

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre

Section 6

Operational

Front Counter Policy

Policy	Front Counter Policy
Sub heading;	Operational
Status:	Operational
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Approved by:	Management Committee
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Please note that this policy has been edited for security and safety reasons in order to be displayed on www.newtowncentre.org

Policy

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre is committed to establishing and maintaining a safe and healthy workplace for all employees and those visiting the Centre.

The demand at the front counter has seen a significant increase in use. There has also been a noted increase in the number of people presenting with challenging and aggressive behaviour. The front counter was reviewed in December 2008 resulting in the clarifying of existing policy and inclusion of some new policies to provide a guide for best service.

1. The Mutual Respect Statement

Acts as a code of conduct for the front counter and is displayed at the front counter, so service users are aware of what behaviour is expected of them and what their rights are. The statement is as follows:

We ask that everyone participate in and share the space at the front counter by...

Treating others with RESPECT:

- If anyone is physically or verbally abusive towards other staff or visitors they will be asked to stop and may be required to leave the Centre
- When service users are using the phone it is their responsibility to be aware of other people needing to use the phone. We ask that people please limit their phone calls to 5 minutes or less if there are people waiting.

Making it a SAFE place to be:

- Everyone has the right to feel safe inside the Centre. Safe from injury, fear or threats

SUPPORTING and being SUPPORTED by Newtown Neighbourhood Centre:

- If there are services or information that service users need they are free to ask

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre

Section 6

Operational

- If service users have a complaint about a service they have received they are free to talk to a staff person or write a letter to the Centre. They have the right to make a complaint without worrying about losing the service or being treated badly.

Following the RULES of the Centre

No Smoking inside the Centre

No Drinking Alcohol inside the Centre

No Taking Illegal Drugs inside the Centre

2. Resources

The Front Counter provides resources for use by the general public. Whilst NNC has resources/equipment that it offers to front counter clients to use it does not aim to replace other services that are funded to supply these services. NNC staff at all times encourages or teaches people to utilise these independently. The policies surrounding their use are listed below:

2.1 Public Phone (For local calls, 1800 and 1300 numbers)

It is the responsibility of the person on the phone to be aware of other people needing to use the phone. NNC ask that people limit their phone calls to 5 minutes if other people are waiting. Often a staff member may need to check how many people are waiting and who is first so that things go smoothly.

2.2 Computer (the following points are a guide for using the computer)

- The computer is provided for free use by the community
- It is intended to help people find out about accommodation, employment, training opportunities, emailing and finding information
- The computer is not suitable for downloading music or visiting offensive sites or visiting sites that other people may find unacceptable
- Staff have the right to ask people what they are using the computer for, and if it is not acceptable to ask that people stop using the computer.
- Staff ask that people be aware of others who may be waiting to use the computer. If there is a queue use is limited to 20 minutes from when they started.
- Staff request that people do not listen to music on the computer

2.3 Mobile and long distance calls

One of the office phones has an extension cord that allows it to be used by people at the front counter. Staff members will ascertain what the call is being made for and decide if the call can be made based on the following guidelines for the use of the phone:

What it can and can't be used for

- accommodation needs eg, calling boarding houses, real estates or housing services out of the Sydney metropolitan area.
- Employment
- It can also be used in exceptional circumstances, for example, if someone needs to ring a rehab, jail or DoCS, that are located out of the Sydney metropolitan area.
- It is not permitted for calling friends and family
- It is at the individual workers discretion to permit and limit use of the phone.

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre

Section 6

Operational

When calling

- It is best for the worker to make the phone call and then put the person on the phone
- If you are calling a service it may be best to ask them to call back on the public phone at the front counter.
- Phone calls must be kept brief due to cost as well as demand on the office phone.

2.4 Photocopying and Faxing

- Photocopying will cost 10c a page
- Faxing will be 50c for 3 pages or less. Staff will only fax a maximum of 3 pages.

These resources are meant to aid in the seeking of accommodation and employment or other issues deemed a priority by NNC staff. It is up to the staff member's discretion as to the amount of photocopying and faxing that is provided. If it is a high priority and the person has no capacity to pay, it is once again up to the staff member's discretion to allow the free use of these resources.

2.5 Money

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre does not lend or give people money. Staff should refer people to services that provide financial assistance.

2.6 Storing Property

- The Newtown Neighbourhood Centre can store small amounts of property for up to three days.
- We can only store what we can safely keep in our office
- Any property will be stored under the colour printer in the front office or in this general area
- It is a requirement that people tell us what they are storing, why and how long they would like us to hold it for.
- We reserve the right to refuse storage.
- We will not store bags that can be easily carried.
- We will not take any responsibility for items that go missing while property is stored with us.
- The staff member will take down the person's details and the item being held. This form can be found to the right of the front counter.

3. Safety Policies and Procedures

The following policies and procedures have been put in place to ensure that the front counter is a safe and healthy workplace for all employees, students, volunteers, visitors and service users.

3.1 Staffing Levels

- The front counter is only to be opened when there are two or more employees in the main office
- The front counter will be closed between 1.00 - 2.00pm for staff to take a lunch break
- Staff should inform the Executive Officer if they are going to be on the premises after 6.00pm or on weekends
- Staff should write their whereabouts on the staff board whenever they are out of the building, and this should be done the day before, if they will be absent early or all of the next day.
- Students will not spend the entirety of their placement at the front counter.

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre

Section 6

Operational

- Only experienced volunteers will work at the front counter
- Banking should not be done at any regular time and two employees should take cash and cheques to bank.

3.2 Security

NNC employees should adopt the following practices relating to their security:

- Be aware of other employees in the building
- Keep the doors to all offices closed at all times
- Do not display or count cash where it can be seen by members of public
- Staff must wear the personal duress button if working in the building on their own
- Staff must also wear the personal duress button if working in non office space
- Handbags and valuables must be kept out of site and away from doors

3.3 Dealing with an aggressive or potentially violent client at the front counter

If a service user is physically or verbally abusive towards staff, other services users or the premises, the staff member will ask the person to stop the behaviour and explain why the behaviour is not appropriate. If the behaviour continues or worsens any staff member can ask a client to leave the premises and not return for the rest of the day.

Other staff members who witness what is happening at the front counter will take the following action:

- The staff member will make their way to the front counter to provide support to the person handling the situation.
- If the situation is escalating ask them XXXX
- If the situation is OK they will say XXXX. In this case stay in the background but stay aware that they might be working with a difficult client.
- OR If they need you to call the police they will say, XXXX
- The staff member will then call the police by dialling 000 and pressing the duress alarm.
- Once the police have been called this means we will need to follow the lock down procedure

Lock Down Procedure

The Lock Down Procedure is enacted once the Police have been called for an aggressive or potentially violent client.

All staff must then follow the Lock Down Procedure.

If you need someone to call the police because you feel unsafe and cannot get away from a situation proceed with following process:

- Say to another staff member XXXX
- The staff member will then call the police on 000 and pressing the duress alarm and follow the lockdown procedures.

3.4 Safe Working

It is the responsibility of Newtown Neighbourhood Centre employees to contribute to a safe working environment for themselves and fellow employees. Employees should report any hazards

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre

Section 6

Operational

immediately using the hazard/incident procedures. Other policies that must be read and understood by staff, volunteers and students who are utilising the front counter are:

- Banning Policy
- Duress Alarm Policy and Procedure
- Critical Incident Procedure