

## Standard A14: Complaints

Complaints Policy – September 2014

### **“Intent**

The YMCA of Simcoe/Muskoka is committed to providing excellent programs and services. We recognize that from time to time there may be concerns or complaints, that our stakeholders have the right to raise such complaints or concerns, and that they need avenues to do so. This policy is intended to ensure that complaints received from members of the public about YMCA services and programs are dealt with promptly, consistently, and fairly. The YMCA recognizes that when a person has a complaint about the YMCA, the way in which his/her complaint is handled is critical to the person’s ongoing relationship with the organization.

### **Scope**

This policy and procedure applies to all complaints received from members of the public about our activities, programs, services, staff, or volunteers. This policy serves as a companion to the organization’s Whistleblower Policy. This policy does not apply to employees or volunteers, as there is a Dispute Resolution Policy and Whistleblower Policy available in the Human Resources Policies and Procedures to address concerns or complaints that may arise.

### **Guiding Principles**

- It is in the interest of all parties that complaints are dealt with promptly and resolved as quickly as possible.
- Review of complaints is fair, impartial and respectful to all parties.
- Complainants are advised of their options to escalate their complaint to a more senior staff person if they are dissatisfied with treatment or outcome.
- Complainants are provided clear and understandable reasons for decisions relating to complaints. Updates are provided to complainants during review processes.
- Complaints are used to assist in improving services, policies and procedures.

### **Definition**

Complaints are defined as an expression of dissatisfaction with regard to a service/program, an action or a decision taken by the YMCA, or the way in which YMCA employees or volunteers carry out their duties. Complaints typically arise when a person believes:

- The YMCA has failed to do something agreed upon or expected
- A YMCA policy or procedure has not been followed
- A YMCA policy or procedure is unfair or inadequate
- An error has been made
- YMCA employees or volunteers acted in a wrongful way

A complaint is distinct from an inquiry, feedback, or a suggestion.

## **Procedure**

### **Informal Complaint**

If you have a complaint or concern, you are encouraged to discuss the matter with the staff who is most connected to the concern/situation, either in person, by phone, or by email. If your complaint is not resolved or if you are uncomfortable discussing the issue with the relevant person, you can inform the supervisor, manager, or General Manager/Director for the program or service. This informal process can be used to resolve many inquiries or matters of simple error that can be corrected to your satisfaction. If the matter is not resolved at this stage, you have the opportunity to make a formal complaint.

Every effort will be made to resolve complaints in a timely fashion. When receiving a verbal complaint, staff should listen and seek to understand the complaint, and may attempt to resolve it immediately. If follow-up is required, basic contact information including name, phone number, and email address should immediately be recorded.

### **Formal Complaint**

If you have been unable to resolve your concern through the informal process described above, a formal complaint may be made in writing to:

#### *Complaints*

*c/o Manager of Executive & Association Services  
YMCA of Simcoe/Muskoka  
63A-320 Bayfield Street  
Barrie, ON L4M 3C1*

Please provide your contact information, as the YMCA will not respond to anonymous complaints. If you are unable to register the complaint in this manner due to a disability, you may contact the YMCA to request accommodation, which will be provided appropriate to your needs and circumstances.

### **Process**

Once you have registered a complaint, the YMCA is committed to handling the complaint promptly, consistently, and fairly. You will be treated with respect and kept informed of the status of the complaint. The YMCA will respond to your complaint within 2 business days of receiving the complaint to confirm the complaint has been received, and indicate expectations for how long the investigation will take if it can be reasonably assessed at that point.

The YMCA aims to resolve all complaints within 10 business days of receiving them. If this timeline cannot be met, you will be informed of the reasons and given a revised timeframe. Upon completion of the investigation, you will be provided with clear reasons for the decisions relating to the complaint.

### **Appeals**

If you are not satisfied with the findings or the corrective action, you may submit a written appeal to the CEO or Designate within 10 business days of the receipt of the communication. The decision made at this level is considered final.

### **Confidentiality/No Retaliation**

The YMCA will make every effort to ensure confidentiality for the person reporting a complaint or concern. In some programs that receive funding from partner agencies, complaints may need to be shared with those agencies. No person who in good faith and under this policy submits a concern/complaint shall suffer harassment or retaliation.

### **Records**

Serious complaints and their resolutions will be recorded as Serious Occurrences and reviewed by the Vice President for the program or service area. A complaint is defined as serious if it is one of the following:

- Any complaint about the operational, physical or safety standards of the service that is considered serious by the Operator including reports of adverse water quality. Other examples include reports of lead exceedance, hazardous/dangerous substances (poison, flammables), medication error (not resulting in medical treatment), missing or stolen files, neighbor complaint about noise or physical appearance of the property (only where the municipal authorities are involved), etc.
- Any complaint made by or about a child, or any other serious occurrence involving a child that is considered by the Operator to be of a serious nature, e.g. inappropriate disciplinary techniques (excessive, unsanctioned).

Information recorded includes a description of the complaint, who handled it, timeframe, and a description of the resolution. A summary of Serious Occurrences received including number and type will be reported to the YMCA's Board of Directors at least annually."

---

### **Complaints Procedure:**

Our "Serving All Members" National Procedure Standards outline the feedback/complaints process, as follows:

5.3 The YMCA Centre has a member feedback system in place.

- Suggestion/comment card, voice box or email system is in place for members to provide feedback.
- Comments/feedback received from members results in an evident action response on the part of the YMCA staff within 24 hours.
- Staff/volunteers demonstrate the ability to handle member feedback using YMCA values, probing skills and active listening to provide a satisfactory resolution for the member.

5.4 There is a system in place to consult members about changes.

- The Centre can demonstrate that within the last 6 months member feedback has been sought using member surveys, focus groups or another formal method.
- Members are encouraged through proactive engagement with staff/volunteers to provide valuable feedback.

At the YMCA of Simcoe/Muskoka, we take the service we provide to our communities as the most important thing we do. We welcome comments, feedback, and suggestions through each of our service areas as outlined above. The feedback/complaints process is built into our association through a number of methods:

- Online through “contact us” forms, located online on each center’s landing page (example used in the text box form is for the Barrie area).
- Program and service surveys, conducted annually (some coordinated nationally by YMCA Canada)
- Comment boards/boxes located in each center for anonymous or noted feedback or complaints
- Location specific contact information publically available online

The YMCA of Simcoe/Muskoka Member Sales and Service Handbook outlines the following procedures for dealing with complaints:

### **Complaints**

Staff handles complaints as best they can, and are welcome to request the assistance of the Manager on Duty (MOD). Follow the LOVE model of responding to complaints:

- L - Listen to entire complaint
- O - Offer apology / show empathy
- V - Verify your understanding and facts
- E - Explain specifically what you will do

Staff should assure the complainant that their concern is heard:

- Write the complaint down so that the complainant can see that you are taking their problem seriously.
- Complete an incident report form as necessary.
- Ask the complainant if they would like a call from a more senior staff person.

Resolution: All staff are authorized to offer the complainant a guest pass for a friend or a complaint-appropriate refund. Do NOT provide a cash refund.

### ***Immediate action:***

Health and Safety issue: member complaints on service or disrepair must be reported to the appropriate department and copied to the General Manager in writing.

Criminal activity: member complains involving report of criminal activity must be forwarded to your supervisor and GM immediately.

Personal safety: member complains involving report of a threat to personal safety must be forwarded to your supervisor and GM immediately.

If in doubt as to the seriousness of the complaint, forward all pertinent information to your supervisor

**24 hour action:**

Member complaints on service or disrepair (not an immediate health and safety issue) must be reported to the appropriate department and copied to the General Manager in writing.

Member complaints involving programming or service concerns must be reported to the appropriate department within 24 hours

The General Manager is to inform their program VP of such matters that cannot be resolved using these guidelines. These situations are reviewed and dealt with on an individual basis, and may be escalated to the CEO/Board. See following reporting section:

**Board Reporting:**

At each Board meeting, the Board receives a serious occurrence report, which includes any serious complaints received during that period. According to our Serious Occurrence Reporting Procedure, a complaint is defined as serious if it is one of the following:

Any complaint about the **operational, physical or safety standards** of the service that is considered serious by the Operator including reports of adverse water quality. Other examples include reports of lead exceedance, hazardous/dangerous substances (poisons, flammables), medication error (not resulting in medical treatment), missing or stolen files, neighbour complaint about noise or physical appearance of the property (only where municipal authorities are involved), etc.

Any **complaint** made by or about a child, or any other serious occurrence involving a child that is considered by the Operator to be of a serious nature, e.g. Inappropriate disciplinary techniques, e.g., excessive, unsanctioned.