

Local Friends Policies

Dealing with Incidents

Introduction

Local Friends is a small organisation which operates on a largely informal basis. But when a serious incident has occurred, informality must be put to one side and clear, correct procedures followed.

A serious incident, for the purpose of this document, is one in which:

- somebody connected with *Local Friends* has suffered harm, or been at serious risk of harm; or
- somebody connected with *Local Friends* has caused, or there has been a serious risk of them causing, harm; to someone else.

Even if an incident is not considered to be serious, it may be wise, and it will generally be good practice, to follow this procedure anyway.

The procedure for dealing with an incident, in outline, is as follows:

- notification;
- documentation;
- report;
- investigation;
- outcome; and
- action.

Details

Notification

This is mostly relevant when you are verbally informed about an incident, but some aspects may be relevant if you are informed by writing.

- Listen carefully and with empathy.
- Ask about the facts: who, when, where and what, but do not ask for judgements or about motives.
- Ask whether there is ongoing harm, or risk of harm, to anybody.
- Repeat what you have heard to check your understanding of the situation.
- Report to the appropriate staff member (see below)
- Do not promise to keep the incident secret, but assure them, if this is an issue, that all details will be confidential and disclosed to as few people as possible, on a 'need to know' basis.

Documentation

Write down what you have been told, or collate the written details into a clear statement (preserving the original text, of course), identifying clearly any uncertainties or assumptions you have made.

The statement should include, as a minimum, the following details.

- Your name.
- The date and time when you were notified, and possibly the location if relevant.
- The name of the person who reported the incident.
- The name(s) of the those who experienced the incident, if different from above.
- The name(s) of anyone who is alleged to be responsible for the incident.
- The date(s), time(s) and location(s) of the incident.
- A description of the incident.

Report

Report the incident as soon as is practical. This should be the person you report to, unless there are reasons to choose someone else.

The senior person involved should decide on who undertakes the investigation. If there is any suspicion of child abuse, then expert advice is essential. In any case, the person undertaking the investigation must have the relevant expertise and capacity. *Local Friends* has access to people through both *Churches Together in Greater Bristol* and *The Care Forum* if external advice or support is required.

In the most serious cases, the relevant statutory body should be contacted at this point, and asked to advise on how to proceed. The remaining steps have been written with the assumption that the investigation will be undertaken in-house, but this is not necessarily the case.

Investigation

There are two main priorities at this point:

- caring for the people involved in the incident; and
- investigating the report.

There are two important questions at this point.

- What is the evidence to support (or not) the claims made in the report?
- What other information do we need to gather in order to fully and accurately understand what has actually happened?

The actions taken during the investigation should be documented, along with the information gathered.

Outcome

The investigation will reach a conclusion, which must be checked by a competent person.

A summary of the investigation must be written, protecting the anonymity of the individuals concerned, for reporting to the board.

An appropriate report must be drafted for each the relevant external bodies, such as:

- the insurer;
- funding organisations;
- umbrella bodies and membership associations; and
- statutory bodies, such as the Charity Commission.

The same report may suffice for several, or all, of the above, but each one should be checked for their current reporting requirements.

Action

Any recommended action must be followed through, both for the individuals concerned and the organisation: anyone who was harmed must be cared for, with steps taken to mitigate the harm where possible; organisational changes must be implemented, policies reviewed and updated, and so on. It must be clear to anyone concerned that any lessons have not only been learned, but also put into practice.

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Last updated: 22:22 on 20 April 2020, revision: 0.3
Location: /home/paul/C/LF/policies/LF_Policy_Incident_Report.odt