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1. Policy Statement

SpecialEffect strives for excellence in all aspects of our work and is committed to providing a good standard of quality services to anyone who engages with our work, including employees, service users, supporters, volunteers, other agencies and organisations. We welcome feedback from all individuals or organisations that work with us, on all aspects of our services, communications and fundraising activities. Such feedback is invaluable in helping us evaluate and improve what we do.

The objectives of this policy are to:

- ensure everyone knows how to make a complaint and how a complaint will be handled
- ensure that complaints are dealt with seriously and sensitively, within clear time frames for resolution as quickly as possible
- provide every individual with a fair and effective way to complain about our work
- ensure that complaints are monitored to improve our services, communications and fundraising activities.

SpecialEffect will ensure that we:

- listen carefully to complaints and treat complaints as confidential, where possible
- record, store and manage all complaints accurately and in accordance with the Data Protection Act
- investigate the complaint fully, objectively and within the stated time frame
- notify the complainant of the results of the investigation and any right of appeal
- inform the complainant of any action that will be implemented in order to ensure that there is no re-occurrence
- keep a register of all complaints, which will be reviewed regularly by the Trustees

- report on an annual basis, the number of complaints received, the outcomes and any actions taken (including information on fundraising complaints in the annual Trustees' report)
- ensure that the complaints procedure is accessible to all individuals and people acting on their behalf, including those with disabilities or language barriers, by providing reasonable accommodations such as translation services, alternative formats, or physical assistance if required
- wherever possible, the person investigating the complaint should not be directly involved in the incident that led to the complaint to ensure impartiality
- regard complaints as an opportunity to learn and to improve
- include the complaints procedure as part of the process of monitoring the quality, effectiveness and non-discriminatory nature of our services
- make all staff, volunteers and Trustees aware they are required to read, understand and comply with this policy.

SpecialEffect is registered with the Fundraising Regulator and we are committed to following the Code of Fundraising Practice and the Fundraising Promise.

2. Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction by an individual, whether justified or not. An individual may make a complaint if they feel SpecialEffect has:

- failed to provide a service or an acceptable standard of service or made a mistake in the way the service was provided
- failed to act in a proper way
- provided an unfair service.

This policy and procedure relate only to complaints received about SpecialEffect and its services, communications and fundraising activities.

Making a complaint may not be the most appropriate course of action. Employees can also refer to the Grievance procedure (within the Disciplinary Policy) and/or Whistleblowing Policy, which may be more relevant.

3. Concern or Complaint

It is important to establish the difference between a concern and a complaint. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage will reduce the likelihood of their developing into formal complaints.

If you have any concerns about our work please tell a member of staff or their line manager (if you have their contact details - otherwise please send an email to info@specialeffect.org.uk asking to be put in touch with the individual in question) as soon as possible, so they can quickly understand your concerns and try to put things right.

If you are not happy with the response to your concern and/or you want to make a formal complaint please follow the procedure below.

In cases where complaints involve safeguarding concerns, criminal activities, or breaches of relevant legal or regulatory requirements, SpecialEffect will be obligated to report these matters to the appropriate authorities or regulatory bodies.

4. Complaints Procedure

SpecialEffect aims to settle the majority of complaints quickly and satisfactorily. The complaint may be resolved informally by way of an apology or by an acceptable explanation to the individual.

There are three stages to the formal complaints procedure:

- Stage One – complaint
- Stage Two – investigation
- Stage Three – appeal

Stage One - Complaint

The complaint can be written or, if the individual prefers, they can tell someone at SpecialEffect, or someone else, who will write it down for them. In this situation, the complainant will still need to sign the description of their complaint.

Individuals wishing to make a complaint should contact the person who provided the service, or their Line Manager. Alternatively, they can contact us by writing to: SpecialEffect, Units 9–12 Southill Business Park, Cornbury Park, Charlbury, OX7 3EW or by email to: info@specialeffect.org.uk

The complaint should include the complainant's name and address, the nature and date of the complaint and how they want to see it resolved.

On receipt, each complaint will be allocated a reference number and logged on the complaints register. Complainants must receive an acknowledgement within three working days of receipt of a signed complaint.

Stage Two - Investigation

Complaints at this stage should be dealt with by a line manager. However, if the line manager feels that the complaint is of a very serious nature, or concerns a line manager/ member of the Leadership Team, then it will be referred to the CEO. If the complaint is about the CEO then the matter will be discussed with two Trustees.

If they need to meet with the complainant, they will do so within seven working days of receiving the written complaint.

Complaints will be fully investigated, and a written response provided to the complainant within ten working days by the investigator. If the complaint is complex and more than ten working days is required, an update will be provided to the complainant and an updated timeframe provided.

The complainant will receive written confirmation of the outcome of any investigation and any recommendations/remedies made, such as the reviewing of policies, staff development and training or appropriate improvement to our services, communications and/or fundraising activities.

Where the complaint is upheld an apology should be offered.

Occasionally investigations may take longer, particularly if the complaint is complex. Should this be the case a holding letter will be sent after ten working days and a final date given for a conclusion to be reached.

If an individual remains dissatisfied with the outcome from Stage Two they can appeal within fourteen working days of the date of the outcome and progress to Stage Three.

The complaints register will be updated, and any pending complaints flagged so they are followed up.

Stage Three - Appeal

If the complaint cannot be resolved to the complainant's satisfaction at Stage Two, then it will be referred to the CEO and/or two Trustees.

The CEO and/or Trustees will acknowledge receipt within three working days, they will review the Stage Two investigation and recommend one of the following actions within ten working days (from the date the complainant stated they wanted to take the complaint to Stage Three):

- uphold the action taken at Stage Two
- make changes to the Stage Two recommendation/actions.

The complainant should be informed in writing of the outcome of Stage Three. This decision will then be final but other options available to the complainant (as listed below) should be detailed in the letter.

If, after SpecialEffect has been through the three stages and the complainant is still not satisfied with the result, they should be advised that there is no further right of appeal with SpecialEffect but they could approach any of the following agencies for advice:

- a solicitor
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- relevant ombudsman
- fundraising regulator

This should be done within one month of receiving the outcome from the appeal.

5. Anonymous Complaints

Complaints received anonymously will be recorded and considered. If the anonymous complaint raises serious issues such as safeguarding concerns or criminal conduct, SpecialEffect will take the necessary steps to address the matter in line with our legal and

regulatory obligations, even if only limited action can be taken due to lack of identifying information.

6. Data Protection

To process a complaint, SpecialEffect will hold personal data about the complainant, which the individual provides, and which other people give in response to the complaint. We will hold this data securely and only use it to address the complaint. The identity of the person making the complaint will only be known to those who need to consider the complaint and will not be revealed to other people or made public. However, it may not be possible to preserve confidentiality in some circumstances, for example, where relevant legislation applies or allegations are made which involve the conduct of third parties.

To ensure we can learn from complaints the following data will be collected:

- name and address
- name of person dealing with the complaint
- date of complaint and response
- nature of complaint
- action(s) taken/recommendations made in response to the complaint
- lessons learnt.

SpecialEffect will normally destroy complaints files in a secure manner six years after the complaint has been closed.

SpecialEffect is committed to full compliance with GDPR in processing personal data related to complaints. Data will be processed fairly, lawfully, and securely, and complainants have the right to access their data in line with our Data Protection Policy and GDPR requirements.

7. Monitoring

Complaints are an important tool which, alongside data provided by exit surveys and user feedback, will allow us to learn about the services, communications and fundraising activities we provide. They provide a useful source of information about how individuals see our services and how we are serving them.

Complaints information will be considered on a regular basis by the Leadership Team and reported annually to SpecialEffect's Trustees. Wherever possible the data will be used to improve and develop the services, communications and fundraising activities of the Charity.

This policy will be reviewed annually by Trustees, or more frequently if warranted by significant organisational changes or an increase in the volume or complexity of complaints.

8. Related Policies and Guidance

- Data Protection Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Governance Policy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

- Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Disciplinary Policy (includes Grievance Procedure)