

Confidentiality

Date reviewed: September 2006

Updated Review: September 2009

Next review due: April - June 2010



Introduction

VAW expects its staff, volunteers and Board of Trustees to behave in a professional manner at all times and in line with our diversity policy.

We place a duty on all staff at VAW not to discuss and disclose confidential information about staff, volunteers and members. It is also expected that confidential information about the organisation will not be disclosed.

We expect that there may be times when the right to confidentiality may need to be broken. This is defined as the risk of serious harm or abuse to a client, staff or any other person, or a situation in which a criminal offence is committed. VAW's Chief Executive should be involved immediately on these occasions.

Guidelines

All VAW staff will be briefed about the confidentiality policy during their induction.

All staff are expected to familiarise themselves with the confidentiality policy and adhere to it all times. Failure to do so will be regarded as a disciplinary issue.

VAW is committed to providing support, supervision and guidance for our staff and volunteers on confidentiality issues. Information may therefore be shared with the VAW internal supervisor. This information should be recorded and locked away in the supervision file.

Records

All information held electronically or in paper format is subject to the Data Protection Act.

All records kept on clients should be available to the client concerned if they request it.

VAW staff will answer relevant and specific questions about groups with which it is working, from appropriate bodies e.g. the Charity Commission, or funding agencies.

Some VAW staff are members of other decision-making bodies and funding panels and in this role they may be required to divulge sensitive information

about a particular organisation. If a potential conflict of interest arises for the VAW staff member, s/he will declare this and follow whatever protocols are in place for the panel or meeting – including withdrawing from the meeting if required to do so.

Some VAW staff sit on informal inter-agency information-exchange groups. In these roles those staff may pass on factual information about their experiences of working with particular groups or individuals within groups – and may offer considered professional opinions about such groups and individuals, based on their experience. In such circumstances a group or individual may obtain details of information given about them by asking for it from the VAW staff member concerned.

All personal information held about clients, volunteers and staff should be stored in a lockable cabinet.

All information held on the VAW database will be accessed using a security code. This information will only be accessible to VAW staff and office volunteers. Computer files should be backed up regularly.

Personal information about staff and volunteers such as supervision and appraisal details, salaries and pay slips are deemed to be confidential. These files should be locked.

The Public Interest Disclosure Act (whistle blowing)

“Whistle blowing” is when you report to an outside organisation something seriously wrong or illegal happening in the organisation. Examples include; fraud, theft, jeopardising the safety of staff, volunteers and members. The act protects those who “blow the whistle” subject to the issues being raised internally prior to reporting to an outside organisation. The law on whistle blowing does not contradict the VAW confidentiality policy.