Forest Churches Emergency Night Shelter (FCENS)

Communications Policy

January 2023

To be next reviewed in January 2024

Introduction and Philosophy

Forest Churches Emergency Night Shelter (FCENS) is a Christian organisation that is passionate about living out God's kingdom values of love, hope, justice and transformation. It's what inspires us and drives us. FCENS will therefore reflect this Christian ethos through its interaction with staff, volunteer workers and in all of its developments.

In order for FCENS to be a thriving and successful organisation, we must communicate effectively with each other, with our guests, volunteers and care professionals. Everyone must have the information they need to be successful in their role.

Overall we need to take a strategic approach to communication, identifying responsibilities for trustees, staff and volunteers. This policy has therefore been introduced to meet those needs.

Vision for Communications
In all our communications our vision is to proactively demonstrate understanding and respect, ensuring that we communicate in a way that is open, timely, clear and appropriate to the recipient.

Definition of communication

Good communication is much more than the exchange of information. It involves the management of relationships and the need for active engagement. Communication is as much about attitude and behaviour as it is about message. Every member of the team has a role and a responsibility to support effective communication

For the purposes of this policy communication includes not only the message but also how that message is communicated.

Methods of Communication
The methods of communication covered by this policy include:

- Verbal communication, face-to-face communication, one to one meetings, committee meetings and discussions.
- Written communications, letters, emails, reports, memos, minutes, and any other written documentation.
- Vertical Communication up and down the organisation usually via the line management structure.
- Lateral Communication across the organisation covering trustees, staff team, shelter venues (churches), and volunteers.

Standards for Communications
All communications at FCENS should be in line with the following principles:

- Open, honest, professional and transparent. The reasons for decisions are available. Decision makers are accessible and ready to engage in dialogue. When information cannot be communicated the reasons for nondisclosure are articulated and explained (to the extent possible). Questions are expected and will be answered in a timely manner.
- Factually accurate information arrives at a time when it is needed, is relevant and able to be interpreted in the correct context
- Clear messages, communicated in plain English. They are easy to understand and are not easily open to misinterpretation.
- Two way, to support communication up and down the institution as well as across the sites and between different volunteer teams.
- Efficient. The communication and the way it is delivered is "fit for purpose" and appropriate to the recipient.

Responsibilities
All trustees, staff and volunteers have a responsibility to demonstrate the standards noted within this Communication Policy. Specifically, all trustees, staff and volunteers:

- Should be aware of the Communications Policy and demonstrate the principles of good practice.
- Are responsible for ensuring that they communicate effectively and appropriately in line with the standards in this policy.
- Should be aware of the various methods of communication (verbal, written etc.) and utilise them appropriately.
- Should tackle incidents of poor communication in a proactive and constructive way.
- Should share information openly, appropriately and in a timely fashion.
- Should ensure effective two-way communication.
- Should ensure effective and appropriate feedback is provided.
- Should reflect on communication standards and practices within the team and identify opportunities for improvement
- Where someone constructively raises an issue relating to poor, or inappropriate communication, the relevant individual should consider carefully this feedback and reflect on their ability to communicate well within the organisation.
- Where communication issues are raised that cannot be dealt with successfully, should ensure that they are taken to the Trustees for action and support.
- Should ensure effective lateral communication between the team/guests/volunteers
- Should support and promote a culture that encourages inclusion and involvement and challenges non-engagement.

All staff and trustees

All staff and trustees have the following additional responsibilities:

- Act as a role model – demonstrating good practice in communication in all aspects of the role.
- Ensure that the principles of good practice are applied in their area of work and responsibility.
- Ensure all staff understand how their role fits in achieving the charity objectives.
- Ensure that when staff or volunteers raise issues of poor or ineffective communication they are dealt with proactively and constructively to effective resolution.
- Ensure that all staff are aware of the Communications Policy and that they meet the standards required by the trustees.
- Ensure all staff actively engage in proactive communications and challenge non engagement where evident.

Principles of Good Practice

The following examples of good practice are provided as a guide to trustees, staff and volunteers:

All Identified Meetings

- Should take place on a regular and planned basis.
- Should be attended by all members of the team when required
- Opportunities should be provided for all attendees to contribute equally.
- The agenda should be open to input from the whole team.
- Meetings should be held at a time and in a venue, which allows and encourages input.

There should be opportunities for occasional team meetings between staff and between staff/trustees/volunteers where the following may be discussed:

- Strategic and longer term planning
- Areas for development
- Opportunities to share good practice
- Opportunities to understand the work and contribution of team members
- Operational objectives and progress
- Health and Safety matters - based on worker/volunteer feedback
- Feedback to the trustees

Planning Change – Inclusion and involvement
We will actively seek opportunities to include and involve staff and volunteers in changes that will impact on them and their work. In some cases this may be a minor operational issue, at other times it could be more significant strategic change. Staff and volunteers should be advised in advance of any planned change and be given an opportunity to have input, the subsequent ideas being considered before the decision is made.

Use of electronic recording processes
Individuals should provide work records using the tablet computers provided so that colleagues in other areas can be informed about how the previous night's operation went. This will benefit lateral communication across the organisation.

Where paper records are kept, these should be transferred to the electronic systems at the earliest possible opportunity.

All staff should have access to the electronic recording/reporting systems and be provided with relevant training to enable them to use these systems well. All staff should be actively encouraged to make appropriate information available on the tablet computers and use this as the main source of information and record keeping.

Record keeping
Accurate and timely records should be kept of all meetings and decisions regarding individual guests and be made available for statistical purposes where necessary.

Email/texts/Whatsapp
E-mail/text/Whatsapp communication is to be encouraged to share information when appropriate. This must be in compliance with the Privacy Policy and Confidentiality Policy.

Communication should be effective, professional and succinct. Staff, volunteers and trustees should consider if e-mail/text/Whatsapp is the best way to communicate or if a face to face discussion would work more effectively.

All staff, volunteers and trustees should respond to incoming e-mail, text and telephone messages directed for their attention at the earliest opportunity.

Signed:
(Chair of Trustees)



Date: 31st January 2023

This policy is subject to review, monitoring and revision every 12 months (or sooner if work activity or legislation changes.)