

Concerns Policy for Service Users

Introduction

LIFE-FORCE Centre and Counselling Service, hereafter referred to as the Organisation, considers all Service Users' concerns to be an important way of monitoring the quality of the service it provides and a useful tool in the maintenance of a professional BACP Accredited Counselling Service. The Organisation believes it is important that all Service Users can raise concerns regarding the service provided and that these are responded to by the Office Staff and Team Counsellors, hereafter referred to as Members, in a positive and receptive manner.

The Concerns Policy is the usual starting point for any concerns or grievances. The opportunity to raise concerns is available for Service Users who initially do not wish to make an informal/formal complaint and therefore the Complaints Procedure for Service Users and Members is not applicable. However Service Users have the right to use the complaints procedure immediately if they consider the situation to be a major breach of professional standards and/or policies and procedures. The Organisation intends for all concerns to be addressed and processed promptly within 20 working days.

NB. This policy is not applicable to Service Users who contacted the counsellor on an independent and private basis and therefore have not been referred via the Counselling Service.

Concerns Procedure

Stage 1

Initially the Service User is advised to raise their concerns directly with the Member with whom they have a concern and have a conversation with them. If at all possible, this should be done face to face or alternatively by telephone. It is suggested that this is undertaken in a calm manner and both the Service User and Member aim to resolve the situation during this conversation.

Stage 2

If the Service User feels unable to do this, or is unhappy with the response they receive from the Member, then they should contact the Office and raise their concern with the Centre Director or a member of the Office Staff, who will initially advise them of the Concerns Policy for Service Users and inform them that concerns are not confidential and will be shared with the Member. Furthermore the Service User needs to be aware that, for any disclosed concerns which raise either an ethical or health and safety issue, the Organisation reserves the right to take action and investigate these, regardless of whether or not they proceed to Stage 3. If the Service User decides to go ahead and share their grievance, the Office Staff will listen to a summary of the concern and if requested to do so by the Service User, will forward them a copy of the policy, which they should read prior to proceeding to the next stage. Following the conversation, the member of Office Staff will discuss the situation with the Centre Director and, if considered appropriate, will contact the Member and let them know a concern has been raised about them.

Stage 3

After reading the policy, should the Service User, decide to pursue their complaint they can do so by putting their concern in writing in the form of an attachment marked 'Private & Confidential' sent by email to info@lifeforce-centre.co.uk, or sent by post if they prefer. The Service User's attachment should also state they give their explicit consent for their written concerns to be shared with the person concerned. The Service User should be aware that anything that they have then put in writing will be shared with the Member, unless the nature of the concern is extreme and therefore dictates otherwise.

Stage 4

The Centre Director will read the written concern and then contact the Member by email to advise them that a concern has been raised by the Service User and attach the written concern. The Member then has 10 working days to respond to the concern raised and to write back by email to the Service User via the office.

Stage 5

If the Service User is not satisfied with the response they receive from the Member then they can inform the Member by email via the office. The Member will be required to meet with the Service User, within 5-10 working days, in order to address and hopefully resolve the concern. The Centre Director will liaise with both parties in order to find a mutually convenient time for them to meet each other on the LIFE-FORCE premises. It is recommended that the Service User and Member meet each other with an open mind to the other's position regarding the concern raised, discuss the matter in a calm and professional manner and, if at all possible, resolve the situation to a mutually satisfactory outcome. If either party feels they cannot meet the other without an independent mediator being present then the Centre Director or the Service Support Manager will attend the meeting who will act as mediator, record keeper and witness. There will be no fees incurred to any of the participants for this meeting.

Stage 6

Following the meeting the Service User and Member should both ideally email the Centre Director within 2-3 working days, detailing the outcome of the discussion and summarising their current position regarding the situation. If the Service User is not satisfied with the outcome of the meeting then, if applicable, they have the right to follow the **LIFE-FORCE Complaints Procedure for Service Users and Members** from 'The Formal Procedure'.