



POLICY NO: SP 10

VERSION NO: 4

APPROVED BY: Committee of Management

DATE: August 2014

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REVIEW DATE: August 2017

Complaints and Feedback

1.0 Introduction:

ConnectAbility Australia views feedback and complaints as ways to help us improve our services and create greater service user satisfaction and outcomes.

Our Complaints Management process ensures that problems you have with ConnectAbility Australia services, decisions and policies, are valued and listened to with open ears, taken seriously and dealt with promptly and in ways that are culturally appropriate. Your concerns will be treated as a priority, we will keep you fully informed and are committed to working with you towards a satisfactory resolution.

2.0 Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to outline how people are able to provide feedback and make complaints about any aspect of ConnectAbility Australia and the process that we will take to address and/or respond to the complaint.

3.0 Scope:

This policy applies to stakeholders of the organisation including: service users, families and carers, contractors, other service providers and members of the community.

Issues raised by staff would generally be dealt with under our Grievance and Dispute Resolution policy, however from time to time staff may raise issues or provide feedback that is best dealt with under this policy.

4.0 Policy:

ConnectAbility Australia is committed to managing complaints in an accountable, transparent, timely and meaningful way and in the most direct way possible.

ConnectAbility Australia supports and encourages the rights of our service users, their families/carers and stakeholders to lodge and pursue any complaint in relation to any aspect of ConnectAbility Australia services or operations.

The organisation is committed to the following complaints management principles:

- assisting people to make a complaint in whatever way is meaningful for them;
- complaints can be lodged without fear of retribution;
- protect confidentiality and privacy of complainants;
- complaints are assessed fairly, objectively and professionally;
- openness and accountability;
- complaints are resolved in a timely manner;
- ensure the application of procedural fairness and natural justice for all involved;
- encourage the development of harmonious partnerships;
- integrate complaints information into the organisations improvement process.

ConnectAbility Australia expects that most complaints/feedback will be able to be addressed and responded to by the people directly involved or at a support worker/middle management level, with only the most serious or unresolved complaints being dealt with by the General Manager or Committee of Management.

However, where complaints require investigation or more formal review we will ensure that sufficient resources are allocated as a means to ensure that complaints are proficiently managed and investigated and will only allocate suitably skilled and qualified employees to investigate and manage complaints.

Complaint Management Stages include:

- acknowledgment of receipt of complaint
- complaint assessment;
- investigation of complaint;
- complaint response;
- communicating the decision; and
- complaint closed.

We have produced a complaints brochure that outlines our policy and procedures in an easy to understand format.

5.0 Procedures

- 5.1 Any individual, stakeholder or agency wishing to lodge a complaint against services, management or employees of ConnectAbility Australia will be provided with information regarding the organisation's Complaints Management policy and process. Any complaint will be heard with open ears and a willingness to assist complainant.
- 5.2 Information will be provided in a format that is easily understood and considered effort will be provided to ensure complainant is fully informed re the Complaint Management process. Complaints may be lodged by a third party on behalf of another person, if their permission and consent has been given.
- 5.3 ConnectAbility Australia will afford all complaints the highest standard of confidentiality. Complaint matters will only be discussed with those on a need to know basis and will not be a matter of discussion between any other individuals. All documentation will be retained in a secure place.
- 5.4 All staff will handle complaints with:
 - courtesy and encouragement;
 - sensitivity to the needs of complainant;
 - efficiency and effectiveness;
 - timeliness- complaints received will be formally acknowledged within two (2) days of receipt and the complaint responded to within thirty (30) days;
 - empathy – understanding others feelings and perspective of issues involved;
 - communicate mindfully;
 - provide details regarding external support agencies that may assist them with complaints resolution if required. Some of these bodies are listed in this policy.
- 5.6 The following details relating to the complaint will be documented in ConnectAbility Australia Complaints Register.

- nature of complaint;
 - witness responses;
 - findings and outcomes.
- 5.7 Complaints will be resolved within a practicable timeframe – ideally the organisation will diligently work to resolve the complaint within thirty (30) working days of receipt. Persons who have lodged complaint will be regularly updated and advised of progress within agreed intervals (eg. weekly). If it is perceived that a delay may be experienced, this delay will be clearly articulated in writing to complainant.
- 5.8 Investigation of complaints will not be conducted by a person about whom a complaint has been made.
- 5.9 ConnectAbility Australia will undertake to fully inform any employee that is the subject of a complaint of the nature of the complaint and of the process being implemented to resolve complaint. If required, the employee concerned will be provided with a seven (7) day timeframe in which to submit a written response and/or seek further advice.
- 5.10 If a complaint is received that alleges criminal activity or provides information about possible criminal activity, it must be referred to the General Manager immediately. The General Manager will inform Management Committee and General Manager will contact the police or other relevant authorities.
- 5.11 If the complaint relates to the General Manager, the Chair of the Committee of Management can be contacted initially on chair@connectabilityaus.org.au.
- 5.12 Individual or parties with a complaint may make contact with the following bodies should the complaints remain unresolved or at any time in the complaints process.

These may include:

NSW Ombudsman

Free call (outside Sydney metro area): 1800 451 8050

TTY: (02) 9264 8050

Email: nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au

Website: www.ombo.nsw.gov.au

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (CTH)

Phone: (02) 9284 9600

Complaints Infoline: 1300 656 419

Privacy Hotline: 1300 363 992

TTY: 1800 620 241

Website: www.hreoc.gov.au

National Disability Abuse and Neglect Hotline

A hotline for reporting or complaining about the abuse or neglect of a person with a disability at home, in the community, or in any other location. The hotline will refer a complainant to a relevant state or local agency where necessary.

Free call: 1800 880 052
TTY: 1800 301 130
National relay service: 1800 555 677
Fax: 02 9318 1372
Website: www.disabilityhotline.org

National Disability Complaints Resolution and Referral Service (CRRS)

For people with a disability who wish to make a complaint about their rights being infringed in a disability employment service or by a disability advocacy service.

Free call: 1800 880 052
TTY: 1800 301 130 (free call)
National relay service: 1800 555 677
Fax: 02 9318 1372
Website: www.crrs.org.au

Intellectual Disability Rights Service (IDRS)

A community legal centre specialising in legal and rights issues for people with a disability.

2C/199 Regent St
REFERN NSW 2016
Phone: (02) 9318 0144
Freecall: 1800 666 611
Fax: (02) 9318 2887
Website: www.idrs.org.au

People with Disability Australia Incorporated

For people with a disability who wish to make a complaint about their rights being infringed.

Phone: (02) 9370 3100
Freecall: 1800 422 015
TTY: (02) 9318 2138
TTY: 1800 422 016 freecall
Fax: (02) 9318 1372
Website: www.pwd.org.au
Email: pwd@pwd.org.au

Anti Discrimination Board (NSW)

Hunter Office
Phone: (02) 4926 4300
TTY: (02) 4929 8419
Tollfree (NSW): 1800 670 182
Website: www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/adb

Disability Advocacy NSW

Newcastle
Phone and TTY: 1300 365 085 or (02) 4927 0111
Fax: (02) 4927 0114

Email: newcastle@da.org.au

Department of Human Services, Ageing, Disability and Home Care (NSW)

Central Office

Phone: (02) 8270 2000

TTY: (02) 8270 2167

Hunter Regional Office

Phone: (02) 4978 6100

Fax: (02) 4978 6299

Email: service@dadhc.nsw.gov.au

6.0 Complaints Management

As part of the organisations commitment to implementing a Quality Management System ConectAbility has adopted an online complaints reporting system. As part of its ongoing commitment to effective reporting processes ConnectAbility will maintain all complaint information using the ADHC Quality Framework Reporting (QFR) System.

Adopting this complaints reporting system assists ConnectAbility in reviewing service performance, and progress against implementing the quality requirements and meeting the NSW DSS. All complaint details are treated with privacy and confidentiality through the QFR Online reporting process. It is the responsibility of the Operations Manager to complete the complaint online reporting process.

7.0 Complaints Relating to Abuse and Neglect

ConnectAbility takes reports of abuse and neglect very seriously. It is mandatory for any report of abuse or neglect reported to ConnectAbility by staff, participants, families, carers other stakeholders or members of the public to be reported by ConnectAbility to the Police and to its funding body Department of Family and Community Services, Ageing Disability and Home Care.

Any reports of abuse or neglect reported are to be immediately forwarded to the Operations Manager. The Operations Manager is then responsible to report the information to the CEO. The CEO will then report the matter directly to the Chair of the Committee of Management.

Direct reporting to the Police, ADHC or the NSW Ombudsman's Office will be the responsibility of Senior Management (i.e. Operations Manager, CEO).

8.0 Advocacy and support for people using the service

People who access supports and services provided by ConnectAbility have different types of support networks. Some people have families who are closely involved in their lives or may be reliant on legally appointed guardians to make particular decisions for them. Other people are represented by advocacy services and for some clients these advocates are their only support network.

An advocate must represent the best interests of a person, and in the absence of a family member or any other person having a close relationship with the person, may be the contact person for issues or complaints made by or relating to the person. Other people may be the passive recipients of informal advocacy support, and in this case, ConnectAbility will have to consider what information about a person is appropriate for sharing with an informal advocate.

9.0 Responsibilities

- 9.1 The ConnectAbility Australia Committee of Management is responsible for approving and monitoring the implementation of this policy.
- 9.2 The CEO is responsible for ensuring that:
- all stakeholders are aware of and understand their rights and responsibilities in relation to the making a complaint and managing a complaint.
 - all employees, volunteers, students, team leaders and managers have been provided with training in relation to this policy as required.
 - ongoing support and guidance is provided to all employees in relation to implementing this policy.
 - Providing an annual report to the Committee of Management.
- 9.3 General Manager, Operations Manager are responsible for ensuring that:
- all complaints and feedback are dealt with and recorded in accordance with this policy.
 - Complaints and feedback data is analysed annually and use to inform systems improvements.
- 9.4 Team Leaders and Senior Workers are responsible for ensuring that:
- they attempt to resolve and address any complaints or issues raised with them in line with their authority.
- 9.5 All employees are responsible for ensuring that:
- viewing complaints and feedback as opportunities to improve the organisation.
 - they attempt to resolve and address any complaints or issues raised with them in line with their authority.
 - are aware of and understand this policy and procedures and seek clarification if they do not understand.
 - they follow the policy and procedures outlined in this policy.
- 9.6 Participants, families, carers and other important stakeholders are responsible for:
- Using this complaints process to raise issues with the organisation.

10.0 Equity and access considerations

Employees, volunteers and students are to ensure that services are provided with sensitivity to, and awareness of, people with culturally diverse or indigenous backgrounds, and cultural practices. This is to be carried out without deviating from ConnectAbility's Complaints Management - policy and procedure or legislative responsibilities. Information provided to a person, their family/carer, person responsible or other support person about legal rights, options and support services, must be provided in a format that suits their individual communication needs.

11.0 Communication

Communication about this policy should be implemented in a way that suits each person with regard to their cultural background e.g. use of an interpreter or easy to read documents.

This policy will be:

- communicated to the key internal and external stakeholders of ConnectAbility;
- communicated to ConnectAbility Australia staff through professional development opportunities;
- accessible through ConnectAbility Australia's internal intranet and website.

12.0 Breaches of Policy

Staff are expected to follow this policy. Failure to follow ConnectAbility Australia policies and procedures will be treated seriously and may result in disciplinary action. Serious breaches of policy resulting in gross misconduct could result in instant dismissal.

13.0 Other policies and procedures to be cross referenced with this policy

- Rights and Responsibilities
- Grievance and Dispute Resolution
- Abuse and Neglect
- Participant Advocacy
- Managing Performance Issues
- Compliments and Complaints Brochure
- Using an Advocate Fact Sheet

14.0 Cross reference to relevant legislation

- Disability Services Act NSW 1993
- National Disability Service Standards

15.0 Policy review

This policy will be reviewed in consultation with stakeholders every 3 years.

Implementation of this policy will be reviewed through staff meetings, support and supervision and annual budget processes.

| Version | Date | Author | Reason | Sections |
|-----------|-------------|------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| 4 (draft) | August 2014 | Scott Harvey | Include new Sections 6.0, 7.0, 8.0, 10.0 and 11.0 | Sections 6.0, 7.0, 8.0, 10.0 and 11.0 |
| 3 | August 2012 | Karen Stace | Due for review | All |
| 2 | June 2008 | Scott Harvey | Due for Review | All |
| 1 | April 1996 | Christina Morris | New Policy | All |

ⁱ The three core principles of natural justice or procedural fairness are:

- the right to be heard fairly;
- the right to an unbiased decision made by an objective decision maker; and
- the right to have the decision based on relevant evidence