

Service Feedback Procedure: Compliments, comments and complaints

ACT Together is a consortium of:

- Barnardos Australia
- Australian Childhood Foundation
- Oz Child



ACT
Government

A Step Up for Our Kids -
Out of Home Care
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ACT Together Service Feedback

ACT Together agencies welcome compliments, comments and complaints from its client/client representatives and external stakeholders as valuable and direct feedback on the quality and performance of our services and organisational support functions. The purpose of this procedure is to provide staff with the framework and tools to enhance accessibility for all clients, client representatives and external stakeholders and ensure proper process is followed in responding to complaints and reviews of decisions. The procedure also provides guidance in managing requests for information from external agencies in relation to feedback they have received.

SCOPE

This document relates to all staff, students, and volunteers within ACT Together. Any feedback received that relates directly to the behaviour or performance of a staff member of an ACT Together agency will need to be managed within the policies of that particular agency and with reference to ACT Together policies around management of allegations against staff (if relevant). Managers/Regional Managers of ACT Together agencies are required to notify the General Manager Operations – ACT Together of any allegations against their staff.

The preferred process for management of feedback is for ACT Together agencies to try and remedy issues at the service level within their organisation in the first instance. This usually would be the caseworker involved with the issue arising but may also include a carer support worker or contact and transport worker. Frontline staff are well positioned to identify issues or concerns and respond to them as well as managing expectations.

However, all clients, family and other stakeholders are free to use without recrimination, the available external complaints mechanisms (which are outlined later in this document).

ENGAGING WITH CLIENTS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Responding to issues and concerns

Agencies within ACT Together will attempt, wherever possible, to respond to issues at the service level as discussed above.

Feedback generally should not be escalated for response if there has been no attempt to resolve the issue at the service level. The benefits of responding to issues at the service level include:

- Allowing the opportunity for the person providing feedback and the worker providing direct service to attempt to resolve issues that may impact on their future capacity to have an effective working relationship;
- Where the issue involves work with children and young people, that workers most closely involved with the child/young person have the opportunity to provide a response.

Caseworkers should be familiar with the [Working effectively with carers when issues arise](#) and [Decision making practice paper](#).

Requesting a review of a decision

A client/client representative or external stakeholder may request for a decision that has affected them or a child in their care to be reviewed.

Before an internal review of a decision is undertaken, a written decision statement from the decision maker should be requested.

An internal review of a decision will be undertaken by someone other than the decision maker from the operational area responsible for the decision. For example, if the decision was made by a Kinship Care Program Manager, it is expected that the review will be undertaken by the Kinship Care Regional Manager.

An external review of a decision can be requested for some decisions. This can only take place if an internal review of the decision has been completed. Contact details for external review agencies are available further in this document.

Sometimes a complaint may be submitted about a decision that has been reached. This might be a situation where a service user is unhappy with the outcome of a decision but is aware that a review will not change the outcome. In these cases the feedback will be treated as a complaint and responded to in accordance with the below processes.

Decision Review Process

If a client, carer, birth family member or other service user is dissatisfied with a decision, in the first instance they are encouraged to make contact with the case manager or decision maker to understand the basis for the decision. They may request a written explanation of the decision which is to explain:

- The decision that was made;
- Who made the decision;
- On what basis the decision was made and the evidence considered; and
- How the effect of the decision is in the child or young person's best interests.

When the written explanation has been provided, the person may then request a meeting to discuss the decision, or request a review of the decision. This review will be undertaken by a staff member other than the decision maker, usually from the same operational area. Any review of a decision must give consideration to the best interests of the child or young person to whom the decision relates.

The reviewer will determine whether the decision will be upheld or overturned, and will provide a written response outlining the outcome of the review to the person who requested the review. This response will explain the outcome of the review, details of the reviewer, the evidence considered and how the best interests of the child are met by the outcome.

If the person requesting the review is not satisfied with the outcome of the review, they may request that the review be escalated for internal review at a more senior level or proceed with external review as discussed on page 7 of these procedures.

MANAGING COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

If a client wishes to provide feedback about the service that has been provided by the agency, the worker can offer the opportunity to provide this feedback in writing, or alternatively the worker can forward the information to the feedback email to be registered and referred for response if needed.

When receiving a compliment, comment or complaint from a client/client representative/stakeholder, staff within ACT Together will observe the following practices:

- Explain the compliments, comments and complaints process and advise they will receive a response from the appropriate program area or manager;
- Offer a copy of the policy and procedure;
- Advise that their service provision will be maintained;
- Listen carefully to the details provided;
- Receive the information impartially and without offering personal opinion;
- Ask whether the person would like a support person or advocate to be present;
- Record the details of the compliment, comment or complaint and ask what outcome they are seeking;
- Advise that the compliment, comment or complaint will be registered, reviewed and actioned.

PROCEDURES FOR FEEDBACK MANAGEMENT

Receiving feedback about our services

ACT Together agencies recognise that feedback will come in a variety of ways including written, verbal, email, SMS, digitally or any other form of correspondence. No matter the method, a compliment, comment or complaint needs to be treated diligently. Information is provided to carers, children and young people about the various options to provide feedback to ACT Together and is also available on the ACT Together website.

ACT Together operates a feedback email address feedback@acttogether.org.au. This inbox is monitored and feedback received is distributed for a response in line with the staged process outlined below. Feedback received outside of the Feedback Inbox is forwarded to the inbox to be registered and filed appropriately. An acknowledgement is sent to the person providing the feedback within 3 working days.

Feedback management process

ACT Together manages service feedback utilising a three stage process:

Stage One:

This stage is the first step when an issue or concern raised by a child or young person, carer, family member or external agency staff cannot be addressed at service level

as discussed above. It will also be the response level when the person providing the feedback specifically requests that it be lodged as a complaint.

A compliment, comment or complaint can be raised directly with a staff member and/or their Program Manager or Team Leader for an immediate response. If received through the feedback mailbox it will be referred to the staff member or program manager as appropriate for a response.

Feedback responded to by Program Managers and Team Leaders is recorded in the Service Feedback Register and correspondence is filed in a secure folder. The feedback and any correspondence should be forwarded to the feedback mailbox to be filed and added to the Feedback Register.

Stage Two:

Any compliment, comment or complaint not successfully addressed by the staff member and their Manager at Stage One will then be addressed by the Regional Manager/Manager of the relevant agency, including undertaking an investigation if required.

Stage Three:

Any compliment, comment or complaint not successfully addressed at Stage Two will then be reviewed and investigated as necessary by the General Manager Operations – ACT Together for a final response. Information about escalation to Executive or external agency review will be provided in the final response.

If this three stage process is unsuccessful in addressing the service feedback, then the person offering the feedback has the option of escalating their issue to an external party.

Address at Program Level

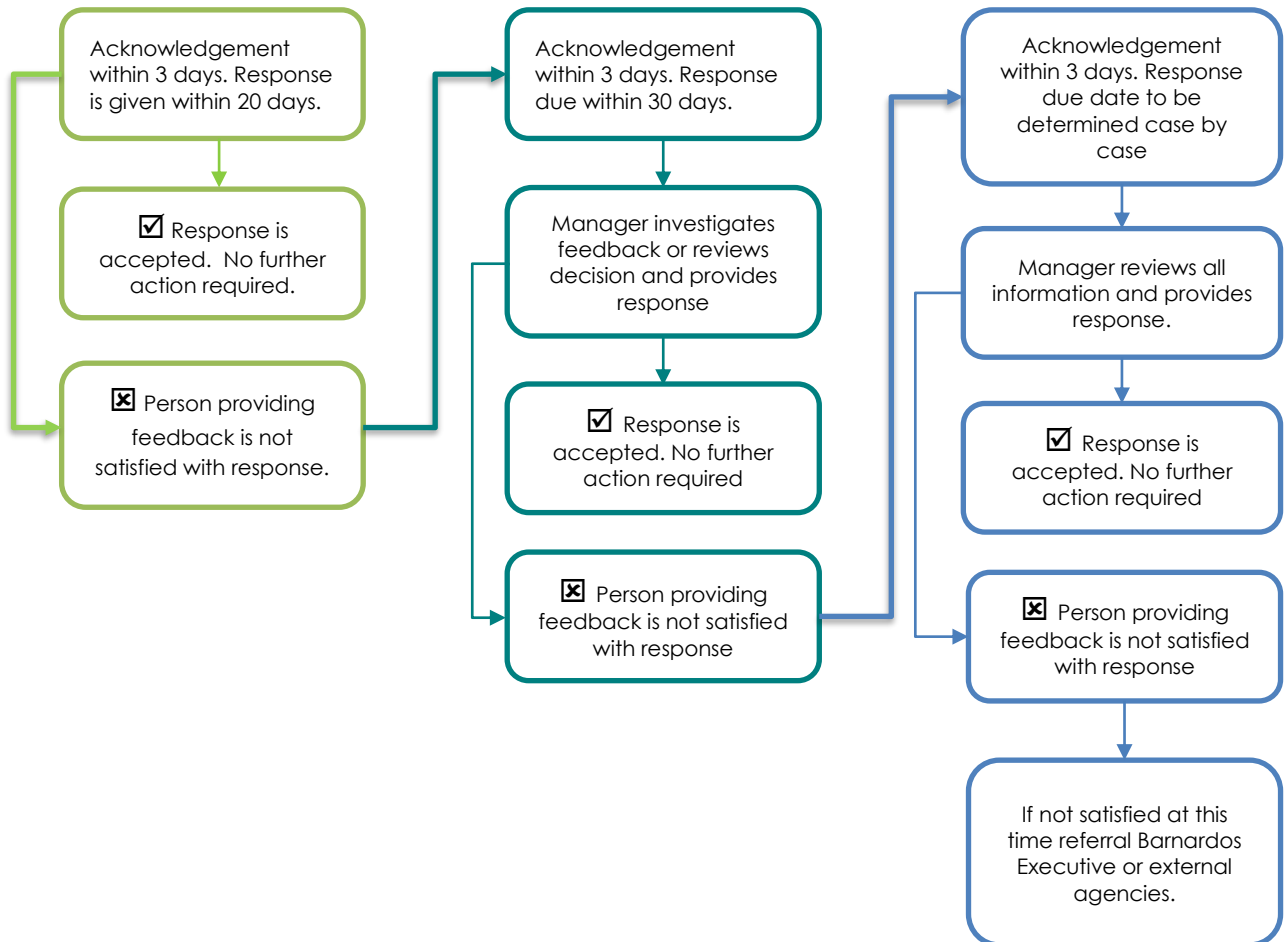
Response provided by Program Manager or Team Leader. Response provided to Feedback inbox to be registered and filed.

Service/Regional Manager

Referred to the consortium agency manager or Regional Manager Barnardos for response including undertaking an investigation if needed

General Manager Operations – ACT Together or external agency review.

Referred to General Manager Operations for review and a final response.



Documentation

Within three working days an acknowledgement of receipt will be provided. This can be via the same media by which the feedback was received (written, SMS, email, etc.) or by phone or mail, keeping in mind any requests made about the mechanism for feedback about a comment or complaint. This must be recorded in the Service Feedback Register, located on SharePoint.

If the matter can be immediately resolved or actioned to the satisfaction of the client/client representative/stakeholder, this should occur. If the matter can not be resolved at service level, then the feedback will be assigned to the relevant program manager for a response.

The Program Manager or Team Leader who is responsible for responding to the feedback will document their response and forward it to the complainant and the Feedback inbox for recording on the Service Feedback Register within 20 working days.

If the matter is not able to be immediately resolved or actioned to the satisfaction of the client/client representative/stakeholder, the service feedback is to be referred to the Manager/Regional Manager for follow up. All feedback not immediately resolved or actioned is to be forwarded to the Feedback Inbox to be registered.

If the Manager/Regional Manager is able to respond to the feedback to the satisfaction of the client/client representative/stakeholder, then the response should be recorded on the Service Feedback Register.

If not resolved at Manager/Regional Manager level, then the service feedback is escalated for review by the General Manager Operations – ACT Together. Feedback should only be escalated to this level once all other avenues have been exhausted.

The Service Feedback Register contains the following information:

- Date of feedback and details of person providing feedback
- Details of the staff member responding to the feedback
- Dates by which a response is required
- Nature of feedback
- Agency involved (this may include more than one consortium member on occasion)
- Any action taken in response to feedback
- Whether there has been a resolution in response to the feedback and whether this has been communicated

The Service Feedback Register is reviewed by ACT Together Operational Leaders on a regular basis to identify trends or potential practice issues or program development opportunities. The ACT Together Operational Leadership Group receive a service feedback summary every six months. This report is presented in July covering the preceding six months and January covering the preceding 12 months. In addition, feedback is a standing agenda item at the Operational Leaders monthly meeting. Membership of the ACT Together Operational Leadership Group includes the General Manager Operations – ACT Together, Barnardos Regional Managers for Foster Care, Kinship Care, Residential Care and Contact, Transport and Support, Australian Childhood Foundation Manager and OzChild ACT Manager.

Feedback containing allegations of misconduct

If there is an allegation of gross misconduct, unethical activity or illegal activity the feedback must be forwarded immediately to the manager/regional manager within the relevant organisation and the General Manager Operations – ACT Together. The General Manager Operations – ACT Together will make determinations in relation to the necessity of legal or other external reporting requirements.

Where a staff member discloses information in relation to misconduct within the organisation, this is known as 'whistleblowing.' While such disclosures would normally occur through normal lines of management, alternative pathways are available.

Detailed information in relation to this is available in the Barnardos Australia [Whistleblower Policy and Guidelines](#).

Feedback Progress and Conclusion Reporting

Progress reports (written or verbal) are to be provided to the client/client representative/stakeholder on a regular basis during the course of the feedback process. Records of correspondence must be maintained and filed in the appropriate SharePoint folder.

For matters that have escalated beyond immediate resolution, a final written response is to be provided to the client/client representative/stakeholder that outlines the outcome of the complaint (ensuring that any respect is maintained for the privacy of any individual).

Types of outcome include but are not limited to:

- a fuller explanation
- an apology
- reconsideration of a decision
- expediting action
- amending documentation or information
- changed policies or practices
- dismissed as unsubstantiated
- found true but no further action

The written response to the complainant should clearly articulate the appeal or review options available. A template for responding to complaints is saved in the SharePoint Templates folder [[hyperlink](#)].

EXTERNAL REVIEW

Where a client/client representative/stakeholder is dissatisfied with the outcome of the feedback process within ACT Together they are able to request a review from external sources including:

- CYPs Client Services Unit – Feedback relating to decisions and case management pertaining to children who are under the parental responsibility of the Director General.
Phone: (02) 6207 5294, or email OCYFS@act.gov.au.
- Quality Complaints and Regulation (Community Services Directorate) - Quality Complaints and Regulation within the Directorate provides an independent complaints resolution service or review function for the Director-General.
Phone: (02) 6205 0473 or email senioradvocate@act.gov.au
- ACT Human Rights Commission – including ACT Children and Young People Commissioner/ACT Public Advocate can help resolve complaints about services for Children and Young People. The Public Advocate advocates for vulnerable children and young people (including children in Out of Home Care) and provides oversight in relation to services.
Phone: (02) 6205 2222 or email ACTkids@act.gov.au
www.hrc.act.gov.au/childrenyoungpeople
www.publicadvocate.act.gov.au

- ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT) – matters can only be brought before the ACAT where an authorising law gives the tribunal the power to make a decision around a particular matter. More information is available at <http://www.acat.act.gov.au/>

MANAGEMENT OF FEEDBACK ABOUT ACT TOGETHER SERVICES RECEIVED BY EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

The way in which feedback (particularly complaints) is received is often complainant driven and on occasions, feedback about ACT Together services will not come through the internal compliments, comments and complaints pathway within ACT Together. This will be the case where feedback from a client/client representative/stakeholder goes directly to CYPS, or where a complaint is made to the Minister for Children and Young People or the Human Rights Commissioner.

If the internal ACT Together feedback processes have not been followed, in most instances, the external organisation will attempt to refer the person providing feedback back to ACT Together for a response. This will occur by either suggesting the complainant contacts the relevant staff member directly and providing the contact phone/email, or by recording the complainant's contact details and issue and calling the agency contact, requesting they contact the complainant directly.

When feedback is referred back to ACT Together in this manner, the three staged feedback process will be followed within ACT Together wherever possible. In some cases, the client/client representative/stakeholder will not be agreeable to the complaint being referred back to ACT Together for a response, in which case the external organisation will follow its own complaint management mechanisms.

In these situations, it is highly likely that the external organisation will be required to liaise with ACT Together to gather information in order to formulate a response. In addition to this, there will be occasions where information is requested by oversight bodies such as the Public Advocate or Human Rights Commissioner, the Minister or Shadow Minister's office (either directly or via CYPS) in line with the Children and Young People Act 2008. In each of these instances the following steps should occur:

1. The external organisation representative will contact ACT Together (using the feedback@acttogether.org.au email address) to advise ACT Together that feedback or a request for information has been received, the substance of that feedback request and the timeframe within which a response is required;
2. Staff will clarify which of the consortium agencies the feedback or request relates to (may be more than one service provider) and identify the appropriate Manager or Regional Manager to coordinate the response;
3. Manager/Regional Manager will liaise with the relevant staff to gather information in response to issues raised within the feedback or request;
4. Information will be collated and a formal response (endorsed by the appropriate Regional Manager) will be provided to the external organisation.

DEFINITIONS

Compliment

A client/client representative or external stakeholder may wish to provide positive feedback to a staff member, service or the organisation. Compliments reflect actions that indicated the satisfaction derived or an action that exceeded expectation. Compliments are important records for the purposes of morale, team work and client/stakeholder perceived value of the service.

Comment

Comments provide opportunity of recording an observation, insight, aspect or experience that is not a compliment or complaint, but may be useful to improving the way we do things.

Complaint

A client/client representative or external stakeholder may experience and wish to report a negative experience or aspect of service. In considering whether feedback constitutes a complaint, it should be determined that the expression of dissatisfaction is about a service provided by ACT Together and that it requires a response. Complaints can relate to delays, lack of response, an unresolved matter that is escalated, a decision, inaction, a breach, or other negative impact both perceived and actual that they wish to report.

Review of Decision

A request for a decision in relation to child/young person, carer or family member to be reviewed. While a complaint may sometimes be submitted about a decision that has been reached, this is different from a request for a review of decision and will be handled in accordance with the Service Feedback Procedures.

An external review of a decision can be requested for some decisions. This can only take place if an internal review of the decision has been completed.

Request for Information

A request for information (usually pertaining to a specific child or young person) requiring a formal response from ACT Together.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

This procedure is to be read in conjunction with the [ACT Together Service Feedback Policy](#). The procedure has been developed with reference to consortium agencies' policies and procedures for managing complaints. These documents are available in the [ACT Together Hub](#).

Staff should also be familiar with the [Carer Handbook \(Feedback and Raising Concerns\)](#), [Charter of Rights for Kids in Care](#), [Decision Making Practice Guide](#) and [Working Effectively with Carers when Issues Arise](#).

Version control and change history

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1.0	30/11/2021	Executive Leader, Children & Families	New Procedure. Rewrite of policy and procedures.