

## **SIGNPOST STOCKPORT FOR CARERS CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY & PROCEDURE**

### **1. Confidentiality Statement**

Signpost Stockport (Signpost) is committed to providing a confidential service to its users. Signpost believes that principles of confidentiality must be integrated across all aspects of service and management. Signpost believes its users deserve the right to confidentiality to protect their interests and safeguard Signposts services. All employees and volunteers will be required, upon joining Signposts service, to sign a declaration that all information about the personal circumstances of Signpost service users, voluntary workers and staff is strictly confidential and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised person.

### **2. Definition & Framework of Confidentiality**

Signpost understands confidentiality to mean that no information regarding a service user shall be given directly or indirectly to any third party who is external to the Director and staff and volunteers, without the service user's prior expressed consent to disclose such information. Signpost recognises that all users should be able to access Signposts' services in confidence, and that no other person need ever know that they have used Signposts' services.

Signpost recognises that information may be indirectly given out through staff informally discussing cases. All staff should ensure that no discussion relating to an individual user of Signpost can take place outside of Signposts premises, or premises being used for Signposts services. On all occasions, no discussion should take place when unauthorised persons are present. The Executive Committee will not receive details of individual users or their cases.

Signpost recognises that users need to feel secure in using Signpost services in a confidential manner. Signpost will ensure users are afforded the opportunity to avail themselves of confidential interview space if it is required, and in such cases, will take appropriate steps to ensure that no breach of confidentiality can occur inadvertently.

Signpost will not disclose a user's presence in the Signpost office nor the use of Signpost facilities, without obtaining the users consent.

Insofar as the welfare of people is concerned, particularly in connection with Signposts Young Carers Service, the service will provide relevant users with a statement of Signposts policy that, where the Service Manager deems that information obtained indicated that the user or someone else may be at risk or that what has been disclosed is against the law, another relevant party may be informed. The user will be told that this is being done, and that this is to protect the user and others.

The following points must be observed by all staff:

- Passwords must be kept secure – change regularly and no sharing
- Log off your computer when away from your desk
- Dispose of confidential waste paper by shredding

- Prevent virus attacks by taking care when opening email attachments or visiting new websites
- Keep a 'clear desk' policy – securely store hard copy personal information when it is not being used
- All visitors should be signed in and out of the premises and accompanied in areas normally restricted to staff
- Position computer screens so that there is no accidental disclosure of information to visitors
- Personal computer information about clients should not be taken out of the office unless it is encrypted
- Only keep the information you need for a particular purpose
- Update records promptly – e.g. change of addresses
- Delete personal information no longer required
- Be aware that there are people who will try to trick you into divulging personal information, and carry out identification checks if you are uncertain who you are speaking to
- Limit the amount of personal information given out over the telephone.

Staff should also be aware that:

- People have a statutory right to have a copy of the personal information we hold about them
- We have to respond within 40 days to such a request and can charge an admin fee.
- The identity of a person requesting such information should always be checked.

### **3. Statistical Recording**

Signpost is committed to effective statistical recording of enquiries by service users to enable Signpost to monitor take up of services and to identify any policy issues arising from services provided.

It is the Directors responsibility to ensure that statistical records that are given to third parties, such as to support funding applications and monitoring reports for the local authority shall be produced so as not to disclose the identity of individual users.

### **4. Enquiry Recording**

It is the Directors responsibility to ensure that all case records and log sheets are kept in locked filing cabinets, or in a secure environment. All such records must be locked away at the end of each working day. All information relating to service users will be left in locked drawers. This includes notebooks, copies of correspondence, calculation sheets and any other sources of information.

### **5. Expressed Consent to Give Information**

It is the responsibility of Signpost staff to ensure that an action to be undertaken on behalf of a client is agreed by them and noted on the client log form.

Signpost staff are responsible for checking with clients if it is acceptable to call them at home or work in relation to their case. All staff must ensure that they make no reference to Signpost when making telephone contact with clients, unless the client has agreed to this.

Signpost staff are responsible for checking with clients that it is acceptable to write to them at home in relation to their case.

All details of expressed consent will be recorded on the case file.

## 6. Breaches of Confidentiality

Signpost recognises that occasions, other than where there is a legal requirement (as indicated in Section 2, final paragraph), may arise where individual members of staff feel they need to breach confidentiality. Signpost recognises however, that any breach of confidentiality may damage the reputation of Signposts services, and therefore has to be treated with the most serious of approaches.

On occasions where a member of staff feels confidentiality should be breached, the following steps must be taken as quickly as possible:

1. The member of staff should raise the matter immediately with the Director (or the Chairperson if the Director cannot be contacted)
2. The member of staff must discuss with the Director the issues involved in the case and explain why it is felt confidentiality should be breached and what would be achieved by breaching confidentiality. The Director should take a written note of this discussion.
3. The Director is responsible for discussing with the member of staff what options are available in each set of circumstances.
4. The Director is responsible for making a decision on whether confidentiality should be breached. If the Director decides that confidentiality is to be breached, then the following steps should be taken.
5. The Director should contact the Chairperson in the first instance, or failing that the Vice Chairperson of the Executive Committee. The Director should brief the Chair/Vice Chair person on the full facts of the case, ensuring they do not breach confidentiality in so doing. The Director should seek authorisation from the Chair/Vice Chair to breach confidentiality.
6. If the Chair/Vice Chair agrees that confidentiality should be breached, a full written report on the case should be made and any action agreed undertaken. The Director is responsible for ensuring all such action is carried out.
7. If the Chair/Vice Chair does not agree that confidentiality should be breached this decision should be considered by the Executive Committee. This is the final decision of the organisation.
8. In no circumstances should any breach of confidentiality be discussed at this stage with Signposts Chairperson or Director (see Signposts Complaints Policy & Procedures for further information concerning this person). This is to ensure that any future complaint or investigation arising from breach of confidentiality can be carried out independently.

## 7. Legislative Framework

Signpost will monitor this policy to ensure it meets relevant statutory and legal requirements. Information about these requirements will be made available, as appropriate, for the use of staff and Executive Committee.

## 9. Ensuring the Effectiveness of the Policy

All Executive Committee members will receive a copy of the Confidentiality Policy and Procedure. Existing and new staff and volunteers will be introduced to the policy and procedures via induction and training. The policy will be reviewed annually and amendments should be proposed and agreed by the Executive Committee.

### Version Control

Version	Date	Author	Change Description	Signed off by
1.0	18/01/2012	Nigel Greaves	Review	Signpost Board
2.0	19/05/14	Katie Smith	Version Control	Signpost Board

3.0	16/7/14	Katie Smith	Amendment – Removal of cost of admin fee (Pg 2	Signpost Board