MAINTAINING

PROFESSIONAL

BOUNDARIES

POLICY

Aspire Ryde

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Trustee Signature: _____

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Maintaining Professional

Boundaries/Relationships At Work.

Introduction

All trustees, staff and volunteers are required to operate within clear professional boundaries as defined by the organisation's Code of Conduct and policies.

This document is intended to assist everyone in establishing and maintaining professional practice and boundaries with colleagues, service users, professionals, partner agencies and the community as a whole.

The following information contained in this document is intended to complement and support the following organisational policies and documents:

- **Code of Conduct**
- **Equality and Diversity Policy**
- **Health and Safety Policy**
- **Confidentiality Policy**
- **Disciplinary Policy**
- **Grievance Policy**

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Areas of Work Covered.

The standards of professional practice/conduct/relationships/boundaries covered in this document relate to working with

- Service Users/Clients
- Staff
- Trustees
- Volunteers
- External agencies and other professionals

General working practices and procedures are also addressed in Section 5.

1.2 Practical Examples

This document contains practical examples of both and good and bad practice. These examples are not exhaustive but are illustrations of how the values and principles governing professional practice translate in the workplace.

By providing examples the intention is to assist staff and volunteers in achieving a common frame of reference within which to manage their responsibilities to service users, each other, professionals, external agencies and the community as a whole.

1.3 Implementing the guidelines

All meetings between staff, volunteers, service users, volunteer co- ordinators, project leader, trustees etc. must be conducted within the framework of professional boundaries/values and principles contained in this document.

It is the responsibility of all staff and volunteers to apply them in their day to day work and to support their maintenance. Staff and volunteers must also use supervision to reflect on their practice and identify training needs.

Volunteer Co –ordinators are responsible for the implementation and monitoring of professional practice and must provide regular supervision to volunteers.

Volunteer Co-ordinators must bring to the attention of individuals any areas where standards as defined in this document and other related policies and procedures are unsatisfactory. This could be in either one to one setting (supervision) or in a group setting through training where overall practice is of concern.

This guidance is intended to enable everyone to deliver high quality, consistent services within a framework of empowerment. Everyone must also be aware that contravening some of the guidance offered in this document would constitute gross misconduct.

Section 2: Working With Service Users

2.1 Individual and Organisation Practice With Service Users

The purpose of this section is to establish the professional context for work with service users. Examples of some of the basic values and principles that govern professional practice and inform work with service users are as follows:-

2.1.1 Favouritism

Favouritism is "the unfair favouring of person or group at the expense of another" (Concise Oxford Dictionary) Staff and volunteers must not favour one individual or group as opposed to another. Whilst staff and volunteers may find some individuals or groups easier to work with or more rewarding than others, the quality and level of service and the amount of attention given to ALL must be consistent.

2.1.2 Versatility and Adaptability

Staff and volunteers must be versatile within their own abilities i.e. they must be capable of and willing to deal with many different issues/tasks and they must be adaptable i.e. willing to adjust easily to differing circumstances and needs.

2.1.3 Choice

Expression of individual culture and personal preference must be respected and encouraged. An approach that encourages personal development and facilitates individual growth must be aimed for.

2.1.4 Approachability

Staff and volunteers must be approachable, open to fair challenge and criticism and not be intimidating or inaccessible. Staff and volunteers must not allow personal or professional problems to influence the way they present themselves when working with fellow users.

2.1.5 Unconditional Positive Regard

Unconditional positive regard involves staff and volunteers accepting individuals without any conditions attached. Certain actions must be challenged but the person must ALWAYS be accepted as worthwhile. To this end staff and volunteers must not prejudge, label or stereotype individuals or groups.

2.1.6 Elitism

Staff and volunteers must not present themselves as superior in any way including morally. To this end, they must always be prepared to admit when they have made a mistake or failed to do something they said they would. Team members must be prepared to apologise when and if necessary.

2.1.7 Professional Working Relationships

A professional relationship is one where staff and volunteers do not allow personal feelings or likes/dislikes to influence their day to day work and decision making. Relationships can easily become blurred particularly when staff and volunteers are working together for lengthy periods of time and get to know each other very well. Staff and volunteers can easily become over familiar in their working relationships and the Volunteer Co-ordinators must take all reasonable steps to be aware of situations developing and deal with issues through supervision.

Good delivery of our services can be achieved based on the development of balanced working relationships not on cold mechanical approaches which is equally unprofessional.

2.2 Examples of Acceptable and Unacceptable Practice

How the above values translate into practice is illustrated by the following examples of acceptable and unacceptable conduct.

2.2.1 Discussing Others/Gossip

- Gossip or hearsay is almost always negative and based on rumour.
- Gossip or hearsay must not feature as an aspect of Aspire Ryde culture and must be actively discouraged among staff, volunteers and service users.
- Staff and volunteers must not share personal details about other staff and volunteers with service users.
- Staff and volunteers must not discuss other staff and volunteers with service users.

2.2.2 General Relationship Issues

- Staff and Volunteers must always ensure that service users are treated equitably and without favouritism.
- Staff and volunteers must not swear at service users.
- Staff and volunteers must not offload their own problems onto service users.

2.2.3 Respect

- Patronising remarks that consciously or unwittingly demean other people must be challenged
- Labelling or stereotyping of groups must not occur
- Racist or other discriminatory remarks or behaviour from whatever source must be challenged.
- Staff and volunteers must respect everyone as individuals and acknowledge differences.

- Staff and volunteers must ensure that there are safeguards against disclosures or confidential information being overheard during discussions.

2.2.4 Confidentiality

- Staff and volunteers must always be aware of confidentiality.
- Information heard must not be shared outside the organisation – unless there is a legal requirement.
- Confidential Information within the organisation will only be shared on the basis of necessity.
- Staff and volunteers must not disclose people's names or contact details without the person's express permission.
- All records and documentation regarding personal details must be kept in a locked cupboard or filing cabinet.
- Staff and volunteers must respect the need for confidentiality when it arises and be clear about the limits to confidentiality.
- Please refer to the Confidentiality Policy for further guidance

Section 3: Relationships With Colleagues/Team working

3.1 Some Principles Of Good Service Delivery

Quality Services can only be delivered effectively by cohesive teamwork based on a shared understanding and application of the Aspire Ryde Visions and Values. It is important that all staff and volunteers work consistently with one another to enable the delivery of quality services.

In order to enable the delivery of high quality and effective services the establishment and maintenance of professional co-operative and open relationships with colleagues is essential. Likewise an individual staff/volunteer's responsibility to contribute constructively to effective team practices and procedures is paramount.

The following values and principles underpin all aspects of practice in relation to relationships, boundaries, and professional practice with individual colleagues and staff/volunteers.

3.1.1 Communication

Systems to assist good communication such as daily briefings and volunteer communication book are important in the maintenance of a cohesive and positive team. They provide opportunities for discussion and the resolution of issues that have risen. All staff and volunteers have a responsibility to respect the importance of these systems and to actively participate in them.

3.1.2 Personal Responsibility

Every staff member and volunteer must endeavour to maximise team performance and contribute to the general wellbeing of the team. If staff or volunteers are unhappy they have a responsibility to deal with this in a professional manner employing, if necessary, appropriate organisational procedures.

3.1.3 An Honest and Open Approach

Good teams can be made up of members who have a diversity of skills, knowledge, culture, qualities, ages etc. and who all have common interest and are working towards the same aims and objectives. Staff and volunteers must have the ability to communicate openly and honestly and take constructive criticism. Healthy debate and exchanges of ideas must be encouraged.

In any team there are going to be professional differences in opinion, attitude, views etc., which need to be addressed in a professional manner. Personal attacks must not be tolerated. If this is not achieved then the quality of the services will inevitably suffer.

3.2 Specific Examples of Acceptable And Unacceptable Practice.

How the above values translate into practice is illustrated by the following examples of acceptable and unacceptable conduct.

Staff and Volunteers must:

- Avoid backbiting or gossip. Complaints must be addressed to the people concerned, do not go behind their back.
- Stick to what you have agreed you will do, inform other staff or volunteers if you are unable to complete a task, it is bad practice to not do a task because you know someone else will do it.
- Recognise that it is legitimate to report unacceptable conduct and practice and that there are procedures for doing this- Whistle Blowing Policy.
- Be open and honest when difficulties arise. Do not sit on grievances or leave issues to fester; they only build up resentment and affect performance.
- Always use appropriate language with staff and volunteers – avoid swearing.
- Never isolate or marginalise a colleague
- Raise any issues where there are differences of opinion with others in an appropriate manner e.g. privately and in confidence
- Keep relationships within the working environment strictly professional.

- Physical contact must be within appropriate professional boundaries.

Section 4: Relationships/Conduct with Other Agencies and Professionals

The establishment and maintenance of professional relationships with partner agencies and individuals is essential to ensure that service users obtain the best possible range of services. In their dealings with other agencies staff and volunteers are representing both Aspire Ryde and service users.

The following represents general and specific guidance on conduct with other professionals and agencies:

Staff and Volunteers must:

- Always remember that they are representing the organisation and that the reputation of Aspire Ryde is at stake when working with agencies and professionals and therefore must conduct themselves in a professional manner.
- Discuss only relevant information keeping this concise and accurate avoiding anecdote and gossip.
- Dress appropriately for the environment and ensure a good standard of personal hygiene.
- Never represent Aspire Ryde in a negative light. It is expected that staff and volunteers will represent Aspire Ryde accurately, fairly and professionally bearing in mind issues of confidentiality, obligations to funders and partners and the Code Of Conduct.
- Never talk to the press directly, any enquiries should be made to the Project Leader/CEO or his P.A, unless an agreement is in place.
- Conflicts arising between staff, volunteers, service users and others must be addressed openly and professionally in line with Aspire Ryde's grievance procedure.

General Work Practices.

This section is intended to address other issues in the management of services, which impact on values and principles and where professional boundaries by staff and volunteers and the culture of Aspire Ryde as a whole are a potential issue.

5.1 Lifestyle

All staff and volunteers have the right to their own beliefs, views and lifestyles.

5.2 Expression

Discriminatory Language and Behaviour

- Staff and volunteers must challenge language and behaviour, which is racist, sexist or otherwise, expresses prejudices or discrimination etc. on all occasions. Failure to do so may be perceived at tacit approval.
- Staff and volunteers must use their own judgement as to the appropriate time to challenge; it may not be advisable to challenge, for instance, when they are agitated or an aggressive mood. This must not be used an excuse to avoid challenging and discriminatory language or behaviour.

Swearing

- If you are as staff or volunteer do not like swearing, you can request that others refrain from using it, or refusing to acknowledge questions/ comments directed at you that certain swearing and explain why.

5.3 Alcohol/Drugs/Substance misuse

Staff and volunteers must not consume or be under the influence of alcohol or misuse any other substances whilst representing Aspire Ryde.

5.3 Record Keeping

- Staff and volunteers must ensure personal files are kept in a locked cabinet to ensure confidentiality.
- Not allow anyone other than authorised staff and volunteers to access personal files except where they are required by police/courts. In this instance always discuss with the Project Leader before access is given.
- Ensure offices are kept locked when not in use.

Section 6: Responsibilities Of Management In Supporting And Monitoring Good Practice In The Workplace.

The Senior Leadership Team have a key role and responsibility in ensuring the establishment and maintenance of professional practice in the workplace and for ensuring the implementation of the guidance contained in this and other related documents.

Volunteer Co-ordinators have a specific role in monitoring professional practice within Aspire Ryde on a day to day basis and must challenge and address areas where standards are not being maintained. This includes individual and team practice.

What To Do When Boundaries Are Broken.

Aspire Ryde recognises that the issue of professional judgement and maintenance of boundaries is a complex one and impossible to legislate for all possible situations. It is also recognised that in some situations where a decision is required, the fine line between good and bad practice is not always obvious or clear.

Managing Difficult Boundary Issues

a) Access Senior Leadership Team Support

It is the responsibility of all staff and volunteers to reflect on their practice and where they have doubts as to the appropriateness of an action they must access the Volunteer Co-ordinators for support and guidance.   Similarly if the Volunteer Co-ordinators require advice they should consult the Project Leader/CEO. It is the responsibility of the Volunteer Co- ordinators to offer guidance on this issue therefore they must always respond in ways that are supportive to volunteers.

It is advisable to discuss matters as soon as possible at supervision in order to establish why things occurred, to identify coping strategies, and identify any gaps in training etc.

b) Involve Colleagues

Always discuss issues with others – within the boundaries of confidentiality – and be willing to admit when, on reflection, you feel you may not have maintained an appropriate level of professionalism.

If the issues involves other staff or volunteers it is advisable to discuss the matter with them thus avoiding any misunderstanding on their part. This will:

- Avoid guilt and self- recrimination
- Aid the learning process and self- development for both the individual and that of the organisation as a whole.
- Make sure that the same mistake is not repeated.

c) Keep A Record

Some written record of acts resulting in a broken or blurred boundary must be kept in the appropriate file or book again to ensure openness and consistency.

It is worth noting that breaking or blurring of boundaries is potentially a disciplinary offence. Taking the steps outlined above not only constitutes good practice but will also serve to mitigate the seriousness of an incident in the event of disciplinary action being taken.

Reviewing Issues As An Individual And As A Team

It is important that staff and volunteers have a process in place for the regular review of all the issues contained in this document, and that they remain a frequent feature of discussion amongst staff and volunteer in supervision, team meetings and discussions.

Aspire Ryde