

## POL36 – Access to Service User’s Homes Policy and Procedure

Serendipity Healthcare Ltd  
Unit 5 Millennium Way, Dunston, Chesterfield, Derbyshire  
S41 8ND



### 1. Purpose

**1.1** To ensure that Serendipity Healthcare Ltd knows how to respond to a 'No Reply' and recognise that this is an emergency situation and takes priority over any other day-to-day business. This is sometimes referred to as 'unable to gain access' or 'access to people's homes'.

**1.2** To safeguard the wellbeing of vulnerable Service Users.

**1.3** To support Serendipity Healthcare Ltd in meeting the following Key Lines of Enquiry:

Key Question	Key Lines of Enquiry
SAFE	S1: How do systems, processes and practices keep people safe and safeguarded from abuse?
SAFE	S2: How are risks to people assessed and their safety monitored and managed so they are supported to stay safe and their freedom is respected?
WELL-LED	W5: How does the service work in partnership with other agencies?

**1.4** To meet the legal requirements of the regulated activities that Serendipity Healthcare Ltd is registered to provide:

- The Care Quality Commission (Registration) and (Additional Functions) and Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) (Amendment) Regulations 2012
- The Care Act 2014
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Mental Capacity Act 2005
- Mental Capacity Act Code of Practice

### 2. Scope

**2.1** The following roles may be affected by this policy:

- Registered Manager
- Other management
- Care staff
- Care Co-ordinator

**2.2** The following Service Users may be affected by this policy:

- A Service User whose visit is scheduled and when staff would reasonably expect the Service User to be at home

**2.3** The following stakeholders may be affected by this policy:

- Family
- Representatives
- Commissioners
- Local Authority
- NHS

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### **3. Objectives**

- 3.1** To ensure that all staff recognise their responsibility for the safety and security of all Service Users. Failing to establish the exact situation can lead to tragic consequences for Service Users, their families, and the staff of Serendipity Healthcare Ltd, including:
- Death or serious harm to the Service User
  - Distress for relatives and others
  - Police or safeguarding investigation
  - Adverse publicity in local or national print or broadcast media
- 3.2** To ensure that there are clear escalation procedures in place when staff are unable to access to a Service User's home and that effective communication mechanisms are in place to prevent staff from being unable to gain access to carry out scheduled care and support.

### **4. Policy**

- 4.1** Serendipity Healthcare Ltd recognises the urgency in all situations where access cannot be made to a Service User's home at the time of a scheduled visit and the Service User does not respond to requests for entry. Care Workers will consider there to be a possible emergency situation, requiring immediate action to establish the wellbeing and safety of the Service User, or to alert the emergency services where appropriate.
- It is the policy of Serendipity Healthcare Ltd that under no circumstances will the attempt to establish the Service User's safety be discontinued, until the exact circumstances are known, or the matter has been placed in the hands of the emergency services. Where appropriate to do so, the Service User's family or representative will be informed of the situation.
- Serendipity Healthcare Ltd recognises its responsibility to the health, safety and welfare of staff, and at no point during or after the incident will the safety of staff or others be put at risk.
- 4.2** Where a Service User's care is commissioned by Derbyshire County Council, Sheffield City Council, Nottinghamshire County Council, the Access to Service User's Home Policy and Procedure at Serendipity Healthcare Ltd will dovetail with Derbyshire County Council, Sheffield City Council, Nottinghamshire County Council policies and procedures to ensure a consistent response.
- 4.3** All managers, care co-ordinators and Care Workers working for or on behalf of Serendipity Healthcare Ltd must be familiar with this policy and procedure where Service Users do not appear to be at home, or do not respond to requests for entry.
- In the event that Serendipity Healthcare Ltd uses agency staff or sub-contracts their care visits, Serendipity Healthcare Ltd will ensure the Access to Service User's Home Policy and Procedure is understood and followed by the worker when the worker is allocated any visits.

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### 5. Procedure

#### 5.1 Action Required by the Care Worker

At all times, the Care Worker will consider their own safety, and will not attempt any of the following actions if they have any reason to be concerned.

- The Care Worker will repeat the usual method for gaining access at least three times, allowing sufficient time for the Service User to respond if they would normally be expected to do so, e.g. knock at the door and wait for a reply
- If the Service User's telephone number is known, the Care Worker will contact them by telephone, if they are able to do so
- The Care Worker must look for signs which may indicate that the house is empty or that the Service User's condition has changed. This may include letters or newspapers lying uncollected at the door, unopened bottles of milk which have not been collected, curtains closed when they would normally be open
- The Care Worker will attempt to establish whether the Service User is at home (including the possibility that they may be lying on the floor) by looking through the letterbox or any windows at the property which can be accessed safely, and in any gardens adjoining the home
- Where appropriate, the Care Worker will attempt to attract the Service User's attention by calling them through the letterbox or through an open window
- The Care Worker will look for possible signs of break-ins, such as broken windows or doors which have been forced open. If there is any possibility that the Service User's home has been broken into, or that someone may be in the home without the Service User's consent, the Care Worker will not attempt to enter the home, but contact the Police by calling 999. If the Care Worker does not have a mobile telephone, they must use a payphone if there is one nearby, or consider attracting assistance from neighbours or passers-by if it is safe to do so
- If the Care Worker can see the Service User, but they are not responding or appear to be distressed, they must contact the emergency services by dialling 999 and ask for the Police or ambulance services (as appropriate)
- If it is safe to do so, the Care Worker will consider talking to neighbours to establish the Service User's whereabouts, or whether they have concerns about the Service User's wellbeing
- If speaking to neighbours, the Care Worker must apologise for disturbing them, identify themselves by showing their ID badge or card, and state that they are concerned about the Service User's wellbeing
- Where necessary, Care Workers must be prepared to provide neighbours with the telephone number of Serendipity Healthcare Ltd if they wish to speak to their employer. The Care Worker will make contact with Serendipity Healthcare Ltd by telephone immediately and ask to speak to their line manager or the manager in charge at the time. Out of hours, the Care Worker must call the On-Call Team and follow the same process
- The Care Worker must not just leave a message for the manager to call, but must explain their concerns to a manager who can act on them. The Care Worker will

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follow any instructions given by Serendipity Healthcare Ltd, including waiting at the Service User's home, if it is safe to do so. The Care Worker must not leave the Service User's home until instructed to by Serendipity Healthcare Ltd (or the On-Call Team if the incident occurs out of hours)

### **5.2 Actions of All Staff Involved in Concerns about a Service User's Location or Wellbeing**

Any member of staff receiving a call about inability to access the Service User's home must ensure that the call is dealt with by a manager capable of responding to the issue and that the manager has accepted responsibility for managing the issue.

It is generally unacceptable to leave voicemail messages or notes which could go missing, or not be acted upon without delay. Any details of calls must be logged in the Service User records. This includes dates and times, and who was involved.

### **5.3 Actions to be Taken by Serendipity Healthcare Ltd Staff**

Managers (this includes co-ordinators, schedulers, Serendipity Healthcare Ltd managers and on-call staff) must be aware that concerns raised by inability to enter a Service User's home could be a potential emergency and that the policy and procedure must be followed until the location and safety of the Service User is established. Being unable to gain access takes priority over all routine activity of Serendipity Healthcare Ltd, unless failure to do other work will result in immediate harm to another Service User.

On being alerted to a situation where access to the Service User's home has not been possible the manager responsible must:

- Advise the Care Worker to remain at the Service User's home
- Check whether there is any prior information about the Service User's absence from home at Serendipity Healthcare Ltd
- Confirm if the initial actions to be taken by the Care Worker (as outlined above) have been completed
- Consider whether there is sufficient concern to summon emergency services immediately
- Assess the Care Worker's safety for any future actions requested
- Instruct the Care Worker to complete any necessary actions not already undertaken
- Follow any contractual unable to gain access procedures

A manager must attempt contact by telephone with the following people to establish any known reason for non-response, and/or the Service User's location and safety:

- The Service User's home telephone, and any mobile phone, if known
- The Service User's emergency contact
- The Service User's main representative
- Members of the Service User's family or friends, where known
- Any other responsible person or organisation that may know the Service User's whereabouts and safety
- The Service User's social worker or named nurse (where the care is commissioned by a local authority or health authority)
- If the manager is reassured that the Service User's location and safety are known following a conversation with any of the above, this must be documented in the Service User's records and the procedure halted

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- If necessary, and safe to do so, the manager may request that the Care Worker attempts to gain access to the Service User home. Please refer to section 5.4 for the procedure to follow
- If the care is commissioned by the Local Authority and there is no named social worker, the social services duty team must be contacted and advised of the situation. Advice will be taken on the next steps. Serendipity Healthcare Ltd must document the name of the duty social worker and the date and time contacted
- If Serendipity Healthcare Ltd is unable to satisfy itself that the Service User is safe, the manager must contact the Police and co-operate with all reasonable requests for information and assistance. The Care Worker must be informed and remain at the premises unless instructed to leave by Serendipity Healthcare Ltd or the Police
- The actions taken by the manager, or information that the Police or emergency services have been summoned, will be recorded in the Service User's notes and the Service User's main contact, family members or social worker will be advised accordingly
- The manager must check if the Care Worker involved is due to visit any other Service User/s and if the emergency response will make the Care Worker late. If this is the case, those Service Users must be contacted immediately and where possible, and where calls are time-critical, a replacement member of staff known to the Service User will be sent

### 5.4 Attempting to Gain Access to a Service User's Home

Caution must be taken by Care Workers in the event of any of the following actions, until they have contacted their manager to discuss the situation and agree that it is safe to do so. Together with their manager, the Care Worker must assess whether they are able to enter the Service User's home and whether it is safe to do so. Think about whether there may be anyone else in the house, or whether there are pets which might injure the Care Worker. If Serendipity Healthcare Ltd has the Service User's prior permission to do so and if a key to the Service User's home is available; if a key can be obtained from a safe place (e.g. through a key safe); or the Service User's home is fitted with a security keypad, use it to open the Service User's door. Do not attempt to force doors or window frames, or to smash windows to gain access.

#### **Arrangements Where the Care Worker has Access to the Home, but the Service User is Not There**

In some situations, the Care Worker may have access to the Service User's home as part of their normal duties (e.g. because the person is unable to open the door). If the Service User cannot be found, follow the steps outlined in the section below.

#### **Arrangements for Checking Individual Rooms in the Service User's Home**

The Care Worker must announce their presence before entering the home as well as in each individual room, in a loud and clear voice.

The Care Worker must establish whether the Service User is present by checking each room on the premises, if it is safe to do so, and if necessary, contacting the Police or ambulance service as appropriate. The Care Worker must be aware of the possibility of the Service User being behind a locked door or on the floor, and ready to seek guidance from their office on how to proceed if that is what they find. The Care Worker must record the time and date that the home was entered in the Service User's care records, and any actions needed. Once

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access to the Service User's home is complete, the Care Worker must make sure that the premises are secure, that the door used to gain entry is locked, and any keys obtained from a key safe have been returned.

### **5.5 Process for Service Users Known to 'Walk About' from Home**

Every Service User has a right to independence, choice, and control. There may be Service Users who do not inform Serendipity Healthcare Ltd when they are going out and this may be an issue if a care visit is due. If the Service User has capacity, a process must be agreed with the Service User (and any commissioners) of what the Service User wants to happen if a Care Worker fails to gain access.

Serendipity Healthcare Ltd will ensure that there are detailed records about significant people, places, and contact numbers if the Service User is known to walk about and leave the home. Serendipity Healthcare Ltd will work closely with other external partners to ensure a plan is put in place to keep the Service User independent, but safe.

Tools such as the Herbert Protocol used in care homes may be useful to adapt for use with Service User's with dementia, mental health conditions or learning disabilities.

### **5.6 Communication between Other Care Providers**

Serendipity Healthcare Ltd will ensure that there are robust communication procedures in place

when Service Users move between other care providers, particularly following admission or discharge from hospital, to ensure that 'unable to gain access' incidents do not arise when a Service User is expected to be at home and is delayed arriving home, to avoid placing unnecessary strain on emergency services.

### **5.7 Auditing**

All 'unable to gain access' incidents will be documented and a root cause analysis undertaken to understand why they occurred, if procedures were followed correctly, and if there are any lessons that can be learned from the incident. High numbers of 'unable to gain access' incidents may indicate an issue with rota scheduling, travel time, access arrangements or communication issues.

### **5.8 Safeguarding and Regulatory Notification**

Where an incident of being unable to gain access occurs, and the Service User is harmed or has been put at risk of harm because of a failure by a Care Worker, Serendipity Healthcare Ltd, or another organisation; a safeguarding notification must be made. Serendipity Healthcare Ltd also has a statutory requirement to submit a notification to the Care Quality Commission.

Serendipity Healthcare Ltd must ensure that all staff are aware that 'unable to gain access' can be a safeguarding matter, and failure to follow the agreed procedures by any member of staff working for or on behalf of Serendipity Healthcare Ltd may result in disciplinary action being taken.

## **6. Definitions**

### **6.1 Walking About**

- Many people with dementia feel the urge to walk about and in some cases, leave their homes. Walking is not a problem in itself - it can help to relieve stress and

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boredom and is a good form of exercise. When a person with dementia often walks about, it can be worrying for those around them and may at times put the person in danger

- It may not be clear why the person is walking about, and this is often referred to as 'wandering'. However, this term is unhelpful because it suggests aimlessness, whereas the walking often does have a purpose
- Rather than dismissing it, it is important to think about how the person's independence, safety and dignity can be preserved

### **6.2 Herbert Protocol**

- The Herbert Protocol initiative is named after George Herbert, a war veteran of the Normandy landings, who lived with dementia
- It is an initiative adopted by many police forces compiled of useful information, which may be used in the event of a vulnerable person with dementia going missing. Serendipity Healthcare Ltd will seek advice from their local Police force on the initiative in the local area

### **6.3 Missing**

- Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character, or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime, or at risk of harm to themselves or another

### **6.4 No Reply**

- People receiving a service who do not answer the door, for example, on a day when the service is being provided. This is referred to by the CQC as Access to People's Homes

**Reviewed – 28.01.2022**

**Lisa Ward – HR Manager**