PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

**Policy Statement**

It is recognised that staff must establish rapport with Service Users and provide support that optimises the potential for Service Users to meet their basic human needs and rights. However, staff are responsible for ensuring that they establish and maintain appropriate professional boundaries between themselves and Service Users. There is no single all-encompassing definition of what constitutes professional boundaries. Our intention is to achieve a shared understanding of acceptable and unacceptable practice, enabling us to apply clear and consistent standards across Chapter Care (North Devon) Ltd’s service.

This guidance applies to all contact with Service Users, families and colleagues and should be incorporated into day-to-day support practices. The company therefore recognises this policy as an expectation of ‘Reasonable Management Instruction’ and expects all staff to abide by its contents.

**Staff Responsibilities and Authorities**

The management have overall responsibility for ensuring that these guidelines are followed. Managers, supervisors and care workers all have the specific role of monitoring day to day team and individual practice and have a responsibility to challenge and address staff when standards are not being maintained. All staff are individually responsible for applying and maintaining appropriate professional boundaries in their day-to-day work and for raising any associated issues or training needs with their supervisors or manager.

**Personnel Selection**

All applicants are sent an application form and a job description. Only applications made using the proper form and received by the advertised deadline are considered. Applicants are short-listed by comparing their application form with the person specification for the job. All short-listed candidates are offered an interview and given details of the agency, the position for which they have applied and the terms and conditions of employment.

**Working with Service Users**

This section sets out a professional context for working with service users by describing basic values and principles that govern professional practice.

These principles are:

* Boundaries define the limits of behavior, which allow a professional care worker and a service user to engage safely in a supportive caring relationship. These boundaries are based upon trust, respect and the appropriate use of power.
* The relationship between staff and service users is a therapeutic caring relationship that must focus solely upon meeting the needs of the service user. It is not established to build personal or social contacts for staff. Moving the focus away from meeting service users needs towards meeting the employee’s own needs is an unacceptable abuse of power.
* On occasions a member of staff may develop an attachment toward a particular service user. Whilst this may be natural the staff member should ensure that this does not lead to a breach of professional boundaries. Staff should be encouraged to discuss these kinds of difficulties with their manager or supervisor.

**Befriending**

Staff must never overstep professional boundaries and confuse befriending with friendship. All workers must be aware of the difference between:

* Befriending a service user – which is a professional relationship, made to meet the service users needs and
* Becoming a service users friend – which is a relationship that focuses on the needs of both people. A professional relationship focuses solely on the needs of the service user.

Befriending is an appropriate relationship for staff, and part of building the necessary trust to work with service users. Becoming a friend is inappropriate.

Staff are employed by Chapter Care (North Devon) Ltd to work with service users as part of the contract of employment and it is potentially an abuse of power to represent the relationship as a friendship.

**Counselling**

Similarly, staff must be aware of the difference between being a counsellor and using counselling skills (such as active listening with a non-judgmental approach) that are appropriate for the delivery of care and support. Counselling is not an appropriate role for staff unless you have been employed specifically to counsel and your job description outlines the areas of work for you to cover as a professional counsellor.

**Providing Advice**

In general, advice should normally only be offered to service users when they request it, unless there is good reason to be more directive. Where you do offer more directive advice, for example in a situation where there is potential for physical harm or danger, you should aim to do this in a non-judgmental manner. When you offer advice to service users you should ensure that you provide sufficient information for service users to make an informed choice. You should be aware of the areas in which you are not qualified to give advice and/or feel it is not appropriate for you to offer advice. In these instances, you should inform the service user of this, making every effort to assist them in accessing appropriate and/or qualified advice.

**Influence**

Staff must be careful not to influence service users with their own beliefs and personal values. Staff should also be aware of their potential to influence vulnerable and/or impressionable service users. Although morality, religion and politics are common areas of conversation and service users may wish to discuss their views with staff, staff should never promote or impose their own views.

**Approachability**

Staff should be seen as being approachable, open to fair challenge and criticism, and available to engage in meaningful dialogue. They should not be seen as intimidating or inaccessible people. Service users must not be discouraged from accessing support within agreed boundaries or from making complaints.

**Privacy**

Staff must respect service users’ rights to privacy and be sensitive and responsive to any different personal and cultural needs for privacy that might arise.

**Inappropriate Personal Disclosure**

Staff must not divulge any personal information about themselves or other members of staff. Staff need to ensure that they only disclose information that the service user has given permission to do so. Family members do not have an automatic right to information about their relative, be aware and think before you speak. If ever in any doubt, then refer to management.

How would you fell if someone was talking about you without your permission?

**Concealing Information from Colleagues about Service Users**

Staff must not conceal any information about service users that could result in inconsistent practice or harm. This might include:

* Personal information
* The intention of the service user to self-harm or harm others
* Violent or critical incidents/issues
* Child protection issues
* Not completing full records of service user interactions

**Touch – Physical Contact**

Chapter Care (North Devon) Ltd’s staff should approach touching with great care and caution. Where touching does occur, it must take place within the specific local work instructions or professional boundaries within the service.

Some service users may misinterpret physical contact as affection outside the professional relationship. All staff should therefore be aware that physical contact risks being misunderstood and may result in staff being vulnerable to allegations of inappropriate professional behavior. In all service contexts where touching occurs it must only take place within the context of a professional relationship and with the service users agreement. The limits and boundaries for touch between staff and service users should be fully described and documented. In those service contexts where touching is an integral part of service delivery, staff should discuss the subject fully at staff meetings so to ensure consistency and clarity of approach.

**Financial Relationships**

* Staff must not enter into any financial transactions with service users including buying, selling, exchanging or bartering of goods and services.
* Staff must not lend their personal money or possessions to service users.
* Staff must not borrow money or possessions from service users.
* Staff should not give or accept gits from service users with prior agreement from management.
* Staff should not accept monetary charitable donations without the prior agreement from management.
* Staff should not normally handle money on behalf of service users except in clearly defined work instructions which is written into the service users support plans.
* Staff should not agree to become trustees, beneficiaries or executers in relation to the wills of service users.
* Staff should not accept the service user paying for their meals unless management have been notified and agree this practice.

**Relationships and Contact with Service Users within Work**

* Where members of staff know service users prior to entering the service, the staff member must inform their supervisor or manager.
* Staff members should not be given the position of key worker for service users they already know.
* New members of staff might find that they know existing service users, this should be brought to the attention of their supervisor or manager. This will be explored with the member of staff, issues around confidentiality and risk assessment.

**Relationships and Contact with Service Users Outside of Work**

* Staff must not allow service users to visit their homes.
* Staff must not encourage service users to develop relationships with staff members’ relatives or friends.
* Staff must not give service users their personal contact details, address, phone numbers, email address etc.
* Staff must not give service users the personal details of any colleague.
* Staff who encounter service users out of hours should be pleasant and civil if approached but should generally discourage prolonged social contact. Staff should not approach service users in any social setting if the contact is not instigated by the service user especially where the service user’s behavior indicates that they do not want to be recognised or indeed identified as a user of the service.
* Staff must endeavor not to arrange out of hours contact with service users.

**Discussing Others**

* Staff must not partake in gossip or hearsay, this should not feature as an aspect of service culture. Staff need to be aware that if people are taking part in gossip or hearsay then this should be actively discouraged among both staff and service users. Staff need to be aware that this behavior is likely to result in disciplinary action and management are often informed of gossip and hearsay and the people involved in it.
* Staff must never share personal details about other staff with service users.
* Staff must never discuss other staff members with service users except on issues relating to their care and support work.
* Staff must never discuss service users with other service users and other third parties.

Where any of the above does occur, the incident must be brought to the attention of management.

**Use of Computers, Social Networking Sites and Texting**

* Staff must never discuss company business, service users or other members of staff through private email or instant messaging such as messenger, whatsapp, etc
* Staff must never discuss company business, service users or other members of staff using computer programmes, such as Facebook.
* Staff must never discuss company business, service users or other members of staff using text messaging on mobile phones.

Where any of the above does occur, the incident must be brought to the attention of management.

**Managing Boundary Issues**

Staff may unwittingly be put in a position where their relationship with service users is compromised or be drawn into conversations or situations where their boundaries are being stretched or crossed. In some situations, the fine line between good and bad practice may not always be obvious or clear. A staff member should seek guidance from management if they are unsure about the nature of a relationship developing with a service user or if they need advice on how they intend to deal with a situation.

Other staff members, especially those who are likely to work with the service user must also be aware of where a boundary has been blurred or crossed, this is for two reasons:

1. So they can maintain consistent practice with that service user.
2. To ensure that the action taken does not look like a ‘dirty secret’.

Boundary issue should be discussed with management and staff on a regular basis and on occasions specific training may be appropriate.

There are some events and arrangements that are highly valued with service users but may present potential boundary issues, in these instances there may be, at times, a need to exercise flexibility and discretion in the interpretation of this policy. Such instances where there are clear potential benefits to service users should be brought to the attention of management, so the situation can be risk assessed, any necessary safeguards agreed, and a record kept.

**Monitoring & Review**

Management and supervisors are responsible for monitoring these guidelines. Transgression will be reviewed with individual staff members but in some cases, it may be appropriate to record examples for discussion as part of staff training or discussion at team meetings.

Significant and/or repeated breaches of this policy will lead to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.