

Advocacy for Mental Health & Dementia

COMPLAINTS: POLICY AND PROCEDURE

1. STATEMENT OF INTENT

A4MHD recognises that while we aim to operate to a high standard, we cannot guarantee that we will always achieve this. Responding positively to both comment and criticism is one way of making sure that we are achieving what we have set out to do.

Moreover, as an advocacy organisation, we have a moral responsibility to encourage anyone who comes into contact with us to tell us if they are unhappy (or happy) with what we do. By being open to learning from ongoing experience, we hope we can steadily improve what we do and the way we do it.

However, we are clear that:

- Our responsibility only covers the area of our aims and objectives.
- The need for advocacy far exceeds what we can provide with our limited resources.

All those taking part in the complaints procedure should be aware that making a complaint is not easy. At every stage it should be made clear that external support is available, if necessary providing appropriate names and telephone numbers. Other than this A4MHD should have no further involvement with the external support.

It is important that anyone making a complaint should be encouraged to state clearly what they would like us to do to put matters right. We cannot assume that we know what is the best outcome for someone else.

2. COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

If the Manager or the Chairperson are the subject of the complaint, they will not be involved in the complaints procedure. In this situation, the management committee will make alternative arrangements.

This policy does not apply to staff issues which will be dealt with through the disciplinary and grievance procedures.

Anyone can approach A4MHD's Manager or advocacy workers to discuss problems. This should be treated as an **Informal Complaint**. A record of the problem and the agreed outcome should be made and filed in the Complaints File under Informal Complaints. The member of staff dealing with the matter should make sure they discuss it at their next session with their supervisor and it should be recorded.

If someone feels they cannot do this or they have a serious complaint, they should be given a complaints leaflet and encouraged to make a **Formal Complaint** as soon as possible.

The stages of a Formal Complaint are as follows:

Stage 1: The complaint should preferably be made to the Manager; if this is inappropriate then to the Chairperson. The complaint can be written down on the form provided or otherwise. It can be raised over the telephone or at a meeting especially arranged for this purpose. It should be made clear that the complaint will be dealt with as a Formal Complaint and the procedures for this discussed. The complaint should be dealt with within 5 working days. However, if the investigation is complex e.g. several people needing interview, this may not be possible in which case a time scale should be mutually agreed.

The process should be recorded and filed in the Complaints File.

The matter should also be raised at the next supervision session and recorded in the minutes.

Stage 2: If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome they have the right to ask that the matter be raised with the Chairperson. The complaint will be investigated by the Chairperson, a member of the committee especially designated by the Chairperson and the Manager.

The process should not exceed 28 days from initiating stage 2.

The decision should be sent in writing. The process should be discussed at the next management committee meeting and recorded appropriately in the minutes (see Policy on Confidentiality).

Stage 3: If the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome they have the right to appeal to the Management Committee as a whole.

This process should not exceed 28 days from initiation. The decision should be sent in writing and recorded appropriately in the minutes.

Stage 4: If the complainant is still unsatisfied with the outcome the complainant has the right to appeal to the Chairperson that an Appeals Panel be set up. This will consist of the Chairperson, a management committee member from another advocacy organisation and one other person unconnected with A4MHD the last two to be agreed by both parties.

They will investigate the complaint and let the complainant know of their decision in writing within 28 days of initiating Stage 4. This decision will be final.

While we should every effort to comply with the decision, A4MHD cannot necessarily be legally bound by it e.g. if the decision is outside the remit of our aims and objectives.

This process should be recorded and filed in the Complaints File.

The process should be reported to the next management meeting and recorded appropriately in the minutes.

3. REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed annually not more than three months after the AGM.