



WOCA 'Step Away' from Abuse and Aggression Policy

Approved by WOCA Committee: November 2018
Date of next review: November 2021

We at West Oxford Community Centre (WOCC) are here to provide the best services possible but in doing so we will not tolerate abusive or aggressive behaviour from our customers. The Committee will act decisively, using a range of options to deal with aggression, assaults or abuse towards our staff or volunteers, including expelling people who do not respect the code of conduct for the centre.

This '**Step Away**' Policy and guidance is to help all our staff and volunteers who may encounter abuse, aggression or even violence in the course of their duties. As you read this document have in mind WOCC is still 'a safe place to work', compared to many places.

Definitions

We define abusive or aggressive behaviour as any behaviour which produces damaging or hurtful effects, physically or emotionally on other people. This definition is not exhaustive but would include:

- verbal abuse including name calling
- bullying, shouting or swearing
- threat of any of the above
- assault - resulting in injury or not
- assault using a weapon or other instrument including broken bottles, hypodermic needles etc.
- sexual assault
- injury caused by pets e.g. dogs
- threat of harm to property or family
- racial or sexual abuse

Commitment

We are committed to minimising the risk of abuse and aggressive behaviour against our staff or volunteers whilst acting in the course of their duties. It is recognised that in addition to any physical injury, the effect on mental well-being can be equally as serious.

We will:

- Empower staff and volunteers to be able to 'step away' from abuse or aggressive situations
- Provide skills training for staff and volunteers, and the Centre Manager to ensure that a consistent approach to dealing with abusive, violent or aggressive people is maintained and supported by this commitment and guidelines
- Carry out risk assessments for all vulnerable categories of front line jobs and introduce safe working practices and procedures to minimise the risks identified
- Require staff to report incidents and to monitor patterns and take steps to reduce risk
- Reinforce our support for staff and volunteers who 'step away' from abuse and violence by signs and the inclusion of statements in appropriate correspondence and literature. Signs and statements will be balanced i.e. identifying the service customers can expect from WOCA and the response we expect from customers

Trustees will:

- Support this policy and the staff who apply it.
- Not be seen to support aggression when taking up complaints about WOCA staff.
- Reflect the requirement on the Centre Manager that the complainant should not receive special attention unless clearly warranted.
- Treat staff as they themselves wish to be treated.

The Centre Manager will:

- Be as supportive as possible of decisions taken by their staff in the first instance.
- Ensure they are in possession of all the facts when asked to intervene.
- Not ask for the complainant to receive special attention unless clearly warranted.
- Reassess the risks and control measures required, after incidents.
- Team brief and train staff, as required. Monitor the effectiveness of training.
- Be responsible for staff welfare, safety and support.

Staff and volunteers will:

- Take all reasonable steps to ensure their own and their colleagues' health and safety.
- 'Step Away' from abuse and aggression as soon as practicable. Report incidents.
- Be alert to any escalating situation your colleagues may be dealing with. Be prepared to render help in any way it is safe to do so.
- Follow the guidance provided and participate in training given.

Legal position

Under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 WOCA has a legal duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of its employees.

This policy and guidance aims to meet the objectives set out in WOCA's Health & Safety Policy. Particular attention is paid in this document to the provision of systems of work, and a working environment, that is safe and without risks to health. Within this framework WOCA affirms its intention to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of its employees against abuse and violence arising from or during the course of their work activities.

Procedures

Informal Complaints

If you have a complaint it is a good idea to talk to the people directly involved, to try to get the issue resolved. If you are not satisfied with the outcome of these informal discussions then you can follow the formal complaints procedure.

Formal Complaints

Help in making a formal complaint

When making a formal complaint it is often useful to have an advocate. This person, of your choice, can support you to put your case effectively. They can be any person: for example a friend, a member of an advocacy organization, or anyone else you feel is appropriate.

Putting the formal complaint in writing

If your complaint cannot be resolved satisfactorily through dealing with it informally you need to put your complaint in writing. If necessary, and if you feel it is appropriate, someone at WOCA can advise you how to put your complaint in writing. The written complaint should be addressed to the Centre Manager, who will normally be the person investigating the complaint. The Centre Manager, or in their absence a nominated trustee, will let you know within 3 working days who will deal with your complaint. If the complaint is about the Centre Manager, it will be investigated by a member of WOCA's Board of Trustees. If the complaint is about the Board of Trustees as a whole, it will be investigated by an independent person nominated by the Board, but outside of its organisational structure.

The Centre Manager must report the complaint to the designated Safeguarding Officer immediately, giving details of the circumstances. If the designated Safeguarding Officer is unavailable (or is the person against whom a complaint has been made) the Chair or in their absence Vice Chair of the Management Committee must be informed and they will ensure that the designated Safeguarding Officer is informed.

If any of the above (Chair, Vice Chair, Manager or the designated Safeguarding Officer) is the person against whom a complaint has been made they will be excluded from the processing of the complaint.

Investigation

The person nominated to deal with your complaint will gain an initial account of what has occurred from all relevant parties, including the person (if any) against whom the allegation has been made. If this is not possible, contact will be made by telephone. If appropriate, they may convene a meeting between you and the person(s) involved in the complaint.

The Manager or the Chair/Vice Chair will have the right to suspend from duty and/or the premises, any person who is the subject of the allegation until a full investigation has been made in line with WOCA's Disciplinary Procedures.

This action does not prejudice the outcome of the investigation of the complaint or imply in any way that the person suspended is responsible for, or is to blame for, any action leading up to the complaint. The purpose is to enable a full and proper investigation to be carried out in a professional and objective manner.

Decision

The person dealing with your complaint will make a recommendation to the Board of Trustees on whether to uphold your complaint and on what action should be taken, if any. The Board of Trustees will then decide on the appropriate action to take. A written record of this will be given to you. The complaint will be dealt with within 2 weeks of the complaint being received by the person nominated to deal with it.

Appeal

If you are not satisfied with the outcome, you can appeal against it, in writing, within two weeks of receiving the written record. The appeal will be referred to an independent person nominated by the Board of Trustees, but outside of the organisational structure of WOCA. This will be a review of the process by

which the decision was reached and the proposed action arising from the decision. If the process or decision was found not to be in line with WOCA policy then the complaint can be reinvestigated. A written response about the outcome of this review will be made within four weeks. No further appeal can be made.

Safeguarding Issues

In the event that issues of safeguarding are identified, it is the responsibility of the Safeguarding Officer to decide whether to inform Oxfordshire County Council Social Services, NHS Adult Mental Health Team (AMHT) and/or the local police, depending on the nature of the allegation. They may also have a legal duty to report the case to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS).

The Manager or his/her nominated deputy will ensure that the Chair of WOCA or in his/her absence the Vice-Chair, Secretary or Treasurer, is fully briefed. An agreed statement will be prepared for the purpose of accurate communication with external sources and for the protection of the legal position of all parties involved. The Manager or his/her nominated deputy will make a full written report of the incident and the actions taken. This report will be stored securely following the procedures detailed in the Data Protection and Data and Record Retention Policies.

Independent Persons

Independent persons carrying out investigations will either be:

- Colleagues from partner organisations which have similar values and principles to West Oxford Community Association
- Representatives of funding organisations, or organisations which contract with West Oxford Community Association

The independent person does not have the power to make decisions. Their role is to investigate the complaint, or the complaint process, and report their recommendations to the Board of Trustees.

Publicising

People making formal complaints have the option to publish a summary of the complaint, the recommendations following the investigation, and the Board of Trustees' decisions in the light of the investigation.

Monitoring Complaints

All formal complaints received will be recorded in a Complaints Log.

New entries in the Complaints Log will be read out at Trustee Meetings as a matter of record. Any necessary action will then be confirmed or set in motion.