

# WARRAH

LIVING LEARNING GROWING



*Annual Report 2017*

## Introduction

Warrah School is a co-educational, non-denominational Special School working out of the pedagogical indications of Rudolf Steiner and offering educational programs for children with an intellectual disability and/or autism, from Kindergarten to Year 12. Warrah Special School is registered as a School of a Kind and continues, as such, to deliver a modern and quality education for students with a disability or special needs using the pedagogical guidelines given by Dr Rudolf Steiner. Warrah School is guided by its *Vision for Warrah to be known for its unique approach, innovative delivery and outstanding results in the provision of support that serves the needs and aspirations of individuals with intellectual disability.*

The “Disability Standards for Education 2005” articulate the rights of students with disabilities and the responsibilities of the school.

Warrah Special School is an integral part of Warrah Society, an organisation for children and adults with an Intellectual Disability and as such upholds the following shared values. Our education is:

1. Based on the Anthroposophical understanding of human development and the principles of Curative Education and Social Therapy.
2. We always uphold the rights and dignity of people with intellectual disability.
3. We uphold the National Disability Service Standards.
4. We strive for the highest standard of professional knowledge in providing quality education, services and support for both children and adults with disabilities.
5. We strive to understand each individual’s disability and needs, and provide support that empowers each person to make choices, develop and contribute.
6. We acknowledge and support the innate capacity of each individual to know their own intentions and social needs, regardless of disability.
7. We recognise that although the physical body or soul may have a disability, the spirit of every individual is unique, enduring and free of disability.
8. We support individuals to build and maintain community networks of interest in accordance with their wishes, and encourage engagement and exchange with our local community.
9. We recognise the important principle that all relationships throughout Warrah carry a quality of *mutual* learning and respect.
10. We strive for clarity and transparency in communication and decision making as the foundation for trust, harmony and productive working relationships.
11. We strive to be a Learning Community where learning and continuous improvement are embraced by every individual as well as by the organisation.
12. We enjoy the cultural diversity of the Warrah community and encourage its expression through Festivals, special events and other cultural activities.
13. Our commitment to sound, holistic environmental values is inspired by Warrah’s unique natural environment, and Warrah Biodynamic Farm.

## Principal's Report

2017 was a full and varied year with many outings, celebrations, festivals and gains in our curriculum delivery and student participation.

Over recent years, the Warrah School student cohort has changed to be primarily students with Autism and with our Curative approach, it highlighted the need for us to continue to learn and deepen our understanding of Autism and what the child asks of those providing their education. We were supported in this striving with the final year of the Schools Leading Learning Grant, which enabled many staff to attend training, specialist teachers to come into the school and observation between classes to occur. Given Warrah School is the only school of its kind left in Australia these opportunities and the accompanying financial support are highly valued. We are a small school in a unique setting of bush and rural land and we understand this environment offers us many possibilities in our curriculum delivery, management of student mood and behaviour and in what and how we work with the students.

This year we saw many families enter into the NDIS funding plan and were able to support those who asked in establishing a framework out of which to identify their needs and goals for their child. We did not experience first-hand any consequences of NDIS packages except for a few requests for therapists to conduct their individualised sessions in school time, at school, which we willingly agree to.

This year also saw us begin a more conscious approach to Transition to Work and Community Activity for our older students. Significant learning was gained from this experience and we will continue to build our program each year. Two senior students participated in community activities with the Warrah Youth Discovery program such as attending a local gym, visiting libraries, learning their way around a library, travel training and socialising in the community. This work is important in terms of preparing our students for making a contribution in the wider community once they leave school. We also had one student attend his second year of Work Experience at Redfield College which enabled him to study a Certificate online through TAFE mid-way through the year. We thank Redfield College staff and students for their generosity and support with our senior students. It is an excellent and valuable relationship. We are also grateful to the Dural Men's Shed volunteers who gave one of our senior student's time each term to create and build a range of items. This commitment has given the young man confidence, social skills and the capacity to follow through tasks as well as a wide range of practical woodworking skills.

From a more global perspective, we grappled throughout the year with the deep questions that arise when we, as a small school, wish to continue to welcome students with all intellectual disabilities yet have a predominance of students with Autism. Ensuring the balance and the ability to meet the needs of all students is at the forefront of our commitment. We believe the beginnings of a stronger Life Skills and Outdoor learning program are key to this. This ongoing striving provided many challenges and led to appeals for extra funding from a range of services who responded positively initially. Many of our students require additional 1:1 support than current funding allows although it is important to note that we have managed to address these demands well in the short term. Longer term extra funding will be essential. However, the introduction of the NDIS plans has made that impossible for now. Changes to funding for students with a disability are imminent and we look forward to understanding these in the light of our needs and students.

As we reflect on our student population and the rich daily experiences, challenges and learnings, we are very aware of the importance of nurturing and growing the work of curative education in our unique way. Communication is an ever present matter requiring ongoing attention. In a world where I-pads and tablets are part of daily life we also strive to ensure the traditional and fundamental elements of Steiner Education remain alive and core to our approach for the students who come to us. This work is right at the forefront of education for those with special needs and Warrah chooses to be a caretaker of the discussion.

Jan Fowler  
Principal



## **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR WARRAH SPECIAL SCHOOL 2017**

2017 was an important year for Warrah School as the Board liaised closely with the CEO and School Principal to understand the needs arising from the changing student population and the impact of the transition to the NDIS for families.

The Board membership comprises ex-parents as well as those with the necessary financial, educational and business expertise to ensure a comprehensive overview is held at all times. The Board is supported in its work by the work of several small committees.

A Board Retreat early in the year brought to the fore the value of Warrah's approach in a world in which Autism and Special Needs can easily be seen from a behavioural perspective only. We uphold the commitment to striving to ensure the school can continue the excellent work done over the past decades and has the capacity to meet the changing times. We also reviewed current building needs and maintenance and placed repainting and refurbishment of bathrooms and classroom furniture as priorities in the next budget.

Inclusion is the key focus of many of the Commonwealth Government's decisions and while it is of great significance for our school, we are also aware that it means different things to different groups. The Board seeks to support the school to enliven and broaden this important discussion to ensure the needs of those with a disability are always at the centre of discussion and decision-making. It appears that special schools are growing once again which suggests some understanding that they have the capacity to meet the individual in a different way than inclusion in mainstream does. We encourage this ongoing study and discussion and believe as a governance body it is our responsibility to ensure our approach stays alive and offers choice to parents. We have been pleased to see the development of some new curriculum approaches in response to the needs of current students. Warrah School is built on a robust foundation of meeting the varying needs of students and we have confidence this will continue into the future.

I would like to thank my fellow Board members who give their time and expertise willingly and with dedication.

Steve Mitchell  
Chairperson, 2017



## Class Teachers Report

We had three classes formatted on age and ability for the first semester – essentially Primary, Middle and Senior. Following the resignation of one teacher, we ran two classes supported by more assistants and a change in timetabling and program which worked well. It was successful given the extra attention given to aligning the work with individual education plans and small groupings based on interest and ability.

This year we trialled a themed approach to an aspect of Main Lesson work choosing Ancient Greece. Lessons were developed according to individual learning plans and were age appropriate, but the overall impact was potent and created a sense of interest and engagement across the school. The term's study culminated in a Mini Greek Olympics which was an enormous success. We intend to further develop and implement this themed approach annually.



Being such a small school, collegiality is very important and our team made up of teachers, assistants and therapists strive to work closely together sharing 'pictures' of the students, ideas and insights in order to strengthen the work and quality of what we do. Special needs work means small class sizes and individualised plans but the students teach us all a great deal about ourselves and the world they live in. Collegiality is vital to ensuring we have the support to remain steady and clear in our work. We are building this capacity not only with our Professional Development days but also with regular after school debriefs and study times.

Classes have been on common outings for bush walking and a day Outdoor Education camp to Vision Valley. We are inspired by the encouragement the students give each other resulting in amazing achievements in rock climbing and abseiling particularly.



## Therapy Report

Students are offered a range of therapies within the week's program. These include:

- Music Therapy by the Nordoff Robbins Music Therapy Australia.
- Riding for the Disabled – off site at Rouse Hill.
- Therapeutic Massage – by Monika Bebb, Qualified Massage Practitioner.
- Bothmer Gym – by Louise Swanson, Teacher and Qualified Bothmer Gym Teacher.
- Chirophonetics – by Helen Cameron, Qualified Practitioner and Special Needs Teacher. We trialled this in 2017.

There is also the opportunity for parents to add additional sessions of these therapies using their NDIS funding. The school accommodates this by providing rooms and times for individual sessions.



## Curriculum Report

Students have Individual Education Plans developed in consultation with parents. These are designed to develop identified life and learning skills to the student within the curriculum presented by each teacher. Warrah School is registered by the NSW Board of Studies and as such ensures all students are provided with age appropriate access to the curriculum. We follow the framework of the Steiner education curriculum which has been approved by the Department of Education. With an approach that fosters Thinking, Feeling and Doing/Activity, our students commonly learn from practical activity initially which is then translated into intellectual understanding and knowledge. We have set a 3 year goal of establishing and implementing traditional crafts and trades into the curriculum. The archetypal nature of these activities stimulates the students' will forces and connection to the activity giving meaning and purpose. This year has seen the Farm work and gardening program build with students harvesting and cooking food planted and preparing a school lunch weekly. The chickens provide us with a steady supply of eggs also. Senior students pack fruit and vegetable boxes at the farm weekly for Warrah Residential houses and external co-op customers. This provides them with skills in Mathematics, weighing, following a shopping list and monitoring quality as well as promoting team work and task completion.





As part of our commitment to developing knowledge and awareness of the importance of good nutrition we established a Breakfast program for Semester 2 for all students. It had a mixed response but overall students experienced new tastes and flavours and began the day with the social experience communal eating offers.



## Celebrations

The Warrah School year is enriched with the celebration of festivals which bring rhythm and acknowledgement of the outer and inner world to us all. Over the course of the year we celebrated Easter with a Palm Cross walk leading into a short service led by Rosalind Pecover (School Chaplain) followed by lunch shared with all Warrah students, staff and adult clients. Pacific Hills Compassion Club visited us again to play games, share an Easter Egg hunt and put on a short puppet show.



We also enjoyed Apple Picking at Bilpin Orchards, a Games day led by Louise Swanson (Bothmer Gym teacher), the much-loved Mid-Winter Spiral, and a Lantern Walk on a cold winter's evening. This festival is also one of the favourites as we sing our way around the property before sharing soup and freshly made bread with the family. The Annual Spring Fair was a very joyful day with music and a wide variety of activities and stalls.



The year came to a close with Advent stories each day and finally our wonderful Christmas Play and Concert. The concert is always a celebration of our fine students who bring to the speech work, the play and singing such a zest for life and participation that staff and parents alike leave filled with wonder and gratitude at what the students bring to us. At the end of 2017 only one student graduated – Thomas Culling – and he transitioned to the Warrah Youth Discovery Program.

## Student Cohort

We see a significant change in the students coming to Warrah from what historically was our situation. The majority of students attending Warrah have a diagnosis of Autism although we also have students with other physical and intellectual disabilities. This shift requires us to continue to reassess our work and approach so we can meet and educate these young people in the best manner possible. The majority of students are male at this time.



## **Parent Body**

Students come to Warrah from many suburbs in Sydney with the support of the Department of Education Assisted School Travel. This means that while parents are always welcome at school, the majority visit only for Individual Education Planning meetings, for celebrations and festivals. The main form of communication is via a daily Communication Book between teacher and parent and/or email or phone calls to the Principal. It is an effective system and the parents always have a direct line of contact should any queries or concerns arise. Warrah has excellent support from the parent body for the work we do.

## **Student Attendance and Retention**

Enrolment numbers sat steadily at 16 students over the year with 5 students having an annual non-attendance rate between 19.6% and 75%. These absences were due to behavioural issues and serious illness. The other 11 students maintained an absence rate 4.8%.

## **Teacher Support and Professional Development**

Warrah School was a grateful recipient of a Schools Leading Learning Grant this year which enabled us to provide teachers with a wide range of Professional Development and Support. Teachers attended training and mentoring in “Sexuality & Puberty”, “Nutrition & Autism”, Auslan, Learning Support, Fire Training, Bush Fire Training, Senior First Aid, CPR, Multi-Modal Communication Systems for Individuals with Autism and Intellectual Disabilities, Steiner informed Craft work and Painting, and Classroom Management.

Warrah also runs an annual Curative Education Seminar open to all educators with the intention of deepening our understanding of Children with Special Needs and the practical application of insights gained. This year Barbara Baldwin and Dr Lakshmi Prasanna were the guest speakers. The theme was “Autism and the Sense of Self”. Attendees came from Sydney, Adelaide, Melbourne, Canberra, Queensland and New Zealand.

## **Staffing**

Teaching Staff – Ludwig Sevcek, Melissa Date, Marissa Madigan.

Mid-year, Melissa resigned to take up the position of Principal of MacDonald Valley School. She left a very positive legacy having shown commitment and insight into the students which placed them in a strong position to manage the transition.

Ludwig Sevcek also resigned for family reasons. Ludwig served many years at Warrah and his gentle and skilled manner was highly valued. We wish him well and are grateful for all he brought to the students and school. Ludwig was replaced by Peter Rathjen, a highly experienced Special Needs teacher from Victoria. Having secured a new third teacher for 2018, it was decided to combine the classes into two for the remainder of the school year and timetable lessons and activities to ensure all students maintained their individualised programs with minimal stress and change. With the addition of extra assistants, this worked effectively and the students ended the year in a strong position with a positive air of well-being.

Lucy Drummond, Classroom Assistant also resigned to move to the Central Coast after a wonderful contribution to school life, particularly through her craft expertise.

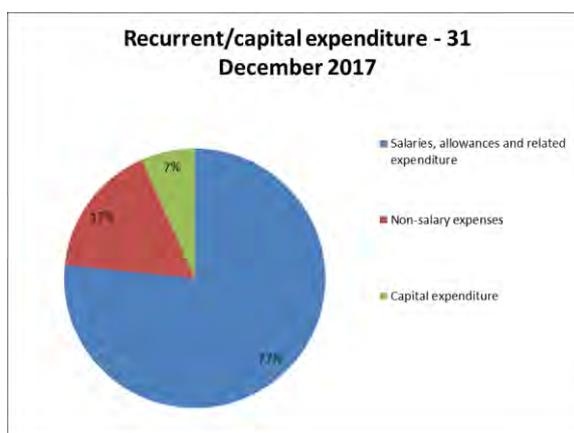
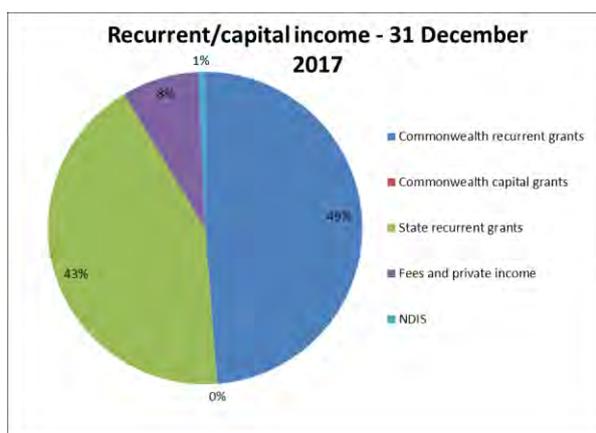
We were able to appoint an Administration Assistant for the School for the first time.

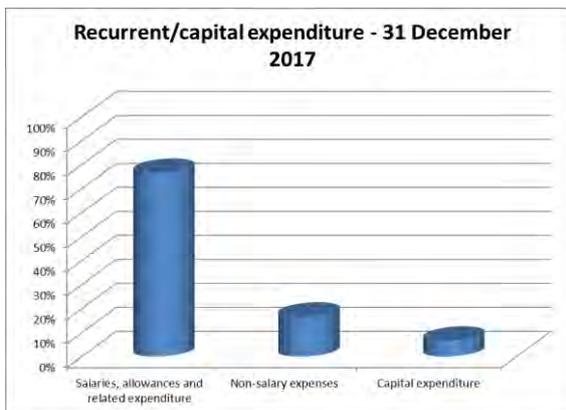
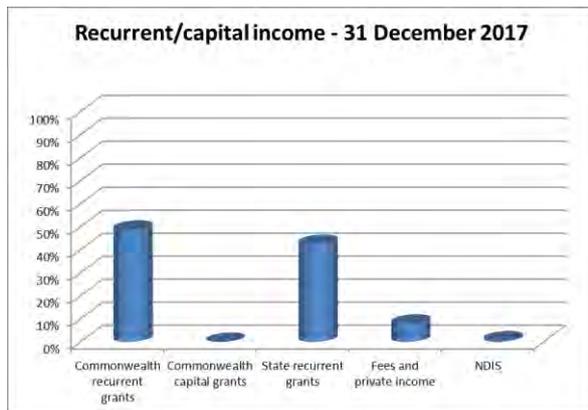


### Strategic Planning Goals

1. Ensure Steiner Curative Principles sit at the heart of the School’s educational approach.
2. Increase enrolments.
3. Address Staff Development and Succession Planning.
4. Consider opportunities for additional Children’s services.

### Finances





## School Fees for 2017



Adult Residential & Day Services  
Warrah Special School K-12  
Warrah Biodynamic Farm & Retail

### Warrah School Fees

**Effective 1 January 2017**

**Tuition fees**

Tuition fees provide tuition 9am to 3pm daily, Monday to Friday for the School Term (excluding Public Holidays and scheduled pupil-free days).

a) Primary student to age 12:	\$915/Term	\$3,660/Annum
b) Junior High School student 13 -15 years of age:	\$1,190/Term	\$4,760/Annum
c) Senior student from 16 - 18 years of age:	\$1,525/Term	\$6,100/Annum

**Activity fees**

School activity fees assist with additional costs for school activities such as swimming, hydrotherapy, cooking, craft work, farming, gardening and music.

a) Primary student to age 12:	\$95/Term	\$380/Annum
b) Junior High School student 13 -15 years of age:	\$130/Term	\$520/Annum
c) Senior student from 16 - 18 years of age:	\$165/Term	\$660/Annum

**Please note:**

- All fees are payable within 14 days of the start of term. If you require an alternative arrangement, please contact Warrah's Business Manager on 9651 2411.
- For families experiencing economic hardship, application may be made to the Warrah Finance Committee for consideration. For further detail, or to make application, please contact Warrah's Business Manager on 9651 2411.
- This Fee Schedule reflects a 4% (approximate) increase. This increase is in line with the education component of the CPI which rose 3.3% over the period September 2015 to September 2016. School fees are indexed annually.
- All families are encouraged to complete a direct debit form for payment of fees. Fees can also be paid by credit card, bank transfer or cheque.

**Enrolment Fee:** \$200

On enrolment, a non-refundable Enrolment Fee is charged and included with the first term's School Fees.

**Bond:** One Term's Fees

The bond will be held for the duration of the student's enrolment at Warrah School. One full term's notice in writing is required for any student to exit from the School. The bond is held as a deposit and is credited against fees due for the student's final term. Where a bond has not been paid and a full term's notice is not given, an additional term's fees will be charged.

## Fund Raising

We were privileged to receive a generous grant from Variety which enabled us to buy a bus with a wheelchair lift thus enabling us to take all students on outings.



We also began a fund raising campaign to create a sensory garden and playground.

## Warrah School Policies

**All policies and procedures for Warrah Special School are available on request.**

### Enrolment procedure

In order to be enrolled at Warrah School a student must be eligible for funding in accordance with the Commonwealth Government's disability funding guidelines for a primary disability diagnosis of Intellectual Disability or Autism.

Enrolments are processed in order of receipt of completed enrolment forms accompanied by the required information and assessments.

### Criteria used for Enrolment:

- There is a suitable vacancy available.
- The educational and support needs of the student can be accommodated by the school and are consistent with the principles of Rudolf Steiner Curative Education.
- The educational and support needs of the student are compatible with current and potential programs and with students already in the class, within reason.

Parents and family are required to support the ethos of Warrah School which is based on Rudolf Steiner Curative Education, to pay fees on time or as agreed in writing and to support all school policies and procedures.

## ENROLMENT POLICY.

### Enrolment Process

1. Enquire and receive information.
2. Make an appointment to visit or attend a School Tour.

3. Bring student to meet teachers and Principal.
4. Discuss criteria, fees and needs.
5. Submit enrolment forms, assessments and previous school reports if applicable.
6. Receive a letter of acceptance.
7. Meet with Business Manager to arrange bond and fee payment.
8. Plan transition to Warrah School.

The full enrolment policy for Warrah Special School is available on request.

- **Student Welfare & Bullying, please Addendum #1**
- **Complaints and Grievances, please see Addendum #2**

## Addendum #1

<b>Title</b>	Dealing with Bullying Behaviour		
<b>Version Number</b>	1.1	<b>Status</b>	Current
<b>Date last amended</b>	March 2015	<b>Review Date</b>	March 2016
<b>Responsible Person</b>	Principal	<b>Approval Authority</b>	CEO
<b>Scope</b>	This policy applies to all members of Warrah School		
<b>Policy Statement</b>			

Warrah Special School works with the indications given by Rudolf Steiner aiming to create a safe and caring environment which promotes personal growth and positive self esteem for all. Bullying behaviour in any form does not belong in such an environment where positive assertive communication is promoted and difference is valued. Warrah School does not tolerate bullying.

Warrah aims to

- To ensure the protection and support of the child who is feeling victimised by assisting them to explore strategies of response towards harassment.
- To change the behaviour of the bully – both for the sake of other future victims and for the sake of the bully's future.
- To deter or dissuade other students from engaging in bullying.

### Procedures

It is necessary to distinguish between the two main forms of bullying which may be pertinent to the special school situation – *malign* and *non-malign*. (Rigby, 1997). Different approaches may be adopted depending on the type of bullying which is occurring.

*Malign bullying* is that which seeks consciously to do harm to someone.

*Non-malign bullying* is a form of “non-conscious” bullying which is less “obvious” and often of longer duration. The bully may not be as obvious as his/her actions are more subtle. There can be more than one “victim” involved.

### What are the effects of bullying?

Regardless of the “type” of bullying involved, the results for the victim are similar. They can include:

**Emotional** - mood swings, sleep disturbance, depression

**Psychosomatic** – negative body language

**Social** – withdrawal, increase sibling rivalry

**Behavioural** – outbursts of temper, problematic behaviour, decline in work standards, truancy.

### What can we do to prevent bullying?

Teachers make explicit the rights and responsibilities relevant to children through class activities/discussion. More specifically, teachers will:

- help create a climate which changes from “don’t do it” to “it’s O.K. to tell”.
- Involve students in using problem solving for conflict situations.
- Support students to identify bullying, as victim, perpetrator and as witness.

## 1. RIGHTS

### CHILDREN

- Have a right to be treated with dignity and respect.
- To feel safe at school.

### TEACHERS

- To teach in a friendly safe and satisfying school.
- To be supported in all areas of behaviour management.

### PARENTS

- To expect that something will be done about incidents of bullying.

## 2. RESPONSIBILITIES

### CHILDREN

- To respect others in speech and deed
- Keep our hands and feet to ourselves
- To work out problems in a fair manner
- To refuse involvement in any bullying situations
- To support one another by speaking up.

### SUPERVISION TEACHERS

- To be thoughtful, courteous and respectful of children at all times
- To reflect in their behaviour, the values that are expected of students
- To make efforts to remove occasions for bullying by active patrolling during supervision duty
- To be observant of signs of distress or suspected incidents of bullying
- To take steps to help victims and remove sources of distress without placing the victim at further risk
- To communicate relevant observations to involved teachers, to parents and to college.

### CLASS TEACHER

- To be aware of and prompt for supervision responsibilities
- To foster appropriate co-operative learning approaches which can promote positive self-esteem and fruitful peer relations
- To be thoughtful, courteous and respectful of children at all times
- To reflect in their behaviour, the values that are expected of students

### PARENTS

- Being supportive of the underlying philosophy at Warrah School
- Being supportive of teachers in their endeavours to improve student relations and welfare by being aware of signs of distress in their child
- Taking an active interest in their child's social life
- Communicating with their child's class teacher and encouraging their child, if possible, to also communicate with their class teacher or other staff member about a bullying incident
- Encouraging their child *not* to retaliate
- Being willing to attend interviews if their child is involved in any bullying incident.

<b>Definitions</b>
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**Bullying** – It is an act of aggression causing embarrassment, pain or discomfort to another. It can be the repeated use of:

- physical aggression
- the use of put-down comments or insults
- name calling
- damage to the person's property
- deliberate exclusion from activities
- the setting-up of humiliating experiences
- "ganging up" of a group of children against one child

## Addendum #2

<b>Title</b>	Complaints		
<b>Policy Number</b>	4.1		
<b>Version Number</b>	1.1	<b>Status</b>	Current
<b>Date last amended</b>	October 2017	<b>Review Date</b>	October 2020
<b>Responsible Person</b>	CEO	<b>Approval Authority</b>	Board
<b>Scope</b>	This policy applies to Adult Services.		
<b>Related Documents and References</b>	DSS – Standard 4 – Feedback & Complaints		

### Authority

- the New South Wales Disability Services Act 1993 and the New South Wales Disability Services Standards.
- the New South Wales Community Services [Complaints, Appeals and Monitoring] Act 1993.

### Standards in Action, Second Edition 2011.

- “When a person wants to make a complaint, the service provider will make sure the person’s views are respected, that they are informed as the complaint is dealt with, and have the opportunity to be involved in the resolution process”.  
[Standards in Action 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 2011, Standard 4, Feedback and complaints]
- “Each person is treated fairly by the service provider when making a complaint”.  
[Standards in Action 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 2011, Standard 4, Feedback and complaints, *Practice Requirement 1*]
- “Each person is provided with information and support to make a complaint”.  
[Standards in Action 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 2011, Standard 4, Feedback and complaints, *Practice Requirement 2*]
- “Each service provider has the capacity and capability to handle and manage complaints”.  
[Standards in Action 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 2011, Standard 4, Feedback and complaints, *Practice Requirement 3*]

<b>Policy Principles</b>
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The following principles capture the spirit and intent of the policy and procedures that will be implemented by Warrah to efficiently and effectively respond to complaints, and to ensure that the quality of services is continuously improved [from good to better within available resources].

- **INFORMING:** there is no point in having a complaint handling system if the individuals expected to use it don’t know about it. All service recipients/potential service recipients and ‘interested parties’ should be provided with a copy of Warrah’s complaint management policy and procedures. This information should also be available on request, in alternative formats such as large print and in brochure formats.
- **SUPPORTING:** persons who wish to make a complaint might need some help in putting their complaint into words, obtaining the assistance of an interpreter, or an advocate or friend to support them. Warrah staff should provide all assistance and support necessary to ensure the complaint is made.

- **RECEIVING:** complaints need to be accepted politely and with respect. Persons wishing to make a complaint will be deterred from doing so if they feel that they will not be taken seriously.
  - Warrah staff when receiving a complaint should not be judgemental, be defensive, or offer their personal opinion as to whether or not they think that the complaint is well-founded, and should be helpful and respectful of the linguistic or cultural background of the person lodging the complaint.
  - The staff person receiving the complaint should ascertain whether the person wishes to lodge a formal complaint [either verbally or in writing]. If it is not clear from what the person has said, it is important to ask the question: “would you like me to treat this as a complaint”?
  - If the answer is yes, then the person is to be invited to complete the ‘Complaint Form’ or a member of staff may complete the form if appropriate. The procedures for complaint handling must then be followed.
- **PROTECTING:** Warrah will ensure that the person is protected against recrimination or reprisals if they exercise their right to complain. The complaints system will be fair to all parties [ie. the person making the complaint and Warrah’s staff] and follow the principles of ‘natural justice’ [ie. staff must not jump to conclusions about where the fault, if any, may lie].
- **RESOLVING:** the emphasis of the complaints system should be on resolving problems at the earliest possible stage. The earlier the better for everyone.
- **REVIEWING:** persons who are dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint should be able to request a further review by the Board of Directors.

#### **Policy Statement**

Each person who receives a service from Warrah will be encouraged and supported as necessary, to make complaints about the type or quality of services provided to him or her.

The right to raise service issues or complain about how the service is provided extends to ‘interested parties’ such as the person’s family, friends, advocate and guardian, and to other members of the community who can demonstrate a genuine interest in the life and circumstances of the person (e.g. other service providers).

The right to complain or raise service issues includes ‘Community Visitors’ appointed by the Minister for Disability Services, Warrah staff complaining on behalf of a person receiving services, and to persons who feel that they are eligible to receive a service from Warrah but who are denied access.

Warrah will provide appropriate avenues for clients to state and have resolved to their satisfaction any complaints about the service they receive, without fear of penalty or victimisation.

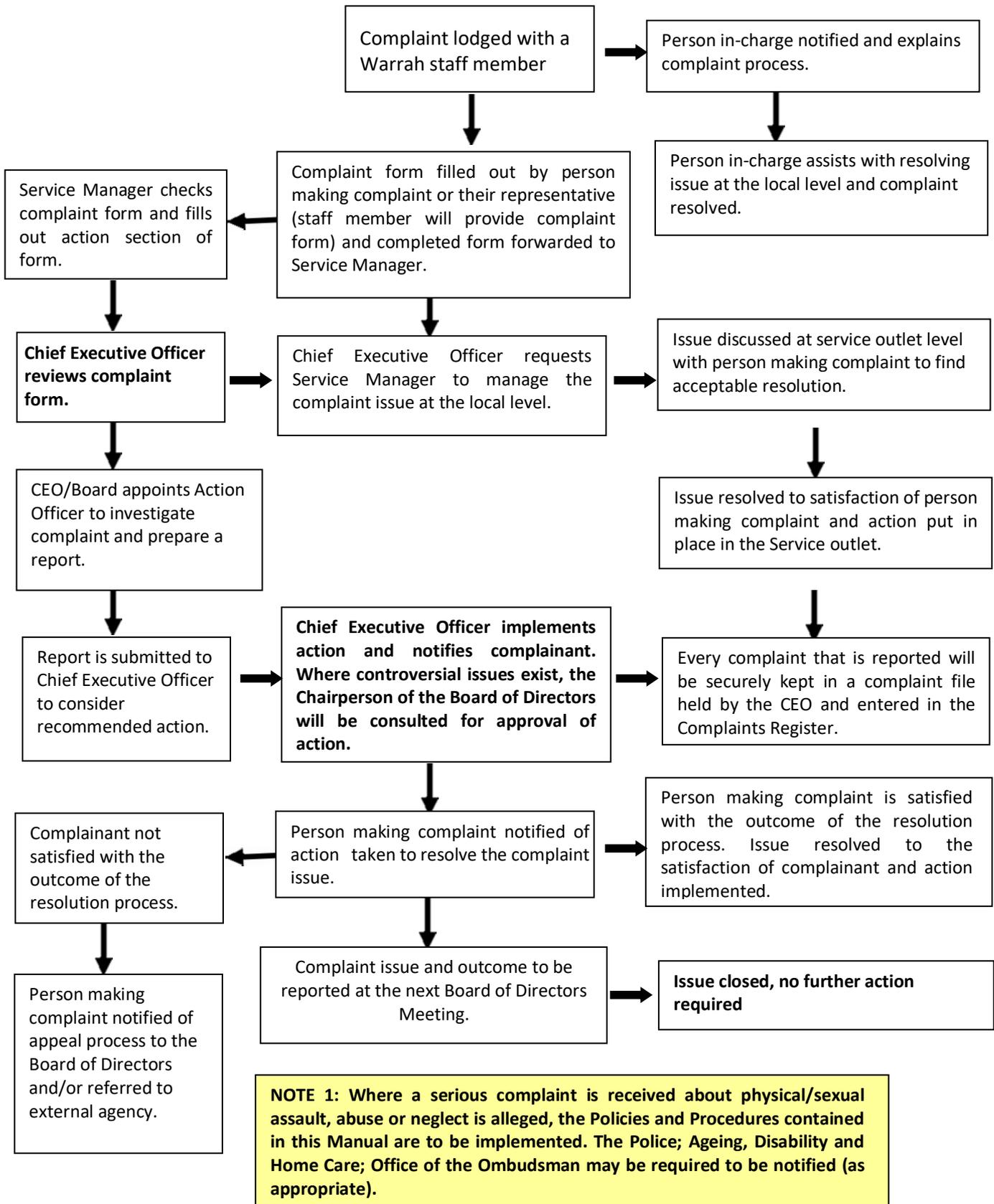
The complaint management processes are designed to achieve resolution at the earliest possible time and provide an opportunity to Warrah to review service delivery and achieve service improvement.

All complaints shall be handled according to policies regarding privacy, dignity and confidentiality.

Where a matter cannot be resolved within Warrah, then it may be taken to an independent mediator.

Complaints are a mechanism for continuous improvements in all services.

## Appendix A - SUMMARY OF PROCEDURES FOR COMPLAINT HANDLING



### **Awareness of the Complaint Process**

- All Service Managers will ensure that the complaint process described in this policy is clearly explained and understood by staff during their induction to Warrah.
- All Service Managers will reinforce to staff the confidentiality aspects of complaints and that staff may not disclose (at any stage of the complaint) any details of a complaint that they have received except to report it to the appropriate staff member.
- The Supervisor in each service outlet will ensure that clients in the service outlet are informed and are regularly reminded of the complaint process.
- Warrah staff are responsible for openly communicating Warrah's complaints process in the following forums on a routine basis:
  - Client Meetings;
  - Ongoing training and support to clients in making complaints. Both formal and informal methods may be used to facilitate this goal (eg training sessions and photo version complaints display); and
  - Induction of new clients (this may include parents /guardians) into a service outlet.
- Warrah provides access to the Complaint Handling Brochures in:
  - The Main Office;
  - Each Warrah service outlet;
  - Is included in the Induction package for clients accepted into an Warrah service; and
  - Provided when requested by families, external advocates, guardians or other stakeholder.
- Warrah provides training to staff about Complaint Handling, within structured in-service training programs.

### **General Complaint Handling Process**

All staff at Warrah are required to educate clients regarding the complaints procedure, staff will carry this out at weekly client meetings.

- Warrah staff who identify concerns about a client's welfare are required to raise these with the coordinator. If the staff member does not consider an adequate response is made, the matter should be raised by the staff member with the next appropriate management level.
- Concern about a client's welfare will be handled as a complaint and investigated as outlined in this policy.
- When a complaint involves alleged serious criminal behaviour, official misconduct, that endangers the health or safety of a person (adult or child) with a disability or any other staff member or stakeholder, the complaint will be referred to the appropriate external agency.
- Warrah ensures that the staff complaints and disputes process observes the rights of Warrah employees without conflicting or disrupting the rights of its clients.
- Warrah will receive complaints in any format - written and verbal; via correspondence, email, over the phone or in person. The manner by which the complaint is received will not influence the priority afforded to, or quality of, the response provided.
- Warrah will accept anonymous complaints and investigate these as far as possible. Anonymous complaints will be treated with the same priority as other complaints.
- Warrah retains a specific Complaints form which complainants are encouraged to utilise; however it is not necessary to complete the form to lodge a complaint.
- Complaints can be made to any Warrah staff member. Complaints investigation and management will be coordinated by the appropriate level of management.
- Warrah encourages complainants to discuss arising issues with the coordinator in the first instance, or the person delivering the service. All complaints will be referred to the most senior manager of each department.

- Warrah will assist complainants who require assistance in making a complaint including assisting them to access an interpreter, or advocate if needed.
- All complaints will be recorded in a register and copies kept in relevant files.
- Complaints received by Warrah will be handled in a manner that protects the privacy and dignity of complainants, and clients and ensures that information is only handled by individuals required to manage the complaint. Consent to provide information to a third party or to proceed with an enquiry into a complaint should always be obtained.
- Warrah will consult with the complainant to identify how the complainant wishes the complaint to be handled and the outcomes the complainant is seeking without reference of the matter to third parties. However, where the conduct complained about amounts to serious misconduct (e.g. serious risk to the health and safety of clients or staff), allegations of criminal behaviour or abuse Warrah has an obligation to deal with the matter under the relevant rules and to report the matter to the Police or other external agency for investigation without consent from the complainant.
- Warrah will utilise the complaint process to improve service delivery. The data from complaints will be incorporated into the planning and review.
- Warrah is committed to managing complaints, consistent with the principles of 'natural justice'.
- Warrah will ensure that all parties to a complaint are aware of the complaint handling process.
- Warrah will facilitate the complaint handling process in a transparent manner.
- Warrah will provide all parties with equal opportunity to participate in the process.
- Warrah will treat all parties in a respectful manner.
- Warrah will provide a response that outlines reasons for decisions that have been made.
- All parties to a complaint will have the opportunity to provide statements without fear of a negative reaction or victimisation. A person should not be reprimanded or treated unfairly in any way for making a complaint.
- Regular service or communication with the complainant should not be altered in any way as a result of the complaint, unless this is an agreed outcome or has been specifically requested by the complainant.
- A person who takes or threatens to take detrimental action against another person because a complaint has been made, may be found in breach of a criminal offence, as outlined in the Bullying Policy & Procedures document, depending on the situation, this can then be referred to external agencies.
- Warrah staff members are entitled to be treated with respect and courtesy when handling complaints. Warrah staff members are required to respond to all complainants in a respectful and courteous manner, in accordance with the Warrah Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct.
- Complainant's behaviour that can be considered as threatening, rude or of a harassing nature is unacceptable. If an employee is found to have engaged in this behaviour misconduct, disciplinary procedures may apply. A complainant's emotional state and/or communication skills will be considered, however complaints are more effectively resolved when mutual respect and courtesy is maintained at all intervals of the complaints process.
- Complainant's that experience difficulty with expressive communication with should be encouraged to put their concerns in writing, with referral to appropriate resources to assist them to do this as appropriate.
- Warrah staff will always ensure that concerns about the safety and wellbeing of a client or staff member are looked into, regardless of the manner in which they are expressed.
- All clients, staff and interested parties will be made aware of, and have access to complaints procedures.
- Warrah will endeavour to resolve all complaints at the most local level to where the issue has arisen

### **Informal Complaint Handling Procedure**

When a staff member receives an Initial Verbal Complaint:

- The staff member receiving the complaint informs the person in-charge on duty to discuss the issue with the person raising the issue/complaint.
- The person in-charge on duty identifies and clarifies the person's complaint and the outcomes expected by the complainant;
- Where the issue can be resolved through mutual agreement in the service outlet, then this should be undertaken and the informal complaint has been resolved;
- Where appropriate an Incident Report may need to be completed.
- Staff will inform their coordinator
- Coordinator will record the informal complaint
- All informal complaints will be reported in coordinator's meetings

### **Formal Complaint Handling Procedure**

- Where the complaint cannot be mutually resolved in the service outlet, the person in-charge on Duty will inform the complainant of Warrah's complaints handling processes and procedures;
- The person will be provided a 'Complaint Form', which summarises:
  - the complaint;
  - the outcomes expected by the complainant; and
  - provides contact information for the complainant.
- The person in-charge on Duty will assist the person with completing the Complaint Form where needed;
- The 'Complaint Form' will be forwarded to the Service Manager as soon as it has been received. This should occur as soon as possible and by no later than 48 hours after receiving the complaint [if complaint lodged during the weekend].
- In the case of very serious complaints [eg. criminal activities or allegations of physical, sexual or emotional abuse] this must reported immediately to the Service Manager.

### **RESPONSIBILITIES FOR COMPLAINT HANDLING**

#### **Service Managers:**

- All formal complaints will be reported to the CEO
- Very serious complaints must be immediately reported to the Chief Executive Officer (refer to iv below for examples of serious complaints).
- Where the complaint is not a serious matter, review 'Complaint Form' and determines if immediate action can be taken to resolve the complaint;
- If appropriate, seeks to immediately resolve the complaint and verbally advises complainant of action being taken, and in writing where requested;
- Decide whether the complaint is serious and requires the Chief Executive Officer to be notified immediately. A complaint would be considered serious if it is:
  - potentially involving a criminal action such as assault, abuse or fraud that needs to be investigated by the Police;
  - potentially related to a complaint about neglect of client needs;
  - about the unprofessional or unethical behaviour of a staff member (breaches Policies and Procedures of Warrah).
- Notes immediate action taken or recommendations if any, and forwards Complaint Form to the Chief Executive Officer. This should occur as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after a complaint has been received;

**Warrah Chief Executive Officer shall:**

- Consider information in the 'Complaint Form'. The Chief Executive Officer determines if immediate action can be taken to resolve the complaint;
- If the complaint has been resolved, signs-off the complaint form for entry in the complaint register, as completed. Attach any correspondence that has been forwarded to the complainant.
- Where action taken has not lead to resolution or the complaint is complex, the Chief Executive Officer may appoint a senior staff member or an external person as "Action Officer" to be responsible for resolving the complaint;
- Set time frame during which the complaint concern must be investigated and responded to [generally set at a maximum of 4 weeks] by the nominated 'Action Officer';
- Discuss the complaint with the Chairperson of the Board of Directors, if the issue is complex or needs to be managed independently of Warrah. Where the complaint is serious and involves notification of the Police, the Chairperson of the Board of Directors will be informed immediately of the complaint;
- Ensures that all complaints and the outcomes of complaints are appropriately recorded on the 'Complaint form Sheet' and that the Chief Executive Officer where appropriate:
  - prepares a monthly report for the Board of Directors to inform them and up-date actions taken regarding complaints received;
  - maintains accurate records in the event of further investigations;
  - monitors trends and identify staff who may require additional supervision, support or training;
  - assess, reviews and monitors the adequacy or otherwise of current policies, procedures and practices.
- In those instances where the complainant seeks a review or appeals a complaint decision, the Chief Executive Officer will forward the request to the Chairman of the Board of Directors.
- Where a complaint cannot be resolved, provides assistance to the complainant or refers the complainant to an external body for examination of the complaint, such as:
  - Metro North Region, Disability Services, Ageing Disability and Home Care, Department of Human Services NSW;
  - NSW Ombudsman;
  - Complaints Resolution and referral Service;
  - Intellectual Disability Rights Service;
  - Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission.

**Action Officer (Appointed by CEO/Board of Directors):**

The Action Officer appointed to investigate a complaint will be responsible for:

- Investigating the complaint in an objective manner, which will include;
  - accessing/liasing with all relevant stakeholders, internal and external to the organisation;
  - generates an acknowledgment letter of received complaint from Warrah within 5 working days and sending this to the complainant;
  - preparing a report to the Chief Executive Officer which includes:
    - A brief summary of the complaint and the events leading up to same;
    - Background information on current policies, procedures and protocols that are relevant to the complaint;
    - Details on exactly what occurred including actions taken by involved staff;
    - Details on what was/not done which should/could have been done at the time, and the reasons why this was the case;
    - Identifies any potential disciplinary action, where the actions of a staff member may be the source of the complaint; and
    - Details on what steps if any have now been taken, or could/should be taken in the future to prevent the occurrence of the same or a similar situation.

- Updates the Chief Executive Officer during the course of the investigation;
- Contacting and maintaining contact with the complainant throughout the investigation without pre-empting the outcome of the investigation;
- Forwarding the report of the investigation and all other documentation or material associated with the complaint to the Chief Executive Officer, including a draft of the formal response to be sent to the complainant.

#### **Complaint Documentation:**

All complaints will be recorded and copies kept in relevant files. Accurate written records must be kept of all communications that form part of the complaint process. This includes notes taken of conversations between the parties which relate to management of the complaint and all agreed actions and decisions made in relation to the complaint. All records must be marked "Confidential".

- Only the people who are directly involved in the complaint, or in helping to resolve it, are to have access to information about the complaint.
- All documentation of complaints managed under this policy will be held by the CEO.
- Complaint documentation is to be kept separate from client or staff files.
- Complaints will be kept confidential and will be dealt with in an agreed time frame (no longer than six weeks).
- Confidentiality and Recording: the privacy and confidentiality of parties will be respected to the extent practicable and appropriate; accurate records will be kept by each staff member dealing with the complaint, including recording of reasons for all significant decisions.

#### **Board of Directors:**

The Board of Directors will be responsible for:

- Oversight of the actions of Warrah in managing complaints;
- Review/monitor complaint handling practices;
- Hear an Appeal about a Complaint Outcome;
- Supervise the investigation of serious complaints involving suspected criminal or corrupt conduct; and
- Consider proactive measures that will address issues related to any consistent areas of complaint.

#### **Responsibilities in the Complaint Process:**

- All Employees and Stakeholders are responsible for:
  - Receiving complaints and immediately after receipt of the complaint reporting complaints to the immediate supervisor or senior manager.
  - Advising people of their right to make a complaint where appropriate
  - Cooperating with investigations and responding to requests for information in a timely manner;
  - Respecting those individuals involved in the complaint handling process and maintaining privacy and confidentiality at all times.
- All levels of management are responsible for:
  - Exercising primary responsibility for receiving and resolving complaints and any conflict in their areas in a timely and fair way.
  - Immediately advising the senior manager of the department that a complaint has been received.
  - Advising people of their right to make a complaint where appropriate.
  - Providing advice and assistance to people who have a complaint.

- Cooperating with investigations and responding to requests for information in a timely manner;
  - Maintain accurate documentation and follow up.
  - Respecting those individuals involved in the complaint handling process and maintaining privacy and confidentiality at all times.
  - The CEO will be advised of complaints.
- Complainants are responsible for:
    - Providing a clear and honest account of their concerns and their expectations for the outcome of their complaint, including providing all relevant information and documents to assist in the investigation and/or resolution of the matter.
    - Engaging openly in the complaint handling process, including participating in discussion with other parties to resolve the concerns.
    - Cooperating with and responding to Warrah requests for information in a timely manner.
    - Respecting those individuals involved in the complaint handling process and maintaining privacy and confidentiality at all times.
  - Respondents are responsible for:
    - Providing a clear and honest account of their concerns and their expectations for the outcome of their complaint, including providing all relevant information and documents to assist in the investigation and/or resolution of the matter.
    - Engaging openly in the complaint handling process, including participating in discussion with other parties to resolve the concerns.
    - Cooperating with and responding to Warrah requests for information in a timely manner.
    - Respecting those individuals involved in the complaint handling process and maintaining privacy and confidentiality at all times.

### **Time-Line of Complaints Management**

Complaints received by Warrah will be responded to in a timely manner. Consideration of factors that may influence the response timeframe, such as potential risks posed to a person or agency will be considered.

Warrah will acknowledge complaints as soon as possible following receipt of the complaint. Acknowledgement will include advising the complainant of the Warrah staff who will be handling the complaint and an anticipated time when that person will make further contact. Acknowledgement may be made in person, by phone, email or in writing. Timeframe: within 1 day of receipt.

Response to a complaint should commence as soon as practicable, within two weeks of receipt. For complex complaints and complaints of a sensitive nature it may be necessary to investigate the matter or seek information from external parties. When a matter is going to take a longer period of time to resolve, the complainant should be kept informed of progress at regular intervals, at least every week or as agreed with the complainant. Timeframe: within 2 weeks of receipt

Finalisation of a complaint will be dependent on the response required. Complaints that are unambiguous in nature should aim to have an outcome within two weeks of the commencement of investigation. Complaints of a complex and sensitive nature may take a longer period to finalise, dependent on results of any investigation or enquiries made. The complainant should be contacted at the end of the complaint handling process to communicate the resolution achieved, any agreed outcomes and to discuss any ongoing issues that may remain.

Timeframe: simple - within 4 weeks of receipt

Timeframe: complex - within 6 weeks of receipt

Follow up of a complaint resolution or outcome is will be undertaken by Warrah within 4weeks of finalisation to ensure that the resolution/outcome agreed upon has resulted in maintaining or improving a client's service and or workplace environment. This should occur within four weeks of the finalisation of a complaint investigation. After a resolution has been reached, written or verbal reports will be made available to all parties concerned.

### **Process of Appeal**

A complainant may not be satisfied with the initial response provided to a complaint. In such instances Warrah will review the complaint handling process followed in the initial response and may further investigate matters and/or reconsider the original decision when appropriate.

### **External Agencies for Complaints**

There are a number of external mechanisms for complaints resolution such the Ageing Disability and Homecare, The NSW Ombudsman, and the Complaints Resolution and Referral Service.

Metro North Region  
Disability Services,  
Ageing Disability and Home Care,  
Department of Human Services NSW  
Level 5, 93 George St  
PARRAMATTA, NSW 2150  
Phone: (02) 9841 9500

Service Support Coordinator, Disability Carers and Mental Health,  
NSW / ACT State and Territory Office  
Australian Government FaHCSIA  
Phone (02) 8255 7792

Complaints Resolution and Referral Service (CRRS)  
Locked Bag 2705  
Strawberry Hills NSW 2012  
Free call: 1800 880 052  
Email: [crrs@pwd.org.au](mailto:crrs@pwd.org.au)  
Fax: 02 9318 1372

Intellectual Disability Rights Service  
2C/199 Regent Street, Redfern NSW 2016  
Phone: (02) 9318 0144  
Toll Free: 1800 666611 (within NSW)

NSW Ombudsman  
Level 24, 580 George Street,  
Sydney NSW 2000  
Phone: (02) 9286 1000

Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission  
Level 8, Piccadilly Tower  
133 Castlereagh Street  
Sydney NSW 2000  
Phone: (02) 9284 9600  
Toll Free: 1300 369 711

## Definitions

**Complaint** - A claim by an interested party that Warrah has acted unreasonably towards a person:

- by either providing or not providing a service;
- by withdrawing or varying a service;
- in the way in which Warrah has provided a service;
- in the way Warrah administers a service.

[Adapted from: Section 12 of the Community Services (Complaints, Appeals and Monitoring) Act.]

**Unreasonable Conduct** - If the service provided does not conform to the norms and standards of practice in the relevant disability service. What is important is what another competent, diligent service provider would have done in equivalent circumstances, and what fair-minded observers would be likely to consider reasonable conduct.