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The Working Centre
Workplace Violence & Harassment Policy and Procedure
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The Working Centre is a volunteer inspired venture that seeks to give individuals and groups access to tools and opportunities to become involved in the building of community. The ideas behind The Working Centre revolve around the basic building blocks necessary to create community.

Some of these ideas, as we have defined them include access to tools, work as gift, respect for the environment, serving others, local democracy, reclaiming buildings and turning them into common public spaces where all are welcome, and the development of sustainable community projects that serve community needs by involving people in the core of the work. We serve people who are often left out of our society, walking beside people, loving past complex behaviours, recognizing the deep humanity of each person in our midst.

Our Commitment and Approach

Our commitment and approach to creating safe and welcoming spaces is to build and nurture positive relationships.

The Working Centre is committed to nurturing welcoming, accepting and safe places. Violent behaviour is unacceptable from anyone; we have a commitment to peace making. This behaviour can be physical or verbal, and includes racist and sexualized offences. We acknowledge and recognize the reality for many people that we serve is that the breakdown in relationship is often the result of trauma and life experiences. Our approach is to find ways to invite people into respectful, caring and non-violent practises, by building and fostering relationships from the beginning.

We have always committed to a philosophy of loving a person past unacceptable behaviours that invites healing for people who are isolated and excluded in our society. Creating such an environment of trust, respectful presence and deep compassion for each person often mitigates situations that might otherwise break down into aggression or violence. Physical violence, verbal abuse, racism, deep disrespect for the other – each of these is a breakdown of this trust.

The extraordinary availability and growing use of chemically produced street drugs is generating new complexities of homelessness, violence, and anger. This adds new challenges to an already complex environment. We continue to explore our best approaches – how do we not give up on the ideas of radical love and unconditional positive regard followed with a trauma-informed lens, while also holding common spaces that are respectful and as safe as possible?

The Team

In our work we support the building of those complex and supportive relationships through extensive collaboration within our staff and volunteer teams. Relationships within the team are fostered and supported through the same respectful and accepting approach that we use with the people we serve. In our spaces, we are continually communicating with our team members as we work collaboratively to intentionally create welcoming and accepting environments, as well as to respond to complex situations as they arise. The team approach transcends our spaces as we foster a collaborative team approach between projects and all the spaces of The Working Centre, by designating staff to sit on broader teams, and discuss issues. We work as a team to constantly keep an eye to safety in our workplaces, we impart skills to new staff and volunteers on handling complex situations, and we depend on the ideas and thoughtfulness of staff and volunteers to stay alert to these realities.

Our work environment is non-hierarchical and we rely on a team model. In complex situations, we trust the team to support one another, often with one person taking a lead role to ensure others feel supported and safe. We refer to the lead person as holding the "anchor" role. While we depend on the good judgement of the staff involved in the direct situation, there is always an organizational lead person available for assistance and advice as needed. Our non-hierarchical model means that communication is lateral and widespread.

While we are always working strategically to de-escalate situations before they lead to violence, sometimes violent, racist or complex situations arise. Because we cultivate the presence of a variety of people in our spaces, we have multiple people with diverse skills, on hand or close by who can support any staff person or volunteer who encounters a complex or violent situation. We never expect any staff or volunteer to step into a situation where they do not feel safe. Our practise is such that those who are most able step in to complex situations, while those who are less confident in these moments step back and offer back-up support. Staff and volunteers are welcome to call the police at any time they choose – this is not a policy driven situation.

We recognize that our environments are complex, and issues and conflicts can emerge quickly in our spaces. We work to ensure the safety of all in the space, but we also work to support the person who is acting aggressively.

Following Situations that arise

We invite staff to respond as thoughtfully and collaboratively as possible in the moment, calling on the support of their team and their “anchor” person in their work environment to respond.

Afterward, we follow these practises:

- In the moment we determine the severity of the incident – and consistently work to follow these steps:
 - o **Physical and Immediate Safety** is a priority for the person/people involved. We use gentle and collaborative de-escalation skills, deflection techniques to remove

key people from the moment safely and thoughtfully. Emergency services can be called at any time as required.

- **See it and Say it** – As a team we respond in the moment, identify that the behaviour is not welcome in our space, reaffirm our commitment to care for each person thoughtfully and respectfully.
 - **Deflection** – Given the unwellness of many people we support, we often use techniques to shift or change a moment of disrespect. This is not a denial of the reality of the situation. It is a carefully applied skill to manage the escalation and de-escalation of moments. In our practice of this skill, we have to be sure to not become accepting of all behaviours and continue to discuss and debate situations that reach complex thresholds.
 - **Support our Co-Workers** – In our focus on people we serve, we must also keep close attention to our co-workers. Has someone been wounded by the situation? Be sure to reach out to your co-workers, acknowledge the impact of the situation, recognizing that each person responds differently to different situations. Step in so the other can move away in the moment, but also follow up afterward to express care and thoughtfulness.
 - **Consequences** – In a moment, a decision about consequences for the person involved can be made quickly and firmly as needed. Our preference is that we reflect together to determine if there are direct consequences – a conversation, a reconciliation, a break from the space. As we reflect on consequences we take into consideration the event, the person who is the main actor in the event, those who are involved in the event, and the way these circumstances impact and effect our social purpose and our work. This is a careful discernment and takes some work to reach a common decision. Once we make this decision, we invite all involved to help to respect and support the way this decision is implemented.
- Immediately after,
 - Follow with person(s) directly involved
 - As a team we debrief the moment to share the experience, gain support and release the intensity. We write an incident report if the situation was complex enough to warrant one, or review the incident in our shift-reports as a significant moment.
 - We ask if there is something that we missed in the moment.
 - At a later point, we reflect with our team and anchor person on how the situation was handled. (What did we do well; should we have handled things in a different way; would we do things differently another time; do the people involved in the situation need any additional support; are there any further actions we need to take with the people involved to ensure we don't repeat this experience? Have we notified other Working Centre locations of possible issues?)
 - As the overall well-being and strength of spirit is an important lens in our work, we actively work to ensure that each of our employees, volunteers and community members feel supported. We reflect and act on how we support and strengthen the overall spirit of the people involved in our work and our spaces.

- We continually work within our team and across teams to share skills on responding to complex and sometimes violent and violating situations.
- Each incident report will be brought to the monthly Health and Safety Committee. If there are common issues or learning areas, the Committee will recommend discussion/training/shared learning to ensure staff and/or volunteers feel as prepared as possible for issues that emerge.

Often it is easier to tolerate aggressive people whom we support in our work, but it feels like a deeper betrayal when this behaviour comes from a co-worker. Whenever this happens, we want to follow this situation together. Breaking trust between co-workers is a deep violation of the commitment we make to our work and to each other. We are committed to working to reconcile these moments. Repeated small violations of respect and trust are often indicators of bigger issues to come. We hope to talk about these situations together – each anchor person is available to actively listen and then problem solve together to respond as issues arise. Opening these issues for discussion and response is a healthy part of our collaborative environment. While we are tolerant of human error, we are also firm about unacceptable behaviours and attitudes that break our core respect and trust for one another.

In situations involving domestic abuse we encourage staff and volunteers to talk with their direct anchor person so we can implement measures that help people to feel as safe as possible in their workplace.

Procedures

- All new staff will review this policy as part of their employment start-up
- Each staff person is mentored into their particular workplace, which includes an understanding of how to support the inclusive environments of our spaces and safe ways to respond to people with complex behaviours; emergency procedures are reviewed.
- Key contact people will be identified for each new staff person in order to ensure they understand who to contact in case of an urgent situation.
- In the event of violence in the workplace:
 - o Respond as thoughtfully and carefully as you can, always working as a team, and work to de-escalate the situation. Prior relationship is an important component of de-escalation. Who knows the person involved in the situation – can you call them to come to the situation or offer advice?
 - o Police can be called as necessary, based on your best judgement, but they don't often come right away, so be sure you and the other people in the space feel as safe as possible. Be thoughtful of your own safety as well as the safety of those around you.
 - o Remember to care for the person involved in the situation, as well as any victims or bystanders. Everyone can be affected by this situation, so if we are acting as a team we can each focus on different people who are impacted.
 - o After the situation, debrief with your team. Support one another. Write up an incident report if the situation warrants this. Make suggestions that emerge out of the situation. Once it's all over, think of your own wellbeing; let yourself be cared for by others.

- The incident report should be completed within 4 days of the incident and submitted to h&s@theworkingcentre.org or directly through Significant Moment reports on Shift Notes. The Health and Safety Committee and your anchor person review these reports to be sure we are being as thoughtful as possible about safety, training, strategies to prevent similar situations. Your ideas are important in this conversation and we appreciate any thoughts you share.
- If an incident arises among you and your co-workers (staff and volunteers), we often start this response with a conversation. If you can, start with your anchor person who holds wider responsibility for the team. Once we understand the situation, we will work together to have further conversation to respond to the situation. We always work towards reconciliation of these moments, but we are also aware that sometimes that is not possible. We invite staff to bring forward issues that they are unable or unwilling to resolve on their own. Sometimes our peer-based environment makes it feel like these conversations are not possible, but this is an important practise that allows us to build trust and strength as a team.
- This policy will be reviewed from time to time.

A safe work environment is a shared responsibility. How we do our work matters to create an environment that is respectful and welcoming. We are grateful for the thoughtful engagement of each person, and we continuously welcome dialogue and relationship-building in our diverse spaces.