

SD – Child Safe Complaints Management

Headway Gippsland is committed to ensuring that any child or young person using Headway Gippsland services or affected by its operations has the right to complain and have their complaint handled in a manner which prioritises children and young people’s right to safety and wellbeing.

This organisation’s complaints handling policy will:

- ensure child rights are embedded in the policy
- ensure staff and volunteers uphold their responsibilities
- uphold information sharing and privacy protocols
- manage the risks posed to children
- ensure investigations consider child-related factors such as trauma, capacity and reasonable adjustments
- be fair and objective
- explain the outcomes in a way that the child comprehends
- comply with record keeping and reporting practices

Definitions

Complaint: is an expression of dissatisfaction made to or about an organisation regarding its staff, services or products that warrants response or resolution.

Reportable conduct: definitions of reportable conduct vary depending on relevant state/territory legislation. It includes sexual offences or sexual misconduct, assault, ill-treatment or neglect of a child or young person or any behaviour that causes psychological or emotional harm to a child or young person or any offences relating to failure to report, or failure to reduce or remove a risk of, child abuse.

Authorised carer: is an individual who have been authorised by their relevant state/territory designated agency to provide statutory or supported Out of Home Care in Victoria

Principles

Headway Gippsland will:

- ensure that all children, their families, carers and advocates are encouraged and supported to raise any concerns they have about the service or organisation;
- treat all children with respect, without judgement or bias;
- conduct investigations with integrity;
- provide support to children and young people throughout the complaints handling process;
- never prioritise an adult’s opinion over that of a child where their opinions may differ;
- adhere to privacy and confidentiality obligations;

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- strive to resolve complaints to the satisfaction of the child;
- deal with all complaints in a timely manner, and aim to provide a response to the child within [time frame] of the complaint being received;
- keep children informed at all stages of the investigation/handling process;
- ensure that a complainant is not penalised in any way or prevented from use of services;
- ensure that feedback data is considered and used in organisation reviews; and
- review and evaluate the accessibility and effectiveness of the complaints management system and continually make improvements.

Procedures

Roles and responsibilities

Throughout the complaints handling process, all Governing body members, staff and Volunteers will:

- prioritise child safety and wellbeing;
- be fair and objective;
- listen to a child's complaint without judgement;
- never dismiss or give less value to a child or young person's views just because they aren't an adult; and
- never prioritise an adult's opinion over a child or young person where their opinions differ.

Workers will:

- be given information about complaints management procedures as part of their induction;
- manage and understand the risks children and young people are exposed to;
- escalate a complaint when they believe the complaint hasn't been dealt with sufficiently by Headway Gippsland and
- understand and acknowledge the common misconceptions about the reliability of children and young people as complainants.

Headway Gippsland will establish a Child Safety Contact Person (General Manager) who will act as a central point for children and young people to raise concerns and communicate with throughout the complaints process.

Management will:

- offer support to the child, the child's parents or carers and the individual who reported the incident, where appropriate;
- assess and remove any internal organisational risks to the child;
- clarify the nature of the complaint; and
- make a decision as to whether the matter should/must be reported to the Police or Child Protection authorities and make a report as soon as possible, if required.

Process and procedures:

1. Receiving the complaint

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- a. Headway Gippsland will provide multiple avenues for children and young people to make a complaint.
- b. Details and relevant information will be recorded, if appropriate, at the first point of contact, on the continuous improvement register
2. Record
 - a. Headway Gippsland will record the details of the complaint using their CRM system.
 - b. The General Manager will be mindful of the child's emotional wellbeing, communication and support needs when collecting and recording information.
3. Acknowledge
 - a. Headway Gippsland will acknowledge the complaint at the time it is brought to their attention, or as quickly as possible after it is made. Headway Gippsland understands the importance of a child feeling like their complaint has been listened to and validated.
 - b. Headway Gippsland will provide the child with a point of contact, the General Manager for themselves and for their parent or carer.
 - c. The General Manager will provide the child with information about the complaint-handling process, enquire as to what they would like the outcome of their complaint to be and ensure they feel comfortable with the process and next steps have suggested.
4. Assess and address risks

Headway Gippsland will ask and address the following questions to determine the immediate and ongoing risks posed to the child, other children within the organisation and the broader community:

 - Does the complaint pose any risk to the child, young person or other people at your organisation?
 - Does the complaint raise other issues? What are they?
 - What steps need to be taken to immediately manage and mitigate the risks posed by the complaint?
 - What risks could arise during the complaint process?
 - What additional supports does the child or young person, or other children at the organisation require during the complaints process?
 - What evidence needs to be stored, protected or kept confidential?
 - What authorities or agencies need to know about the issues raised, and be involved in the investigative/handling process?
 - Is further information needed from the complainant in order to properly assess and resolve the complaint?
5. Plan involvement of the child or young person
 - a. Headway Gippsland will develop a plan for the involvement of the complainant and their parents or carers. This will include keeping them informed of a timeline of the key stages and communicating the progress of the complaint process.
6. Resolve the complaint
 - a. Headway Gippsland will endeavour to resolve the complaint promptly and to the satisfaction of the complainant.
 - b. Headway Gippsland will keep the complainant and their parents or carers informed if there is a delay in the investigation process.

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7. Conduct an investigation
 - a. Headway Gippsland will consider any statutory requirements and relevant external bodies when deciding on the investigative approach.
 - b. Headway Gippsland will develop an investigation plan which consults necessary bodies, considers the child's needs, safety and wellbeing and does not compromise a police or child protection investigation.
 - c. Headway Gippsland will consult relevant external organisations/authorities if it is ill-equipped to deal with the complaint internally.
 - d. Headway Gippsland will obtain and protect important evidence if relevant to the investigation.
 - e. Headway Gippsland will analyse and assess the evidence gathered and make an assessment.
8. Provide an outcome
 - a. Headway Gippsland will consider privacy, confidentiality and procedural fairness when providing the outcome of the complaint to the complainant and other stakeholders.
 - b. Headway Gippsland will explain the outcome of the complaint to the child in their preferred method of communication and provide them with any necessary supports.
 - c. Headway Gippsland will ensure the complainant is aware of the avenues for reviewing and/or appealing if they aren't satisfied with the outcome.
9. Close the complaint and record the outcome
 - a. Headway Gippsland will inform the complainant of the outcome of the investigation in a manner that they understand. Headway Gippsland will ensure that when delivering the outcome, the child has support available to them and their wellbeing is prioritised.
 - b. Headway Gippsland will record details including;
 - i. Outcome
 - ii. How the complaint was managed
 - iii. Recommendations or outstanding actions
 - c. Headway Gippsland will ask the complainant to give feedback on how they felt their complaint was handled.
 - d. Headway Gippsland will provide ongoing support to the complainant if they require or want it.

When responding to trauma during the complaint handling process, the General Manager will:

- reassure the child they did the right thing by raising the complaint;
- enquire as to how you can make them feel more comfortable;
- let the child know they can take a break when they like;
- be cognisant of triggers or stressors;
- offer referrals to receive medical treatment, psychological support and/or other therapeutic services;
- ensure the child has a trusted adult, independent support person and/or advocate;
- consider if it is necessary to inform the child about protective behaviours and age-appropriate information about sexual health and safety; and
- be mindful not to overwhelm the child by providing too much information too regularly.

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Information sharing

Headway Gippsland understands that parents or carers of a child who is an alleged victim of abuse or mistreatment have a legitimate interest in being informed about the process of their child's investigation.

Headway Gippsland will disclose information to the parents or carers of the child, of the progress, findings and actions taken during the investigation process, except in cases where disclosure could:

- jeopardise the child's safety;
- prejudice a criminal, child protection, reportable conduct or formal investigative process;
- prejudice a coronial inquest or inquiry;
- prejudice proceedings in the Children's Court;
- breach any legal professional privilege; or
- expose the identity of a confidential source.

Headway Gippsland will consult with police and child protection authorities before disclosing information on child abuse or mistreatment to the wider communities.

Headway Gippsland will consult with the parent or carer before delivering information to a child.

Reportable Conduct Schemes

Headway Gippsland will adhere to Victoria's reportable conduct scheme when investigating allegations that a child was a victim of abuse or maltreatment.

Headway Gippsland will disclose information to the child who was allegedly the subject of the reportable conduct, any parent of the child and any authorised carer of the child if the child is in out of home care.

Headway Gippsland will not give information about a reportable allegation to the parent or carer of a child or young person in out-of-home care except with the consent of the child protection authority.

Confidentiality and Privacy

Headway Gippsland will only permit the disclosure of information about a child or young person in accordance with the [*Australian Privacy Principles*](#). Headway Gippsland will respect the right of children to lodge a complaint anonymously, and their personal information will not be divulged unless it is required to resolve or investigate the complaint or where statutory obligations apply.

Headway Gippsland will take reasonable measures to protect personal information from loss, unauthorised access, use, disclosure or any other misuse during the complaint-handling process.

Headway Gippsland's General Manager will seek to balance fairness and confidentiality requirements and where possible, safeguard the interests of all parties.