

Manhattan Emergency Shelter, Inc. – Confidentiality Policy

Approved:

Approved by:

Policy No:

Confidentiality Statement

Confidentiality entails protecting an individual's privacy by ensuring that information is not shared other than in specific circumstances. Manhattan Emergency Shelter, Inc. (MESI) is committed to providing confidential services and ensures any information regarding clients or MESI affiliates is only shared when strictly relevant, necessary, and appropriate. MESI believes its clients deserve the right to confidentiality to protect their interests and to safeguard the services MESI provides.

At MESI, any information is strictly confidential which relates to:

1. The affairs of the agency
2. Clients who use the services of the agency
3. Staff, Board of Directors, and Volunteers of the agency
4. Visitors to the agency's premises

The following will be displayed in the waiting areas/interview room:

"MESI offers confidential services—nothing you tell us will be shared with any other organization or individual without your permission. If you would prefer to be seen in an interview room, please tell the front desk staff."

Definition of Confidentiality

MESI understands confidentiality to mean that no information regarding a client or MESI affiliate shall be given directly or indirectly to any external third party to the agency without that individual's prior expressed consent to disclose such information.

MESI recognizes that all individuals should be able to access MESI's services in confidence and that no other person should know they have used MESI's services.

MESI recognizes that clients and MESI affiliates need to feel secure in using MESI's services in a confidential manner. MESI will ensure all users are afforded confidential interview space (if it is required) and will ensure blinds and other mechanisms are used to ensure no breach of confidentiality can occur inadvertently.

Statistical Recording

MESI is committed to effective statistical recording of services to enable MESI to monitor effectiveness of services and to identify any policy issues arising from services.

It is the administration staff's responsibility to ensure all statistical records given to third parties, such as to support funding applications and monitoring reports, shall be produced in anonymous form, so individuals cannot be recognized.

Case Records

All client case records are kept in secure filing cabinets. All case records must be locked at the end of each working day. All information relating to clients will be left in locked drawers.

Client files should not be removed from MESI property without permission from the Executive Director.

Employee Cellular Phone

All information transferred via employee cellular phones should be deleted and cleared within a reasonable timeframe.

Electronic Mail

Manhattan Emergency Shelter, Inc. encourages the use of electronic mail and respects the privacy of clients. Nonetheless, electronic mail and data stored on the MESI's network of computers may be accessed by the MESI for the following purposes:

- To the greatest extent possible in a public setting, individuals' privacy should be preserved. However, there is no expectation of privacy or confidentiality for documents and messages stored on MESI-owned equipment.
- Users of electronic mail systems should be aware that, in addition to being subject to authorized access, electronic mail in its present form cannot be secured and is, therefore, vulnerable to unauthorized access and modification by third parties.
- Receivers of electronic mail documents should check with the purported sender if there is any doubt about the identity of the sender or the authenticity of the contents, as they would with print documents.
- Users of electronic mail services should be aware that even though the sender and recipient have discarded their copies of an electronic mail record, there may be back-up copies of such electronic mail that can be retrieved.
- Electronic mail may constitute a public record like other documents subject to disclosure under the Kansas Open Records Act or other laws, or as a result of litigation. However, prior to such disclosure, MESI evaluates all requests for information submitted by the public for compliance with the provisions of the Act or other applicable laws.
- E-mail is considered a formal communication by MESI with clients, staff, and other organizations. MESI employees are expected to check their e-mail on a frequent and consistent basis in order to stay current with MESI and/or Client –Staff related communications.

Employee Records

All employee records will be maintained in the Executive Director's office at all times. Employee records should not be removed from MESI property without permission from the Executive

Director. Employees are responsible for informing the Executive Director of any changes (i.e., name, marital status, address, telephone number, or number of tax exemptions).

Expressed Consent to Give Information

It is the responsibility of MESI staff to ensure that where any action is agreed to be taken by MESI on behalf of a client, that client must firstly sign an authorization form. This form should be placed in the client's file.

MESI staff is responsible for checking with clients if it is acceptable to call them at home or work in relation to their case. All staff must ensure they make no reference to MESI when making initial telephone contact with clients.

Exceptions

MESI will always act within the law and aim to best protect and promote well-being. MESI offers confidentiality to all, unless:

- An individual's safety is threatened.
- A client gives specific agreement.
- When information is required by the law (i.e. warrant permits police officers to seize documents).
- A service user commits or attempts to commit a criminal offense on MESI premises or against a MESI client or staff member.

Any breach of confidentiality will result in an investigation and/or that person(s) being disciplined.

Guidance to adhering to policy

- Do not discuss clients with outside agencies unless you have the client's permission to do so, it is necessary, and you are confident in the individual's identity.
- Be careful of what is written on client's files. We must not make assumptions and need only record what is relevant to the client—this should be factual, non-judgmental, and value-free.
- Never discuss another client with or in front of other clients or non-MESI personnel. Care also needs to be taken when using the phone or client records when other clients or non-MESI personnel are nearby.
- Do not divulge any staff member's home address or telephone number or whereabouts to anyone outside the agency.
- Desks must be kept clear and any information pertaining to clients must be locked away when other non-MESI staff members are using the offices.
- Breaches of confidentiality may lead to disciplinary action.

Revisions

Adopted 8/5/11.