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**PROTOCOL: RAISING ISSUES**

**Purpose**

The purpose of this protocol is to provide guidance to Community Sponsorship Groups (CSGs) on supporting sponsored individuals and families to raise any issues that they might have with the support provided by the CSG.

**Scope**

This guidance applies to families and individuals who may wish to raise an issue about the CSG or its members. This includes but is not limited to issues relating to how families/individuals are being treated by group members and/or the support provided by the CSG.

Dealing with issues between group members is dealt with in the *Community Sponsorship Training Programme.* Dealing with issues between the CSG and the Regional Support Organisation (RSO) is dealt with in the *Community Sponsorship Memorandum of Understanding for CSG and RSO*.

**Values informing this Process**

-   *No problem too small:* even the smallest issue presents an opportunity to improve the individual/ families experience and build better relationships with group members.

-   *No wrong door:* whoever an issue is raised with is the right person to hear it at that time, even if they can’t resolve it, they can help the family/individual figure out who’s best to help them

-   *Deep empathy:* even if the issue does not seem like a big deal to the person hearing it, it’s essential that we listen and recognise the perspective of the person raising it and what it means to them

-   *Good faith:* regardless of the nature of the issue or how it is raised, all issues raised should be treated as coming from a place of help-seeking and an opportunity for trust-building.

-   *Boundaries:* trauma can cause us to act in ways that may seem aggressive or difficult to other people. Group members will benefit from remembering that issues raised in a challenging way is rarely a personal attack on them or indeed the group.

**Creating an Open, Healthy Culture**

CSGs should seek to create a culture where raising issues is welcomed and embraced just as much as positive feedback. Raising issues is valued because:

-   Responding to an issue raised is an opportunity to build trust – to show the individual or family that they will be listened to, believed and supported

-   Issues raised are an opportunity to connect- working through a difficulty successfully increases connection and strengthens relationships, and opportunities to do this should be welcomed.

-   It is an invaluable way of helping CSGs to find ways to improve the support they are providing and increase the individual/family and the groups wish for a successful sponsorship experience

-   It helps to redress the implicit power imbalance between the sponsor and sponsored by affirming for the individual or family that they can expect a certain standard of treatment and support and address it if they are not happy with it

-   Early identification of issues can often mean simpler solutions or a clearer strategy – when something remains unaddressed it can become more complicated to resolve at a later point

-   It helps the individuals and families build culturally appropriate skills and language / terminology in articulating their needs, raising concerns and seeking resolution from someone providing support to them.

**What the Individual or Family Can Expect**

All individuals and families coming through the CSI Programme should know that:

-   *Access:* they can raise an issue with any individual in the group, or go directly to the RSO if they wish, although each group should have a person specifically nominated as an Engagement Officer to help the person seek resolution to any issues raised.

-   *Standards:*They can expect a standard of support where they are treated with respect, their dignity and autonomy is prioritised

-   *Improvements:*They do not need to ignore what is not working, because they are so grateful for what is – they have a right to have things change and improve

-   *Frequency:*They can ask a question at any time, as often as they like, regarding the standard of support they should expect

-   *Time:*They can raise a query or issue about any aspect of their support or the behaviour of any individual in the group at any time

-   *Good Faith:*They can raise an issue at any point and can expect to be listened to in good faith

-   *Clarification:*They will be supported to explore and articulate the issue raised or what is wrong if it is not initially clear to the group or group member what this is – language, terminology and culture can all contribute to misunderstandings if time is not taken to find the shared truth

-   *Limitations:* sometimes the capacity of the CSG to support the family or individual can be limited by bigger barriers e.g. in relation to housing, employment, material goods etc. This can be a source of significant frustration for all involved and should be acknowledged as such.

**How this is Communicated to Families and Individuals**

The CSG should:

-   Identify an individual within the group as their Engagement Officer (see role description below)

-   Provide a printed copy of the process in English and in the person’s native language as part of the welcome pack

-   In initial discussions, and at regular intervals as appropriate, the importance of raising issues, and the process for doing so should be highlighted by members of the CSG

-   As issues arise, group members can remind families of the guidance, provide them with a copy of the process and offer support to them in seeking a resolution

**Raising Issues and Levels for Escalation**

-   The individual should be encouraged to raise the issue as close to the source of the issue as possible e.g.

o   If the issue is with an individual group member, then the sponsored person should be encouraged to address it directly, and can be supported to find the language to sensitively address this with the person.

o   If the issue is relating to a particular task then this can be raised with the people who have taken responsibility for it

-   If the sponsored person is not comfortable raising the issue with the group member, then they may seek support from the Engagement Officer to help them make a plan to address the issue. This is particularly important where there may be perceptions of bullying, boundary crossing or inappropriate behaviour on the part of one of the group members.

-   If the issue is with the whole group, or for any reason they do not wish to engage with the Engagement Officer then the individual can go directly to the group’s lead sponsor

-   As above, if this is not a viable option from the perspective of the sponsored person, then they may go directly to the RSO. The RSO will be able to help the individual or family access professional services whilst ensuring confidentiality.

**Receiving an Issue**

The Engagement Officer or another individual receiving a complaint should ensure that during the initial communication they:

**Acknowledge and thank**

-   Thank the person and show genuine gratitude to them for the opportunity to help resolve a problem

-   Explain that in order to help them as best as you can, you need to ask questions – this is not because you do not believe them, but because information can speed up an effective resolution to their issue

-   Provide any reassurances around confidentiality that may help them e.g. ‘*you can be honest with me, and we’ll work out together whether and how you want other people to know about this’*

**Seek information on the issue**

-   Get as much information as you can about the nature of their issue, ensuring that key information is not lost in translation by asking open questions

-   Seek to understand how they have tried to resolve it themselves

**Seek information on the desired outcome**

-   Ask them what the ideal outcome is for them, and whether they have ideas as to how to resolve it. Ask them what would be acceptable, if what is ideal cannot be achieved

-   Help them to manage their expectations: be realistic in what the outcome might be and identify any barriers to their goal being met

**Clarify next steps**

-   Reflect back to them your understanding of the issue, their desired outcome

-   Agree what you will do next and what they will do next to resolve the issue - ensure that any solutions and next steps are fully endorsed, if not led by the affected individual

-   Seek written consent if the issue needs to be acted on and shared with other members of the group or RSO

**Serious Issues**

-   If there is an issue raised of a serious nature and the person who receives it is not confident about the capacity of the group to progress it, they may go directly to the RSO to seek support on how to respond and progress it.

-   Where there are immediate and serious welfare or safety concerns the police or relevant State authority should immediately be notified.

**Role Description for the Engagement Officer**

The responsibilities for this role are:

-   To be available to the individual or family who wishes to raise an issue with the group

-   To support the individual or family to address the issue with the person or to escalate the issue to the Lead Sponsor or RSO as appropriate

-   To communicate consistently, in a timely manner and supportive way with the family member or individual about their issue

-   To support the raising of any issues in a way that is respectful, compassionate and honest to all parties involved

Please note that the group may agree on this role being time-limited e.g. it changes after 6 months or a year

**Protocol last updated: Feb 2022**