

## Confidentiality Policy

### Introduction

At Making Connections, we value the safety and privacy of our older persons, their families, staff and volunteers. All personal records relating to staff, volunteers and older people will be processed in a strictly confidential manner and consistent with the principles of data protection and the Making Connections Data Protection/GDPR Policy.

Making Connections collects and processes personal and sensitive personal data (e.g. certain health data) in order to pursue the legitimate interests of Making Connections, namely to provide befriending services between volunteers and older people, to facilitate social events for older people, and to safeguard and uphold the well-being of older people and volunteers involved in our services.

We will ensure that our staff, volunteers and older people can share information with us and with each other in the confidence that it will be kept confidential and processed only for the legitimate interests of the charity consistent with the Making Connections Data Protection/GDPR Policy.

This may include sharing information with health professionals if a health concern involving an older person emerges during the older person's involvement with Making Connections.

**The Data Controller/Executive Director of Making Connections must be consulted before any personal information is shared with a third party.**

In the case where Making Connections deems a person to be at risk of harm, information will be shared, consistent with the 'Duty to Disclose' as set out below, with appropriate services (e.g. HSE, Gardai, Social Services) without consent.

### Purpose

The purpose of the Confidentiality Policy is to provide staff, volunteers and older persons with clear guidelines regarding handling of confidential information and to assign responsibilities.

### Definition

In this policy, confidentiality refers to the principle that the information an older person, staff member or volunteer reveals to another member of staff or to each other is private and cannot be disclosed to a third party, unless the disclosure has been sanctioned by the Data Protection Controller/Executive Director of Making Connections or it is illegal and/or dangerous to society not to disclose such information. Data includes personal data and non-personal data which is not in the public domain.

### Responsibilities

#### Responsibilities of Making Connections Management:

- Ensuring that all staff and volunteers involved in dealing with confidential information receive appropriate training, supervision and support regarding the policy and their legal responsibilities

- Ensuring all staff, Befriending Volunteers and any other volunteers sign a Confidentiality Agreement
- Ensuring that a copy of this document is available to all staff and volunteers.

### **Responsibilities of staff/volunteers:**

- To act in accordance with the policy, noting that failure to do so will be considered as an act of gross misconduct and will result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of the employment contract or the volunteering agreement
- To exercise due care to keep safe all personal information, and in particular sensitive personal information e.g. health information or information which could be used to identify an individual involved in Making Connections
- To not discuss personal information, which they may have access to in the course of their duties/role, with any person outside the Making Connections organisation, except in the circumstances outlined in the 'Duty to Disclose' section below.

### **What information is kept**

Making Connections keeps personal records including:

- Referral forms
- Registration forms
- Correspondence concerning volunteers or programme participants
- References
- Garda vetting reports
- Volunteer feedback reports
- Observations or reports by volunteers or staff on any confidential matter of protection of vulnerable adult issues

### **Why Making Connections keeps information**

Information is kept to enable Making Connections staff to understand the history, needs and activities of volunteers or older people in order to deliver the most appropriate services and to safeguard older people and volunteers involved in the services.

### **This information also helps us to:**

- Recruit and select staff and volunteers for available positions
- Provide screening services, including Garda Vetting
- Provide training and support service
- Undertake advertising, marketing, direct recruitment and public relations exercises
- Meet insurance policy requirements
- Update databases within Making Connections
- Provide online resources and services

## Access to information

- Information is confidential to Making Connections as an organisation. Relevant information may be shared within Making Connections, for example to ensure the best quality service for older people
- Where information is sensitive, i.e. it involves disputes or legal issues, it will be confidential to the volunteer dealing with the case and their Making Connections point of contact
- Any person – older person, staff member or volunteer - has a right of access to their personal data which was collected by Making Connections, and the right to withdraw their consent to the processing of their data where such consent was relied upon to collect data. Data Subjects can exercise these rights easily and free of charge, in order to be aware of, and verify the lawfulness of any processing which is being conducted. See Making Connections Data Protection/GDPR Policy.

Data Subjects may also request to be informed of:

- What information Making Connections holds on them and why
- How to gain access to it
- How to keep this information up to date with Making Connections
- How Making Connections is meeting its data protection obligations

## General Staff/Volunteer Guidelines

- Making Connections' staff and volunteers, including administrative support volunteers, are required to sign a confidentiality agreement, as part of their agreement with Making Connections, to ensure that data is protected
- The Data Controller/Executive Director makes all decisions with regard to levels of access, processing, storage and sharing of data including personal and/or sensitive personal data
- The only people permitted to access data covered by this policy are those who need it for their work
- Making Connections will provide this policy document to staff and volunteers upon commencing employment with the organisation, to help them understand their responsibilities when handling data
- Staff/Volunteers must keep all data secure, by taking sensible precautions and following the guidelines outlined in this policy
- Strong passwords must be used and they should never be shared. (Strong passwords have 12 characters minimum, and combine upper-and lower-case letters, numbers and symbols.)
- Data must not be disclosed to unauthorised people. The advice of the Data Controller/Executive Director must be sought before disclosing data externally.
- Staff/Volunteers must destroy any data in their possession about Making Connections at the time of end of their involvement with Making Connections

- Staff and volunteers should request help from the Data Protection Controller/Executive Director if they are unsure about any aspect of confidentiality or data protection.

### **Befriending and Support Volunteers**

Making Connections Confidentiality Policy/Agreement is applicable formally between the Older Person and the Making Connections programme as a whole (**i.e. not between the Older Person and the Volunteer individually**). In this regard;

- **Volunteers are not permitted to discuss any personal details about the Older Person with anyone other than Making Connections staff**
- Volunteers may be required to share personal information about the Older Person with Making Connections staff for reporting and monitoring purposes as required, or if there is any concern regarding the safety or wellbeing of the Older Person (this is not deemed to be a breach of confidentiality)
- Making Connections treats with confidentiality, in accordance with Making Connections Data Protection/GDPR policy, any personal information about the Older Person which has been provided by the Volunteer

### **Professional and administrative support staff and volunteers**

Any data (personal and non-personal) relating to Making Connections, to which a person has access in the course of working for Making Connections, may only be used to fulfil the person's role with Making Connections and may not be used for any other purpose or given to any third party.

### **Duty to disclose**

As outlined in our Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy and Safeguarding Children Policy, in exceptional circumstances, the organisation may need to break confidentiality if they believe there is a real intent of serious harm or danger to either their client or another individual; this is a legal duty. Such circumstances may pertain to issues relating to sexual abuse, rape, self-harm, suicidal ideation or criminal activity. For example, Making Connections would disclose an issue of elder abuse to the HSE. Insofar as possible, in such cases, a full explanation will be given regarding the necessary procedures that may need to be taken. Other circumstances where Making Connections would have a duty to disclose include:

- Carrying out a legal duty (e.g. under health and safety legislation)
- Conducting any legal proceedings, obtaining legal advice or defending any legal rights

### **Breach of Confidentiality**

- Staff and volunteers who are dissatisfied with the conduct or actions of other staff/volunteers or of Making Connections should raise this with the Making Connections Executive Director using the Making Connections Problem Solving Procedure (p. 31/32 of Volunteer Handbook).

- Staff and volunteers accessing unauthorised files or breaching confidentiality may face disciplinary action up to and including termination of the employment contract or the volunteering agreement.

### **GDPR/Data Protection Responsibilities**

In addition to the duty of care regarding Confidentiality outlined above, the Data Protection Acts imposes legal obligations on Making Connections. Making Connections is aware of and acts in accordance with Data Protection principles which can be found in our Data Protection/GDPR Policy.

*Making Connections monitors reviews and evaluates the success of its policies and procedures on a regular basis and seeks to make ongoing improvements. Making Connections is always on the lookout for new ideas to improve its policies for our volunteers. Making Connections values the input of its volunteers in such policies; constructive feedback on this document is always welcome. To submit feedback please email Making Connections at: [info@makingconnections.ie](mailto:info@makingconnections.ie)*