



Health and Community Services
COMPLAINTS COMMISSION

Complaints Handling for Managers

Presented by:

DRIVING
improvement

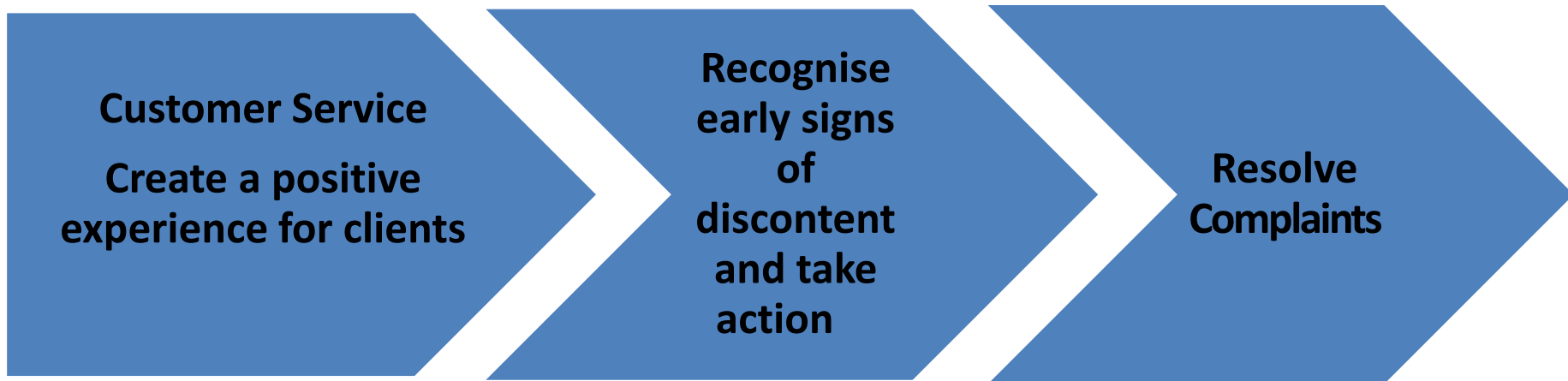
Program Outline

- Complaints and quality improvement
- Positive complaints culture
- Complaints Resolution
- Communication
- Responding to complaints
- When a complaint is made about staff

Welcome to the Training

- Housekeeping issues
- Introductions
- What are you wanting to achieve from attending this training?

Framework for the program



Service Recovery

- Think of a time when you experienced a service failure
- What did the service do that made you feel better about the situation?
- A quick resolution can create high levels of customer satisfaction
- Is this transferable to your setting?

Complaints and Quality Improvement

- Best practice complaints handling and quality improvement
- Improvement at an individual practice level and more systemically

A positive complaints culture

Questions to consider:

- What is a positive complaints culture?
- Why is it important?
- How is a positive complaints culture created?
- How does it/must it/should it/could it influence every decision with regard to complaints and quality improvement?

Ideas for a positive complaints culture

- Ensure best practice complaints handling is reflected in policy
- Role model desired communication skills with staff and clients
- Identify key values and communication skills – recruit for them
- Recognise staff who demonstrate best practice complaints handling practice

Does your organisation give any of these messages?

- Every complaint is important
- We welcome complaints
- We encourage customers to complain
- We make it easy to complain
- We handle complaints in a timely manner
- We keep records of our complaints and learn from them

With adaption from Fitzsimmons J.A., Fitzsimmons M.J and Bordoloi, S.K.
Service Management Operations Strategy, Information and Technology. 8th
Edition McGraw-Hill Irwin New York. Pages 166 - 167

Positive Complaints Culture

For clients:

- People know they have a right to and know how to make a complaint
- Complaints are taken seriously and all feedback is welcome

For service providers:

- Complaints provide an opportunity for quality improvement
- Complaints are dealt with in a fair, confidential and person centred manner

Why do people complain?

Most complaints arise from:

- A problem with communication
- Unmet needs
- Unmet expectations

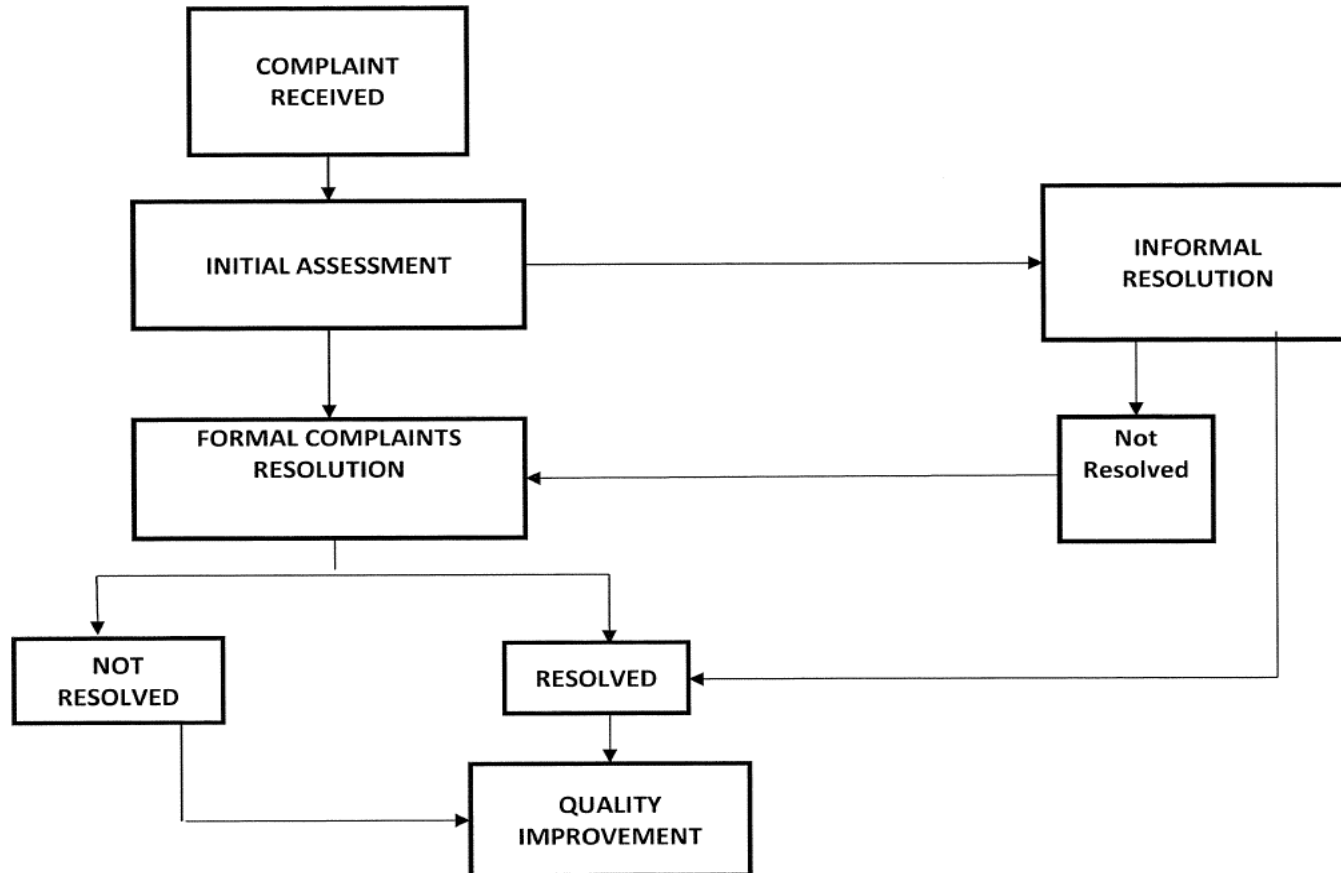
What are clients seeking when making a complaint?

- Assurance it won't happen to anyone else
- An explanation
- To receive a service
- An apology
- Disciplinary action
- Compensation

A Guide to Complaints Resolution



Complaints Resolution Process



Receiving a complaint

- Make sure the complaint is from the service user, or a person authorised by the service user
- Acknowledge the complaint
- Find out what the complaint is about
- Find out what the person is hoping to achieve from making the complaint

Initial Assessment

- Decide how the complaint is to be managed
- Decide who is responsible

Informal Resolution

How might you go about resolving the complaint informally?

Formal Resolution

Formal investigation requires extensive training – not available in this package

- Provide details of complaint to relevant staff
- Advise parties what to expect
- Gather relevant information – e.g. documentation, witness statements, consider legal implications
- Determine resolution response in consultation with parties
- Discuss outcomes to determine whether it is still possible to resolve the complaint

Responding to complaints

- Take time to understand the problem from the complainant's perspective
- Separate the complaint from the situation and respond to the complaint itself
- Ensure the complainant feels heard whether or not you agree with their point of view – acknowledge and empathise
- Avoid becoming caught up in emotions (yours, the complainant's or those of staff)
- Your response to the complaint is as important as whether or not the complaint is resolved

More on responding to complaints

- Ensure accuracy of facts
- Where appropriate apologise and/or offer condolences early in the response where appropriate
- Offer an expression of regret and empathise with the service user
- Avoid becoming defensive and do not judge or blame the person
- Demonstrate goodwill and a willingness to find the best possible outcome

Even more on responding to complaints

Ask yourself:

- What is the best way to resolve this particular complaint?
- Can it be resolved early and an outcome agreed between the parties?
- Is a more personal response appropriate in this situation?
- Would a meeting with the person/s be preferable to writing a letter?

We're still responding to complaints

- Can a complaint be pre-empted where an unexpected outcome has occurred?
- How can the communication process be best served in this instance?
- How can a willingness to be transparent and focussed on the service user be demonstrated?

Sample phrases for written responses

- I appreciate that the situation was distressing/ inconvenient /extremely frustrating and offer my sincere apology. We are doing.....in an effort to prevent any similar incidents in the future
- I would firstly like to offer my sincere condolences on the passing of your mother/father/husband (then go on to respond to the complaint)

More phrases

- I recognise that we failed to/did not provide adequate assistance in relation to your disability.
- I acknowledge that this was unacceptable and offer my sincere apology.
- As a result of your complaint we have implemented.....which we believe will prevent this occurring again

More phrases

- I appreciate that you were understandably frustrated and disappointed to be advised that you are ineligible for theservice. Whilst I agree that you would benefit from the service you are unfortunately ineligible under our funding guidelines due to.....
- These guidelines are put in place to ensure that our limited resources are targeted at the most disabled/unwell service users and I sincerely apologise that as a result I am not able to offer you a place in our ... program

Advising a staff member of a complaint against them

- Choose a quiet private space to discuss/confidentiality/tact & discretion
- Take time to acknowledge/understand the problem from the staff member's perspective
- Ensure staff feel heard whether or not you agree with their point of view – acknowledge and empathise if appropriate
- Encourage the staff member to consider the issue from the complainant's perspective

Advising a staff member of a complaint against them (cont.)

- Explain the complaint in terms of an unmet need or expectation on the part of the complainant. (This may help to depersonalise the issue)
- Avoid becoming caught up in emotions (yours, the complainant's or those of staff)
- How you manage the complaint is as important as whether or not the complaint is resolved

Let's practise the skills

Role play to practise advising a staff member a complaint has been made about them

Prompts for self reflection

- Did the staff member feel heard?
- Were clear details provided about the complaint?
- Did staff know what was expected from them and the process to be followed?
- Was an assurance of confidentiality provided?
- Did the conversation happen in a timely manner?
- Was constructive feedback provided?

If a complaint is made about your team or service

- How do you manage it, personally/professionally?
- What if you believe the complaint to be totally unreasonable?
- How do you manage the situation when someone is making lots of demands and emotions are running high?
- How do you de-escalate a situation?
- Who manages a complaint if it's about you?

Complaints Handling Policy

Discuss an example of a well written policy

Case study to practise the skills

- Work in small groups
- One person to be the client making a complaint
- One person to be the manager hearing the complaint
- One person to observe and provide feedback
- Debrief in whole group

Returning to quality improvement and a positive complaints culture

- Do records indicate many complaints about the same issue?
- Is data from complaints utilised in quality improvement processes?
- Are clients consulted in the development of quality improvements?
- Are clients informed of the improvements implemented as a result of their complaint?

Review of what we've covered

In small groups review the material from the workshop:

- Create a list of what has been important for you
- What were you reminded about and/or learnt?
- How will you apply this learning at work?
- Where do you require further clarification?
- Write down three actions points individually and be prepared to share them with the group

Mahatma Gandhi said

“A customer is the most important visitor on our premises. He is not dependent on us. We are dependent on him. He is not an interruption in our work. He is the purpose of it. He is not an outsider in our business. He is part of it. We are not doing him a favour by serving him. He is doing us a favour by giving us an opportunity to do so”.

For further information

Health and Community Services Complaints
Commission

Phone: 8999 1969

www.hcsc.nt.gov.au