



Document Title	Complaints Policy
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## 1. Introduction to the fws Complaints Policy

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**foodwatershelter** (fws) (henceforth referred to as the Organisation) is a child and youth safe organisation committed to the promotion of best practice principles and continuous development of the organisation. fws' *Complaints Policy* (henceforth referred to as the Policy) provides the principles by which fws operates to maintain best practice in the area of organisation accountability and development.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Purpose***

The Policy provides best practice principles to respond to:

1. issues that concern the operational and fundamental principles of the organisation;
2. concerns, suggestions and recommendations by stakeholders of the organisation; and
3. promoting the transparency and accountability of staff, volunteers and board members of the organisation.

It is expected that staff and volunteers will use the Policy as a reference point to initiate and develop operational procedures to ensure that all stakeholders will have accessible opportunities to provide feedback into the Organisation.

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<sup>1</sup> fws would like to thank and acknowledge this document is largely based on the Brotherhood of St Lawrence's Child Protection Policy.

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The Policy applies to all paid and volunteer staff, students, contractors, residents, visitors at Kesho Leo, community organisations that the Organisation engages with, departmental authorities, the general public, official bodies and funding partners.

### ***Types of Complaints***

A complaint may be a major complaint or a minor complaint.

A *minor complaint* can generally be dealt with by a staff member of the Organisation and resolved within 48 hours. For example, a staff member is unhappy with their working hours that week and wishes to have these temporarily changed. The staff member's manager has authority to make a decision regarding this complaint.

A *major complaint* is based on the level of risk associated with the complaint and the likely consequences should the complaint not be dealt with. For example, where there is a concern about child protection, this is considered to have a high risk topic that could have extremely negative effects for children and the organisation involved. Therefore, this should be immediately considered a major complaint. A major complaint generally requires the involvement of the senior management and board members of the Organisation, and will be resolved as soon as possible.

Minor or major complaints may relate to, but is not limited to,:

- the delivery of programs;
- the treatment of staff, Kesho Leo residents or volunteers;
- the maintenance of the Organisation's core principles; or
- the accountability of resources.

All complaints are considered valid and require an organisational response.

### ***Complaint principles***

All staff, volunteers and board members of the Organisation will implement a set strategy for dealing with complaints. Responding to complaints is considered an important process for the Organisation, as this can lead to the healthy development of the Organisation.

The following principles should also be referred to when responding to a complaint made by an fws stakeholder:

- The Organisation recognises the importance and value of listening and responding to concerns and complaints of stakeholders.
  - Stakeholders should be able to find it easy to make a complaint, and feel that their complaints are being heard and responded to in a considerate, timely and constructive manner.
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- Complaints will be investigated with an open mind, and with respect of people's privacy, confidentiality and right to dignity.
- Act in the best interests of the Organisation and its clients (who are the most vulnerable and require equitable policies and procedures that ensure they are not further marginalised).
- Be respectful to anyone who is being investigated for a complaint.
- Promote organisational awareness and open discussion regarding how the Organisation can enhance its policies and procedures to increase best practice and reduce similar complaints in the future.
- Work in partnership with stakeholders to develop responses that meet their needs and expectations.
- Ensure that the feedback and complaints handling process is as effective, safe, confidential and accessible to all stakeholders as possible, irrespective of gender, culture, literacy status, health status and without prejudice to their future participation in the Organisation's programs.
- Complaints will be responded to as quickly as possible and appropriate.
- Ensure confidential documentation of complaints and responses is maintained for future reference.

## **2. Procedures for Ensuring Stakeholders are able to make Complaints**

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fws has invested heavily in developing and implementing procedures are in place to ensure that stakeholders are able to easily make a complaint. These include:

- An online form for all stakeholders, general public, staff, volunteers, networks, and so forth to provide feedback to the organisation. This online form is sent directly to the Australian board and is considered and responded to within a seven-day timeframe. Where someone does not wish to fill in an online form, contact mobile numbers and direct email addresses are provided for the President of fws and the Project Manager.
  - An induction process and clear reporting structure within Australia and Tanzania to ensure staff and volunteers have a manager that they can meet with, be mentored by and discuss issues or concerns, including constructive developmental feedback for the Organisation.
  - A bi-annual performance review process in Tanzania to ensure staff and volunteers are provided with an opportunity to provide feedback.
  - An exit interview for volunteers in Australia and staff and volunteers in Tanzania to ensure that feedback is provided to the Organisation about why a staff or volunteer may be leaving or observations they have made during their time with the Organisation and how things may be improved in the future.
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- The Organisation actively seeks out opportunities to be involved in relevant networks and forums to ensure the Organisation is kept up to date with best practice principles and open to feedback from other organisations on how to improve practices.

### **3. Procedures for Responding to a Minor Complaint**

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Where a minor complaint is made to management or the fws board, the following procedures are taken:

1. The complaint is considered in light of current practices and feedback from any other staff members involved in the program/ project area.
2. Should the complaint be substantiated (that is, found to be valid), the member who received the complaint is responsible for developing an appropriate response and implementing this.
3. Where possible, the issue and resolution should be documented in the Organisation's 'incident reports'. This will enable a record of the matter to be kept, inform future develop of the Organisation, and act as a reference point for further constructive discussion on the issue.

### **4. Procedures for Responding to a Major Complaint**

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Where a major complaint is made, a formal process for responding to a major complaint is as follows.

1. The complaint is reported to a senior manager of the Organisation or a board member. That manager or board member is then responsible for determining who is a "Suitable Audience" to respond to the complaint. Where the matter involves confidential matters, a Restricted Audience is permitted, but should generally still consist of at least two board members and two members of senior management. Where the matter is in relation to financial accountability issues, the entire board is required to be included in the Suitable Audience.
  2. The Suitable Audience is required to investigate the complaint. Investigation requires gathering as much evidence as possible within a two-day timeframe (either from witnesses, documented evidence, etc.).
  3. The Suitable Audience is then required to analyse the evidence gathered during the investigation.
  4. The Suitable Audience is then required to decide what should occur as a result of the analysis.
  5. The Suitable Audience is required to document the process (ordinarily through a critical incident report) that is filed securely within the Organisation's confidential filing system (Basecamp).
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6. A member of the Suitable Audience who investigated the complaint is responsible for providing feedback to the person who made the complaint and also to any persons against whom a complaint was made. All parties are entitled to and should receive appropriate information in relation to the steps taken as a result of the complaint, advice that the matter has been finalised according to the organisation, and advised of the appeal processes if they are not happy with this specific outcome.
7. The stakeholder who made the complaint may be entitled to a copy of the documented complaint and processes that were taken to resolve the complaint where this is approved by the board. Permission for sharing this documentation will not be unreasonably withheld.

## **5. Appeals Process**

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Where a stakeholder makes a complaint and is not satisfied with the response, they are able to make an appeal to the next level of management. This level of management is easily identified through the organisational chart, available on the Organisation's website.

Should a stakeholder still not be satisfied with the response they receive internally from the Organisation, they can make a complaint to the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), who is able to investigate this matter further. Information regarding confidential contact people within the organisation and within ACFID are available on the organisation's website.

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