

## **Dartford, Gravesham & Swanley Mind**

### **Confidentiality Policy**

Dartford, Gravesham & Swanley Mind is committed to practices and procedures that ensure confidentiality of information relating to service users, tenants, volunteers and staff members.

#### **Sharing Information with External Organisations**

1. In respecting the privacy of the individuals involved with DGS Mind, the overarching policy is that information about individuals' personal lives or problems shared by the individual with DGS Mind staff or volunteers will not be disclosed outside the organisation without the permission of that individual. Where liaison with external agencies may need to occur frequently – as with the supporting housing service – clients will sign a form specifying which agencies or individuals DGS Mind has their prior permission to liaise with.
2. DGS Mind will not actively seek information from external organisations on any individual unless that individual has given informed consent to this. Neither will DGS Mind wish to receive unsolicited information from an external source unless that source has obtained prior permission from the individual concerned.
3. However, where the staff member or volunteer receives information which indicates there is a serious and substantial risk of harm to the service user or others, there is a duty to ensure that this information reaches those who, even if they are outside DGS Mind, might be able to manage, avoid or mitigate that risk. Therefore, no staff member nor volunteer can ever guarantee absolute and total confidentiality to a service user.

#### **Sharing Information Internally**

Within the organisation, the different services offer confidentiality on differing levels

**The Housing Service:** Confidentiality operates on a team basis: anything shared by a tenant with one worker, or otherwise known about them, may be routinely shared within the housing team, which includes the CEO and the Business Manager.

**The Counselling Service:** Confidentiality operates on an individual worker basis: anything shared by the counsellee with the volunteer counsellor remains confidential to that counsellor and their counselling supervisor. Cases discussed at external supervision will be anonymised.

**The Carers' Service:** Confidentiality operates on an individual basis: anything shared by the carer with the Carers' Coordinator remains confidential to the coordinator and the manager who supervises the Coordinator.

**Day Services:** Confidentiality operates on a team and a need-to-know basis. Information given to DGS Mind by individuals accessing the service is available to all workers within the day service, but there is no need to routinely disseminate this throughout the team. When there are concerns or issues around particular clients however, such information may be pooled and shared.

Certain elements of the Day Service, such as self-management groups, might choose to operate on a basis where information shared within the group remains within that particular group. In these circumstances, this will be respected and the facilitators for the group will share only with their supervisor, not the team as a whole.

These levels of confidentiality will be overridden in the following situations:

1. Where there is a duty to inform others within the organisation of issues of danger specific to:
  - Concerns for the safety of volunteer or staff in or out of the work situation
  - Concerns for the safety of the client/service user
  - Concerns for the safety of others (this includes a wide range of situations including child abuse and involvement with terrorism)
2. Where there is a need to coordinate service delivery for a client/service user across different services, or different elements within the same service.
3. Where relevant details need to be shared as part of the investigation of a complaint.

In all these cases, best practice is to secure the consent of the service user, where possible, prior to personal information being shared internally. Where this is not achievable, they should at least be informed that the internal sharing will take place.

### **Storage of Information**

1. DGS Mind will only keep personal information which is required for some specific purpose and that is relevant and adequate for that purpose.
2. Confidential paper information will be kept in a locked filing cabinet; information kept electronically will be password protected. In both cases, this will be accessible only to the relevant staff who may need it to carry out their work. Any electronic device of any description used to store personal information must not be taken off the office premises. Any redundant or superseded computer equipment will have its hard drive destroyed before it leaves the premises.
3. Where volunteer counsellors need to keep personal counselling notes at their home address, these will be coded to ensure full anonymity of the counsellee, kept securely, and destroyed within the guidelines issued by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.
4. All personal information held, with the exceptions listed in points 5, and 6 below, will be destroyed within the following timescales, which adhere to legal and professional requirements:

Staff Files & Payroll information	After 6 years of having left the service
Volunteer Files:	After 2 years of having left the service
Service User Files:	After 2 years of last using the service
CRB/POVA checks:	As soon as any relevant disclosures have been dealt with
Unsuccessful applications for work:	After 2 years subsequent to the unsuccessful application

Any personal information recorded on paper will be shredded prior to disposal. Any personal information held electronically shall be deleted and also emptied from the recycle bin programme.

5. At the CEO's discretion, where there are particular reasons why any information should be stored longer than the above limits, the reason shall be noted on the retained material. This will be necessary, for instance with cautionary notes about ex-service users with a history of violence.
6. In any event, DGS Mind reserves the right to retain indefinitely the basic details (Name, age, address, dates and frequency of contact) of those who have used its services.

### **Access to Confidential Information**

1. DGS Mind will allow tenants, applicants, service users, volunteers and staff reasonable access to any information that is held about them and the opportunity to correct any perceived inaccuracy in it.
2. Information held on any person can only be withheld from the person concerned for a specific reason. Reasons include information about, or from, a third party, and information which is subject to legal privilege.

### **Corporate Confidentiality**

The above policy concerns the appropriate levels of confidentiality for personal information on the individuals who use DGS Mind Services, or who work in these services. Staff and volunteers are also reminded of the need to keep appropriately confidential the content of discussions which occur in various meetings within the organisation, especially where these involve a potential change in policy or practice. While DGS Mind is an organisation which values transparency and consultation, these should be undertaken with appropriate timing, and the organisation and those who work within it must be free to openly discuss issues and ideas without fear of unauthorised dissemination of this material.

The employee handbook, which forms part of the contract between the organisation and its employees, further stresses that information acquired during employment, or which relates particularly to our business, and which has not been officially made public, remains confidential and is not to be disclosed without consent.