

Community Connections Support Services – Policies and Procedures

Section	Organizational Leadership Policy and Procedures
Subject	Complaint Management (ol040)
Applies To	All Service Areas
Effective Date	July 2011
Revised Date	May 2017

Policy: Community Connections Support Services is committed to providing quality services in the communities we provide support and working in an open and accountable way that builds the trust and respect of all our stakeholders.

Complaints are valued as a means to continuously review and improve the services we offer and as such, CCSS is committed to receive, investigate and respond to complaints about how we deliver our services. Community Connections Supports Services strictly prohibits any form of retaliation for reporting complaints in good faith.

Preamble:

Definition:

- A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the agency, our employees or contractors affecting an individual.
- A complaint may be made in person, by phone, fax, email or in writing.
- It is important to remember that reporting a fault or a problem is not necessarily a complaint but may be simply a request for service.

Responsibility:

- **CCSS (applies to all staff and services).** The key objectives are that:
 - complainants are to be encouraged to report their complaints directly to the person/entity with which they have issue;
 - complaints are dealt with efficiently and are properly investigated;
 - complainants are treated with respect and courtesy;
 - complainants receive, so far as is reasonably practical -
 - assistance to enable them to understand the procedure in relation to complaints; or
 - advice on where they may obtain such assistance;

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- complainants receive timely and appropriate response;
- complainants are told the outcome of the investigation of their complaint based on the following findings:
 - Dismissed, including reasons
 - Upheld, including planned action; or
 - Require further investigation;
- action is taken (if necessary) in the light of the outcome of a complaint
 - to use lessons on quality and outcomes from investigations to improve services
 - to ensure that the process meets full compliance with assessment requirements.
- **Complainants.** Responsibility is to:
 - address issues with the party with which there is a problem, before involving others;
 - raise concerns promptly and directly;
 - explain the problem as clearly and as fully as possible, including proposed resolution and any action taken to date;
 - allow CCSS a reasonable time to deal with the matter; and
 - recognize that some circumstances may be beyond CCSS's control.

Rights:

- Complainants have the right:
 - to confidentiality (if an investigation cannot proceed without the complainant being identified, the complainant will be given the option whether or not to continue)
 - to be kept informed of the progress of their complaints
 - to receive an apology if a complaint is upheld
 - to be informed of any changes to our policies or procedures arising from a complaint
- Our employees/contractors have the right to be treated with respect and courtesy at all times by both the complainant and others who may be involved in the investigation of complaints.

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Support and Advocacy:

- Some people are unsure how to go about making a complaint, or how best to put their case. Others may have difficulty with written or spoken English – we will give assistance/support when requested.
- Anonymous complaints will be investigated and may be acted upon at our discretion. Should the complainant fear that we will withhold services, or treat them less favourably if they complain openly, we will, if required, assist in finding support outside CCSS.

Complaints Not Covered by This Policy and Procedures:

- complaints regarding the conduct of a party toward a person receiving support that constitutes abuse or neglect as defined by CLBC policy (see policy on Investigations ol041)
- complaints regarding former employees / contractors;
- complaints regarding former service areas / contracts;
- complaints regarding other agencies; or
- complaints regarding issues that are no longer relevant or have previously been addressed and resolved.

Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting, and Storage:

- All complaint files will be retained for a minimum of 5 years and stored in a secure manner in order to preserve confidentiality.
- A report on complaints received will be published annually by the Director of Strategic Management and shared with the CCSS Management Support Team in order to:
 - monitor system for addressing complaints,
 - consider significant trends in complaints that may require a particular corrective action, and
 - consider any lessons which can be learned from complaints, particularly for the performance improvement of services.

Procedures:

Informal Complaints:

- Anyone wishing to make a complaint may do so in person, by telephone, or in writing (by letter, fax, or email).

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- The first responsibility on receipt of a complaint is to ensure that the health and safety needs of the people we support are being met. This may require urgent attention before any other matters are addressed.
- The complainant is encouraged to try resolve the complaint directly with the person with whom they have an issue.
- The issue may be resolved in a manner that is low-key giving the CCSS personnel an opportunity to set things right without delay.
- If attempts to resolve the issue informally are unsuccessful, the complainant is encouraged to direct the complaint to the personnel supervisor or program coordinator. At this time, the supervisor / program coordinator, if unable to resolve the issue informally, may request that the complainant make a formal complaint in writing.

Formal Complaints:

- Ideally, a formal complaint will be submitted in writing. CCSS has developed a Formal Complaint Form that can be obtained:
 - in hard copy from all CCSS Management personnel,
 - can be mailed / emailed to the complainant,
 - can be downloaded from our website at www.commconn.ca, or
 - can be filled out and submitted directly on our website.
- When a formal complaint is made verbally, a summary of the complaint will be drawn up by the responding party and sent to the complainant for review and return.
- The complaint will be forwarded to the appropriate Service Coordinator and the Director of Strategic Management and will be acknowledged, within one (1) week of receipt by the Director of Strategic Management.
- At this time, the responding party may ask the complainant for more information, collaboration on a satisfactory resolution to the matter, provide reasons for the dismissal of the complaint, address planned action, or inform the complainant that more time is required for investigation and set time-lines for communicating progress in the investigation.
- A final response and planned action for resolution will be forwarded to the complainant within one (1) month of the receipt of the complaint (unless other time-lines have been mutually agreed upon).
- If the complainant still feels unsatisfied with the outcome or feels the result is unfair, he/she is encouraged to ensure that the Director of Strategic Management receives a copy of the complaint including all actions that have been taken to date to address the issue.

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- If the Director of Strategic Management feels that CCSS has made every effort to conclude the complaint, and the complainant still feels that the issue has not been resolved, the complainant may refer the matter to Community Living BC:

Kelowna: phone 250-861-7255,

West Kootenays: 250-365-8594 or 1-800-668-2249

East Kootenays: 1-888-426-1282

Habitual or Vexatious Complainants:

- A person may be deemed to be vexatious where previous or current contact with them shows that they meet one or more of the following criteria:
 - Persist in pursuing a complaint where CCSS procedure has been completely and properly implemented, or has been exhausted.
 - Change the substance of a complaint or continually raise new issues or seek to prolong contact by continually raising further concerns or questions upon receipt of a response whilst the complaint is being addressed. (Care must be taken not to discard new issues that are significantly different from the original complaint. These may have to be addressed separately).
 - Are unwilling to accept documented evidence of treatment given as being factual, or deny receipt of an adequate response in spite of correspondence specifically answering their questions.
 - Do not clearly identify the precise issues they wish to be investigated, despite reasonable efforts by CCSS staff and others to help them specify their questions.
 - Focus on a trivial matter to an extent that is out of proportion to its significance and continue to focus on this point.
 - Have in the course of pursuing their issue, had an excessive number of contacts with CCSS (by phone, email, letter, or fax) placing unreasonable demands on staff.
 - Display unreasonable demands or expectations and fail to accept these may be unreasonable.
 - Have threatened or used actual physical violence. All such cases must be well documented in case of further action and reported to the Director of Strategic Management. The police may also be involved where necessary.
 - Have harassed or been personally abusive or verbally aggressive towards staff dealing with them. All cases must be documented and reported to the Director of Strategic Management.
- Options for dealing with a vexatious complainant will be implemented only as a last

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resort and after all reasonable measures have been taken to assist the complainant. The procedure should only be implemented following careful consideration by, and with the responding party and the CCSS Management Support Team.

- The complainant may be informed in writing that they are being classified as a habitual or vexatious complainant and forwarded a copy of this procedure and advise them to take into account the criteria in any further dealings with CCSS.
- Where the matter relates to a complaint, CCSS will notify the complainant in writing that the agency has responded fully to the points raised and has tried to resolve the complaint, but that there is nothing more to add and continuing contact on the matter will serve no useful purpose. The complainant should also be notified that the correspondence is at an end and that further letters received will be acknowledged but not answered.

References:

- *Luton Borough Council, Coventry, UK – Corporate Complaints Policy and Procedures*
- *Motor Vehicle Sales Authority of BC, Canada – Complaint Handling Policy and Procedures*
- *Association for Learning and Technology, Oxford UK – Complaints Policy and Procedures*
- *Small Business Development Corporation, Australia – Complaints Management Policy*
- *South Staffordshire Primary Care Trust, Uk – Policy for Handling Complaint*

For further information on this policy or permission to reprint, please contact:

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