



ST. PATRICK'S CENTRE (KILKENNY)
KELLS ROAD KILKENNY

Policy Document

POLICY TITLE: Communications Policy

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Policy Number 08 – Schedule 5	Approved By: Signed: <u>David Kiernan</u> Operations Manager Signed: <u>[Signature]</u> Board Member	

Mission Statement

To enable people to live a good life, in their own home, with supports and opportunities to become active, valued and inclusive members of their local communities.

To enable a supported self-directed living (SSDL) model of provision which is underpinned by our beliefs, values and vision.

Review Date: 06.08.2019 Revision No: <u> 1 </u>	Amendments required: Added contents page Added 7.4 Added 15.4 Added Section 18.0	New Revision Status: <u> 06.08.2020 </u>
Reviewed by: Corporate Governance Manager	Approved By: Signed: <u>David Kiernan</u> Operations Manager	

Communication Policy

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 St Patrick's Centre, Kilkenny (SPC) is pleased to produce this Communication Policy which has been developed through the involvement of employees throughout the service. The policy was informed by the following:-
- 1.2 All in leadership and management roles through participation in a consultation at Change Management meetings where principles and values underpinning policy were agreed.
- 1.3 All Team Leaders and CTC Managers through participation in a consultation at a Leadership Coaching Session in relation to best practice guidelines for effective communication at middle management level.
- 1.4 Eight employees who participated in a Listening Exercise where examples of poor communication practice were highlighted and suggestions for improvements to communication practices throughout the organisation were agreed.

2.0 Scope

- 2.1 SPC recognises that if employees are kept well informed and given opportunities to provide feedback, their ability to embrace change is likely to be enhanced. This recognition is at the heart of our new Communication Policy.

For communication to take place-

- a. a message must be **given**
- b. a message must be **received**
- c. a message must be **understood (Management Essentials SHRC Ltd p13)**

- 2.2 This policy should be read in conjunction with the following St Patrick's Centre Policies:-
 - Data Protection Policy
 - Privacy Policy
 - Dignity in the Workplace Policy
 - Social Media Policy

3.0 Policy Statement

- 3.1 Maintaining good internal and external communications is particularly important during a climate of organisational change. Effective communication at this time will help employees and other stakeholders to understand St Patrick's Centre mission, values, objectives, developments and issues.
- 3.2 SPC is committed to ensuring that appropriate policies, procedures and monitoring arrangements are in place to support good internal and external communications.
- 3.3 SPC is committed to developing two-way communication channels recognising that the key stakeholder groups who can support the organisation to improve services are those who use the services and those who deliver them.

- 3.4** SPC is committed to continually improving communications, thus assisting employees to understand the Organisation's objectives and the reasons behind them.
- 3.5** SPC is committed to following clear communication principles for the people we support, their families, employees and all other stakeholders
- Be open and honest
 - Be relevant, accurate, sensitive and timely
 - Enable meaningful engagement with stakeholders
 - Recognise the importance and value of engaging with the people we support, their families, employees and external agencies
 - Ensure that St Patrick's Centre listens to stakeholders, act on information received when appropriate and provides feedback
 - Reflect the principles of confidentiality, data protection, freedom of information and other relevant legislation

4.0 Policy Aims

- 4.1** Provide stakeholders with timely information regarding matters of interest or concern
- 4.2** Ensure that employees, their representatives and other key stakeholders are engaged on a regular basis in order to provide information, receive feedback and act on this as appropriate with particular emphasis on current concerns i.e. de-congregation, HIQA inspections and MOU issues
- 4.3** Promote and enhance the reputation of St Patrick's Centre through external communication e.g. HIQA, MOU
- 4.4** Champion and facilitate the ethos of employee engagement with the organisation

5.0 Policy Objectives

- 5.1** To maximise employee's potential by improving the communication systems and ensuring appropriate mechanisms are in place to increase employee's understanding of the SPC vision, core values and corporate objectives
- 5.2** To ensure that robust systems of communications are in place
- 5.3** To ensure that all employees are aware of policies and procedures relevant to their work
- 5.4** To ensure that all employees are made aware of and participate in the implementation of the Communications Policy
- 5.5** To use formal communication processes in place including change management meetings, organisational listening exercise and employee briefings
- 5.6** To facilitate information sharing and feedback throughout all levels of the organisation
- 5.7** To develop effective two-way communication channels between SPC and all key stakeholders including families of the people we support
- 5.8** To ensure timely communication of changes or developments
- 5.9** To build and maintain confidence in the quality of service provided by SPC
- 5.10** To develop and sustain positive relationships with key external stakeholders

6.0 General Principles of Effective Communication

- 6.1** Two-way communication between employees and management is crucial to the effective operation of the organisation
- 6.2** Effective communication is critical to the achievement of corporate objectives
- 6.3** Employees will be kept well informed and given opportunities to provide feedback, so that their ability to embrace change is likely to be enhanced
- 6.4** Employees have a right to be informed through the management structure.
- 6.5** Information they receive should be up to date accurate information concerning the organisation and its activities, including any proposed changes to service delivery Systems for good communication will include the following:-

- Employees Inductions
- Employees/team meetings
- Publications, Newsletters, E-briefings
- Website

- 6.6** SPC aims to implement, maintain and monitor these systems to ensure that the information reaches all employees and enabling employee feedback

6.7 Open Communication

As an organisation we are committed to open communication. Subject to confidentiality, communications should be complete, unambiguous and made in a timely manner:

- Credibility and trust of employees will only come with consistently truthful and open communication
- Communication about significant occurrences should be thoroughly planned
- Being too busy is not an acceptable excuse for inadequate or ineffective communication
- Care should be taken to decide what requires formal communication and by whom, and what can be communicated informally
- We are committed to communicating both good and bad news quickly, in advance if possible, even if the full impact of the decision or message may not be clear
- Rumours in the workplace will be addressed as soon as is practicable
- Communicating on a 'need to know' basis, avoiding controversial issues, or delaying communication 'until all details are clear' is contrary to our communications policy

6.8 Face to Face Communication

An effective exchange of meaning or understanding is unlikely unless there is discussion and the opportunity for questions to be asked and answered. This is best conveyed in face to face communication.

The target audience should be taken into account when planning communication and the message should be tailored accordingly. Some audiences will be satisfied with simple verbal presentations while others will require documentation evidencing significant information.

6.9 Feedback

Obtaining feedback and listening effectively should be valued aspects of our communication policy in SPC. We know that effective communication will only come

when we seek out and welcome feedback. All employees should always be able to give constructive feedback without fear of retribution.

6.10 Address rumours and misinformation at source

In communicating we will focus on local specific issues. Communication issues that arise at a local level e.g. cross-functional issues and rumours will be addressed by those involved without delay. Disingenuous communication to colleagues and families of the people we support including initiating or continuing rumours known to be untrue is in direct violation of our communications policy and will be addressed promptly and decisively.

6.11 All leadership roles are crucial in effecting good communication

Important information will be made available to all in leadership roles in a timely manner to enable them to relay it to their teams. All in leadership roles in turn will regularly communicate with their team members on a formal and informal basis. They should actively seek feedback from their teams on the effectiveness of their communication with them.

6.12 In this time of rapid change management in SPC all employees no matter what our role in the organisation will

- Strive for professional behaviour at all times, knowing that in everything we do we are communicating:-
 - Our behaviour is everything we say and do
 - Our behaviour is directly observable
 - Conclusions are based on our behaviour
 - Behaviour breeds behaviour
 - We can choose how to behave
 - We can choose our behaviour to help or to hinder

(Management Essentials SHRC Ltd p13)
- Work from the following core commitments which will help us to adhere to our new communications policy:
 - Courtesy, friendliness and a spirit of helpfulness inform all of our communication within St Patrick's Centre, Kilkenny
 - Differences of opinion are handled privately and discreetly. Gossip and backbiting are never acceptable. Instead we will communicate directly with the person or persons involved to resolve differences.
 - Constructive Critique – that which will improve our work by clarifying or instructing is welcomed when delivered with respect and tact. Destructive criticism – that which is designed to undermine work or a person is never acceptable.

6.13 Guidelines for Team Leaders - Information sharing

- (a) The **Team Leader** is tasked with sharing information with all employees in a timely and accurate manner. Key daily strategies for information sharing include:
- Shift planner

- Diary

(b) The Team Leader will also do morning and evening check in with employees on duty Monday to Friday and weekends when on duty.

(c) All Employees will sign each update/ piece of information they have read. Information from each meeting attended will be included in these 'information sharing' processes

7.0 Language

7.1 All employees are charged with using appropriate and respectful language at all times. The language should reflect the values and beliefs of the Organisation and be in keeping with the supported self-directed model of provision.

7.2 People we Support/Person Supported is the term to be used as opposed to Service User. When referring to the person(s) supported in the context of where they live, then resident is acceptable e.g. the resident of Bramble House

7.3 When referring to the residence of the person supported, the home should be referred to by the house name in the first instance e.g. Bramble House and home is the accepted term after that. Unit is no longer deemed appropriate.

7.4 We refer to direct support workers/employees/staff as opposed to front line workers/employees/staff.

8.0 Training

8.1 Training in Effective Communication will be made available to all employees.

9.0 Communication Resources

9.1 Relevant infrastructure such as the use of computers, mobiles, landlines, and printers will be made available as appropriate to all employees at the direction of their Line Manager.

9.2 Team Leaders are to ensure that all direct support employees have the facility and opportunity to access work emails regularly during their protected time.

10.0 Telephone

10.1 Answering the phone

- Employees should endeavour to answer the phone as quickly as possible and where this is not possible, messages should be listened to twice daily and any calls returned within the day
- When contacting houses, call landline in the first instance and if unanswered, call house mobile and leave a message. If urgent contact the PIC/Shift Leader mobile number
- We should endeavour to answer a colleague's extension/phone if they are not present

- The phone should be answered in a uniform manner across the organisation – when answering internal calls, identifying yourself is sufficient i.e. Hello, Liam speaking. For external calls the guide below should be followed.

Home	Administration	Function
Good Morning/Afternoon, Birchfield House Áine Speaking....	Good Morning/Afternoon, St Patrick's Centre Áine speaking	Good Morning/Afternoon Health & Safety Áine speaking

10.2 Mobile Phone Usage

- Employees should not take or make phone calls on personal mobile phones during working hours, emergencies notwithstanding. Restrict calls of this nature to tea breaks, lunch breaks or after hours.
- Under no circumstances should employees have work emails on personal mobile phones. It is in breach of our Data Protection Policy and the Data Protection legislation. Deviation from this will expose the Organisation and will become a disciplinary matter.
- The PIC/Team Leader phones are to be left on site for use by Shift Leader and work emails should be accessed on these phones through the internet on a needs basis. Email app should not be downloaded on work mobile for data protection reasons.
- It is the responsibility of the PIC/Team Leader to ensure that they are logged out of their work emails before handing over of the phone.
- Any loss of work mobile phones/tablets should be reported immediately to Corporate Governance Manager as it may constitute a data protection breach.

11.0 Email

- Consider if email is the appropriate medium for the message. Face to face or a phone call might be more appropriate
- Acknowledge all emails even if not in a position to provide a response at that time
- Be mindful of your language and tone when using email. Be aware that any of your emails might be subject to data protection access requests and compose accordingly
- Each house team has an email. Please utilise to avoid missing relevant people
- Please be selective in utilising 'all users' option. Target your emails accordingly as some might be ignored due to prolific use of the 'all user' function.
- Be selective with whom you cc on emails. It is tiresome and timewasting to have to read through emails that appear to have no relevance to the recipient
- Work emails addresses should not be used for personal communications
- Do not transmit inappropriate material on work email e.g. anything of a pornographic nature
- Please proof-read emails for appropriate capitalisation, spelling and grammatical errors before internal or external transmission as this reflects on the Organisation
- Always use out of office replies if out of the office for more than one day. Indicate who should be contacted in your absence
- If communicating with external parties, use the SPC 'auto signature' and disclaimer
- Respect individual users right for privacy of their personal data under the Data Protection legislation

- Should emails for internal or external transmission be inadvertently sent to the incorrect recipient(s), please report it immediately to the Corporate Governance Manager as it may constitute a data protection breach

12.0 Written Correspondence

- Proof read any correspondence/reports for appropriate capitalisation spelling/grammatical errors before internal or external transmission
- Use standard layout for any letter/writing and report writing templates

13.0 Meetings Structure

- Every meeting should have a purpose
- Every meeting requires an agenda – use template agenda
- Times should be allocated to agenda items. A start and finish time should be decided
- Use template minutes to record meetings

13.1 Team Meetings at Departmental Level

- Employees should endeavour (where feasible) to have one meeting free day across the organisation and Friday is suggested as being the most appropriate.
- Team meetings should occur every month.
- All team members should be invited to attend and contribute to the agenda
- Build capacity in the team by sharing roles in facilitating, recording and preparing work for presentation at the meetings
- Minutes of the meetings should be made available to team members who were unable to attend
- Team members must read and sign minutes of all Team Meeting whether present or otherwise to ensure they are up to date with communications

13.2 Team Meetings at House Level

- Houses Team meetings will be scheduled for each calendar year and held on a monthly basis.
- There should be a procedure in place to support full employee attendance such as utilising TOIL hours
- Use the template for agenda and minutes
- Build capacity in the team by sharing roles in facilitating, recording and preparing work for presentation at the meetings
- Style of team meeting will support engagement, dialogue and collaborative work with accountability across the team.
- Team members must read and sign minutes of all Team Meeting whether present or otherwise to ensure they are up to date with communications

13.3 Multi-Disciplinary (MDT) Meetings

The purpose of these meetings is to facilitate best practice management of all the people we support. Clinical decisions are made on review of clinical documentation such as case notes, test results, diagnostic imaging, evaluation of assessments etc. The person supported who is the subject of the meetings may or may not be present

as appropriate.

13.4 Case Conferences

Case Conferences include regularly scheduled reviews or conferences that meet daily, weekly or monthly (as appropriate) to plan and review specific management strategies to improve the services on offer to the people we support.

A case conference is an opportunity for collaborative decision making amongst key stakeholders, regarding the needs and support systems required for an individual we support

14.0 Communication with the People We Support

14.1 The most effective method of communication for the person supported must be acknowledged and supported at all times.

14.2 Each person we support must have a communication plan in place which includes information on their preferred method of communication in their care place and any communication supports they require.

15.0 Communication with Families

15.1 All communication with families should be logged in the Family Contact Log

15.2 Employees should communicate in a professional manner at all times and front-line communication with families should be confined to issues relating to the person supported only. Deviation from this will be addressed appropriately

15.3 Any other issues such as organisational concerns, staffing, de congregation etc. should be referred to the Team Leader only

15.4 It is SPC policy to communicate with First Contact of person supported only. We do not use the term next of kin as it has no legal basis. We have a Second Contact on file in the event that the First Contact is not available. They are only contacted when First Contact is not available and not in addition to.

16.0 Handovers

Handover/ Shift Planner

This is a key communication tool and Team Leaders will ensure that quality time is allocated at the beginning of each shift for the handover process.

- The shift planner is a live document updated throughout the day with key messages/feedback to employees
- At the beginning of a shift, employees read the shift planner, and the diary from their last day of duty
- All employees on duty sign the shift planner, initial when assigned task has been completed and make a note where it was not possible to complete a task
- Team Leaders sign each days' shift planner and CSM's sign at regular intervals, again making a note where feedback or comment is warranted

17.0 Day / Night Reports

Day and Night Reports are a fundamental operational requirement. These reports are a key component of evidence of the Organisation's operational and clinical duty of care to the people we support.

- 17.1** At the beginning of each shift, all team members must sign the report of the previous shift, confirming that they are aware of all relevant details of the people they will be supporting, before their shift commences.
- 17.2** During a shift the shift leader/delegate must complete daily notes on the DMS throughout the day.
- 17.3** At the end of each shift, the Shift Leader or delegate must complete the Handover Report on the DMS of all relevant developments throughout that shift period – Day or Night. This report is then shared verbally with either the oncoming Shift Leader and / or Staff Team.
- 17.4** Reports should be written in compliance with point 12.0 above of this Communications Policy.
- 17.5** Reports should be completed by the Shift Leader / delegated team member.
- 17.6** Once complete, Handover Reports must be submitted on the DMS.
- 17.7** Shift Reports must be submitted on the DMS at least two hours before end of shift and before the Shift Leader / delegated staff member goes off duty. Any further developments between submission of formal report and end of shift period can be followed up with an email. All issues should be mentioned including but not limited to staffing and health and safety issues. The Senior Cover Holder reports relevant content to the Senior Management Team (see 17.8).
- 17.8** Failure to submit a Handover Report, is a very serious matter. It constitutes a fundamental breach of SPC Duty of Care to Residents and may be considered a competency issue in a disciplinary context.
- 17.9** Once submitted Handover Reports will be critiqued by the Senior Cover holder and collated into a Senior Report. The Senior Cover holder is responsible and accountable for the quality of reported information. The Senior Cover holder may need to return shift reports for clarification, before they can be accepted and consequently used to populate the Senior Report.
- 17.10** Once submitted the Senior Report can be accessed on the DMS by relevant Senior Management members.
- 17.11** Reports should be written in compliance with point 12.0 above of this Communications Policy.

17.12 Failure to submit a Senior Report, is a very serious matter. It constitutes a fundamental breach of St Patrick's Duty of Care to Residents and may be considered a competency issue in a disciplinary context.

17.13 Senior Reports will be critiqued by the Community Services Managers (CSM) and any issues requiring further attention will be notified to the Director of Services (DOS). The CSM's are responsible and accountable for the quality of reported information. The CSM's may have to return Senior reports for clarification, before they can be accepted and consequently filed as the formal Senior Report.

18.0 Media Reporting

18.1 Any requests from media outlets should be referred to our Operations Manager, David Kieran. In line with this company policy, we do not comment or respond to any media coverage (solicited or not) in order that we comply with data protection regulations and to show due deference and respect to the people we support and their family members.