensure that:

* We fully understand the complaint. This may require collecting more information from you.
* We fully understand the response of staff or the situation in which the complaint arose. This may involve interviewing or speaking to staff and volunteers or reviewing any written information.
* We treat you fairly, consistently, and transparently, and offer solutions, explanations, and an apology where appropriate.
* We respect confidentiality where appropriate.

As a result of the investigation, and if the complaint is upheld, outcomes may include:

* Specific changes or improvements to service.
* Bringing together parties to mediate the dispute.
* Recommendations on staff training.

Managers will produce an implementation plan for any improvements identified as a result of the complaint, and actions identified should be implemented within a reasonable timeframe, outlined in the response.

**Responding to your complaint**

After investigation we’ll send you a full response in writing. In some cases you might prefer a telephone discussion regarding the outcome, but this will always be followed up by a written response so there’s a written record of the outcome.

**Timescale**

We aim to provide a full response within ten working days in most cases. However, if this is not possible because, for example, a detailed investigation is required, we will provide an interim reply explaining what is being done to deal with the complaint and with a revised timetable.

**If you’re not happy with the response**

If you’re not satisfied with the response you receive you may appeal the decision within seven days by writing to the person who dealt with the initial complaint. We will review the appeal and respond in writing within ten working days.

If you’re not happy with the response to your appeal, you may escalate your complaint within seven calendar days by writing to the person who dealt with the appeal. The escalation will be reviewed by a senior member of staff and a member of our board of Trustees, who will provide a further written response within 15 working days.

If you’re still not happy, you can refer your complaint to an appropriate external body for consideration. In this instance we would recommend the association of which we are members, The British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists (BACP). Our membership number is 00213956. Please visit <https://www.bacp.co.uk/about-therapy/get-help-with-counselling-concerns-service/>, or call 01455 883300 option 2. Alternatively, email gethelp@bacp.co.uk

**Time limits on making a complaint**

Normally complaints should be made within six months of the event, or within six months of becoming aware of cause to complain, subject to an overall limit of 12 months.

If we need to ask for further information to assist with our investigation but receive no response and cannot proceed with the investigation, we will chase for a response every ten days and consider the complaint closed if there’s no response within thirty working days.

Exceptions to this may be allowed, taking into account reasons for the delay and the practicality of investigating the matter.