Freedom To Speak Up Policy

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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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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.

Speaking up about any concern you have at work is really important. In fact, it is vital because it will help us to keep improving our services for disabled people, families, and communities, and the working environment for our colleagues.

We welcome speaking up and we will listen. Speaking up can be a difficult thing to do, but we are committed to creating a culture where it is safe and acceptable to speak up, where concerns are responded to, and where we harness information to improve the quality of our work.

This policy aligns with best practice guidance from the National Guardian's Office (NGO) for Freedom to Speak Up, adapted for small organisations like ours. It supports our Corporate Responsibility Policy, Duty of Candour Policy, Complaints Policy, and Health and Safety Policy, embedding speaking up into our values:

- **Led by lived experience** — We involve disabled people and families in addressing concerns and improving practices
- **Partnership** — We collaborate with colleagues, associates, and external bodies to resolve issues
- **Inclusion and respect** — We ensure speaking up processes are accessible, culturally sensitive, and free from discrimination
- **Innovation** — We use concerns to drive positive changes and break down barriers
- **Integrity** — We act transparently, accountably, and ethically in handling all matters raised

We commit to listening, thanking those who speak up, and taking action to improve.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all Pathways Associates CIC activities, including:

- Co-produced training and learning programmes
- Policy, strategy, and capability development support
- Expert Hub, Self Advocates Training Partnership, and other networks
- Events, partnership working, and internal operations

It covers anyone who works with or for us, including:

- Colleagues, associates, volunteers, and Experts by Experience
- Students, trainees, or temporary workers
- Agency workers or contractors
- Former workers (where appropriate)

You can speak up about risks, malpractice, or wrongdoing you think is harming the people we support or our organisation.

3. What Can I Speak Up About?

You may want to speak up about any concerns you have about a risk, malpractice, or wrongdoing you think is harming the people we support or our organisation. Just a few examples include:

- Unsafe practices or conditions
- Unethical conduct or breaches of our values
- Bullying, harassment, or discrimination
- Concerns about quality of training, events, or support
- Financial irregularities or resource misuse
- Health and safety risks, including mental wellbeing

If in doubt – speak up. Even if a concern is about something that happened in the past, or that you think has been fixed or is going to happen in the future.

4. Core Principles

We want you to feel safe to speak up. Your wellbeing matters, and we will:

- Thank you for speaking up
- Recognise speaking up takes courage
- Focus on the concern and show what we have done in response
- Treat you with respect and compassion
- Offer personal support where needed
- Not tolerate any detriment or disadvantage as a result of speaking up

We uphold protections under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 for whistleblowers (see Appendix B). Retaliation or victimisation for speaking up is unacceptable and may lead to disciplinary action.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

- **CEO / Senior Leadership**
  - Champion a speaking up culture and lead by example
  - Ensure concerns are handled promptly and fairly
  - Oversee learning and improvements from issues raised
- **Freedom to Speak Up Guardian (or Nominated Lead)**
  - Provide confidential advice and support
  - Record and track concerns anonymously
  - Escalate issues where needed and report themes to the Board
- **All Colleagues, Associates, and Volunteers**
  - Speak up if you have concerns
  - Support others who speak up
  - Participate in training and feedback
- **Board of Directors**
  - Monitor speaking up activity and culture quarterly
  - Ensure resources for effective handling

Our nominated Freedom to Speak Up Guardian is Lynn James-Jenkinson.

6. How to Speak Up and What We Will Do

You can speak up to whoever you feel comfortable with, including:

- Your line manager or a colleague
- Freedom to Speak Up Guardian

- CEO or a Board member
- External bodies like NGO, CQC, or Protect (whistleblowing charity)

How to speak up:

- Verbally, in writing, or via email/phone
- Anonymously if preferred (though this may limit investigation)
- With support from a colleague, advocate, or trade union

What we will do (see Appendix A for process):

- Acknowledge your concern within 2 working days
- Assess and investigate proportionately, keeping you updated
- Provide feedback on outcomes and actions
- Offer support throughout
- Learn and improve, sharing anonymised themes

If you are not satisfied, you can escalate internally or externally.

7. Training, Awareness, and Support

We commit to:

- Providing annual Freedom to Speak Up training for all (in accessible formats)
- Raising awareness through inductions, meetings, and resources
- Offering confidential support, including access to external helplines (e.g., Protect: 020 3117 2520)
- Promoting wellbeing post-speaking up

8. Monitoring, Review, and Continuous Improvement

- This policy is reviewed annually or following significant changes
- Concerns are logged anonymously and reviewed quarterly by the Board
- Learning is co-produced with Experts by Experience and shared
- Feedback is welcomed to ensure a safe speaking up culture

- Annual summaries are included in our CIC report

9. Conclusion

Pathways Associates CIC is dedicated to fostering a culture where speaking up is valued and leads to positive change. By listening, acting, and learning together, we uphold our disabled-led values, ensuring safer, more inclusive services for people with learning disabilities, autistic people, and their families.

Appendix A: What Will Happen When I Speak Up

We will:

- Listen and record your concern confidentially
- Look into it (investigation may involve others, with your consent)
- Keep you informed
- Take action and tell you about it
- Share learning

Escalation: If unsatisfied, contact the CEO, Board, or external bodies like CQC/NGO.

Appendix B: Making a Protected Disclosure

Under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, you may qualify for protection if you make a 'protected disclosure' about malpractice. Seek advice from Protect or a legal representative to check criteria.