

## COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURES

**POLICY:** This policy and procedure applies to client complaints received by Distress Centre Durham, about its activities, programs, services, staff or volunteers. It is in the interest of all parties that complaints are dealt with promptly and resolved as quickly as possible and ensures that:

- complainants receive a review that is fair, impartial and respectful to all parties;
- complainants are advised of their options to escalate their complaint to the Executive Director or the President if they are dissatisfied with treatment or outcome;
- complainants are provided clear and understandable reasons for decisions relating to complaints;
- complainants are provided with updates during the review processes;
- complainants outcomes will assist in improving current services, policies and procedures and in the development of new ones.

**Definition:** A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about the service, actions, or lack of action by Distress Centre Durham as an organization or a staff member or responder volunteer acting on behalf of Distress Centre Durham. Examples include but are not limited to:

- perceived failure to do something agreed upon;
- failure to observe policy or procedures;
- error made by a staff member/volunteer; or
- unfair or discourteous actions/statements by staff member/volunteer;

### PROCEDURES:

Anyone personally affected can complain and their complaint will be reviewed in accordance with these procedures:

#### 1. Complaint Receipt and Handling

A complaint may be received verbally (by phone or in person) or in writing (by mail, fax, email). Any staff member who receives a complaint will always discuss with the Executive Director a plan of action to either resolve it personally or transfer it to the Executive Director who will resolve it directly.

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If the complaint is transferred, the recipient must acknowledge to the transferor that he/she has received it and will act on it.

It is inappropriate for a responder volunteer to listen to or attempt to resolve any complaint. They are trained and understand that any complaint must be transferred to their direct staff supervisor.

The staff person who initially receives the complaint should acknowledge to the complainant that the complaint has been received and will be acted on either by him/herself or the Executive Director. If a timeframe for action can be determined, that should be included in the acknowledgement. Basic contact information including name, phone number and email address should immediately be recorded on the Complaint Form.

## **2. Resolving the Complaint**

Every effort should be made to resolve complaints received in a timely fashion. When receiving a verbal complaint, staff should listen and seek to understand the complaint, and may attempt to resolve it immediately. Complaints received in writing should be acknowledged within two business days and every attempt should attempt to resolve the matter within 10 business days.

Where a complaint cannot be easily resolved, it should be transferred to the Executive Director. If the complaint is about the Executive Director, it will be transferred to the President of the Board of Directors. If the complaint is about the President, it will be handled by the Distress Centre Durham Board of Directors with the Vice-President serving as temporary Chair. Complainants should be kept informed of the status of their complaint. Every attempt should be made to resolve transferred complaints within an additional 10 business days so that all complaints are resolved within a month of having been received.

## **3. Complaint Resolution & Appeal**

When a proposed resolution isn't satisfactory to the complainant or cannot be executed for whatever reason, the complainant has the right to appeal. The appeal must be made to the President, or in the case of the President being the complainant, to the Distress Centre Durham Board of Directors via the Vice-President. The appeal must be received in writing (regular or electronic format) within ten business days of the complainant having received the proposed solution. The appeal must explain why the proposed resolution is unsatisfactory to the complainant, as well as a full description of the resolution being sought.

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The President or the Board of Directors via the Vice-President may conduct interviews with all parties involved in the dispute, collect any or all documents collected or deemed pertinent to the complaint, and consult with outside legal or other counsel that may be helpful to resolving the dispute. A formal (written) response will be made on the appeal within twenty business days of it being received, and it will be sent by registered mail to the complainant and the person or persons who are the subject of the complaint and appeal.

Where the proposed solution to the appeal is acceptable to the complainant, and all parties involved in the dispute (complainant, subject of complaint, person handling appeal), they will sign an agreement acknowledging same. This document will be retained by the association's legal counsel and a copy kept on file at the association's office. Where the proposed solution to the appeal is not acceptable to the complainant, or is acceptable to the complainant, but is not acceptable to the subject of the complaint, then the matter will be considered to have reached an impasse and cannot be resolved internally to the association. If this situation arises, the complainant, the subject of the complaint, or both, will be advised to seek relief through outside agencies or legal counsel or both, especially if the subject of the complaint is in relation to any provincial, or federal statutes, or other regulations.

#### **4. Documenting the Complaint**

It is necessary to keep a record of all complaints, especially those that cannot be resolved immediately or on the same day it is received. Information about such complaints must be recorded on the complaints tracking sheet. Information recorded on the worksheet will include: the subject of the complaint, a description of the complaint, who handled it, what was done to resolve the complaint, a description of the resolution, and whether the proposed resolution was accepted or not. In the event that the proposed resolution wasn't accepted, then the complainant must be advised of the complaints process and provided with a complaints form. This must also be recorded and acknowledged with a signature by the complainant and the person handling the initial complaint.

A summary of the complaints received including number, type, the proposed resolution and outcomes for each complaint will be reported annually to the Distress Centre Durham Board of Directors annually.

## COMPLAINTS FORM

This complaint form is to be used by staff to facilitate the registration of a formal complaint by clients. Before proceeding further, please obtain and review a copy of the **Distress Centre Durham Complaints Policy** (available in shared staff files to ensure correct procedures are followed with respect to the recording of the complaint with the complaints form). Then, this form is to be provided to the complainant as soon as possible so that the complaint can be recorded and handled in an expeditious manner and in accordance with Distress Centre Durham policy. The complainant will also be provided with a copy of the **Distress Centre Durham Complaints Policy**.

### Complainant's Contact Information:

This information is required so that you can be contacted about the status of the complaint.

First Name:

Last Name:

Address:

City:

Postal Code:

Phone Number:

E-mail:

Are you registering this complaint on behalf of:

Check one: Yourself \_\_\_\_\_

Another Individual \_\_\_\_\_

An Organization \_\_\_\_\_

### Information on your complaint:

Date of complaint: \_\_\_\_\_

Location of situation leading to complaint: \_\_\_\_\_

Time of situation leading to complaint: \_\_\_\_\_

**Provide details of your complaint on next page and in as much detail as possible.**

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**Complaint Details** (attach extra pages if necessary):



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**Confidentiality of your Complaint:**

Under most circumstances, the text of your complaint will be considered a confidential record and will not be available to any member of the public or anyone not involved with the complaint, either as a subject of the complaint, or someone who is involved with the handling of the complaint or its resolution. In response to such a request, we generally will not disclose your name, address, phone number or any other information that identifies you and will not disclose this form in response to any request that specifically seeks the complaint you submitted. Your record in its entirety may, however, be disclosed to law enforcement and regulatory agencies who may assist in resolving your complaint if needed.

**Completion of Complaint Form:**

Review, sign (see signature line below), and submit your complaint to the staff member or Executive Director assisting you with the complaint and ask for a copy for your records. If the complaint is not made in person, it should be sent to Distress Centre Durham by mail at:

**306 Brock St. N. Whitby, ON L1N 4H7**

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Confirmation of Receipt of Complaint Distress Centre Durham**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, confirm with my signature below that I have received this complaint from \_\_\_\_\_, in the following manner: in-person \_\_\_\_\_, or by mail, \_\_\_\_\_, mail \_\_\_\_\_, e-mail \_\_\_\_\_, on (enter date) \_\_\_\_\_. I also confirm that it has been passed on to the Executive Director, the President or the Vice-President, for further action.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_