VOLUNTEER PROBLEM SOLVING PROCEDURE

1. INTRODUCTION

Volunteers make a unique and valuable contribution to patients, visitors and staff. It is recognised that volunteers are not only an essential resource in helping us to achieve our organisations' goals, but that by providing opportunities for, and supporting volunteering, it helps to promote active citizenship and social inclusion.

Whilst the involvement of volunteers is generally a positive experience for everyone involved, there are times when things can go wrong. A volunteer may wish to make a complaint about something or someone, and similarly the volunteer’s performance may decline, or someone may wish to make a complaint against a volunteer.

These are rare occurrences, but in an effort to ensure a fair, equitable, and consistent approach to dealing with them, it is essential to have a formal procedure. This document sets out the procedure.

When reading this procedure it is important to note that volunteers have no legal employment rights and therefore are not subject to, or protected by, the usual employee policies and procedures.

2. SOME POINTS TO REMEMBER

- All complaints must be treated confidentially, and should only be discussed amongst those who are directly involved in trying to resolve the issue.
- An effort should be made to resolve the problem informally at a local level.
- A written record of all incidents and complaints should be maintained.
- Allow enough time for all meetings, and conduct them in a private place.
- Keep complainants informed at every step of the procedure.
- Volunteers have the right to be accompanied by a colleague or friend in any meetings that form part of the problem solving process.

3. IF A VOLUNTEER MAKES A COMPLAINT (FLOWCHART 1)

This part of the problem solving procedure gives the volunteer the right to complain if they have been unfairly treated.

3.1 Stage 1 - Verbal complaint
Initial complaints, whether against a member of staff, the organisation or another volunteer, should be discussed with the volunteer and a local resolution sought. If the complaint is about the volunteers’ manager or supervisor, then the matter should be referred to the Voluntary Services Manager. During this meeting the volunteer can be accompanied by a colleague or friend, not acting in a legal capacity, if they wish.

If the issue cannot be resolved at this stage then the volunteer should make a formal complaint in writing to the Voluntary Services Manager.

3.2 Stage 2 - In writing

Volunteers making a complaint in writing should do so within 20 working days, excluding bank holidays or weekends, of the informal meeting taking place. The Voluntary Services Manager will acknowledge the letter within 3 working days of receipt.

An investigation into the complaint will be undertaken, the results and subsequent actions will be discussed with the volunteer within 20 working days of the original letter. During this meeting the volunteer can be accompanied by a colleague or friend, not acting in a legal capacity, if they wish.

The actions or decision taken should be confirmed in writing to the volunteer.

3.3 Stage 3 - Right to appeal

If the volunteer is not satisfied with the outcome, then they can appeal in writing to a Senior Manager* within the organisation within 20 working days of the decision meeting. (*This could be the VSM’s manager or other senior manager as appropriate)

An investigation into the complaint will be undertaken, the results and subsequent actions will be discussed with the volunteer within 10 working days of the appeal letter. During this meeting the volunteer can be accompanied by a colleague or friend, not acting in a legal capacity, if they wish.

The Senior Manager will confirm their decision in writing. Their decision is final.

4. IF SOMEONE COMPLAINS ABOUT A VOLUNTEER (FLOWCHART 2)

This part of the problem solving procedure gives the volunteer the right to be told why they are being disciplined, the right to state their case, and the right to appeal.

Sometimes minor issues can arise during the course of volunteering, such as a volunteer not fitting into the team as well as was expected, not meeting the required standards when undertaking tasks, or being unreliable. However, if a more serious issue occurs then immediate action may be necessary (see exceptions on page 4).
Minor issues are usually detected during regular supervision, and may be quite easy to resolve either by the supervisor or manager for the area, without resorting to formal procedures. This checklist suggests how some issues can be dealt with:

- A comprehensive induction to the ward or department on commencing a volunteer placement.
- Assessment of the volunteer’s training needs and addressing them.
- Providing the volunteer with support and supervision.
- Undertaking an initial review after the volunteer has been in place for one month.
- Undertaking regular 6 monthly reviews with the volunteer.

However, if these do not address the issues then the following procedure should be instigated.

**Stage 1 – Verbal discussion**

The first step is to discuss the issue with the volunteer. There could be external factors influencing their ability to carry out tasks, their behaviour or their attitude.

- Identify goals that will help the volunteer to fulfil their role, and offer extra support, supervision and training where necessary.
- Set a deadline for reviewing the situation.
- Document your discussion and the agreed actions.
- If there is insufficient improvement, then you may need to adopt a more formal approach, and move to stage 2 of the procedure and issue a written warning.
- Notes of the meeting should be sent to the volunteer within 10 working days of the meeting.

**Stage 2 – Written warning**

If the issue hasn’t been resolved by the verbal discussion or the review, then the ward or department manager, in conjunction with the Matron or equivalent where applicable, should issue the volunteer with a written warning outlining the reason for the complaint.

The Ward/Department manager must inform the Voluntary Services Manager who will assist in this stage of the procedure and undertake an investigation.

The volunteer has the right to state their case, to the manager and Voluntary Services Manager, and to be accompanied by a colleague or friend, not acting in a legal capacity, if they wish.

Depending on the nature of the complaint:
- Further investigation of the issue may be needed.
- Further objectives could be set, and help offered to the volunteer.
- The volunteer may be moved to another placement.
- The volunteer may be dismissed.

A decision to dismiss a volunteer should be a last resort.
Whatever the decision, the volunteer has the right to appeal.

Stage 3 - Right to appeal

If the volunteer is not satisfied with the outcome, then they can appeal in writing to a Senior Manager* within 20 working days of the decision meeting. (*This could be the VSM’s manager or other senior manager as appropriate)

An investigation into the complaint should be undertaken, the results and subsequent actions should be discussed with the volunteer within 10 working days of the appeal letter. During this meeting the volunteer can be accompanied by a colleague or friend, not acting in a legal capacity, if they wish.

The Senior Manager will confirm their decision in writing. Their decision is final.

5. CONDUCTING A DISMISSAL MEETING

If a decision is made to dismiss the volunteer, the following good practice guidelines should be adhered to:

5.1. The meeting should take place in a private setting.
5.2. Be quick and direct. The decision has been made, so ensure the volunteer is informed in a timely manner.
5.3. Inform the volunteer of their right to appeal.
5.4. A letter should be sent to the volunteer to re-iterate the decision to dismiss, as well as outlining the reasons why, and their right to appeal. A copy of the Problem Solving Procedure should be included with the letter. Include any information relating to their departure e.g. return of Trust ID badge, parking permit and uniform.

6. EXCEPTIONS

There are some occasions on which volunteers can be suspended immediately while an investigation is carried out. These include, but are not limited to, acts that constitute gross misconduct, e.g. theft, assault, act of violence, malicious damage, and deliberate falsification of documents, harassment or being under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Illegal or criminal acts will be reported to the police and may result in prosecution.

The Voluntary Services Manager must be informed immediately.

The decision to suspend a volunteer must to be confirmed in writing to the volunteer.

This procedure will be reviewed annually.

(Produced with kind permission of Volunteering England Information Team.)
A volunteer makes a complaint

STAGE 1 : Verbal discussion
- Attempt to resolve informally at a local level
- Document discussion

Complaint not resolved

STAGE 2 : In writing
- Volunteer advised to make a formal complaint in writing to the Voluntary Services Manager (VSM) within 20 working days.
- VSM acknowledges formal complaint within 3 working days of receipt.
- Investigation undertaken by VSM.
- Results and actions discussed with volunteer within 20 working days of receipt of original complaint letter.
- Decision / outcome confirmed in writing.
- Inform volunteer of right to appeal.

Volunteer not satisfied with the outcome / decision

STAGE 3 : Right to appeal
- Volunteer appeals within 20 working days of the decision / outcome to the Senior Manager.
- The Senior Manager investigates and responds to the appeal within 10 working days with the final decision.

Please note: At all stages of this procedure the volunteer has the right to have a colleague or friend, not acting in a legal capacity, present if they wish.
VOLUNTEER PROBLEM SOLVING PROCEDURE: FLOWCHART 2

A complaint is made against a volunteer

STAGE 1: Verbal discussion
- Attempt to resolve informally at a local level
- Document discussion
- Set deadline for review

Insufficient improvement

STAGE 2: Written warning
- Volunteer advised that sufficient improvement has not been achieved and further action to be taken.
- Voluntary Services Manager (VSM) informed.
- Investigation may be undertaken by VSM.
- Manager discusses action with the volunteer.
- Decision / outcome confirmed in writing.
- Volunteer informed of right to appeal.

Performance of volunteer improves
- No further action needed
- Document outcome of review

Volunteer not satisfied with the decision

STAGE 3: Right to appeal
- Volunteer appeals within 20 working days of the decision / outcome to the Associate Director of Patient Affairs (ADoPA).
- The ADoPA investigates and responds to the appeal within 10 working days with the final decision.

Please note: At all stages of this procedure the volunteer has the right to have a colleague or friend, not acting in a legal capacity, present if they wish.