

## HARASSMENT POLICY

We believe that every individual should be treated with dignity and respect. Accordingly, any harassment, whether intentional or unintentional, is totally unacceptable to Guildford YMCA.

In our respect for each other, we are all responsible for challenging all forms of harassment.

Harassment is unwanted behaviour, which causes distress and annoyance to the victim.

It can bring about fear, stress, anxiety and demoralisation in the victim and the damage, tension and conflict which harassment creates make for an unpleasant working environment for all.

Sexual and racial harassment are commonly recognised forms of harassment. However, people can be subjected to harassment on other grounds including:

ethnic origin, nationality and skin colour, sexual orientation, disabilities and learning difficulties, age, health, physical characteristics, religion and personal beliefs.

Harassment may be persistent or an isolated incident and may be directed towards one or more individual. It can range from extremes, such as assault, to less obvious forms like ignoring someone. Other forms include:

physical contact, jokes, offensive language, gossip, slander, letters, emails  
posters, graffiti, obscene gestures,  
isolation or non-co-operation and exclusion from social activities  
coercion for sexual favours  
intrusion by pestering, spying and stalking

In certain circumstances, harassment may be a criminal offence and could lead to police involvement. In cases of staff involvement, Harassment will be treated as a serious disciplinary offence, it may result in dismissal. In cases of residents being involved it could lead to eviction from the YMCA premises.

Staff and residents should not ignore behaviour, which makes them feel uncomfortable but take appropriate action so that the behaviour stops. For example, minor sexual harassment may well be stopped by the victim making it clear to the harasser that the behaviour is unacceptable and must stop.

However where approaches by the victim have failed or where more serious harassment has occurred the victim should make a formal complaint in line with the complaints procedure.

For staff, it is best to follow the route outlined in the grievance procedure [contained in the Staff Handbook]. However there may be occasions where it would

not be appropriate to use this procedure and the complaint should be made to an appropriate senior member of staff. Residents should follow the complaints Policy outlined in the Licence Agreement or available from reception.

We recognise that people who are being or who have been harassed may be helped by receiving support and advice from an independent person. A Line Manager; or the Chief Executive can put you in touch with a person who can help you. A resident can have access to the YMCA Counselling service (usually involves a waiting list), or obtain advice from a senior member of staff.

All allegations of harassment will be treated seriously and confidentially and the matter will be thoroughly investigated and dealt with as quickly as possible.

If it is found that an allegation of harassment has been made maliciously, the matter will be treated very seriously; in the case of staff, disciplinary action taken against the person who made the allegation and for a resident; will result in immediate eviction from their accommodation.

Whatever the outcome of a complaint of harassment, no-one who has made a complaint should be allowed to suffer victimisation for having made the complaint.

### Procedure for Dealing with Complaints of Harassment

- All **allegations of harassment** should be treated seriously and confidentially. A full investigation should be carried out by a Line Manager.
- A **statement** should be provided by the victim. In some cases it may be appropriate for a statement to be taken by an independent person. In some cases it would be sensible if this other person was someone of the same sex. Statements should be taken/ requested from any witnesses.

After the allegation has been made, care should be taken to ensure that the complainant is able to either continue working or live at the Y without embarrassment or anxiety. It may be that arrangements can be put in place to minimise contact between the parties.

- If, on the basis of these statements, it appears that harassment may have taken place, the **allegations should be put to the alleged harasser** and an opportunity given for him or her to comment on his/her conduct. It is probably advisable to deal with the evidence on the basis of statements rather than having the witnesses present. However this will mean that there may have to be adjournments to obtain a response from witnesses to any serious conflicts of evidence.
- In some cases a victim of harassment may be too frightened to speak out about their ordeal. Guildford YMCA will, when it is proven that harassment has indeed taken place, use evidence as presented to deal with the perpetrator.

At the end of this process, the member of senior staff conducting the investigation has to decide whether harassment has taken place and on the seriousness of the harassment.

It is important that any allegations of harassment are dealt with promptly within the following time scales given and all complaints must be accurately recorded. The complainant will be initially interviewed within 24 hours of receipt of the complaint. The complainant will be interviewed within 2 days of the complaint being made and a response to the complainant will be made within 4 days of the commencement of the process. If the response is made verbally to the complainant then it must be followed up in writing. It is acknowledged that on occasions the process may take longer than 4 days. Should this be the case, the complainant should be informed within this time period of how the investigation is progressing and when the outcome can reasonably be expected.

- If harassment has taken place **disciplinary action** should be taken against either the accused staff member or accused resident. The action taken will depend on the seriousness of the harassment.

Where appropriate, the victim should be informed of the action taken.

In the case of Staff, if the harasser remains in employment, it is important to check that harassment has stopped and there has been no victimisation or retaliation.

Where appropriate, the outcome should be discussed with the member of staff or resident who has been harassed.

Approved by the Residential Committee - August 2007