

 <p>Leadership & Management Accreditation Standard:</p>	<p>Ref: 02/00 Date issued: 31/03/2001 Date revised: 24/06/05 Reviewed by: CEO Approved by: CEO Review Date: 31/08/2007</p>
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1. POLICY AND/OR PROCEDURE NAME

Complaints

2. DEFINITION OF TERMS

A **Complaint** is an expression of dissatisfaction by or on behalf of an individual or group of individuals regarding care and/or treatment, management practices or any other aspect of service.

A **Complainant**: for the purposes of the complaints process the complainant is the person lodging the complaint

The **Complaints Officer** is the person nominated within the organisation to manage the complaints process and produce reports. At VSK the complaints officer is the Shared Services Manager.

Informal Complaints

Expressions of dissatisfaction which can be dealt with promptly at the point of service. These expressions of dissatisfaction are not “complaints” as defined under the Health Services (Conciliation and Review) Act 1987. Although they do not need to be recorded VSK has made a decision to record and manage all forms of complaint. Any person may lodge a complaint with Very Special Kids, including family members, carers, health professionals, service providers or any other concerned individual, agency or group.

Complainants may approach the manager directly if they wish and staff may at any time refer the situation to the Manager if further assistance is needed to formalise or resolve a complaint.

If the complainant states they wish to lodge a formal complaint, then the process for lodging a formal complaint should be followed, even though it may be considered of minor importance by staff members.

Formal Complaints

All complaints involving matters that cannot be resolved immediately are considered complaints under the Act and must be referred to the Manager of the relevant department. These include all written complaints and any verbal complaints which cannot be dealt with as informal complaints. At VSK formal complaints are referred to the CEO for immediate attention and investigation.

Formal complaints are usually major perceived departures from the standards of care expected by the community and/ or accepted professional and ethical practices. These allegations may involve allegations of discrimination, neglect or abuse.

It is preferable but not essential that formal complaints should be in writing. Complainants may lodge formal complaints by writing a letter or completing a complaints form. Should the complainant wish, a staff member may complete a complaint form on behalf of the client.

Statutory Reportable Complaints

These complaints are covered by statutory reporting obligations and involve allegations of assault and abuse. Mandatory reporting requirements of sexual and physical assault must be followed in these instances. These complaints should be handled as a formal complaint.

Other organisations responsible for handling reportable complaints may include regulatory bodies for the various professions, the Equal Opportunity Board, the Child Protection Office of the Department of Human Services and the Ombudsman.

Verbal Complaints

Complainants should be encouraged to voice their concerns or complain at the point of the services. This allows staff to help resolve the matter to the satisfaction of all parties as soon as possible. Verbal complaints, unless deemed serious in nature or not able to be resolved are informal are managed as informal complaints and the process for the management of informal complaints should be followed.

Telephone complaints

Telephone complaints should be resolved immediately or with a return call as soon as practicable. (Informal complaints)

When verbal or telephone complaints cannot be resolved immediately at the point of service they should be directed to the Department Manager who may be able to manage the complaint. In the event that the complaint is unable to be managed within the department it is to be referred to the CEO and becomes a formal complaint.

3. BACKGROUND

- Very Special Kids is an organisation committed to continuous improvement and as such encourages any type of feedback from all those utilising its services
- The “complaints process” provides a system to enable people to express complaints and to offer views about different aspects of our service delivery
- This feedback mechanism should be viewed as an integral part of our quality improvement program

- Very Special Kids is not required to take part in the complaints reporting process as outlined by the Health Services Commission but our complaints process is based on public health sector best practice.
- A complaint (informal/formal) may arise following an incident, in such situations the incident process and the complaint process are to be followed.

4. POLICY

All complaints, whether informal or formal, written or verbal, are received and handled in the spirit of co-operation. Where possible all informal complaints should be resolved at the point of origin. Formal complaints shall be directed to the Chief Executive Officer for immediate response and investigation. The complaints officer manages the complaints process and presents details of complaints to appropriate committees.

5. PROCEDURE

Informal Complaints

- At the time the complaint is received the staff member shall
 - Attempt to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of all parties at the point of service and at the time the complaint was made
 - Complete a complaint form indicating an informal complaint has been received and the action taken to resolve the complaint
 - Forward the completed complaint form to the Manager of the area for review
- In the event that the complaint cannot be managed by the staff member at the time of the complaint it shall be forwarded to the Manager for attention
- In the event that the complaint cannot be resolved immediately by the Manager and the complainant, then it should be converted to a formal complaint and referred immediately to the CEO
- The reviewed and completed complaint form shall be forwarded to the Complaints Officer for allocation of number, entry into the complaints register, entry into monthly summary sheets
- As a result of the complaints the Manager may decide that further action, staff education or policy review is required

Formal Complaints

- Written complaints or informal complaints that cannot be satisfactorily be resolved shall be referred to the CEO
- The CEO shall make a written response to acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 24 hours
- The CEO shall forward complaint to the Complaint Officer who
 - Completes the complaint form (if the form has not already been completed)
 - Allocates a number to the complaint
 - Enters the complaint into the complaint register

- Opens a file in which all documentation is kept
- The complaint officer shall forward the matter to the Manager of the area concerned for investigation
- The Manager shall complete the investigation of the complaint and forward a response in writing to the CEO within 7 days
- The CEO shall respond in writing to the complainant within 21 days of the receipt of the complaint
- Once the complaint is resolved copies of all relevant documentation shall be forwarded to the Complaints Officer to be filed with the complaint form
- In the event that a complaint cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties the complainant may choose to refer the complaint to an independent source i.e. The Health Services Commissioner or any other authority of their choice.

Documentation and Reporting

- Until a complaint is resolved the file is to be held by the relevant Manager. Once resolution of the complaint is achieved all documentation shall be forwarded to the Complaints Officer
- Complaints Officer ensures that
 - a complaints form has been completed, including action and outcomes
 - each complaint has a number allocated to it
 - Each complaint has been entered on the complaints register
 - All documentation relevant to the complaint is kept together in a file under lock and key. This documentation should include
 - complaints form
 - original letter of complaint (if formal complaint)
 - copy of initial acknowledgement letter from CEO (if formal)
 - documentation relating to investigation of complaint
 - copy of letter to complainant following investigation of complaint
 - Monthly reporting summary is completed
 - Complaints are to be reported using the monthly reporting summary to
 - Management Team Meeting by the Complaints Officer
 - Quality of Care Committee meeting, where appropriate, by the CEO
 - Board of Management (included in the Board report prepared by the CEO)
 - Quality improvement activities may be identified from the complaints process
 - Outcomes of such activities should be reported to the Quality of Care Committee.

6. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Clients know how to make a complaint
- Staff understand and adhere to the complaints process
- Complaints are resolved and used as the basis for service improvement
- A register of complaints is maintained by the organisation
- Information is analysed to identify trends

7. RESPONSIBILITIES

All staff
All Managers
The Complaints Officer

8. REFERENCES

Health Services (Conciliation and Review) Act 1987
Australian Standards: *Complaints Handling. AS 4269-1995*