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CODE OF ETHICS AND PRACTICE

1.0 Introduction

ConnectAbility Australia Inc is committed to ethical conduct in providing the best possible service to people with disabilities. The ConnectAbility Australia Staff Codes of Ethics and Practice form part of ConnectAbility Australia's accountability, service quality and risk management strategies. With ConnectAbility Australia's policies and procedures, they form a three tiered package that provide direction and guidance on a range of ethical and practice issues that staff may face in their day to day work with the organisation.

This policy applies to all staff which includes permanent, part-time and casual employees and volunteer workers. Students are also expected to abide by this policy.

The Committee of Management also has a Code of Ethics that outlines the ethical behavior expected in their roles as members of the Committee of Management.

Service user conduct is governed by ConnectAbility Australia's rights and responsibilities, by law and relevant legislation and by project guidelines and individual service agreements.

2.0 Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline ConnectAbility Australia's position on ethics and proper practice. It aims to assist staff to identify and resolve ethical and practice issues that may arise in their employment with ConnectAbility Australia.

The Codes of Ethics and Practice and ConnectAbility Australia's policies and procedures are all consistent with ConnectAbility Australia's purpose and values and with the NSW Disability Standards and form part of ConnectAbility Australia's commitment to delivering quality outcomes to service users.

The Code of Ethics and Code of Practice do not and cannot cover every possible situation. Asking yourself the following questions may help to determine how ethical a behavior may be:

- Would I like to be spoken to or treated in this way? Would I like a member of my family or friends to be spoken to or treated in this way?
- Does what I am saying or doing serve a purpose beyond self interest?
- Would I be happy to have what I am saying or doing on the front page of the newspaper or discussed on television news?

3.0 Policy

The Committee of Management, employees, volunteers and students of ConnectAbility Australia have a moral, ethical and legal responsibility to practice in the best interests of the individuals we serve. ConnectAbility Australia strongly believes that the way that staff behave directly influences the quality of the life of the service users that they support and the reputation of ConnectAbility Australia. All employees and volunteers will demonstrate professional ethical behavior at all times, in their service to people with disabilities, in their responsibilities to the organisation and in their professional relationships internally and externally.

All staff must read and be willing to comply with ConnectAbility Australia's Codes of Ethics and Practice and Policies and Procedures as a condition of initial employment and as a condition of ongoing employment. Staff must also be aware that from time to time changes may be made to the Code of Ethics, Code of Practice and Policies and Procedures and continued compliance with these is a condition of ongoing employment with ConnectAbility Australia. If changes are made staff will be consulted and each staff member will have access to the revised documents.

4.0 Procedures

4.1 The Code of Ethics

The Code of Ethics is a statement of ethical principles, values and behaviours expected of ConnectAbility Australia staff. It flows from ConnectAbility Australia's values and purpose and from the principles outlined in the NSW Disability Service Standards. The Code of Ethics is designed to guide staff in their dealings with service users, colleagues, stakeholders and the wider community. It puts forward a set of general principles rather than a detailed prescription of actions. It stands beside but does not exclude the rights and obligations of staff under common law or legislation.

ConnectAbility Australia is a complex organisation, comprising diverse groups that have different relationships with each other. These may be relations of power

and/or status. It is essential that staff recognise and respect not only their rights and responsibilities but those of others they come into contact with in their course of their work.

ConnectAbility Australia recognises that our staff may have multiple allegiances to particular religious or cultural traditions, professional disciplines or the community at large and to ConnectAbility Australia. Some staff may also be bound by codes of ethics or conduct as defined by professional bodies. ConnectAbility Australia acknowledges that these allegiances may not always be in harmony. It is the obligation of each staff member to weigh the importance of each of these allegiances in each set of circumstances and to notify their team leader or manager where such conflict may or does arise.

4.1.1 Principles

The Code of Ethics is based on three universal ethical principles:

Equity and Justice

People are to be treated fairly, - not discriminated against, abused or exploited. Justice is concerned with power sharing and preventing the abuse of power. In a just community all members can access opportunities that allow for their full participation in the community.

Respect for People

People should be treated as individuals with rights to be honored and defended. Respect empowers others to claim their rights and achieve their potential. Respect for the rights of other people is the basis on which people come together and accept their social responsibilities and behave with integrity.

Individuals not only have rights but responsibilities to others to act openly and honestly. Demonstrating respect for a person requires, for example, dealing with disagreements by reasoned argument rather than by using language (words, tone, style) that have the effect of attacking or demeaning the other.

Personal and Professional Responsibility

The principle of taking personal and professional responsibility requires that people avoid doing harm to others. It also requires people to exhibit courteous behavior and uphold the standards expected of all people in achieving the common good. Inherent in this is that they protect the rights of others and respect the diversity of cultures and peoples. ConnectAbility Australia's service user group is vulnerable, often subject to discrimination and faces many barriers in achieving equity and justice.

This principle also involves caring for assets, resources and the environment.

4.2 The Code of Practice

The Code of Practice is based on the principles, values and behaviours outlined in the Code of Ethics and in the NSW Disability Service Standards. It defines specific behaviours, actions and procedures applicable to all staff of ConnectAbility Australia for a range of ethical and practice issues. The Code of Practice was developed by representatives of ConnectAbility Australia staff and managers and with reference to the Australasian Society for the Study of Intellectual Disability Code of Ethics for Disability Support Workers (2007).

ConnectAbility Australia staff, students and volunteers should be aware that any breach of this Code will (depending on the nature of the breach) result in disciplinary action. Serious breaches will also be referred to the Committee of Management for Consideration.

If you believe that a colleague has breached this Code you are encouraged to discuss this with the person in the first instance and with your team leader or other senior staff member should you wish to.

4.2.2 Objectives

The Objectives of the ConnectAbility Australia Staff Code of Practice are to:

- Promote professionalism and excellence in all aspects of ConnectAbility Australia's operations.
- Express shared and agreed assumptions and organisational values.
- Communicate ConnectAbility Australia's standards.
- Promote a work environment that is welcoming, enjoyable and attractive for staff.
- Assist the organisation to comply with funding and legislative responsibilities
- Detail ConnectAbility Australia's social responsibilities.
- Motivate staff to do the right thing.
- Assist the organisation in managing risk.
- Assist staff to meet the minimum standards of practice and integrity as described in the Code of Ethics.
- Assist staff to deal with ethical and practice issues in ways that are reflective and consistent with ConnectAbility Australia's values, standards and expectations.

Various ConnectAbility Australia policies relate directly to issues discussed in the Code of Practice. These are cross referenced where appropriate.

4.2.3 ConnectAbility Australia Work Environment

ConnectAbility Australia works to assist service users to achieve their potential and increase their life satisfaction in a way that builds on the strengths of each individual service user. ConnectAbility Australia's client group is made up of a diverse range of individuals whose disability and support needs vary greatly and may make them particularly vulnerable on a number of levels. This brings with it duties to them and their families and carers and also to the community. Our work often involves a number of people working cooperatively within and without the organisation and staff must recognise the significance of their work as an individual within the organisation as a whole.

ConnectAbility Australia employs staff with a diverse range of backgrounds, personality, skills and manner. Staff must take this diversity into account and behave in a collegiate and friendly manner when interacting with their colleagues. All conduct in the workplace must also assist other staff to carry out their duties to the best of their abilities and assist staff to feel safe and secure.

4.2.4 Principles

1. ConnectAbility Australia staff are committed to maintaining and improving exceptional standards of service delivery.

Staff must at all times have a commitment to the improvement of services delivered to service users. This includes taking part in and contributing to processes both outside and within ConnectAbility Australia that are aimed at improving standards of service delivery, service user well being and the efficient operation of the organisation. This includes strategic planning, organisational policy development and review, Occupational Health and Safety initiatives, and internal or external organisational monitoring activities.

In dealing with individual service users, staff must have a commitment to delivering the best possible support to all ConnectAbility Australia service users. This means that service user needs are put first in decision making at all levels of operation and that the needs of all service users are treated equally, within the boundaries of funding received.

It must be recognised that no staff member has an extra interest in a service user over any other staff member. The best interests of the service user may be served by allocating a different community support worker or referring to another service.

2. ConnectAbility Australia staff will respect and value the diversity and strengths of service users. Support will be service user focused, person centred and provide opportunities for service users' to increase their life satisfaction.

ConnectAbility Australia recognises that disability comes about as a consequence of the complex interaction between biological, psychological and social factors including physical, economic and attitudinal barriers to participation at home, in education, at work or in the community (ASSID 2007). The needs, opinions, values and beliefs of service users, their families and carers will direct the way in which support is provided. Service users (and their families and carers) will be consulted as much as possible in planning the support that will be delivered and in setting goals both as part of the Individual Service Agreement (ISA) development and review process but also in daily planning.

It is expected that staff will be positive and non judgemental in their approach with service users and their families and carers and that support time is focused on assisting each service user achieve the goals that they have identified in their ISA.

Support should be delivered to the best of each worker's ability regardless of the service user's nationality, race, religion, gender, sexuality, political belief, disability, medical status, illness.

Policies

Individual Needs Policy

3. ConnectAbility Australia staff will publicly and privately support our colleagues in ways that respect, value and appreciate each other's differences, strengths and limitations.

Staff are expected to privately and publicly support ConnectAbility Australia and their colleagues in a way that acknowledges and respects each others' strengths, weaknesses and differences in a supportive way. Staff will work collaboratively with colleagues both from ConnectAbility Australia and from other organisations in a consistent manner in the best interests of service users, appreciating the differing roles and responsibilities that they may hold. Staff will apply this spirit of collaboration to their work with service users, their families and carers.

4. ConnectAbility Australia staff are committed to their own professional development and practice.

All staff must maintain and develop knowledge and understanding in their area of work. Staff should continuously seek to improve work performance and practices with an emphasis on developing and improving their skills. ConnectAbility Australia is committed to providing staff with opportunities to develop their professional skills and capabilities and will provide an annual training calendar. Staff are expected to attend and participate in all mandatory training and information sessions.

All staff are expected to participate in and accept supervision of work practices. In order to do this they must realistically assess and reflect upon their own strengths, limitations and biases and remain open to suggestion and constructive criticism.

ConnectAbility Australia recognises that the work that staff perform can be challenging and at times stressful. As part of professional practice ConnectAbility Australia expects and encourages staff to take responsibility for looking after their own well being. This includes:

- Balancing work and personal life.
- Managing fatigue and stress.
- Being aware of the impact that lifestyle issues and behavior outside of work can have on work performance.
- Working without being under the influence of alcohol and other drugs that may adversely impact on their work performance.
- Seeking advice and accessing the support mechanisms in place such as EAP and supervision to address any concerns regarding physical, mental, lifestyle or behavior issues that may effect the ability to provide safe and effective service to our service users.

5. ConnectAbility Australia staff acknowledge that we hold a privileged position of trust in relation to service users, their families and carers, colleagues and ConnectAbility Australia as a whole.

Staff are expected to act honestly and in good faith at all times, in the interests of service users, their families and carers and ConnectAbility Australia. Staff should recognise the privileged position of trust that they hold, both in relation to service users, their families and carers and their colleagues and work in a way that will not knowingly abuse or betray this trust.

This also extends to:

- Dealings with colleagues, their team leaders/managers and the Committee of Management.
- Efficient, careful and honest use of ConnectAbility Australia resources, facilities and equipment (such as cars, petty cash and other equipment). Resources should be used economically, secured against theft or misuse and waste avoided.
- Accurate, timely and honest record keeping (support reports, timesheets, incident reports).
- Diligent implementation of any of ConnectAbility Australia's policies and procedures.

6. ConnectAbility Australia staff will act lawfully and ensure that we are familiar with legislation relevant to our work.

Staff have a duty to familiarise themselves with, and observe the law insofar as it affects their work with their service users and the requirements of their position. In particular staff must be aware of their duty of care to service users, other staff, other organisations and the community in general.

ConnectAbility Australia has an obligation to ensure that staff are given information and appropriate training and support to assist them to fulfil these duties. Where staff have doubt as to the extent of their duty of care they must consult their Team Leader, Program Manager or General Manager.

Staff must undertake their job in a safe as way as possible. Staff are obligated to disclose or reveal risks or unsafe practice. Where such disclosure leads to a breach of relevant ConnectAbility Australia is obligated to report these practices to the relevant authorities.

7. ConnectAbility Australia staff are committed to and expect a workplace free of harrassment, discrimination and bullying

ConnectAbility Australia is committed to a workplace free of discrimination, harassment and bullying where all staff demonstrate respect for service users, their families and carers and one another. Discrimination and harassment of any kind, such as racism, sexism and bullying is contrary to ConnectAbility Australia's Code of Practice and will not be tolerated, whether it be by managers, staff, contractors, consultants or others associated with the organisation in the course of its operations.

Staff are expected to maintain a safe, friendly and positive relationship with other staff. Staff are also expected to maintain a supportive, friendly, positive and safe relationship with all service users their families and carers.

Where staff feel that they are subject to discrimination, harassment or bullying in the workplace they are encouraged to follow the guidelines set out in the Equal Opportunity, Harrassment, Bullying and Grievance and Dispute Resolution polices.

Policies

Equal Opportunity

Harrassment and Discrimination

Bullying Prevention

Grievance and Dispute Resolution

Recruitment and Selection

Occupational Health and Safety Policies

8. ConnectAbility Australia staff will manage disagreements, conflicts and other issues in ways that maintain the dignity and respect of all involved.

In the course of their employment with ConnectAbility Australia it is likely that staff may experience differences of opinion with service users, their families and carers, colleagues or other stakeholders. ConnectAbility Australia is committed to promoting and maintaining a culture in which these disagreements are managed in ways that are respectful to and maintain the dignity of all parties. Staff are expected to act with courtesy and respect at all times, appreciating that people's roles, responsibilities and priorities may differ.

Policies

Grievance and Dispute Resolution

Complaints Resolution

9. ConnectAbility Australia staff will maintain the confidentiality of service users, colleagues and the organisation in all situations according to ConnectAbility Australia policy.

Staff must ensure that they follow the Health Privacy Principles set out by the Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002 (NSW) and other privacy legislation. In ConnectAbility Australia these principles apply to information received about and disclosed by service users, families and carers and staff information, such as that contained in personnel files or other documents such as mobile phone number lists. Information about ConnectAbility Australia and our operations may also be confidential. If a staff member is in doubt about the confidentiality of any ConnectAbility Australia related information they should check with the appropriate Team Leader, Programme Manager or General Manager prior to disclosure.

Staff must be particularly aware of maintaining appropriate confidentiality in group situations, and with colleagues in front of service users. Staff should not inappropriately discuss service users in the presence of other service users. Where it is necessary for this to occur, for example in a crisis situation or to ensure that a service user's needs are appropriately met, staff must be as discreet as possible and disclose only that information that is absolutely necessary. An individual's disability should not be seen as an excuse not to maintain the appropriate standard of confidentiality.

In addition to legislation the collection, retention and exchange of information both within and external to ConnectAbility Australia is governed by ConnectAbility Australia policies and procedures and project guidelines.

Policies

Confidentiality and Privacy Policy

10. ConnectAbility Australia staff will use appropriate means of information exchange and obtain information from the right source.

Staff should avoid informal, inappropriate methods of communication such as gossip, rumour, innuendo and speculation whether it be about colleagues, service users, their families/carers, other professionals or the organisation. Information exchange of this kind can compromise confidentiality, adversely impact on service provision, cause harm to individual and ConnectAbility Australia's reputations and cause serious psychological distress. Questions regarding service provision, ConnectAbility Australia's operations, fellow colleagues should be directed to the right person within the organisation.

Policies

Confidentiality and Privacy Policy
Grievance and Dispute Resolution

11. ConnectAbility Australia staff are committed to fair and equitable handling of complaints and grievances.

ConnectAbility Australia service users, their families and carers, staff, volunteers and students are entitled to fair and equitable complaints handling and grievance and dispute resolution procedures. ConnectAbility Australia views feedback and complaints as one mechanism to review and improve how we operate as an organisation.

Part of providing high quality services to service users requires that staff should avoid conflict with other staff by appropriately airing grievances and concerns. Under no circumstances should staff discuss their issues or concerns regarding another staff member or the organisation with a service user, their family and/or carer outside of ConnectAbility Australia's relevant policies and procedures.

Policies

Bullying Prevention
EEO
Discrimination
Grievance and Dispute Resolution
Complaints Handling
Service User Rights and Responsibilities

12. ConnectAbility Australia staff will maintain high standards of professional behavior at all times.

Staff must refrain from illegal behavior or from behavior that reflects badly on themselves or ConnectAbility Australia, such as behaviour leading to a criminal record, or developing an intimate relationship with a service user.

Staff are the face of ConnectAbility Australia in the community and it is expected that they will maintain a professional approach in their dealings with service users, their families and/or carers, colleagues and other stakeholders at all times. This includes promoting ConnectAbility Australia appropriately and accurately, maintaining appropriate confidentiality in relation to organisational issues and referring relevant issues to Team Leaders, Managers or the Committee of Management. This also includes maintaining appropriate standards of behavior within the workplace, at work related or sponsored functions and other work related activities.

Where financial arrangements form part of a service users support, staff must ensure that all procedures and protocols documented in the ISA are followed. Staff must ensure that any arrangements are made in advance and safeguard the best interests of and are fully understood by either the service users, their family/carer or advocate.

Policies

*General Conditions of Employment
Recruitment and Selection*

13. ConnectAbility Australia staff will maintain professional boundaries and relationships with service users, their families and carers at all times.

Central to the effective delivery of services by ConnectAbility Australia is the relationship between staff and service users. The nature of this relationship effects our reputation and as service users chose to access ConnectAbility Australia our ongoing viability as an organisation.

It is expected that staff will maintain appropriate professional boundaries at all times with all service users. This includes but is not limited to:

- Maintaining a professional, respectful and appropriate relationship with all prospective, current and past service users.
- Not soliciting money or gifts of any kind from service users, their families and/or carers. It is acceptable to receive small tokens of appreciation such as gifts from service users, their families and/or carers. Where staff are not sure if the gift constitutes a small token or are concerned that it could be construed as significant they should discuss this with the appropriate Team Leader.
- Not entering into any contractual or other relationship with a service user and/or their family/carer from which they will personally benefit.
- Not taking service users to their own private residences or those of their families/friends.
- Maintaining appropriate levels of self disclosure.

Where staff have any concerns regarding professional boundaries with services users and/or their families/carers they should discuss these with the appropriate team leader, program manager or general manager.

Physical Interaction

ConnectAbility Australia is aware that physical interaction with service users can be an important means of communication and relationship building, especially for people with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities. However we also recognise that physical touch can be misconstrued and place service users and staff in potentially compromising and possibly legally contentious situations (ASSID, 2007). Staff are encouraged to reflect upon their use of physical touch with service users, and in consultation with their team leader, plan for when and how physical touch is to be used, taking into account the situation, service user's needs, personal preferences and vulnerabilities (ASSID, 2007, pg 11).

Staff must not make, accept or maintain any sexual or intimate contact or relationship with any past or current service user.

14. ConnectAbility Australia staff will identify and manage any conflicts of interest

Staff must ensure that personal and financial interests do not conflict with their duty to ConnectAbility Australia. This includes relationships, personal or professional inside or outside of ConnectAbility Australia, employment or activities external to ConnectAbility Australia, use of ConnectAbility Australia resources or multiple loyalties. Staff must not carry out any personal or business activities for personal gain whilst conducting the business of the organisation or use any organisational resources to carry out actions associated with such activities (e.g ConnectAbility Australia computers, telephones) without express permission of the General Manager. Any possible or suspected conflict of interest should be discussed with the relevant team leader or manager.

Staff working with other organisations outside of ConnectAbility Australia (either in a paid or voluntary capacity) must ensure that this employment does not conflict either directly or indirectly with the interests of ConnectAbility Australia or compromise standards of service delivery. Staff involved in employment outside of ConnectAbility Australia must disclose and discuss this with the appropriate Team Leader or Manager to identify any occupational health and safety issues or conflicts that may arise. Where staff are employed by other organisations that provide support to service users, it will generally not be appropriate for staff to be involved in the direct support of these service users.

6.0 Responsibilities:

- 6.1. ConnectAbility Australia's Committee of Management is responsible for approving and monitoring the implementation of this policy.
- 6.2. The General Manager is responsible for ensuring that:
 - all staff are aware of and understand their obligations and responsibilities in relation to the ConnectAbility Australia Code of Ethics and Code of Practice.
 - all employees, volunteers, team leaders and managers have been provided with training in relation to this policy.
 - ongoing support and guidance is provided to all employees in relation to ethical and practice issues.
- 6.3. The General Manager, Program Manager and Team Leaders are responsible for ensuring that:
 - they comply with ConnectAbility Australia's Code of Ethics and Code of Practice.
 - they endeavour to identify, prevent and address potential breaches of the Code of Ethics and Code of Practice.
 - they provide appropriate advice and guidance to staff on ethical and practice issues and refer to these to appropriate source for further guidance where necessary.
- 6.4. Employees, volunteers and students are responsible for ensuring that:
 - they are aware of and understand this policy and procedures and seek clarification if they do not understand.
 - they endeavour to identify, prevent and address potential ethical or practice issues before they arise and seek advice where necessary.
 - they inform the appropriate Team Leader, Programme Manager or General Manager of any paid or voluntary work that they undertake outside of ConnectAbility Australia.

7.0 References

McVilly,, K. & Newell, C. (Eds) (2007). Australasian Code of Ethics for Direct Support Professionals. Melbourne: Australasian Society for the Study of Intellectual Disability.

8.0 Cross reference to relevant legislation

- Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000
- Occupational Health and Safety Regulation 2001
- NSW Anti Discrimination Act 1977
- Commonwealth Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986
- Commonwealth Racial Discrimination Act 1984

- Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992
- Commonwealth Age Discrimination Act 2004

9.0 Cross reference to NSW Disability Standards

- All Standards

10. Policy review

This policy will be reviewed in consultation with staff every 2 years.

Version	Date	Author	Reason	Sections
1 Approved	24 th March 2009	Karen Stace	Reviewed by staff – feedback incorporated	All
1 (draft 1)	24 th February 2009	Karen Stace	Reviewed and approved by Committee of Management	All
1 (draft 1)	30 th January 2009	Karen Stace	New policy	All