Death of a Service User Policy

Policy Created: February 2026

Last Reviewed:

Next Review: February 2027 (or sooner if significant changes in legislation, guidance, or organisational activities occur)

Reviewed by:

Responsible Officer: CEO

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Approved by: CEO

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1. Introduction and Commitment

Pathways Associates CIC is a disabled-led Community Interest Company dedicated to enabling people with learning disabilities, autistic people, and their families to live the lives they choose as equals in their local communities.

The death of a self-advocate, Expert by Experience, training participant, or anyone closely involved in our work is a profoundly sad and sensitive event. We are committed to responding with compassion, dignity, and respect, supporting those affected while learning from the experience to strengthen our inclusive practices.

This policy reflects our values:

- **Led by lived experience** — We involve disabled people and families in shaping compassionate, trauma-informed responses
- **Partnership** — We work closely with families, carers, and external agencies
- **Inclusion and respect** — We ensure responses are accessible, culturally sensitive, and honour individual wishes
- **Integrity and transparency** — We act openly, honestly, and accountably
- **Wellbeing and safety** — We prioritise emotional support for all involved

It links to our Safeguarding Policy, Corporate Responsibility Policy, and Quality Improvement Policy, and aligns with best practice from the Local Safeguarding Adults Board, CQC (where relevant), and bereavement guidance for small organisations.

2. Scope

This policy applies when we learn of the death of:

- An Expert by Experience or self-advocate
- A participant in our training, events, or co-production activities
- A family member or carer closely involved in our work
- Any other person we have supported or engaged with in our activities

It covers all colleagues, volunteers, associates, self advocates, Experts by Experience, partners, and stakeholders.

3. Key Objectives

We aim to:

- Respond promptly, sensitively, and compassionately
- Support bereaved families, carers, and our team
- Conduct a proportionate review to identify any learning
- Ensure compliance with legal and reporting requirements
- Remember the individual's contribution positively and respectfully

4. Core Principles

Our response is guided by:

- Dignity and respect — Honour the person's life, wishes, and cultural/religious beliefs
- Accessibility — Provide information in easy-read, large print, or other formats as needed
- Confidentiality — Share information only with those who need to know
- Trauma-informed practice — Recognise the impact on disabled people, families, and staff
- Co-production — Involve Experts by Experience and families in reviews where appropriate
- Learning without blame — Focus on improvement, not fault

5. Roles and Responsibilities

- **CEO / Director**
    - Lead overall response and coordinate with external agencies
    - Ensure family contact is compassionate and timely
    - Oversee any review and implementation of learning

- **All colleagues, volunteers, and associates**
  - Report any known death immediately to the CEO
  - Participate in supporting colleagues and attending debriefs
  - Maintain confidentiality
- **Board of Directors**
  - Receive anonymised summary of the event and learning
  - Ensure actions are monitored
- **All staff**
  - Access bereavement support (e.g., via Employee Assistance Programme or external counselling)

6. Procedures Immediate response (within 24 hours)

- The person who learns of the death informs the CEO immediately
- The CEO (or nominated lead) contacts the family/carers with a senior colleague to offer condolences and practical support
- If the death was unexpected or there were safeguarding concerns, follow Safeguarding Policy and notify police/CQC as required

Support for families/carers

- Offer practical help (e.g., information on funeral arrangements, bereavement support services)
- Provide accessible information about our services and any ongoing involvement
- Respect family wishes regarding publicity or remembrance

Support for our team

- Hold a sensitive team debrief (virtual or in-person)
- Offer individual support, time off, or counselling
- Ensure Experts by Experience and self-advocates are supported in their own networks

Review and learning

- Conduct a proportionate review (within 4 weeks) to identify any lessons

- Involve family/input from Experts by Experience where appropriate and welcomed
- Produce a simple action plan and share anonymised learning with the team and Board
- Update policies or training as needed

Reporting

- Notify CQC (if the person was involved in regulated activity)
- Report to coroner/police if required
- Include anonymised summary in our annual CIC34 report

7. Training, Support, and Resources We commit to:

- Providing bereavement awareness training for all staff and associates
- Maintaining a list of local/national bereavement support services (e.g., Cruse Bereavement Care, easy-read resources)
- Ensuring all responses are trauma-informed and accessible

8. Monitoring, Review, and Continuous Improvement

- This policy is reviewed annually or following any incident
- Reviews are co-produced with Experts by Experience and stakeholders where possible
- Progress on actions is monitored by the Board
- We welcome feedback to ensure the policy remains compassionate and effective

9. Conclusion

Pathways Associates CIC is dedicated to responding to the death of a service user with the utmost compassion, dignity, and respect. By supporting those bereaved, learning together, and remembering the contributions of self-advocates and families, we honour our values and continue working towards a more inclusive society.