

Complaints Policy

1. Introduction

Families United Network is a registered Charity which supports children, young people and families living with disabilities. It is always aiming to offer the best possible service to members and service users.

Families United Network welcomes any communication about its services and activities. The Charity is committed to providing safe, high quality and appropriate service and activities delivered with care and respect at all times, and to both maintaining and further developing quality standards.

2. Policy Statement

Families United Network therefore, welcomes constructive feedback on all the services it provides. Everyone who comes in contact with Families United Network should feel able to comment on its services and know that their comments will be taken seriously, and action will be taken, where appropriate, to address, any issues and to improve services for the future.

Families United Network understands that complaints will be received from time to time. It will ensure that there are clear pathways for complaints to be made, received, and effectively responded to whilst taking care to act sensitively, promptly and efficiently so as to provide a fair and impartial system.

The Charity recognises such complaints are a valuable aid to improving practice and maintaining service standards. Complaints about its services will be investigated appropriately and Complainants will be kept fully informed about the progress and result of any investigation.

Families United Network believes that everyone in the organisation has a responsibility to handle complaints effectively, learn from them and improve.

Families United Network acknowledges the most successful organisations are those that see complaints as an opportunity rather than a threat. **Families United Network** is determined to follow good practice in this area and to set an example both internally and externally. This policy outlines how complaints are managed within Families United Network.

Scope

The Complaints Policy is aimed at providing a fair and effective complaints framework for service users, organisations and members of the general public who access the Charity's services and facilities. It is not for dealing with employee grievances and issues, which should be dealt with through the Charity's employee and volunteer policies and procedures.

This policy is not for dealing with disciplinary matters, however, if any aspect of the complaint investigation identifies an employee or volunteer performance issues, the disciplinary process may be instigated.

Who can complain?

Any person or organisation using our services or accessing the Charity's facilities or those that hire or use those facilities.

Complaints are welcomed on behalf of others, provided:

- the person knows and consents to the complaint being made;
- or it is from someone acting on behalf of a person who is unable by reason of physical or mental incapacity to make that complaint themselves.

In the case of a child, a suitable person would normally be a parent, guardian or other adult who has care of the child, or (in the case of children in care) anyone who is authorised by the local authority or voluntary organisation with whom Families United Network is working.

3. Responsibilities and Accountability

Charity Manager

The Charity Manager has overall responsibility for the strategic and operational management of Families United Network, reporting to the Board of Trustees.

It is the Charity Manager's responsibility to ensure that this policy and its outworking comply with all legal, statutory and good guidance requirements, and to monitor the response and investigation of all complaints and keep the Board of Trustees informed.

The Charity Manager alone (or in their absence their nominated deputy) can act as the Investigating Officer for major and serious complaints about standards, quality of service or denial of rights. These are issues with clear quality assurance or risk management implications or issues causing lasting detriment, including grossly substandard care or service.

Minor complaints (see below) may be investigated by Service Leads/Co-ordinators

Co-ordinators and Service Leads

These can be identified as those responsible for service delivery and who report directly to the Charity Manager.



All Line Managers and Service Leads can act as the Investigating Officer for minor complaints and be responsible for the investigation and will work with the Charity Manager to ensure satisfactory resolution of the complaint. They may also be called upon to investigate complaints in other programmes and projects.

Employees

All employees are responsible for co-operating with the development and implementation of the policy and any investigations. Obstructing that process will be viewed as a potential disciplinary matter.

4. Procedures and Implementation.

Families United Network believes that if an individual has a problem with or concern about any of its services, this is normally best dealt with informally and as quickly as possible by the individual or service involved. However, if they are not able to answer to the Complainant's satisfaction, there is a formal Complaints process to ensure that the matter is investigated and resolved.

Many complaints and concerns are likely to be verbal complaints made to front line employees in person or by telephone. Others may be received by letter or electronically.

Response

Upon receiving a complaint, the individual concerned should thank the Complainant for bringing the matter to the Charity's attention and advise them how this will be handled (see below).

In attempting to resolve the issue the individual will listen and acknowledge the complaint and do their best to clarify the nature of the complaint and what the Complainant wants to happen as a result of their complaint. The individual should apologise there is an issue which has caused the complaint (e.g. "I am sorry you feel like that") and respond locally, if possible, to take some action to rectify or improve the problem.

4.1 Logging the Complaint

- All complaints must be reported to the Service Lead or Manager, who will deal with minor complaints locally if possible.
- All complaints will be recorded on a complaint/concern form (Appendix.1) and the procedure followed within that form.
- Any complaint of a more than minor nature must be immediately logged by the Service Lead/Manager with the Charity Administrator, who will immediately raise a complaints file for the Charity Manager. The Charity Manager must also inform the Board of Trustees immediately and directly.
- All minor complaints forms will be logged centrally under the oversight of the Charity Administrator.
- The Charity Administrator will maintain a log of all complaints and their nature/dates etc.
- Written or electronic complaints must be passed to the relevant Service Lead/Manager immediately.

It should be noted that the confidentiality of the Complainant must be respected in line with statutory requirements and the Families United Network confidentiality policy. Any employee of the Charity must not discuss any details of complaints or those implicated other than through the complaints process.

Where the complaint is about any employee or a volunteer the Charity Manager (or their nominated deputy) shall have the authority to suspend employee or volunteer, without prejudice, pending the outcome of the complaint. Where the complaint is about the Charity Manager, the Chair of Trustees shall exercise that authority.

4.2 Acknowledging the complaint

- The Service Lead/Manager will, within 1 working day, attempt to contact the Complainant (by telephone or letter but **not** by e-mail) and offer them an opportunity to discuss the complaint, where possible at a local venue of their choice.
- The Service Lead/Manager will agree a written letter of acknowledgement with the Charity Manager, or in their absence their appointed deputy, which will be sent within three working days of receiving a complaint.

4.3 Investigating a complaint

- Minor complaints will be investigated by the Service Lead/Manager. All other complaints will be investigated by the Charity Manager, or by another Service Lead/Manager if so appointed by the Charity Manager.
- Where the complaint involves material stored on a computer the Service Lead/Manager or Investigating Officer must ensure that such information is secured and retained as a matter of urgency to prevent deletion or amendment by anyone being complained against.
- Any issues raised during the investigation which were not raised by the Complainant at the outset, must be dealt with separately and logged as a separate complaint.
- This investigation may include: interviews with relevant employees and/or their Line managers; reference to existing Families United Network policies and procedures; Contact with the Complainant.
- All communications, whether verbal or otherwise must be recorded and placed in the complaints file.
- Wherever possible, the Complainant should receive a full written response within 20 working days of being received. The Complainant must be kept fully informed about any deviation from the planned process and if the investigation needs to take longer than that must be informed of when a full written response is likely to be possible.
- Such a response must be approved by the Charity Manager or, in their absence, by their nominated deputy.

4.4 Unresolved Complaints/Appeals

Should the Complainant not be satisfied the matter may be appealed direct to the Chair of Trustees, who will investigate the matter afresh within the boundaries of above guidelines and appointing a new Investigating Officer from amongst the Trustees. Where the complaint is about the Charity Manager the file will be held securely by the Chair of Trustees.

Should the Complainant still not be satisfied by a response from the Chair of Trustees, they have recourse to the Charity Commission

4.5 Monitoring Complaints

- A log of all complaints will be tabled at every Employee Team Meeting for information and at every Board of Trustees meeting.
- The Charity Manager is responsible to ensure that lessons learned from the complaints are applied and implemented to improve future practice – and that such changes and improvements are reviewed and evaluated.
- All documentation pertinent to the complaint will be kept securely and stored for 3 years.

4.6 Training and Awareness

All employees and volunteers will be made aware of this policy and all Service Leads/Managers will receive training on this procedure – including examination of recent complaints and how they were processed and resolved.

5. Related Policies/Guidelines

- Disciplinary Policy
- Risk Management Policy
- Confidentiality Policy
- Appendix 1 Complaints and Concerns form
- Appendix 2 Structure of Acknowledgement letter
- Appendix 3 Structure of Reports
- Appendix 4 Investigative Interviews
- Appendix 5 Flowchart

6. Monitoring and Review

This is the current version of the Fun Complaints Policy. The policy will be reviewed every two years or earlier if required in the light of any complaint or should relevant legislation change.

Appendix 1 - Concerns/Complaints Form

Please refer to the Complaints Policy for supporting guidance

Reporting service lead /co-ordinator	Complainant	
Project/Department		
Date Comments received	Reported to:	
Concern/Comments Received. (please write a brief description of the issue and identify all persons involved, where possible)		
Co-ordinators/service lead response Comments: (Action taken and/or suggestions for further improvement)		
If Complainant not the individual concerned ensure written consent gained	YES NO Not applicable	Other comments
Date Action completed	Signature Name	
Directors comments Date Signature		

This form is to be used for concerns and complaints but not Incidents/Accidents, which need to be completed on the appropriate form.

Once completed please store this document: Complaints/File Name

Original to be filed with Charity Administrator in Central file.

Appendix 2 Structure of Acknowledgement letter

1. Acknowledgement of complaint and offering apologies if appropriate

Sample phrases

- Thank you for your letter/e-mail dated which was received on I am sorry to hear of the concerns you raised.
 - Thank you for taking the time to write to us regarding your concerns about (subject of complaint). May I begin by saying how sorry I am that you have had cause to complain.
 - From your letter/e-mail/call, it is clear that you do not feel that you received the quality of XXXXXXXX that you expected. We are very sorry about this. We always strive to give the best possible service and support and we will make sure this is investigated properly and any appropriate action taken
 - At Families United Network we take all complaints very seriously and an investigation is taking place. We will be speaking with all those involved in the incident/situation
 - If it would help, I would be happy to meet with you and to discuss this at a time and place convenient to you.
2. Confirm substance of complaint, from conversation/meeting/communication and status of Complainant/consent issues.
3. Outline process – what will happen, when and who by.
- “Your complaint is now being investigated, and I will seek to provide you with a full reply by (Date or 20 days from complaint being received, as applicable). If this is not possible, I will of course keep you informed and I will endeavour to keep any unavoidable delays to a minimum.”
4. Contact if any questions
- “If you have any questions about this, please do not hesitate to contact me”.
5. Again offer appropriate apologies
- “Please accept my sincere apologies for the distress and inconvenience this matter has caused you”.

Appendix 3: Structure of Reports

1. Introduction

- Completed by
- Terms of reference – investigation looked at
- List issues, primary focus
- Methodology – how investigated: interviews, documents, etc.
- Limits and qualifications

Completed by XXXXXXXXXXXX in response to the complaint made by XXXXXXXXXXXX about XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX. The investigation looked at XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX. The investigation was necessarily limited by XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX. This report is a concise and focused summary of the findings and especially focuses on the following areas

2. Framework relevant:

- Legal – law, contracts etc
- Care – policies, protocols, guidelines
- Quality framework

3. Those involved and the sequence of events

- Parties
- Chronology: before, during and after.

4. Findings: what, why and key issues

5. Conclusions

6. Recommendations/Action Plan

- What/ Why /Who /How /When
- Internal/external/reporting

Appendix 4: Investigative Interviews

Note

- The interview may be transcribed and the interviewee is entitled to receive a copy of the transcript.
- The interviewee is entitled to be accompanied.

The key things to remember in obtaining the best possible record of information shared during the interview are:

1. Plan and Prepare (think about where, when, breaks, refreshments – and draft key questions, sort any information needed, records etc)
2. Opening the Interview – establish rapport and ensure your manner and approach is appropriate and non-confrontational – opportunity to reduce stress levels
3. Explain the aims of the interview – introduce, explain purpose, timings etc. Not about blame but about establish a true picture of what happened etc. Are there questions? Does the interviewee have a clear understanding
4. An effective interview
 - Begin with free recall
 - Allow pauses for the interviewee
 - Then use open ended questions for more detail
 - Probe with specific questions
 - Keep up with note taking

Avoid

- Using quick fire questions
 - Interrupting interviewees before they have told their story
 - Interviewee taking control and shaping the structure of the interview
5. Closure – ask interviewee whether anything should have been done differently and what improvements or changes they would now want to make.