

# WOMEN'S AID

## FEEDBACK POLICY

This policy was approved by the  
Board of Management of Women's Aid  
on  
18<sup>th</sup> September 2019



# WOMEN'S AID

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## **1.1 Definition of Feedback:**

Feedback is information received by Women's Aid from any person about their experience of any aspect of Women's Aid services or how these services are provided.

Feedback can generally be a comment, compliment or complaint.

Feedback that is critical of Women's Aid and requires a different response is a complaint and dealt with separately. **(See below 2.3 - What is a Complaint)**

## **1.2 Scope**

This policy and procedures shall apply to any feedback (including complaints) about any service offered by all Women's Aid Departments. These policy and procedures replace previous policies and procedures.

### *1.2.1 Who it covers?*

- Any person seeking service or information from any employee of Women's Aid is potentially covered by the provisions of this policy;
- All full and part-time employees are covered by the provisions of this policy, as are volunteers, and / or other persons conducting work for Women's Aid. Employees and volunteers need to refer to the Grievance policy for any complaint process they wish to initiate.

## **1.3 Policy Statement**

**Primarily, Women's Aid wants to hear from you (any person seeking service or information from any employee of Women's Aid) when things are not right, and also when things work well.**

Women's Aid seeks to deliver high quality services in a manner that will earn the respect and confidence of our service users. In doing so, we are committed to confidentiality<sup>1</sup> efficiency, equality, effectiveness, honesty, and integrity and quality improvement.



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It is important that Women's Aid hears the experiences of those receiving Women's Aid services and those who are impacted by how Women's Aid provides these services. Actively facilitating feedback allows Women's Aid to hear these experiences.

## *1.3.1 Expectations for Women's Aid Service Users:*

Service users are entitled to be treated with respect, courtesy, efficiency, honesty and confidentiality by employees of Women's Aid and likewise are expected to treat employees in a similar manner, and are also entitled to have feedback heard in accordance with the below procedures.

## *1.3.2 Expectations for Employees Providing Service:*

Employees of Women's Aid are expected to provide service which is responsive to service users' requests in a courteous, efficient, respectful and confidential manner. Employees are similarly entitled to be treated with respect and courtesy and confidentiality by clients. In addition, employees are entitled to access supervisory assistance, as needed, when dealing with dissatisfied clients and to appropriate training if and when need is identified.

## **1.4 Key Principles:**

The following principles underpin Women's Aid approach to receiving feedback (including complaints):

- Feedback is essential to the organizations' learning and development;
- Feedback will be used to inform decision-making and the planning, design and delivery of Women's Aid services as appropriate;
- All employees will be open to hearing and addressing any feedback from a service user. Whatever the basis of the feedback it is accepted that it would be unusual that there cannot be some learning for the organization regarding how we carry out our work;
- Service users will be informed of the feedback policy and procedures as soon as possible on any engagement with our service and be reassured by the key principles of this policy;
- This may not always be possible due to the crisis nature of our work and also it is not possible for Helpline calls. Therefore, Women's Aid endeavor to make sure we have the



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feedback policy readily available and publicized for service users and ensure it is accessible as possible for example, encouraging feedback through our social media and directing service users to online access to policy and forms;

- All individuals making complaints and providing other feedback will be treated with dignity and respect;
- Service users will be informed of the feedback procedures and reassured that no action will be taken against them if they complain or offer feedback in good faith and that they will continue to have the same level of access to the services.
- If the complaint is about an individual or group of individuals, it must be made clear that the complaint will be made available to them, and they will be given an opportunity to respond.
- Women's Aid will advise, actively support and assist you, as appropriate, those who wish to make complaints and provide other feedback to the organization. Women's Aid will endeavor to provide service users the opportunity to express their views about services in ways that are safe and inclusive;
- Women's Aid will resolve complaints as expeditiously as practicable;
- Given the nature of the service provided by both the Helpline and the Services department— it is acknowledged that complaints made may be based on a service user's difficulty with external systems rather than the actual support provided by any employee. In these cases Women's Aid will endeavor to provide information on where these complaints can be referred. Women's Aid recognises that we live in a patriarchal society and as a consequence of this there is a lack of awareness and the absence of times of sanctions for abusive partners by external agencies which can contribute to the abusers power and control. In some instances, and wherever possible, Women's Aid will actively support and assist you to make a complaint to an external agency.

## **1.5 What about privacy and confidentiality?**

Women's Aid will treat all personal information and data you provide as confidential and store it securely. This information will be used and retained by Women's Aid for the purpose of dealing



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with your feedback. If we receive feedback in particular a complaint, we reserve the right to access any personal records/ documentation on file to progress actions.

Women's Aid will not share your personal information with others (who are not dealing with your feedback) unless you give permission for Women's Aid to do so or unless Women's Aid has a requirement under law to disclose the information (for example, if your feedback contains information that gives rise to a child protection concern this information will be shared with the local duty social work service for appropriate follow up).

From time to time, Women's Aid uses feedback information for compiling reports and figures. In these instances, Women's Aid will only use non-personal information that does not or could not lead to the identification of the person(s) to whom the information relates.

## 2. Feedback Procedure

### 2.1 How to provide feedback

Feedback can generally be a comment, compliment or complaint.

You can make provide any feedback **in a number of ways:**

- **In Person:** Verbally, in person or by phone direct to the Women's Aid employee you are already engaged with;
- **Call us:** 01 6788858 and leave a message with Reception who will direct to appropriate Manager and for the Women's Aid Dundrum Village Charity Shop on (01) 296 0284
- **By Emailing:**
  - Services Manager: [services.manager@womensaid.ie](mailto:services.manager@womensaid.ie)
  - Helpline Manager: [helpline@womensaid.ie](mailto:helpline@womensaid.ie)
  - Training/Reception Manager: [training@womensaid.ie](mailto:training@womensaid.ie)
  - Communications and Fundraising: [communications@womensaid.ie](mailto:communications@womensaid.ie)
  - Dundrum Charity Shop: [Finance@womensaid.ie](mailto:Finance@womensaid.ie)
- **In writing** to the manager of the individual department:
  - **Services:** Services Manager, Women's Aid, 5 Wilton Place, Dublin 2



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- **Helpline:** Helpline Manager, Women's Aid, 5 Wilton Place, Dublin 2
- **Training/Reception:** Training Manager, Women's Aid, 5 Wilton Place, Dublin 2
- **Communication and Fundraising:** Head of Communications, Women's Aid, 5 Wilton Place, Dublin 2
  
- **Shop:** Financial Controller, Women's Aid, 5 Wilton Place, Dublin 2

## **2.2 What happens to your feedback?\***

*\*Comments and compliments. Complaints dealt with separately in par2.3*

If provided directly to a Women's Aid employee/volunteer then they will acknowledge the comment/compliment with you directly. All employees should provide their line manager with the comments and compliments provided by service users. It is important for the ongoing review, evaluation and development of our services.

Any comments or compliments not directly provided to the employee about a particular Service or Department within Women's Aid will be directed to the line manager of that Service/Department.

Compliments which mention an individual member of staff will be forwarded by their line manager to that staff member.

Women's Aid produces an Annual Report and also regularly does awareness campaigns which include information and use of quotes from comments and compliments that Women's Aid received. However, all of these are fully anonymized and confidential. If you do not want your comment to be used in any of our publications, please specify this in your communication with us.

## **2.3 What is a complaint?**

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by a service user about Women's Aid provision/delivery of service.

### *2.3.1 Is there a time-limit for making a complaint?*



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We would like to hear from you about any aspect of the service delivery you are dissatisfied with, within **6 months** so we could effectively respond.

We may extend the time limit for making a complaint in special circumstances. These could include where you are or had been unwell or bereaved, or where new information becomes available to you over time.

## *2.3.2 What can you make a complaint about?*

Any aspect of Women's Aid service delivery you are dissatisfied/unhappy with.

## *2.3.3 Who can make a complaint?*

Any person who is receiving, or has received, or has sought or is seeking a service from Women's Aid.

Due to the nature of Women's Aid work of working with women experiencing abuse, **we never investigate complaints made by third parties as a result of the possible risk to women who use our services.** If a third party contacts us to make a complaint about a woman's experience of engagement with our services then we will inform them on how the individual concerned can make a direct complaint with us.

## *2.3.4 Can you make an anonymous complaint?*

You can choose whether to make an anonymous complaint or to give your name and contact details. We encourage you to give your details if you make a complaint so that Women's Aid can fully examine and respond to your complaint.

In general, Women's Aid cannot investigate anonymous complaints against an employee. However, all anonymous complaints will be passed on to the relevant manager of the department who will decide if she needs to/can take any action.

If you make a complaint by phone or in person, the employee taking the details of the complaint will encourage you to give your name and telephone number. You will be advised that unless you give a name and contact details, it may not be possible to examine the complaint properly.



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## 3. Stages of the Complaints Management Process

Once a complaint has been made, you as the service user making the complaint will be known as the complainant.

A complaint may be resolved at any of the below stages. When a complainant is dissatisfied with the resolution being offered, it is the choice of the complainant whether she wishes to have their complaint progressed to the next stage of the complaints process.

If the complaint is about an individual or group of individuals, it must be made clear to the complainant from the outset that the complaint will be made available to them, and they will be given an opportunity to respond.

### **3.1 Stage One: Complaint Acknowledgement and Informal resolution**

#### *3.1.1 Resolved Directly with Employee*

If a Women's Aid employee receives a verbal complaint (this can be about the service they directly provided or about another employee/aspect of Women's Aid service delivery), they need to try and acknowledge this complaint as soon as possible and try to resolve the complaint there and then in that moment. Employees need to always inform the complainant about this policy and the principles within.

Even if complaints were resolved it is important that the employees inform their line manager and they have a discussion on what can be learned from this complaint.

#### *3.1.2 Refer to Line Manager*

If either of the parties (complainant or employee) feel the complaint cannot be resolved they can refer to the Manager of the Department concerned. This could be via email/postal/ by telephone. See all contact details **above 2.1**. The Manager of the specific department the complaint refers to



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will acknowledge the complaint within **10 working days of receipt of the complaint, and try to resolve the complaint informally.**

If a complaint is received in any written format and it is possible to respond, the Manager of the specific department the complaint refers to will acknowledge the complaint within **10 working days of receipt and try to resolve the complaint informally.**

Informal resolution involves:

- Engaging actively with the complainant and/or relevant staff with the view to achieving an agreed resolution to the complaint issue for example: Offer of an apology, offer of another appointment, offer to speak to worker and team to learn from complaint.

Department Managers will always endeavor to speak with the employee involved about the complaint and how we can learn from it.

### *3.1.3 Informal Resolution is unsuccessful*

If the woman requests it and provides consent, Women's Aid shall actively facilitate progression on to the next stage of complaint process.

Where the Departmental Manager deems informal resolution was not successful, they will: Inform the complainant of the next steps and how to access the complaint policy.

### *3.1.4 Recording*

Whether successful or unsuccessful all Managers need to record the form of informal resolution offered, record the outcome and ensure all parties (complainant, relevant staff member) also informed

## **Stage 2: Formal Investigation**

If the complaint has not been resolved by informal resolution then the complaint is referred to the CEO who then assigns a manager to investigate within Women's Aid who is most appropriate for an independent investigation for example; the Training Manager may investigate the Services Department complaint.



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In order to facilitate this, the complainant will be asked to complete a complaint form (please see **Appendix 1**). The relevant investigating manager shall support the service user to complete the form if there are any barriers for her in completing it. For example, it could be completed over the telephone.

A written acknowledgement of the initiation of the investigation needs to be sent to the person making the complaint/ complainant. It should include the name and contact details of the relevant investigating manager and the proposed time frame for conducting the investigation. If the service user cannot receive anything in written format, Women's Aid shall facilitate communication through other means.

The Women's Aid staff member against whom a complaint has been made will also be provided with a copy of the complaints form.

## 3.2.1 Time-Frame

The referral to the CEO, allocation to an investigating manager and a written acknowledgement of the investigation sent to the complainant needs to be completed **within 10 working days from an unsuccessful informal resolution outcome**.

The investigating manager will investigate a complaint **within 30 working days** of a written acknowledgement of the initiation of the investigation sent to the person making the complaint/ complainant.

The investigating manager may call on other staff, witnesses and other relevant people and so on to cooperate and assist with the complaint investigation.

If investigation of the complaint will not be completed within the 30 working days advised, the investigating manager will tell the complainant this before this timeframe passes.

The investigating manager will also indicate the extended time it will take to complete the investigation and must then update you **every 20 working days** until the matter is resolved.

Women's Aid endeavours to complete investigations into complaints **within six months of receiving the complaint**.



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If Women's Aid cannot meet this deadline, the investigating manager must inform you that the investigation is taking longer than six months. The investigating manager must also tell you why the complaint investigation is delayed and outline the plan of action for bringing the complaint investigation to a conclusion.

### *3.2.2 Support and Guidance for Employees and Complainants*

The Employee Assistance Programme offered to all employees of Women's Aid can be used and will be encouraged to be used by the employee and line manager concerned during this formal investigation. It is important employees feel supported throughout this process.

The CEO of Women's Aid will provide ongoing guidance and support to the investigating manager.

The complainant may be accompanied to any meetings arranged with Women's Aid by a support person of their choosing (e.g. friend or family member) though this person must be bound to maintain the confidentiality of the process.

The complainant may be offered the support of another support worker from the service, (specifically to meet her support needs in relation to her experience of Domestic Abuse, and not in relation to the complaint) if deemed appropriate or facilitated to access another domestic abuse service if appropriate.

### *3.2.3 Report Recommendations:*

The investigating manager will write a report of their investigation.

The draft copy of this report needs to be provided to the CEO of Women's Aid for sign off to ensure the recommendations are fair, reasonable and realistically achievable considering the limited resources of Women's Aid.

The report must include the following:

- Details of the complaint
- Description of the complaint investigation process
- Response of the service and/ or staff members concerned
- Findings of the investigation
  - Uphold the full complaint or;



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- Uphold the complaint in part or
- Not uphold the complaint.
- Reason for the findings
- Recommendations and the reasons for the same

Once the final copy of the report has been produced then this copy of the report is provided to the complainant, the relevant service manager(s) and employee(s) who are subject to the complaint. The report will likely be forwarded through email/ post depending on the preference of the complainant. The complainant will also be offered an opportunity to meet the investigating manager face to face to talk through the report findings or by telephone again depending on the preference of the woman.

The recommendations of the report will be progressed within the relevant department within Women's Aid wherever possible.

### 3.2.4 Redress

Women's Aid will strive to ensure that any redress should be consistent and fair for both the complainant and the service against which the complaint was made. Women's Aid will offer forms of redress or responses that are appropriate and reasonable where it has been established that a measurable loss, detriment or disadvantage was suffered or sustained by the claimant personally.

This redress may include:

- Apology
- An explanation
- Admission of fault
- Change of decision
- Correction of misleading or incorrect records
- Recommendation to make a change to a relevant policy

A Women's Aid representative may not, following the investigation of a complaint, make a recommendation the implementation of which would require or cause Women's Aid to make a material amendment any approved service plan or service agreement with its funders.



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## **3.3 If you are dissatisfied with Women's Aid formal investigation: Additional Review Stages 3 & 4.**

If you are unhappy with the formal investigation process, then you may move to the next stage of the complaints process.

### *3.3.1 Stage 3:*

If the matter is still unresolved the complaint will be referred to the Board of Women's Aid for review. A designated member or members of the Board will be assigned to review the complaint, and process for dealing with the complaint to date. A report of their findings will be produced which will follow the same format as Stage 2 above (see 'Report Recommendations' section 3.2.3).

### *3.3.2 Stage 4:*

If the complainant remains unsatisfied at the conclusion of stage 3 of the process, the next stage is referring your complaint to an external agency; which is our primary funder Tusla. Tusla, the Child and Family Agency is the dedicated state agency responsible for improving well-being and outcomes for children. Consistent with its functions under the 'Child and Family Agency Act 2013' and national standards, the Agency has developed a national feedback and complaints policy called 'Tell Us'.

This is an overarching policy and procedure which is supported by a number of guidance documents which are outlined in Appendix 1 to that policy. The policy can be found here:

[https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tell Us - Policy and Procedure \(2017\).pdf](https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tell Us - Policy and Procedure (2017).pdf)

- You may request a review of the complaint made to Women's Aid by writing to Tusla

#### **Postal Address:**

Tusla – Child and Family Agency,  
The Brunel Building,  
Heuston South Quarter,  
Saint John's Road West,  
Dublin 8.  
D08 X01F



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- Or Email: [tellus@tusla.ie](mailto:tellus@tusla.ie)
- See all means of contacting Tusla: <https://www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/>

## 4. Women's Aid notification to Tusla:

Under the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, Women's Aid will provide Tusla with a general report on the complaints received by the organisation during the previous year indicating:

- The total number of complaints received
- The nature of the complaints
- The number of complaints resolved by informal means
- The outcome of any investigations into the complaints

*This information contains no identifying information.*

## 5. Matters excluded from the complaints procedure:

A person is not entitled to make a complaint about any of the following matters:

(a) a matter that is or has been the subject of legal proceedings

before a court or tribunal;

(b) a matter relating to the recruitment or appointment of an employee by Women's Aid;

(c) a matter relating to or affecting the terms or conditions of a contract of employment that Women's Aid proposes to enter into/has entered into or of a contract with an adviser that Women's Aid proposes to enter into/has entered into.

(d) a matter that could prejudice an investigation being undertaken by the Garda Síochána;

(e) a matter that has been brought before any other complaints procedure established under an enactment.



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## 6. Refusal to investigate or further investigate complaints.

Women's Aid may refuse to investigate or further investigate complaints if they either: Fall under matters excluded from the complaints procedure (listed above), or: the complaint is deemed to be vexatious or habitual.

## 7. Definition of a Vexatious or Habitual complaint.

Complainants (and/or anyone acting on their behalf) may be deemed to be habitual or vexatious complainants where previous or current contact with them shows that they meet **TWO OR MORE** of the following criteria:

Where complainants -

- **Persist in pursuing a complaint** where the Women's Aid complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and exhausted.
- **Change the substance** of a complaint or **continually raise new issues** or seek to prolong contact by **continually raising further concerns or questions** upon receipt of a response whilst the complaint is being addressed. (Care must be taken not to discard new issues which are significantly different from the original complaint. These might need to be addressed as separate complaints.)
- Do not clearly identify the precise issues which they wish to be investigated, despite reasonable efforts of Women's Aid to help them specify their concerns, and/or where the concerns identified are not within the remit of Women's Aid to investigate.
- Focus on a trivial matter to an extent which is out of proportion to its significance and continue to focus on this point. (It is recognised that determining what a 'trivial' matter is can be subjective and careful judgement must be used in applying this criteria.)
- Have threatened or used actual physical violence towards staff at any time - this will in itself cause personal contact with the complainant and/or their representatives to be discontinued and the complaint will, thereafter, only be pursued through written communication. All such incidences should be documented.



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- Have in the course of addressing a registered complaint had an excessive number of contacts with Women's Aid; placing unreasonable demands on staff. (A contact may be in person or by telephone, letter or fax. Discretion must be used in determining the precise number of "excessive contacts" applicable under this section, using judgement based on the specific circumstances of each individual case.)
- Have harassed or been personally abusive or verbally aggressive on more than one occasion towards staff dealing with their complaint. (Staff must recognise that complainants may sometimes act out of character at times of stress, anxiety, or distress and should make reasonable allowances for this. They should document all incidents of harassment.)
- Are known to have recorded meetings or face-to-face/telephone conversations without the prior knowledge and consent of other parties involved.
- Display unreasonable demands or expectations as Service users /complainants and fail to accept that these may be unreasonable (e.g. insist on responses to complaints or enquiries being provided more urgently than is reasonable or normal recognised practice).

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<sup>i</sup> See Women's Aid Confidentiality policy and limits to confidentiality

