***AHN Complaint Management Policy***

# Document Overview

This document outlines the AHN policy on complaints and the procedures to be followed if a student or host cannot reach a resolution between themselves, should a problem in homestay occur. AHN’s response to complaints between a student and host will be based on a fair and efficient resolution, and at the first available opportunity. Please note the procedure below may vary slightly, depending on whether the complaint is raised by a student, host or school.

**Background information:**

AHN should ensure all students and hosts have contact details for their local office should they have concerns or complaints about any aspect of their homestay placement.

When investigating a complaint, the number of people who know of the matter should be kept to a minimum. Only those directly involved e.g. student, host and an AHN staff member should be informed in the first instance. Every person who becomes aware of the alleged complaint has a duty to maintain **confidentiality** and should be made aware of this.

Complaints and their investigation should be carried out in **good faith**. Students and hosts involved in a complaint should not be motivated by malice or ill will. The AHN staff member investigating the complaint should be fair and thorough, limiting his or her investigation to matters of relevance to the complaint and adhering to the confidentiality principle, while acting in good faith.

There are at least two perspectives to a complaint and the opportunity to present both needs to be provided. This needs to be done without prejudging, forming conclusions without all the facts, or predetermining any outcomes.

Support

At all stages of the complaint process the student or host are entitled to have a support person present. A student may prefer an interpreter or friend whose English is at a higher level than their own. The support person is not an advocate and should not advocate on behalf of the student. Similarly, if a host is more comfortable with a support person then this must be allowed.

Documentation

Confidential records will be kept of all conversations, telephone calls and meetings, and will be used if the complaint becomes formal. Notes will be documented in the files of both hosts and students on the AHN system. Notes should include the following:

* Who was present
* When the meeting took place
* What was discussed
* The outcomes of the meeting
* The actions taken

**Methods of Resolution:**

Informal:

The preferred method of complaint resolution is informal, where appropriate.

Informal complaint resolution processes can be effective. They are voluntary, confidential, are conducted with goodwill, involve the minimal number of people and allow the parties to explore options and make their own decisions about how to resolve a complaint rather than having a ‘third party’ making and enforcing a decision.

Informal processes are not about blaming or finding fault; they are about attempting to resolve the complaint. In many instances informality encourages both student and host to be more honest and to feel that they do not have to defend or justify themselves as they would have to in a more formal investigation process.

An AHN staff member will assist in solving a problem when it is bought to the attention of the local office. If satisfaction is not reached after discussion with the staff member, the problem can be escalated to the AHN State Manager and then the AHN CEO.

Formal:

Where informal resolution does not satisfy the student or host and the grounds and context of the complaint require further investigation, a formal process will be instigated if this is what the complainant requests. Upon request AHN staff will provide a Complaint Report Form for the complainant to complete and return to AHN for further investigation.

AHN take any complaints regarding harassment, bullying or discrimination very seriously.

Definitions

**Harassment** may be sexual in nature or based on gender, race, disability or sexual preference. It includes behaviour that intimidates, offends, degrades or humiliates.

**Discrimination** occurs when a person is treated less favourably than another person because of certain attributes (direct discrimination), or when a requirement that is the same for everyone has an unfair effect on some people because of an attribute, such as race, gender or disability (indirect discrimination).

**Bullying** behaviour is described as the repeated less favourable treatment of a person by another or others, which may be considered unreasonable and inappropriate practice. It includes behaviour that intimidates, offends, degrades or humiliates.

**Procedure:**

1. Record as much information as possible, including:

* Who the allegations are against
* What the alleged behaviour is
* When the alleged behaviour occurred
* Where it occurred
* How the parties both felt and how it affected them
* How the parties wants to proceed with the complaint
* What each party wants as an outcome of the complaint process and how this might be achieved
* Check if there is an immediate need to make interim changes to reduce the continuing impact of the situation, e.g. the re-allocation of the student

1. Discuss the complaint with a fair, non-judgemental attitude
2. Assist the student or host to evaluate their options and choose a strategy for addressing the issue
3. Ensure record of the information in **1)** is obtained from the corresponding party
4. Attempt to resolve the complaint with the parties concerned
5. Clarify appropriate standards of behavior
6. Escalate if necessary

AHN will ensure that a complaint is dealt with **as quickly as possible.**

It is important that, whatever the outcome, both the student and host understand what the outcome is, how it was reached and what is expected of them.

The outcomes should include:

* A guarantee that any offending behaviour will stop
* An assurance that reprisals for making the complaint, or retribution for having offended, will not be tolerated
* An agreed path forward, which takes into account the specific needs and feelings of each individual involved
* A procedure for monitoring the situation so that each individual will feel supported and protected

# Appeals

Students or hosts should request the assistance of the AHN State Manager or the AHN CEO if no resolution is able to be reached. Full written justification of the appeal will need to be provided.

Where the student or host remain dissatisfied with the outcome of an appeal process or a grievance process, the student or host may lodge a complaint with

* The Justice Department
* The Ombudsman in each State