



# FIRST STOP CENTRE

## RECORD KEEPING AND ACCESS TO RECORDS

### 1 Introduction

It is the policy of First Stop Centre to keep only a minimum of personal records. Nevertheless, record keeping provides direction for staff in ensuring that visitors' needs are met and continuity of care is provided. Our records include legally required information such as expected by visiting inspection officers, testing of fire equipment, etc., to ensure that adherence to legislation such as Health & Safety is maintained.

### 2 Personal Records

Personal records are only kept for visitors using structured interventions or on those visitors who are known to another agency as a high degree of risk or have a serious medical condition which may need attention. The information will include in respect of each individual the following particulars:

- The name, address, date of birth and marital status of the visitor and whether he/she is subject to a court order or any other proceedings.
- The name, address and telephone number of the visitor's next of kin or any person authorised to act on his or her behalf.
- The name, address and telephone number of the visitor's registered medical practitioner and officer of local social services authority whose duty it is to supervise the welfare of that person.
- The date on which the visitor entered the Centre and the frequency of visits.

### 3 Guidelines to Writing Records

- Records will be factual information, not judgmental. If a personal opinion is stated it will be made clear it is an opinion not a fact.
- Records will be short and concise with accurate information using any relevant forms.
- Records will be dated, signed and the time of specified report, e.g. accident, incident, will be recorded.
- Information about other agencies involved will be recorded including contact name and telephone number.

### 4. Financial Records

Financial records are held on the premises of petty cash, canteen, recreational and Christmas club monies.



## 5. Accident and Incidents

Records are required to ensure that any accidents or incidents, e.g. assaults on staff or visitors, break-ins to the Centre, minor or serious injuries to staff or visitors are reported to the Management Committee. In certain circumstances incidents and accidents are required to be reported to the registration department of the local authority and the Environmental Health Department.

Information concerning any incident where a visitor or staff member is assaulted will be kept to enable the Management Committee and staff to ensure appropriate action is taken so that the risks of future incidents are minimised or prevented.

## 6. Access to Records

First Stop will abide by the Access to Personal Files Act 1987. These regulations allow for individuals to have access to manually held records about them by the local authority for the performance of social services functions. The requirement for open access to information is also highlighted as good practice under the National Health & Community Care Act.

An individual only has right of access to material on him or herself. Visitors will, however, need to be made aware of the limitation of such access and disclosure of materials needs to be handled sensitively and honestly. Such information as medical records or incidents affecting other family members or visitors will not be disclosed without permission of the persons about whom the information is kept.

## 7. Procedure for Access

A request for access to personal files must be in writing and signed by the visitor. If the visitor is unable to sign then a person independent of the service should do so on his or her behalf. The visitor can also instruct a representative to seek access for the visitor. In such cases First Stop must be satisfied both that the visitor has so instructed and that the representative is genuine. A guardian or next of kin may also apply on behalf of the relative. The appropriateness of the person applying should be discussed with the Manager and staff.

The deciding issue on granting a request for access is whether in the judgment of the staff and Manager, a visitor can understand the request and make it in writing. Subject to these safeguards, requests for access must be met.

If the access may jeopardise on-going work with a visitor and the records contain damaging or upsetting material, then access should be offered within a broader counselling framework and sometime taken to ensure the material is understood. Information should always be shown to the visitor rather than read out paraphrased. If it is felt the information could cause harm, reference to the exclusion clauses below should be made.

There must be no special amendments to the record once access is requested, nor should it be tampered with.



Where other individuals are named in the record, then their consent is needed before granting access, and such consent should be sought within fourteen days of the request being made. In editing the records, only the name of such individual should be removed.

Access should take place with staff who know the visitor. If, after having read through the records, the visitor or staff member disagrees with any aspect of their contents, she/he will be given the opportunity to discuss this with the Centre Manager (for visitors), or the Chairman of Management Committee (for staff). If it is clear to both parties that there is an error in the records then this may be amended. If there is a difference of opinion or interpretation of the matter recorded, then the visitor or staff member should be invited to write her/his own report which can be added to the file.

If a visitor remains dissatisfied with the contents of a record, she/he may make a formal complaint to the Management Committee (see Complaints Procedure).

If a staff member remains dissatisfied with the contents of a record, he/she should raise the matter with the Management Committee.

## 8. Exclusion Clauses

The following grounds are reasons to withhold information.

- There is a risk of serious harm, either physical or mental, whether to the visitor, member of staff or another individual. For this to be a factor in consideration, the Manager should contact other appropriate professionals relevant to the situation.
- In the prevention of or detection of crime: This clause covers all police records and any information held by First Stop which may relate to a criminal matter, e.g. abuser. The advice of First Stop's legal adviser should always be sought before allowing or denying access under this clause.
- Information restricted by legislation in relation to adoption remains confidential.
- Information gathered from health service professionals, e.g. general practitioners, district nurses, consultant psychiatrist, should be recorded by the professionals under the Medical Records Act and the Access to Medical Records Act. In general, visitors have the right to see their medical records and this access should be obtained through the general practitioner.
- Where there is information pertaining to people's health or whether the information is felt to be harmful to the visitor in line with the general policy on Access to Records and Confidentiality, it will be necessary to discuss with the general practitioner before disclosure.



9. Equal Opportunities

First Stop will publicise to visitors the right of access and where required arrange for translation services to be provided. For people with visual impairments or communication difficulties, records will be transferred on to audiotape, translated into Braille or translated into the appropriate language.