

Complaints and Problem Solving Policy

Whilst we hope that volunteering with Independent Age will be a positive experience, there may be circumstances in which volunteers may find they have cause to make a complaint against a member of staff, another volunteer or the older person they support.

There may also be instances where a concern is raised about a volunteer and the purpose of this policy is to explain what happens if issues arise so that everyone is clear about the procedure.

Independent Age recognises a complaint as any expression of dissatisfaction against the organisation or service we have provided or failed to provide. This can be made verbally, by phone or email or in writing.

All complaints, no matter how big or small, will be recorded and reviewed as a mechanism to improve the quality of our volunteering and service delivery.

This policy operates in conjunction with the Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions Policy and Procedures for staff.

Concerns or complaints about volunteering

Simple Complaints

We hope that most issues can be solved informally by having a conversation. We encourage volunteers wherever possible to raise concerns directly with the team responsible or their Independent Age contact so that any issues can be addressed promptly. The volunteer's Independent Age contact will do their best to advise and support them to resolve the issue.

Efforts should always be made to reach a mutually acceptable solution. If this does not prove possible, volunteers should notify their Independent Age contact via email, letter or phone call that they wish to make a complaint.

Escalated Complaints

Escalated complaints are those that cannot be resolved immediately. When a volunteer raises a complaint which cannot be resolved immediately, Independent Age will carry out an investigation.

An Independent Age staff member will write to the volunteer explaining the next steps and the date by which they should receive a response.

Once the volunteer receives the response, if they are not satisfied with the outcome they can make an appeal within the next 2 weeks. This appeal should be addressed to the relevant Head of Department and Head of Volunteering who will make a decision and inform the volunteer within 10 working days of being notified of the appeal.

Concerns or complaints against the volunteer's Independent Age contact.

If the volunteer does not feel able to discuss the issue with their Independent Age contact or the complaint raised is about them, the volunteer should contact the Independent Age contact's line manager who will respond to the complaint. If unsure of who to contact, please email volunteering@independentage.org or call the volunteering line on 020 7605 4255 for advice.

Concerns or complaints about the volunteer

A concern about a volunteer will trigger a Volunteering Placement Review. This is a structured process to enable both the charity and the volunteer to resolve any issues raised about a volunteer's suitability to continue volunteering with Independent Age.

Each case will be assessed against the volunteer's conduct and attitude in the context of Independent Age's policies and procedures including:

- Volunteering policy
- Volunteer role description
- Volunteer role boundaries
- Any training the volunteer has received/has been asked to complete
- The risk assessment for the volunteering role
- The volunteer's participation in catch up sessions.

The Independent Age contact will get in touch with the volunteer for an informal chat to address the concern or complaint. The outcome of this conversation could be:

- The volunteer carries on with their role or an alternative role
- Adjustments are made, including extra support, additional training or a review of the tasks involved in the role
- The volunteer decides to leave.

If the informal conversation does not reach a satisfactory conclusion, a formal process will be initiated where the Independent Age contact and their line manager organises a face to face meeting with the volunteer to explore the concern and/or complaint raised.

Telephone volunteers will be offered two options, either a call conference or a local face to face meeting with an Independent Age staff member in the local region.

For investigations in which the Independent Age contact is involved, another staff member will attend the meeting alongside the Independent Age contact's line manager.

If after this meeting an agreement hasn't been reached, the volunteer may be asked to stop carrying out their duties while the process is resolved. The

Independent Age staff member will write to the volunteer explaining the next steps and the date by when they should receive a final response.

The Independent Age staff member will then raise the concern with the Head of Department and Head of Volunteering explaining the case, the actions taken and the volunteer's response. The Heads of Department will make a decision on the suitability of the volunteer to carry on with their role and inform the volunteer within 10 working days of being notified of the concern.

Gross misconduct

There are some occasions when a volunteer can be suspended immediately whilst an investigation is carried out. These include, but are not limited to, acts that constitute gross misconduct. Eg:

- theft,
- assault,
- safeguarding concerns,
- allegations of putting someone at risk,
- act of violence,
- malicious damage,
- deliberate falsification of documents,
- harassment,
- being under the influence of drugs or alcohol,
- bringing the charity into disrepute,
- behaviour which undermines managerial decisions/authority.

The decision to suspend a volunteer will be confirmed in writing.

All gross-misconduct cases are assessed by the Independent Age contact's line manager, Head of Department and Head Volunteering. The volunteer will be asked to stop their volunteering immediately while the investigation is in process and a formal meeting will be requested within 10 days. Detailed information can be found in the When It's Time to Leave policy.

Recording Complaints

All complaints are logged and reviewed regularly to enable us to learn from these incidents.