



Procedure Name

Complaints and Feedback Procedure

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1. Definitions

The following definitions apply to this policy and help ensure consistent understanding across the organisation.

- 1.1. **Board Member:** A Board Member is a person who has been appointed or elected to sit on The Canopy's Board of Management.
- 1.2. **Child:** A Child is any person under the age of 18 years.
- 1.3. **Child Safe Environment:** A Child Safe Environment is one where children are safe from harm, feel respected and included, and where the NSW Child Safe Standards are actively applied.
- 1.4. **Manager:** A Manager is any staff member with formal responsibility for supervising others, managing a program, team, or site, or making decisions about events covered by this policy.
- 1.5. **Volunteer:** A Volunteer is a person who performs work or duties for The Canopy without pay, under an agreed role or arrangement.
- 1.6. **Client:** Any individual, child, young person, or family who receives a service, support, or is engaged in any program or service with The Canopy.
- 1.7. **Employee:** A person engaged by The Canopy under an employment contract, including full-time, part-time, and casual employees. Employees have specific responsibilities and

obligations under The Canopy's policies and workplace agreements. Individuals engaged under temporary work arrangements or subcontracted through external agencies to act on The Canopy's behalf are referenced as 'employees' in this policy.

- 1.8. **Complaint** An expression of dissatisfaction about a service provided by The Canopy, either written or verbal, made by a client or their representative, that requires a response. Complaints may relate to service delays, poor practice, communication gaps, lack of timely response, unresolved matters, decisions, inaction, breaches, or any negative impact experienced from service delivery or an employee in line with the NSW Ombudsman, contractual agreements, and legal responsibilities. Complaints help identify areas for practice improvement, ensure accountability and enhance outcomes for clients, their families and stakeholders.
- 1.9. **Dispute** is defined as an unresolved complaint that is escalated to a more senior level inside and outside of The Canopy. Disputes are **managed** in line with legislative and service requirements.
- 1.10. **Complainant** is a person making a complaint.
- 1.11. **Complaints management system** refers to the policies, procedures, practices, and systems used by The Canopy in the management and recording of complaints.
- 1.12. **Advocate** is a person, working in a professional capacity, who submits feedback, a complaint, or compliment on behalf of a client or service user.
- 1.13. **Just culture** is a culture where all people feel safe and supported and are encouraged to identify and report adverse events so that opportunities for systems improvement can be identified and acted on.
- 1.14. **Feedback** Any information, opinions, or suggestions provided by clients, families, employees, community members or other stakeholders about The Canopy's services, practices, or operations. Feedback can be positive or constructive and is used to improve service standards, practice quality, inform decision-making, and enhance the overall experience for those engaged with The Canopy's programs.
- 1.15. **Compliment** Positive feedback from a client, family member, community member, or stakeholder about an employee, program or service they have received. Compliments reflect satisfaction or recognition of actions that exceed expectations and contribute to team morale, collaboration, and continuous improvement.

2. Purpose

- 2.1. At the Canopy, we take all feedback and complaints seriously. Complaints and feedback are encouraged and managed whilst upholding high service standards of accountability, child safety and service improvement.
- 2.2. The purpose of this Complaints and Feedback Procedure is to outline the process, procedural guidelines and lines of delegation for all personnel working with The Canopy in relation to complaints and feedback.

3. Scope

- 3.1. This policy applies to all people we support including: children, young people, families, carers,

client representatives, advocates, service users, employees, volunteers, and stakeholders who interact with The Canopy. It covers complaints and feedback related to services, programs, decisions, or actions taken by the Canopy.

3.2. The following concerns are **not** covered by this policy;

3.2.1. **Employee Grievances** – Concerns or issues raised by employees and volunteers regarding their role or work environment. Such concerns or issues are addressed internally by respective Team Leaders, Coordinators, Service Managers, and/or the Canopy's Chief Executive Officer (CEO), in accordance with relevant Performance Management systems, processes, and Industrial Relations legislation.

3.2.2. **Allegations of Misconduct** – Issues relating to abuse, fraud, harassment, unlawful behaviour, or any conduct that endangers the health or safety of employees, volunteers, community members, or the environment.

4. Principles

- 4.1. Child and Family-Centred
- 4.2. Culturally Safe and Responsive
- 4.3. Structured, Flexible and Supportive
- 4.4. Strengths-based and Dignity Driven
- 4.5. Transparency, Fairness and Accountability
- 4.6. Accessibility
- 4.7. Confidentiality and Privacy
- 4.8. Continuous Improvement

5. Principles in Practice

5.1. **Child and Family-Centred** The complaints and feedback process is founded on optimising the voices, opinions, perspectives, strengths, and participation in decision making of children, young people, families and their communities in enhancing service and practice change.

5.2. **Culturally Safe and Responsive:** The Canopy aims to be culturally safe, responsive, inclusive and respectful of diverse cultural backgrounds embedding cultural knowledge, values and beliefs in the development of our complaints and feedback mechanisms.

5.3. The Canopy's Complaints and Feedback processes are designed to ensure cultural safety and respectful engagement of all children and families, and community members, prioritising participation in co-designing and developing processes with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and individuals from a culturally and linguistically diverse background.

5.5. **Structured, Flexible and Supportive:** Our complaints and feedback process is structured and flexible to ensure all avenues of tailored support is provided to children, families and community members wishing to make a complaint or provide feedback.

5.6. **Strengths-based and Dignity Driven:** Complaints and feedback procedures managed within The Canopy embody strength-based, dignity-driven, respectful and safe practices to enable children, young people, families and community members to advocate for their wants, needs, and rights.

5.7. Transparency, Fairness and Accountability: Feedback and complaints are handled transparently, fairly, and in an accountable manner. Clear communication about the complaints process, regular updates and estimated timeframes of final outcomes are openly provided to all complainants. The Canopy is committed to ensuring an unbiased non-judgemental complaints and feedback process with all potential Conflicts of Interest avoided. We take responsibility for errors and take corrective action when needed.

5.8. Accessibility: We aim for our complaints and feedback process to be simple, accessible, and child and family centred. We empower children and families from varying backgrounds with for diverse needs to speak up about their individual preferences, make complaints and give feedback. We are encouraging of people wishing to lodge feedback and complaints through multiple channels. This includes feedback and complaints made anonymously and to employees other than their direct Caseworker, Family Worker or Team Leader, children and families requiring advocacy and/or interpreter support. The Complaints and Feedback process recognises and overcomes individual differences and circumstances, including language barriers and cultural differences.

5.9. Confidentiality and Privacy: The Canopy ensures the privacy and confidentiality of all people involved in a complaint or feedback process in accordance with child protection laws, relevant legislative regulations, governance procedures and compliance measures.

5.10. Continuous Improvement: Feedback and complaints are used to identify areas for improvement that enhance service delivery.

6. Our Child-Safe Organisational Commitment

- 6.1. The Canopy prioritises the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people who access our services and interact with our employees, volunteers, contractors, students, and community partners.
- 6.2. As a child-safe organisation, we recognise the importance of amplifying children's voices and supporting their active participation in decisions that affect them.
- 6.3. The Canopy recognises that a child-safe organisation must be a listening organisation. We are committed to ensuring that all feedback and complaints—particularly those raised by children and young people are welcomed, taken seriously, and responded to with care, respect, and urgency.
- 6.4. We provide safe, accessible, and child-friendly avenues for raising concerns and actively promote a culture where children feel empowered to speak up without fear.
- 6.5. Our feedback and complaints processes align with our safeguarding responsibilities, ensuring all concerns are handled transparently, fairly, and in a trauma-informed and culturally safe and responsive manner.
- 6.6. By embedding child-safe principles into our feedback and complaints systems, we strengthen trust, accountability, and continuous improvement—ensuring that every child, young person, family member and community member feels heard, valued, and protected.

7. Child-Friendly Complaint Handling

- 7.1. The Canopy is committed to ensuring that children and young people can safely and confidently provide feedback or lodge complaints. This includes:

- 7.1.1. Providing clear, age-appropriate information about the complaints process.
- 7.1.2. Offering support, including access to advocates or representatives.
- 7.1.3. Ensuring children's voices are heard and taken seriously.
- 7.1.4. Maintaining confidentiality and privacy, except where reporting obligations apply.
- 7.1.5. Responding to complaints in a trauma-informed manner.

8. Cultural Safety in Feedback and Complaints

- 8.1. Feedback and complaints processes will be culturally safe and responsive, ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait families feel respected and supported. The voices and experiences of Aboriginal children, young people, families, and communities are embedded in decision-making, policy and procedure design, practice and program.
- 8.2. Processes will be inclusive and accessible for children, young people and families from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. This may include access to interpreters, bi-lingual staff, support from a specialist cultural support service, program information translated in the family's chosen language, culturally sensitive and inclusive signage, organisational environment and/or office inclusions, separate private offices or appropriate areas for confidential discussions of a sensitive nature, and additional casework support hours for families to link in with their local cultural community networks.

9. Complaint and Feedback Process and Procedure

9.1 How to Make a Complaint

9.1.1. Ideally, concerns should first be discussed and resolved with your Caseworker or Child and Family Worker at The Canopy. If you are not satisfied with the outcome, you can raise your complaint through the following steps;

- 9.1.2. Talk with the Manager about your concerns.
- 9.1.3. If you are not satisfied with the Manager's response, you can escalate your complaint and feedback to the Canopy's CEO.
- 9.1.4. If your concerns remain unresolved, you can then contact the Chairman of the Board.
- 9.1.5. We at The Canopy welcome you to lodge your complaints or concerns via our website or Email: complaints@thecanopy.org.au

9.2. Step 1. Lodging Feedback or Complaints

- 9.2.1. Clients, including children, youth, families, community members and service users can provide feedback or lodge complaints through the following channels:
- 9.2.2. **Verbally:** Directly to your Caseworker, Family Worker, Team Leader, Family Service Manager, or CEO.
- 9.2.3. **Written:** Submit a completed Feedback and Complaints Form, via our secure website inbox, email to the complaint's email address; complaints@thecanopy.org.au or post to the CEO at; The Canopy, Cameron Park Community Centre.
- 9.2.4. **Online:** Through the Canopy's website or email complaints@thecanopy.org.au.

9.3. Step 2. Acceptance, Investigation and Resolution of Complaints

- 9.3.1. **Acknowledgment:** Complaints will be acknowledged within two business days.

9.3.2. **Assessment:** Complaints will be assessed for urgency and severity, with immediate action taken for safety concerns.

9.3.3. **Investigation:** Complaints will be investigated thoroughly, fairly, and proportionately, with findings based on evidence.

9.3.4. **Update Communication:** Complainants will be provided contact details for the key contact person managing their complaint. Regular progress updates will be provided to complainants.

9.3.5. **Outcome Communication:** Complainants will receive a written response explaining the outcome, reasons, and options for review.

9.4. Steps for Escalating and Resolving Complaints

9.4.1. **Initial Resolution:** Discuss the issue with the relevant Caseworker, Child and Family Worker.

9.4.2. **Escalation:** If unresolved, contact the relevant Coordinator or Team Leader.

9.4.3. **Escalation:** If still unresolved, email the relevant Service Manager at complaints@thecanopy.org.au

9.4.4. **Further Review:** If the Service Manager cannot resolve the issue, escalate to the CEO via complaints@thecanopy.org.au

9.4.5. **Final Review:** If the CEO cannot resolve the issue, escalate to the Chairperson of the Board via chair@thecanopy.org.au

10. How feedback and complaints are managed when received through The Canopy website

- 10.1 Feedback and complaints raised through The Canopy website are sent to a secured inbox managed by the CEO or the Chairperson of the Board.
- 10.2 Feedback and complaints will be acknowledged, assessed, and allocated to the appropriate Service Manager to resolve in the first instance.
- 10.3 The relevant manager will work with you to ensure your complaints are resolved and you receive a written response outlining the decisions and/or actions we have taken to address your concerns.
- 10.4 The CEO or member of the management team may contact individuals making a complaint to obtain additional information is obtained, and as part of the complaint resolution and follow-up process. Such information can be used as part of The Canopy's continuous improvement and practice enhancement processes.
- 10.5 In some situations, complaints are investigated by a professional outside of The Canopy. The decision to conduct an independent investigation into your complaint will be communicated with you, as well as regular updates on where the external investigation is up to. A plan to resolve your complaint may then be developed with you.
- 10.6 Written records of complaints and feedback are stored in a secure online platform that ensures privacy and confidentiality. Information from complaints and feedback is used to help us

improve program practice and enhance service delivery. Complaints and feedback play an important role in The Canopy's continuous improvement initiatives.

11. Review of a Decision

- 11.1. The Canopy acknowledges the right of clients, families, advocates, community members stakeholders and the public to provide feedback and lodge complaints. In some cases, clients or community members may seek a review of a decision that has been made by The Canopy during the complaints assessment and resolution process.
- 11.2. A decision review is a formal process that requires a written request from the person making the complaint (the complainant) and will be conducted by an employee who was not involved in making the original decision. However, decision reviews are only available for decisions made within The Canopy's authority.
- 11.3. Decisions made by external bodies, such as The Ombudsman, the Department of Communities and Justice, or other external organisations, will follow their own decision review processes.
- 11.4. It is important to distinguish between a request for a decision review and a complaint about a decision;
 - 11.4.1. A decision review seeks to reconsider the original decision based on relevant policies, procedures, and any new information provided.
 - 11.4.2. A complaint about a decision relates to dissatisfaction with how a decision was made or its outcome and will be addressed through this feedback and complaints procedure. Some complaint outcomes and decision reviews may also be eligible for an external review by an independent body.
- 11.5. External reviews can only be requested after an internal review has been completed.

12. Who can I go to outside of The Canopy?

12.1. You may also raise your feedback and complaint with an external oversight agency if The Canopy has not resolved the issues to your satisfaction.

12.2. External Oversight

If the complaint remains unresolved, clients, community members and stakeholders may contact external oversight agencies, such as:

12.2.1. NSW Ombudsman

Phone: 02 9286 1000

Toll-free: 1800 451 524

Email: nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au

Online: www.ombo.nsw.gov.au

12.2.2. NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ)

Enquiry, Feedback and Complaints Unit

Phone: 1800 000 164

Email: complainst@facss.nsw.gov

Post: Reply Paid 63437

Complaints Unit

Locked Bag 4028,
Ashfield
NSW 2131

12.2.3. Commonwealth Ombudsman

Phone: 1300 362 072
Email: ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au

12.2.4. Office of The Children's Guardian (OCG)

Phone: (02) 8219 3600
Email: ocg@ocg.nsw.gov.au
Postal: Office of the Children Guardian
Locked Bag 5100
Strawberry Hills
NSW 2012

12.2.5. NSW Information and Privacy Commissioner

Phone: 1800 472 679
Email: ipcinfo@ipc.nsw.gov.au www.ipc.nsw.gov.au

12.2.6. Office of the Australian Information Commissioner

Phone: 1300 363 992
Email: enquiries@oaic.gov.au www.oaic.gov.au

12.2.7. The Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW

Phone (02) 9268 5544 or 1800 670 812
Email: complaintsadb@agd.nsw.gov.au

13. Related Information

13.1. This policy is to be read in conjunction with relevant policy and procedures of the Canopy.

13.2. This includes, The Canopy's External Complaints Policy and Procedure, The Canopy's Child Safety Reporting Policy and The Canopy's Whistleblowers Policy. This policy has been written in consultation with The Canopy Leadership team.

14. Document Details

Document ID:	PRO-000
Version:	2.0
Finalised date:	April 2026
Review date:	April 2027
Author – branch/unit/area:	Project Officer
Audience:	• Clients/Service users • Stakeholders

	• Community Members • Board • All Employees • Volunteers and Contractors
Related Legislation, Standards and Frameworks:	• Children and Young Person's (Care and Protection Act) 1988 • Child Safe Scheme • NSW Child Safe Standards • Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1988 • Australian Privacy Principles • National Complaint Handling Guidelines
Status:	Mandatory
Related Governance:	• Incident Reporting Policy and Procedures • Code of Conduct • Risk Management related governance • Privacy Policy • Complaints and Feedback Policy • Whistleblowers Policy
Replaces:	N/A – New Procedure

15. Change History:

Date	Change Description	Reason for Change	Author	Issue No:
29.04.2026	Full rewrite	Transfer to New Policy and Procedure Template.	Suzanne Hicks	1.0
2/07/2026	New template	New template	Suzanne Hicks	2.0

16. Acceptance Certificate:

This policy is approved by: ☐ Tier 1 – Board Approved Policy <i>Requires formal approval by the Board.</i> ☒ Tier 2 – CEO Approved Policy <i>Approved and authorised by the CEO.</i> ☐ Tier 3 – Executive Approved Procedure / Guideline <i>Approved by relevant Executive Staff.</i>	Approved Date: July 2026 Signed: Name/Position: Gen Wilcox, CEO
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