

# **SOUTHWARK PLAYHOUSE VOLUNTEER PROBLEM SOLVING PROCEDURE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Volunteers make a unique and valuable contribution to Southwark Playhouse. It is recognised that volunteers are not only an essential resource in helping us to achieve our organisation's goals, but that by providing opportunities for, and supporting volunteering, it helps to promote active citizenship and social inclusion.

Whilst the involvement of volunteers is generally a positive experience for everyone involved, there are times when things can go wrong. A volunteer may wish to make a complaint about something or someone, and similarly the volunteer's performance may decline, or someone may wish to make a complaint against a volunteer.

These are rare occurrences, but to ensure a fair, equitable, and consistent approach to dealing with them, it is essential to have a formal procedure. This document sets out the procedure.

## **SOME POINTS TO REMEMBER.**

- All complaints must be treated confidentially and should only be discussed amongst those who are directly involved in trying to resolve the issue.
- An effort should be made to resolve the problem informally at a local level.
- A written record of all incidents and complaints should be maintained.
- Allow enough time for all meetings and conduct them in a private place.
- Keep complainants informed at every step of the procedure.
- Volunteers have the right to be accompanied by a colleague or friend in any meetings that form part of the problem-solving process.

## **1. IF A VOLUNTEER MAKES A COMPLAINT**

This part of the problem-solving procedure gives the volunteer the right to complain if they have been unfairly treated.

### **STAGE 1 - VERBAL COMPLAINT**

Initial complaints, whether against a member of staff, the organisation, or another volunteer, should be discussed with the volunteer and a local resolution sought. If the complaint is about the volunteers' manager or supervisor, then the matter should be referred to the Front of House and Venue Manager. During this meeting

the volunteer can be accompanied by a colleague or friend, not acting in a legal capacity, if they wish.

If the issue cannot be resolved at this stage, then the volunteer should make a formal complaint in writing to the Front of House and Venue Manager.

## **STAGE 2 - IN WRITING**

Volunteers making a complaint in writing should do so within 20 working days, excluding bank holidays or weekends, of the informal meeting taking place. The Front of House and Venue Manager will acknowledge the letter within 3 working days of receipt.

An investigation into the complaint will be undertaken, the results and subsequent actions will be discussed with the volunteer within 20 working days of the original letter. During this meeting the volunteer can be accompanied by a colleague or friend, not acting in a legal capacity, if they wish.

The actions or decision taken should be confirmed in writing to the volunteer.

## **STAGE 3 - RIGHT TO CHALLENGE**

If the volunteer is not satisfied with the outcome, then they can challenge in writing to the General Manager within 20 working days of the decision meeting.

An investigation into the complaint will be undertaken, the results and subsequent actions will be discussed with the volunteer within 10 working days of the challenge letter.

During this meeting the volunteer can be accompanied by a colleague or friend, not acting in a legal capacity, if they wish.

The Senior Manager will confirm their decision in writing. Their decision is final.

## **2. IF SOMEONE COMPLAINS ABOUT THE VOLUNTEER**

This part of the problem-solving procedure gives the volunteer the right to be told what the concerns are that are being raised. The right to state their case and the right to challenge.

Sometimes minor issues can arise during volunteering, such as a volunteer not fitting into the team as well as was expected, not meeting the required standards when undertaking tasks, or being unreliable. However, if a more serious issue occurs then immediate action may be necessary (see exceptions on page 4).

Minor issues are usually detected during regular supervision and may be quite easy to resolve either by the supervisor or manager for the area, without resorting to formal procedures. This checklist suggests how some issues can be dealt with:

- A comprehensive induction to the theatre and the Volunteer Usher role.
- Assessment of the volunteer's training needs and addressing them.
- Providing the volunteer with support and supervision.
- Undertaking an initial review after the volunteer has been in place for one month.
- Undertaking regular six-monthly reviews with the volunteer.

However, if these do not address the issues then the following procedure should be instigated.

### **STAGE 1 – VERBAL DISCUSSION**

The first step is to discuss the issue with the volunteer. There could be external factors influencing their ability to carry out tasks, their behaviour, or their attitude.

- Identify goals that will help the volunteer to fulfil their role, and offer extra support, supervision, and training where necessary.
- Set a deadline for reviewing the situation.
- Document your discussion and the agreed actions.
- If there is insufficient improvement, then you may need to adopt a more formal approach and move to stage 2 of the procedure and issue a written warning.
- Notes of the meeting should be sent to the volunteer within 10 working days of the meeting.

### **STAGE 2 – LETTER DETAILING CONCERNS**

If the issue hasn't been resolved by the verbal discussion or the review, then the General Manager, in conjunction with the Front of House and Venue Manager or equivalent where applicable, should issue the volunteer with a written warning outlining the reason for the complaint.

The volunteer has the right to state their case, to the Front of House and Venue Manager and General Manager.

Depending on the nature of the complaint:

- Further investigation of the issue may be needed.
- Further objectives could be set, and help offered to the volunteer.
- The volunteer may be moved to another placement.

- The volunteer may be told to cease all voluntary activities.

A decision to ask a volunteer to cease all activity should be a last resort.

Whatever the decision, the volunteer has the right to challenge.

### **STAGE 3 - RIGHT TO CHALLENGE**

If the volunteer is not satisfied with the outcome, then they can challenge in writing to the CEO within 20 working days of the decision meeting.

An investigation into the complaint should be undertaken, the results and subsequent actions should be discussed with the volunteer within 10 working days of the challenge letter. During this meeting the volunteer can be accompanied by a colleague or friend, not acting in a legal capacity, if they wish.

The Senior Manager will confirm their decision in writing.

Their decision is final.

### **DISCONTINUING WITH THE VOLUNTEERING ARRANGEMENT**

If a decision is made to end the volunteer arrangement, the following good practice guidelines should be adhered to:

- The meeting should take place in a private setting.
- Be quick and direct. The decision has been made, so ensure the volunteer is informed in a timely manner.
- Inform the volunteer of their right to challenge.
- A letter should be sent to the volunteer to re-iterate the decision to dismiss all volunteering activities, as well as outlining the reasons why, and their right to challenge.

A copy of the Problem-Solving Procedure should be included with the letter. Include any information relating to their departure e.g., return of any lanyards etc.

### **EXCEPTIONS**

There are some occasions on which volunteers may be asked to suspend their voluntary activity until an investigation is carried out. These include, but are not limited to, acts that constitute gross misconduct, e.g., theft, assault, acts of violence, malicious damage, and deliberate falsification of documents, harassment or being under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Illegal or criminal acts will be reported to the police and may result in prosecution.

The Front of House and Venue Manager must be informed immediately.

The decision to suspend the volunteer's activity must be confirmed in writing to the volunteer.

This procedure will be reviewed annually.