Complaints Policy

The Avenues Youth Project

Approved by the Executive Committee on: …15.02.2025……

Chair ……Jennie Marshall…….

Date for review: ……15.02.2026……..

The Avenues Youth Project - Complaints Policy

Introduction

The Avenues Youth Project is committed to handling any complaints about the organisation or members of staff promptly and respectfully to ensure there is mutual trust between staff and the beneficiaries of The Avenues work. Our objectives in this policy are:

- We will treat all complaints fairly and impartially.
- We promise that making a complaint will have no implications for your dealings with our organisation.
- We will apologise for any mistake, explain what happened and put it right wherever possible.
- We will change the way we do things to avoid making the same mistake in the future.

Complaints Procedure

Our complaints procedure is designed to be as simple as possible so that concerns can be addressed quickly and resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant.

The purpose of this policy and procedure is to:

- help us to provide a service of the highest standard to all those who come to The Avenues Youth Project
- help us to ensure that children and families using or wishing to use The Avenues Youth Project know they have a right to complain about our service if they need to
- help us to deal with complaints in a positive way and use them to improve our service
- set out the steps that children, young people and their families should take if they wish to make a complaint
- set out how we can deal with complaints in a fair and consistent way.

This policy and procedure applies to all children and young people attending or wishing to attend The Avenues Youth Project. It is not intended to be used by staff or volunteers who are unhappy about their own experience in the workplace.

In these circumstances, staff should use the grievance policy and procedure referred to in the Staff Handbook.

It is also not intended to cover concerns that staff or volunteers may have about issues of possible malpractice or wrongdoing in the workplace. These should be dealt with under the whistle-blowing procedure.

If anyone, whether staff member, volunteer, child/young person or family member, is concerned that a child or children may be at risk of harm, The Avenues' Youth Project's Safeguarding Policy should be adhered to rather than this complaints policy or procedure.

We will seek to deal with complaints by:

- defining clearly what we mean by a complaint
- setting out a procedure that can be easily followed and understood
- making sure that everyone knows about the policy and procedure
- producing child and family friendly material explaining this policy and procedure
- reassuring people that they will not be penalised in any way for using the complaints procedure and that we will respond positively to any complaints made in good faith
- offering extra support to those who need help to make a complaint
- taking a staged approach to complaints that takes account of the level of seriousness and the possibility of resolution at different points
- investigating each complaint as objectively and fully as we reasonably can
- keeping the complainant informed during the course of the investigation and of the outcome of the complaint
- keeping clear records of complaints and of how they are resolved.

What do we mean by a complaint?

A complaint is a statement from someone that they are not happy about the service provided to them by The Avenues Youth Project and would like this to be improved.

Procedure for making a complaint

If possible, the person should discuss the complaint with the lead youth worker or worker in charge. If this is not possible (for example, the complainant does not feel comfortable speaking to the lead youth worker or worker in charge) the complaint should be directed to the Programme Manager.

The lead youth worker or worker in charge will, in the first instance, try to resolve the matter informally. This is often possible and can mean that the problem is sorted simply and quickly.

If an informal solution has been tried before and has not worked, or if the complainant does not feel that informal discussions are adequate or likely to be effective, stage one of the complaints procedure should be followed.

Stage one

The complainant should put their concerns in writing to the Programme Director Carol Archibald or, if the Programme Director is the subject of the complaint, the complainant should direct their complaint to The Avenues' Chief Executive.

The Programme Director should advise the Chief Executive of stage one complaints within one working day. The Avenues Youth Project should then acknowledge the complaint within two working days by sending a brief letter to:

- thank the complainant for getting in touch
- express regret that a complaint has been necessary
- assure them that the matter will be investigated
- set a provisional timescale for the investigation that is reasonable but avoids delay as much as possible
- explain when The Avenues Youth Project will next be in contact
- offer a contact name (usually the Programme Director or the relevant person dealing with the complaint) in case the complainant has any questions in the meantime
- make any temporary arrangements that may be necessary pending the outcome of the investigation into the complaint.

Normally the service to the complainant should continue as normal during the investigation into the complaint. If this is not possible (e.g. because a child has had to be excluded from an activity, or because the complainant does not want to use the service at that point, or because it would not be appropriate for The Avenues Youth Project to continue working with the child/family) then this should be acknowledged.

If the complaint is about a specific staff member, volunteer or other child/young person, then that person (and the parent/carer if the person is a child) should be informed within two working days (or as soon as possible) that a complaint has been made against them and the nature of the complaint. However, the person should not be informed if doing so would compromise anyone's safety or a police investigation.

If the complaint is about a building, facilities or equipment, then this should be examined.

If the complaint is about access to a service, the reasoning behind a decision to offer or not offer a particular service should be examined

If, at any point during the investigation, it appears that a criminal offence may have been committed, the matter should be reported to the police. Discussions should be held with the police about whether the investigation into the complaint can continue alongside their own enquiries.

If it emerges at any point that a child may have been caused significant harm or may be at risk of significant harm, safeguarding procedures should be instigated immediately.

The investigating party should make notes of the investigation, including notes of any meetings that take place, and should write a report based on their findings. The report should state clearly whether the complaint is upheld or not and should make recommendations about how the matter can be taken forward. The report should be shared with both the complainant and any specific member of staff, volunteer or other child, who may be involved. Any comments that either party may wish to make about the extent to which they accept or reject the findings of the report should be noted.

If either the complainant or a person who is the subject of the complaint is not prepared to accept the findings of the report, they should confirm this in writing. The matter then becomes a stage two complaint.

A complaint also progresses to stage two if it has previously (i.e. within the last 12 months) been handled as a stage one complaint but has resurfaced.

Stage two

A stage two complaint may come about for one of two reasons. It may be a complaint that has escalated from stage one because the complainant or a person who was the subject of the complaint wishes to challenge the findings from a stage one investigation. Alternatively, it may relate to matters that were investigated as a stage one complaint within the previous 12 months and have resurfaced.

If a complaint is to progress to stage two, the complainant (this could be the original complainant or a person who was the subject of the original complaint) should again indicate in writing that they wish to complain (or complain further) and should state the reason for this.

The written statement should be presented to the Programme Director or Chief Executive, who should then, within three working days, respond in writing to the complainant. In addition, the programme manager or director should provide the complainant with the name of the person who will investigate the stage two complaint.

The Avenues will endeavour to provide the complainant with a full and final response following a detailed investigation within 15 working days, or a timeframe deemed reasonable if the matter is particularly complex.

Details of all The Avenues Youth Project staff can be obtained from The Avenues Youth Project website at https://www.avenues.org.uk/our-team/ or by calling the office on 0208 969 952 or by writing to The Avenues Youth Project, 3-7 Third Avenue, Queens Park, London W10 4RS

Keeping a record of the complaint

Regardless of whether a complaint is dealt with formally or informally, accurate notes should be made by the key worker or investigating manager of each stage of the process, including records of meetings. Copies of the final report should be given to the person making the complaint and to anyone who may be the subject of the complaint.
If the complaint leads to any disciplinary action or a referral to a statutory authority, copies of the notes made during the investigation and the report of the investigation (together with any notes relating to the outcome) should be kept confidentially on the file of any person who is the subject of the complaint.