

WS1 - Complaints Policy and Procedure

1. Policy

1.1 Aims of this Complaints Policy

- a. To enable a complaint to be investigated in a fair manner
- b. To enable complaints to be resolved as quickly as possible
- c. To allow consequences of mistakes to be put right without unnecessary conflict
- d. To improve the quality of our service

1.2. The difference between a concern and a complaint

- a. A 'concern' may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'. Concerns raised should be listened to sympathetically and it may be possible for the person to whom they are expressed to provide an acceptable answer, simple explanation or apology.
- b. A complaint may be generally defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'.
- c. This process covers how both of the above are to be managed.

1.3. Who can complain?

- a. Anyone who has enquired about the counselling service, is on the waiting list or is a client receiving counselling.
- b. Anyone who is using or has enquired about using any other Wellspring Therapy and Training's service.
- c. For the purposes of this process, both the above are collectively referred to as "complainants".

1.4. Scope of Complaints

Complaints made under this Procedure may involve paid employees, volunteer counsellors, welcomers and other volunteers acting for or on behalf of Wellspring Therapy and Training, for the purposes of this process, collectively referred to as "staff".

1.5. Confidentiality and Communications

Every complaint will be treated with care and confidentiality. Attempts will be made to communicate clearly and directly with all complainants or their representatives in a timely manner, as described below.

1.6. Safety of Complainants

At all times the complainant's safety and privacy will be a primary consideration. If a complaint relates to the conduct of a counsellor during counselling, suspension of counselling and/or disciplinary proceedings may take place at any stage of the complaints process, if appropriate. A similar approach may be adopted where the complaint is related to other (non-counselling) Wellspring services.

2. Complaints Procedure

Notwithstanding this procedure, where the complaint is in regard to counselling the complainant is entitled to raise the matter with Wellspring's professional association, the Association of Christian Counsellors (ACC) or if an individual counsellor is the subject of a complaint, to that counsellor's professional association, at any point.

2.1 Initial Action

- a. It is in everyone's interest that issues are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Some concerns can be resolved without the need to use an informal complaint.
- b. If a client receiving counselling or awaiting such, has a concern, they should aim to resolve it in discussion with their counsellor, to give an opportunity to talk the matter through in the safety of the counselling relationship.
- c. Where anyone other than a client (see 1.3b) has a complaint in relation to any other Wellspring service, they are encouraged to solve it by discussing with the member of staff involved.
- d. The majority of concerns should be resolved in this way.
- e. If the complainant's concern is not resolved, they may escalate the concern; in the case of those relating to counselling services, to the Therapeutic Lead; where related to other Wellspring services, to the Operations and Resources Officer.
- f. A complainant has the right to escalate the matter to an informal complaint without discussion with the counsellor or member of staff concerned.

2.2 Stage 1 – Informal Complaint

- a. The Therapeutic Lead (in counselling related complaints) or the Operations and Resources Officer (where other Wellspring services are concerned) will take every opportunity to settle the complaint informally.
- b. This may include telephone conversations and/or face to face meetings and a written explanation of any decision taken.
- c. If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of discussions at this stage, then a formal complaint can be made.
- d. This should be made in writing to the Executive Director of Wellspring.

2.3 Stage 2 – Formal Complaint

- a. A formal complaint will be acknowledged in writing by the Executive Director within seven days. A copy of the Complaints Procedure will be enclosed.
- b. If a member of staff is the subject of the complaint, they will also be sent a copy of the complaint along with the Complaints Procedure.
- c. If a counsellor is the subject of a complaint their supervisor will also be informed.
- d. Counselling sessions with the complainant will be suspended when the complaint moves to Stage Two – Formal Complaint. At the discretion of the Therapeutic lead, all client work of the counsellor complained against may be suspended during investigations.

2.3.1 Investigation of the Complaint

The complaint will be investigated by the Executive Director and another independent member of the Wellspring management team.

- a. They will make a thorough and confidential investigation of the complaint, and may contact both the complainant and the person complained against.
- b. They will have access to relevant documents and to staff members, if appropriate. They may ask for evidence from either party and if this is sought in person, they will meet with each party separately.

- c. If a meeting in person takes place, all parties will have the right to be accompanied, and/or be represented, by a supportive person of their choice.
- d. The complainant and the party or parties complained against and/or their representative will not be asked to attend any meetings together.
- e. A written response to the complaint will be made within twenty-eight days, a copy of which will be sent to the person complained against.
- f. If it proves impossible to respond within 28 days, the complainant will be informed of any reasons for a delay.
- g. All investigations will be completed and responded to within a maximum of six months.
- h. Whoever is managing the complaint, may halt the procedure at any stage if it emerges that legal action is under way, pending or intended, until such time as any legal process is complete.

2.4 Stage 3 – Escalation to Wellspring Board

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after reading the response to the complaint, he/she will be advised, if appropriate, that they may take their complaint to The Chair of Trustees

2.4.1 Investigation of the Complaint

- a. If the complainant does not agree to the outcome of the Stage Two, they may escalate the complaint to Stage Three by submitting their reasons in writing to the Chair of Trustees. This written submission must be received by Wellspring's Chair of Trustees within 7 days of the Stage Two response.
- b. Such written submission must set out the full grounds for the complaint.
- c. The Chair will engage the assistance of another trustee to participate in the Complaints process.
- d. Where the complaint specifically relates to counselling, the Trustee selected will be the Trustee Counselling Subject Matter Expert (SME) the Board of Trustees has such a person appointed who is an experienced Counsellor.
- e. The utmost discretion and privacy will be maintained throughout this stage.
- f. If another member of staff is implicated in the complaint, they will be informed in writing within three working days and given the opportunity to respond. Such response to be in writing and made to the Chair of the Trustees within seven working days.
- g. The Chair of Trustees will convene a special Complaints meeting within 21 days of the receipt of the written complaint. The Complaints Committee should comprise of the Chair, a trustee (in the case of a counselling complaint the Trustee Counsellor SME) and the appropriate Manager. None of the meeting members should be those implicated in the original complaint.
- h. The complainant and the member of staff implicated in the complaint will be notified of the date of and may be invited to attend part of the Complaints meeting to present their views. If invited, attendance is not compulsory.
- i. The findings of the Complaints meeting will be relayed to the complainant and any other relevant parties in writing within 5 working days of the date of the Complaints meeting.
- j. The Complaints meeting will decide on appropriate action, should the complaint be upheld, which may include Disciplinary action which can ultimately result in dismissal.
- k. If the complaint is resolved to the complainant's satisfaction, no further action is taken.
- l. For **non-counselling**-based complaints, the results of this stage are binding, and the process ends, unless the complainant wishes to escalate to an external body which they believe is appropriate.
- m. For **counselling-based** complaints, the complainant may move to Stage 4 below.

2.5 Stage 4 – External Body Escalation

- a. If the complainant who's complaint is based upon our counselling service remains dissatisfied after reading the response to the stage 3 complaint, he/she will be advised, if appropriate, that they may take their complaint to Wellspring's professional association, the Association of Christian Counsellors (ACC) or if an individual counsellor is the subject of a complaint, to that counsellor's professional association
- b. Each individual counsellor at Wellspring is obliged to be on a professional standards register.
 - i. If the client's complaint alerts Wellspring to actions of a counsellor who is acting in breach of the BACP/ACC ethical framework, Wellspring are obliged to report this mis-conduct to the counsellor's own professional body.
 - ii. If the counsellor is a student and not a fully registered member, Wellspring should notify the counsellor's training provider.

3. Monitoring of Complaints

- a. A record will be kept of all complaints received.
- b. Anonymous complaints will also be recorded, including the reasons for any decision to pursue or not to pursue the complaint.
- c. Complaints will be monitored regularly by the Director and brought to the attention of the Board of Trustees.

4. Access to this Complaints Procedure document

This Complaints Procedure can be accessed as follows:

- a. A copy is available on the notice board in Wellspring reception.
- b. A hard or electronic copy can be requested by phone, email, letter or in person from the Wellspring Office.

Document Control & History

Version	Date	Author	Authorised by	Summary of Changes	Issue Date	Review date
1.0	Sept. 2019	S. James/S. Ball	Board of Trustees	New Policy		
1.1	Oct 2019	R. Elliott	Board of Trustees	Updated language		Oct 2020