

Air Ambulance Northern Ireland

Volunteer Problem Solving Procedures

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Introduction

While the involvement of volunteers is by and large a positive experience for everyone involved, occasionally things can go wrong. These procedures set out how we will address issues and complaints raised either by or about volunteers.

When a Volunteer Wishes to Complain

1. Introduction and Purpose

In any organisation there may, from time to time, be occasions when an individual feels that he or she may have been treated unfairly or in a way that is inappropriate or disrespectful.

- 1.1 It is Air Ambulance NI's policy to ensure that you have the right to have your concern investigated by an independent impartial individual and you should know to whom you should apply if you have a concern.
- 1.2 The aim of the procedure is to settle any issues in the shortest possible time, following an investigation, and allowing for the concerns to be properly and impartially heard.

2. Principles

- 2.1 Air Ambulance NI's policy is to ensure that these procedures are consistently followed and that all volunteers are treated in a fair and equitable manner. This procedure has been written to fulfill this objective and is to be applied whenever a concern is registered. A written record is to be started at this point.
- 2.2 In the first instance, if you wish to express a concern you should discuss it with the Volunteer Coordinator. If the concern relates to the Volunteer Coordinator you should discuss it with the Head of Fundraising. If the grievance is about the Head of Fundraising you should discuss it with the Head of Operations and Finance.
- 2.3 The Volunteer Coordinator is to investigate the circumstances surrounding the issues raised and decide on appropriate action, outlining their decision in writing within seven days of receiving the grievance. If proper investigation is going to take longer than seven days, you will be informed of the reasons in writing within the initial seven days and given a time scale by which it will be resolved. This time scale must be reasonable.
- 2.4 If the concern is not resolved within the first 10-15 working days (or the longer time period when notified in writing) you may refer it to the Head of Fundraising or Head of Operations and Finance. The Volunteer Coordinator will be notified of this by the Head of Fundraising or the Head of Operations and Finance, who will endeavor to resolve the matter within seven days.

3. Process

- 3.1 The Volunteer Coordinator will listen to your concerns. No opinions should be expressed or commitments made before the concern has been properly investigated. This meeting is purely to establish the nature of the concern, hear your viewpoint and any background information. If you wish to be supported by an Air Ambulance NI colleague (volunteer or staff) from this point, you may do so.
- 3.2 The Volunteer Coordinator will speak to any third parties to ascertain any additional relevant information that will help in deciding the merits of the concern. People consulted would probably include anyone involved in the situation that has provoked the complaint and those who may have witnessed an action leading to the complaint.
- 3.3 The Volunteer Coordinator will then make a decision as to appropriate action, taking into account the following: -
 - Current Air Ambulance NI volunteering procedures.
 - The agreed facts surrounding the concern raised and any precedents set.
 - Appropriate conditions of volunteering.
 - Statutory responsibilities of Air Ambulance NI.
- 3.4 The Volunteer Coordinator will discuss their decision with the Head of Fundraising or Head of Operations and Finance, and take into account any advice given.
- 3.5 The Volunteer Coordinator will inform you of their decision in writing. The sources of information and the actions taken to obtain it, together with reasons for the decision, will be explained.
- 3.6 A note confirming the decision will be given to you and a copy placed on any relevant personnel file(s).

4. **Appeal**

- 4.1 If you are dissatisfied with the way in which your concern has been handled, and the complaint does not involve the Head of Fundraising, you may appeal to the Head of Fundraising stating the reason for your dissatisfaction.
- 4.2 The Head of Fundraising will enquire as to the process carried out by the Volunteer Coordinator (see above) and, if satisfied that the decision was made correctly, will inform you that the appeal has been unsuccessful. This process should be completed within seven working days.
- 4.3 If the Head of Fundraising is not completely satisfied that the situation was dealt with correctly, they will reconsider the issue and reapply the above process.
- 4.4 The decision of the Head of Fundraising is final.
- 4.5 If the problem involves the Head of Fundraising then it should be heard by the Head of Operations and Finance, and the process already outlined above should be followed.
- 4.6 In this instance the decision of the Head of Operations and Finance is final.

When a Complaint is about a Volunteer

1. **Introduction and purpose**

- 1.1 Air Ambulance NI has clearly defined rules and guidelines which ensure acceptable standards of volunteer conduct.
- 1.2 The standards of conduct which are expected are outlined in the Air Ambulance NI Volunteer Policy.
- 1.3 By becoming a volunteer with Air Ambulance NI, you are bound by the standards of conduct as outlined in the Volunteer Policy document and the consequences of failing to adhere to them.
- 1.4 You are issued with a copy of this Volunteer Policy document at your AANI volunteer induction. Any changes or additions to rules or guidelines will be issued to you as they occur.
- 1.5 A formal problem solving procedure is not a substitute for normal day-to-day exchange of views. In many instances, informal discussions will achieve the desired improvements without using the formal procedure.
- 1.6 The objective of Air Ambulance NI in applying the problem solving guidelines is that its actions should be corrective rather than seeking to punish you. To this end, the procedures make provision for either verbal or written warnings to be given to you depending on the seriousness of the matter. However, further incidents could lead to dismissal from your volunteer role.
- 1.7 Although Air Ambulance NI believes that it is more important to understand what has led to the situation and to re-establish co-operation and prevent a re-occurrence, it is important that you understand that disciplinary action will be taken, which may ultimately lead to the termination of your volunteering agreement if you fail to achieve the required standard of conduct, or break regulations.

2. **Management roles and responsibilities during the disciplinary process.**

- 2.1 Responsibility for the application of the problem solving procedure rests in the first place with your Volunteer Coordinator.
- 2.2 The Head of Fundraising will take responsibility for the application of the disciplinary procedure where the Volunteer Coordinator is a witness to the disciplinary incident, as she will be required to provide independent evidence.
- 2.3 At formal interviews, a member of Air Ambulance NI staff will be present to ensure that the Volunteer Coordinator conducts the interview correctly, adhering fully to the Air Ambulance NI procedures, and therefore, that the individual is treated fairly. The role of this staff member is NOT that of investigating/dismissing Manager.
- 2.4 If the procedure reaches a serious (i.e. formal) stage, you are entitled to be accompanied by an Air Ambulance NI employee or volunteer of your choice. The accompanying representative will not have any input into the meeting. If you have a family member who is a volunteer, we suggest that they do not accompany you.
- 2.5 Criticisms or allegations will always be discussed with you and you will, of course, be given the opportunity to make comment, reply to or explain before any decision concerning any further action is taken.
- 2.6 Confidentiality and discretion will be maintained at all times by the Volunteer Coordinator and all those involved in the disciplinary procedure during the investigation and interview process, regardless of the nature of the incident.
- 2.7 The Volunteer Coordinator will ensure that individual circumstances will always be considered fully in

order to maintain consistency and fairness.

- 2.8** If a guideline is not understood or consistently observed, the process will begin at the previous appropriate stage to that which would normally be taken.
- 2.9** In normal cases, you will remain at the appropriate stage of the process for six months. Exceptionally this may be extended to twelve months. This will be recorded on your volunteer file. If no further incident occurs within this period, the warning will become void and will not be taken into consideration if any further issues arise in the future.

3. Examples of situations leading to Action

- 3.1** The following are examples of those standards and regulations which, if disregarded, will require corrective action:
- Where your conduct does not reach the required standard
 - Where you break Air Ambulance NI regulations and procedures
 - Where your standards of conduct are not acceptable
 - Where criminal and other acts are committed outside your volunteer role, which are relevant to your agreement with Air Ambulance NI

4. The Problem Solving – a summary

4.1 Stage 1 – Informal Discussion

Informal discussion with the Volunteer Coordinator; followed by a letter stating the outcome.

4.2 Stage 2 – Formal Discussion

Formal discussion with the Volunteer Coordinator (or Head of Fundraising) following a previous informal discussion, to which you may be accompanied.

You will be warned that a further similar occurrence will be treated very seriously.

A record of the discussion and the outcome will be recorded on your personnel file, and you will also receive letter outlining the outcome.

4.3 Stage 3 – Warning of dismissal

Formal discussion with the Volunteer Coordinator, to which you may be accompanied.

Takes place where the same/similar act of misconduct takes place within a 12 month period of the previous act of misconduct OR for more serious initial acts of misconduct as outlined in *ANNEX A*

You will be warned that you may be dismissed if there are any further occurrences.

A record will be made of the warning of dismissal - you will be asked to sign this and given a copy.

4.4 Stage 4 - Dismissal

The dismissal interview (to which you may be accompanied) takes place following a warning of dismissal or in cases deemed sufficiently serious by the Volunteer Coordinator in conjunction with the Head of Fundraising.

If a guideline is not understood or consistently observed, the disciplinary process will begin at the previous appropriate stage to that which would normally be taken.

There may be circumstances where it is appropriate for the Volunteer Coordinator to decide to place you onto Stage 3 or 4 of the disciplinary procedure immediately, without Stages 1 or 2 being followed - this would usually be in cases of gross misconduct (see *ANNEX A*).

In normal cases, you will remain at the appropriate stage of the disciplinary process for six months.

Exceptionally this may be extended to twelve months. This will be recorded on your personnel file. If no further incident occurs within this period, the warning will become void and will not be taken into consideration if any further issues arise in the future.

Dependent on the Volunteer Coordinator's view of the seriousness of a particular incident, you may be dismissed immediately i.e. without following all the stages of the above process - this is because you will have shown yourself to be unsuitable as a volunteer of Air Ambulance NI.

All proposals for dismissal are to be endorsed by the Head of Fundraising or Head of Operations and Finance, before being put into effect.

5. Implementation of the Complaint Procedure

5.1 Investigation

Prior to any meeting with you, the Volunteer Coordinator (or Head of Fundraising) will make a full investigation of the facts which are known to them in order to assess the situation and its background. This may include interviews with staff or volunteers.

5.2 Location

In all cases, the Volunteer Coordinator will arrange for the meeting to take place in a private place free from interruptions and will set aside an appropriate period of time to deal with the situation. In some circumstances, this conversation may be done over the phone.

5.3 Notification of meeting

- 5.3.1 You will be given prior notification that a meeting is to take place, other than in cases of gross misconduct which are likely to result in instant (summary) dismissal.
- 5.3.2 You will be informed of the issue which is to be discussed, and you will be required to attend a review meeting at a specified time and place.
- 5.3.3 The meeting will take place within office hours.
- 5.3.4 If you are on holiday or absent through sickness, the meeting will be arranged for your return to volunteering (other than in cases of long term sickness).
- 5.3.5 If the Volunteer Coordinator is on holiday or absent, the meeting will be arranged for their return to work.
- 5.3.6 In certain cases it may be difficult to deal with the incident immediately. In this case you will be suspended until a time which is convenient to Air Ambulance NI.

5.4 The right to be accompanied

- 5.4.1 You will be offered the opportunity to be accompanied by a staff member or volunteer during Stage 3 and Stage 4 of the disciplinary procedure.
- 5.4.2 The role of the accompanying person is to provide moral support and to be a witness to the proceedings. You may confer with each other at any point during the proceedings, although they must not be actively involved with the meeting. If you have a family member who is a volunteer, we suggest that they do not accompany you.

6.0 Stage 1 – Informal discussion

- 6.1 A private meeting will take place between you and the Volunteer Coordinator.
- 6.2 The discussion will be informal.
- 6.3 You will be asked for your explanation and comments.
- 6.4 The discussion will focus on how to improve behaviour if relevant or will clarify any rules which do not appear to be understood.
- 6.5 No record will be made of this discussion.
- 6.6 If you do not attend this meeting without adequate warning your volunteering for Air Ambulance NI may be suspended until such time as resolution is reached. The meeting will be arranged for a mutually convenient date and time.

7.0 Stage 2 - Formal discussion

- 7.1. A private meeting will take place between you and the Volunteer Coordinator.
- 7.2 You will be reminded of your right to be accompanied and to take notes during the interview. The Volunteer Coordinator also has the right to be accompanied.
- 7.3 The nature and details of the alleged act of misconduct will be outlined to you.
- 7.4 You will be asked for your explanation and comments.
- 7.5 The Volunteer Coordinator will assess these explanations and comments in relation to the alleged act of misconduct.
- 7.6 Where the explanation is felt to be reasonable, the conversation will cease at this point, and no record will be made of the interview.
- 7.7 Where the explanation is not felt to be reasonable, the discussion will continue and where the act of misconduct relates to behaviour, will focus on how to improve the behaviour.
- 7.8 Where the act of misconduct relates to behaviour, a time scale will be set for improvement. This will vary according to the changes required and will be agreed between you and the Volunteer Coordinator as being reasonable and realistic.
 - 7.8.1 You will be warned that any further acts of misconduct of this kind will lead to serious action.
 - 7.8.2 The warning will remain active for 6 or 12 months, depending on the seriousness of the alleged act of misconduct.
 - 7.8.3 A record will be made on your volunteer file outlining the content of the discussion, reasons for any decision made, and any time scales agreed for improvement. Both you and the Volunteer Coordinator will

sign the record.

7.8.4 You will be reminded of your right to appeal as stated in the problem solving procedures.

- 7.9** If you do not attend this meeting without adequate warning your volunteering for Air Ambulance NI may be suspended until such time as resolution is reached. The meeting will be arranged for a mutually convenient date and time.

8. Stage 3 – Warning of dismissal

- 8.1** A private meeting will take place between you and the Volunteer Coordinator.
- 8.2** You will be told that it is a serious disciplinary situation.
- 8.3** You will be reminded that you have the right to be accompanied and to take notes during the interview.
- 8.4** An Air Ambulance NI staff member will accompany the Volunteer Coordinator in order to ensure that the Volunteer Coordinator adheres fully to the Air Ambulance NI problem solving procedures, and, therefore, that you are treated fairly. They will make a note of the proceedings and be an independent witness. The role of the representative is NOT that of investigating/dismissing Manager.
- 8.5** The nature and details of the alleged act of misconduct will be outlined to you.
- 8.6** You will be asked for your explanation and comments.
- 8.7** The Area Fundraising Manager will assess these explanations and comments in relation to the alleged act of misconduct - if further investigation is required, the meeting will be suspended and reconvened at a suitable time as soon as possible after the original discussion. In some cases, suspension may necessitate absence from volunteering.
- 8.8** Where the explanation is felt to be reasonable, the conversation will cease at this point, and no record will be made of this interview, although any previous verbal warnings made connected to this subject matter will remain in operation.
- 8.9** Where the explanation is not felt to be reasonable, the discussion will continue and where the act of misconduct relates to behaviour, will focus on how to improve the behaviour.
- 8.9.1** Where the act of misconduct relates to behaviour, a time scale will be set for improvement - this will vary according to the changes required and will be agreed between you and the Area Fundraising Manager as being reasonable and realistic.
- 8.9.2** A record will be made on your personnel file outlining the act of misconduct, your explanation, reasons for any decision made, and any time scales agreed for improvement. You will read, sign, and date this. A copy will be retained on your file and a copy given to you.
- 8.9.3** You will be advised that any further breach of this guideline may result in dismissal and reminded that you are at Stage 3 of the problem solving procedure.
- 8.9.4** You will be reminded of your right to appeal as stated in the Problem Solving Procedures.
- 8.10** In all cases the warning will remain active for six or twelve months, depending on the seriousness of the alleged act of misconduct.
- 8.11** If you do not attend this meeting without adequate warning your volunteering for Air Ambulance NI may be suspended until such time as resolution is reached. The meeting will be arranged for a mutually convenient date and time.

9. Stage 4 – Dismissal

- 9.1** A private meeting will take place between you and the Head of Fundraising.
- 9.2** You will be told that this is a serious disciplinary discussion which may result in dismissal and reminded that you have the right to be accompanied at the meeting.
- 9.3** An Air Ambulance NI member of staff will accompany the Head of Fundraising in order to ensure that they conduct the interview in accordance with the Air Ambulance NI disciplinary procedures, and, therefore, that you are treated fairly. They will make a note of the proceedings and be an independent witness. The role of the representative is NOT that of investigating/dismissing Manager.
- 9.4** The nature and details of the alleged act of misconduct will be outlined to you.
- 9.5** You will be asked for your explanation and comments.
- 9.6** The Head of Fundraising will assess these explanations and comments in relation to the alleged act of misconduct - if further investigation is required, the meeting will be suspended and reconvened at a suitable time as soon as possible after the original discussion.
- 9.7** Where the explanation is felt to be reasonable, the conversation will cease at this point, and no record will be made of this interview, although any previous written or verbal warnings made connected to this subject matter will remain in operation.
- 9.8** Where your explanation is not felt to be adequate, the Head of Fundraising will suspend the interview in order to consider the action which is to be taken. Consideration will be made of any mitigating circumstances (such as domestic or health factors, financial situation), and the severity of the incident. As long as this time is not excessive, you will remain in the interview room and will be accompanied by an

appropriate Air Ambulance NI employee.

- 9.9** If the decision is that although you did commit the offence, you are not going to be dismissed, a further written warning will be made which states reasons why you were not dismissed, and action which will take place if there is a further relevant act of misconduct by you within a set time period. You will read, sign, and date this. A copy will be retained on your volunteer file and a copy given to you.
- 9.10** If the decision is made to dismiss, you will be told that you are being dismissed, and told the grounds on which you are being dismissed.
- 9.11** You will be told that
- Any expenses due will be paid.
 - Air Ambulance NI will give a factual reference on request.
 - A written statement of reasons for dismissal will be sent to you by the dismissing manager no later than 14 days after the dismissal interview.
 - You have the right to appeal as stated in the Air Ambulance NI Problem Solving procedure outlined in the Volunteer Policy.
- 9.12** If you do not attend this meeting without adequate warning your volunteering for Air Ambulance NI may be suspended until such time as resolution is reached. The meeting will be arranged for a mutually convenient date and time.

10. Disciplinary appeals procedure

- 10.1** If you are dissatisfied on any point of action beyond the informal warning stage, you may refer the matter through the appeals procedure.
- 10.2** You may refer the matter in writing to the Head of Fundraising who will arrange for an appeal hearing with an appropriate member of the management team. If the matter involves the Head of Fundraising, the appeal hearing should be with the Head of Operations and Finance.
- 10.3** Following the interview, the Head of Fundraising concerned will communicate their decision to you in writing within 7 working days.
- 10.4** At any stage in the appeals procedure you may ask a member of AANI staff or a volunteer colleague to accompany you, but not a person from outside Air Ambulance NI.

11. Definitions

- 11.1** Head of Operations and Finance = The manager who holds the Charity Manager role.
- 11.2** Volunteer = Anybody who has a volunteer agreement with Air Ambulance NI.
- 11.3** Acts of misconduct = see examples in *ANNEX A*.

ANNEX A - Definitions of ordinary and gross misconduct

1. Behavior that falls into the category of Ordinary Misconduct

The following are examples of the type of offence that are regarded by Air Ambulance NI as ordinary misconduct. They will be dealt with through the full problem solving process, starting with an informal discussion

- Poor time keeping
- Unsatisfactory attendance record
- Conduct consistently below the required standard
- Disregard for health and safety when representing Air Ambulance NI
- Insubordination
- Unauthorised activities whilst volunteering on Air Ambulance NI premises
- Disorderly conduct of a minor nature (e.g. lack of appropriate seriousness or dressing in an inappropriate fashion)
- Disregard for property of Air Ambulance NI or its employees

2. Behavior that falls into the category of Gross Misconduct

The following are examples of the type of offence viewed by Air Ambulance NI as being extremely serious and may be regarded as gross misconduct. They may lead to an immediate formal written warning or dismissal without notice, unless there are exceptional mitigating circumstances

- Behaviour which is damaging to the reputation of Air Ambulance NI.
- Not adhering to AANI's volunteer policies and procedures.
- Falsification of company documents or records whether with or without intent to deceive/defraud
- Fraudulent acts with the intention of obtaining money, assets, services or information which would otherwise be denied
- Tampering with IT equipment and accessing computer-held files without authorization
- Refusal to comply with lawful and reasonable instructions from a superior whether written or verbal
- Failure to disclose information or to give accurate information to the Charity when making an application for volunteering
- Theft, misappropriation or embezzlement of the Charity's funds/property whether attempted or actual
- Unauthorised disclosure to a third party of information concerning the Charity or its donors/volunteers
- Willful damage to the property of Air Ambulance NI or its employees or volunteers
- Assault or attempted assault (whether physical or verbal) on an Air Ambulance NI colleague
- Sexual/personal harassment
- Carelessness in relation to or willful disregard of health and safety of other volunteers, employees, visitors and subcontractors
- Discrimination in dealing with Air Ambulance NI employees, volunteers or applicants for employment on the basis of: age, race, colour, ethnic or national origin, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender re-assignment, religion or marital status
- Gross negligence in the performance of duties.
- Disorderly conduct of a serious nature including being unfit to volunteer through the use of alcohol or non-medically prescribed drugs
- Conviction in a court of law that compromises the volunteer's ability to carry on their agreement with Air Ambulance NI