



Housing Services

Mental Health Services

Employment Services



# Housing Services

## Client Handbook

What to expect and your rights as a client of Starling Community Services

[starlingcs.ca](http://starlingcs.ca)

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## **Introduction**

Welcome to Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood).

Our Housing Services team is working to reduce and prevent homelessness in Waterloo Region. We do this by focusing on each individual and their situation to help us provide the highest level of service possible.

We help families, couples and individuals aged 16 years or older to find and maintain affordable housing. This can include a meeting with a Housing Advisor who can assess your needs to housing stability services including support to maintain and secure new housing through loan or grant options.

Our Families in Transition team is a single access point for families who are seeking emergency shelter in Waterloo Region. Our FIT Counsellors will assess your eligibility, strengths and needs so that we can offer individualized resources and supports.

Behind the scenes, we have two teams working with individuals experiencing chronic Homelessness in Waterloo Region who have a greater depth of need. The Prioritized Access to Housing Support (PATHS) team works with local housing stability system partners and others to provide coordinated access prioritizing housing offers and connecting participants to housing. Once housed, our Home-Based Service (HBS) team works intensively with individuals to help them maintain housing.

Visit [www.starlingcs.ca/housing](http://www.starlingcs.ca/housing) to learn more about our Housing Resource Centres and Housing Services.

Our housing programs are expanding with culturally aware staff and we continually educate ourselves on the diverse needs of our community. We invite you to read more about Starling Community Services (formerly Lutherwood), our Mission, Vision and Values, and our commitment to Anti-Racism and Land Acknowledgement at [www.starlingcs.ca](http://www.starlingcs.ca).

Our tagline is our commitment to you: Caring People. Strengthening Lives.

## **Participant Rights and Responsibilities**

### **Your Rights**

While receiving service through Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood), every participant has rights. Your participation is protected by the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Your rights with regard to participating in Lutherwood's programs and services will be reviewed with you during the intake process. These rights include:

1. You must recognize that service is voluntary and that you give consent to the service. Consent means that you clearly understand all aspects of the service.
2. You have the right to be informed of any information, decisions and actions that will affect you.
3. You have the right to participate in all decision making relevant to you.
4. You have the right to review and, if necessary, correct Agency information in the file/record.

### **Your Responsibilities**

The following is a list of expectations for those participating in our programs that will help you to get the most out of your experience:

- Let us know your needs in the most accurate and complete way possible so we can provide the most appropriate service options.
- Be respectful of other participants, volunteers, students, staff and property.
- Contact us when unable to keep appointments or of any change of address or other information relevant to service.
- Inform us of health and safety concerns and any accommodation required.
- Provide feedback on services and programs.
- Observe the terms of the service agreement.

## **Service Agreement**

Before participating in our services, you will sign a Service Agreement. Our services are voluntary and the decision to participate is up to you. Signing the Service Agreement confirms that you wish service from Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood) and that you understand the agreement.

The service agreement clearly outlines what things Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood) is responsible for and committed to provide. As well, the agreement outlines your responsibilities.

Both you and Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood) will be working together to make this service work. You can review this service agreement at any time and ask for changes. However, some areas, such as confidentiality or duty to report cannot be changed

If you decide that you no longer wish to receive services, you can end your participation and your Service Agreement with us any time. If we notice that you are having trouble participating, we will try to work with you resolve and issues or barriers that might be making it difficult for you. In some cases, we may need to end service with you but are always open to starting again once you are ready.

# Privacy Policy

Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood) takes privacy very seriously and is committed to protecting the trust and privacy of its employees, clients, residents, donors, volunteers and other stakeholders. We recognize that maintaining this trust requires that we be transparent and accountable in how we treat the information that you share with us.

## Your Personal Health Information

Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood) programs follow the privacy principles as outlined in the Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA), as well as the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA) where they apply. Many safeguards are in place to protect the information you share with us. If you have any questions about our privacy safeguards, please ask your worker or ask to speak with our Privacy Officer.

### Purpose of Information Being Collected and Used

When you enter one of our programs, we start a file. We only collect and use information necessary for the purpose of providing the agreed upon service. A more specific purpose statement for collecting and using your information can be found in the program handbook on this website or provided to you at your appointment.

On an ongoing basis, Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood) is required to report to our funders non-identifying aggregate (which means total or overall) data collected about clients using our services for the purpose of demonstrating accountability and measuring the effectiveness of services. Examples of aggregate data reported to funders include number of individuals served and outcomes of service.

Also, Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood) may use non-identifying data externally such as total numbers and/or quotes in proposals, research projects and/or social media for the purpose of seeking funding, promoting and making service improvements within our agency, region and beyond. Internally, Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood) uses non-identifying aggregate data for the purpose of informing risk management, quality improvement and planning.

### Direct and Indirect Collection of Information

Information will be collected from you directly as part of your participation in service. There may be circumstances where information is collected indirectly when it reduces risk or when it is not possible to collect it directly from you in an accurate, complete and/or timely manner.

### Your Right to Access Your Records

It is your right to have access to your file. You may request to see your file and/or request a copy of information from your file. Certain exceptions apply as outlined in our access to records policy and will be explained to you at the time of request. To access your records as a current

client, a request is made for an appointment with the Program Manager. If you are a past client, an appointment request is made with the Program Director.

### **Your Right and Responsibility to an Accurate File**

You are responsible to provide accurate and up-to-date information and changes and have the right to correct information in your files. You may request that staff make corrections to your records where the record is shown to be incomplete or inaccurate. Staff may require that you put the request in writing to ensure accuracy of changes.

### **Storage of Records**

Your file may be in paper and/or electronic format. Paper files are kept in a locked file cabinet within a locked room. Electronic files are part of a web-based client information system that has many security features in place. Your file cannot be accessed without an assigned and secure password.

Your files are kept for as long as required by standards and legislation. You may ask your worker how long records are kept specific to your program area.

### **Housing Services**

To provide housing services for you, we need to collect practical and personal information about you. We ask for information about your current and past housing and health story. We use this information for the purpose of understanding your needs, making sure you get the right service to find and/or maintain housing and connecting you with community resources as needed

We are funded through the Region of Waterloo to offer these services in our community. As our funders, they have access to all the personal information you share with us to ensure your eligibility for the programs and to hold us accountable for delivering quality services.

Your information is stored in a shared data base that is viewable by other housing sector service providers who are also funded through the Region of Waterloo. The purpose of this shared database is to minimize how often you repeat your story through your housing journey and so those working with you can assure that all services are well coordinated to best meet your needs.

## **Your Informed Consent**

A consent is your verbal or written permission allowing us to ask for and/or share information with specific agencies, organizations or individuals. An "informed" consent for collection use and release of information, means that the purpose has been explained to you in language and format that is understandable to you.

### **Your Implied or Understood Consent**

We would like you to be aware that as a participant in a Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood) program or service, your personal health information may be shared with other relevant Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood) staff members and joint service delivery partner staff who are working with you and your care team.

### **Your Verbal or Written Consent**

For staff to either collect information or talk to third party such as a counsellor, family doctor, school, caseworker, landlord etc., we ask for your verbal and/or written permission or 'consent'.

### **Limits to Confidentiality**

We will not disclose your information to any third party without consent except where required by law, where failure to do so might result in serious injury or death of self or others, or where there is knowledge or suspicion of child abuse.

### **Your Right to Withdraw or Withhold Consent**

Consent can be withdrawn at any time by informing us in writing. Once consent is withdrawn, we can no longer seek or share information. Withdrawal of consent cannot reverse any action that was already taken with your previous consent.



## **Electronic Communication Consent**

**(as per Service Agreement)**

Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood) recognizes that the use of technology can be a timely and friendly way to communicate however before we agree to communicate via email or text, it is important that everyone understands and accepts the risks and guidelines involved.

1. The privacy and security of electronic communication through email and smart phones cannot be guaranteed. To ensure that all confidential information is secure, you are advised to use password protection on all electronic devices.
2. Electronic communication is not always the best way to communicate. At times a face-to-face meeting with staff may be suggested.
3. You are encouraged to always double check where you have addressed an email or text before sending, as it can be misaddressed and sent to unintended or unknown persons.
4. Staff's email address or contact information is not to be included in any mailing lists. If this occurs, it may result in not being allowed to continue electronic communication with Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood) staff.
5. Deleted emails may not be permanently deleted; back-up copies may exist on a computer or in cyberspace.
6. Emails can introduce viruses into a computer system and potentially damage the files. Emails can be viewed by Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood) IT staff for security purposes.
7. Emails and text messages will be summarized and entered into your file as part of your record. Client records can be used as evidence in court. All copies of emails will be deleted by Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood).
8. No phone or online video software is entirely secure. Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood) computer systems have strong internal security, which helps protect my privacy and confidentiality. Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood) will not be responsible for breaches of your confidential information if they are not the direct result of intentional misconduct.
9. There is no guarantee that staff will respond to email or text messages immediately. If you need immediate assistance, please do not call your worker, call 911 or seek assistance in other ways appropriate.
10. You are asked to inform your worker of any changes to your email/text address.

## **Phone & Video Services**

**(as per Service Agreement)**

The use of technology can sometimes be a helpful way to provide service to you and your family, when meeting in person is not possible or suitable. However, before we agree to offer services (such as support or therapy) through phone or video options, it is important that you and your family understand and accept the risks and guidelines involved.

1. To ensure your privacy, you should choose a private and quiet place where our conversation cannot be overheard and free from distraction. When meeting by phone or video, there is a risk of others finding out about you working with Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood) if you did not want them to know.
2. You are asked not to record this session without the direct permission of everyone involved.
3. All individuals present for the phone or video session must be within view of the camera or acknowledge their presence so that everyone is fully aware of who is participating.
4. It is necessary to let staff know of your location and provide an emergency contact, and that in the event of an emergency, emergency services may be called to your location.
5. There could be interruptions in meetings due to technology or connection failures, and we will create a plan in advance for what to do if this happens.
6. Everything outlined in the service agreement that applies to in-person meetings also applies to phone and video meetings. Phone and video meetings will be summarized and entered into your file as part of your record, in the same way as in-person meetings.
7. Phone and video meetings are not always the best way to communicate and staff may decide that they are no longer appropriate. Face-to-face meetings with staff or other alternatives may be suggested if phone or video meetings are no longer suitable.
8. You are requested to use a private internet connection rather than public/free wifi, as this increases confidentiality and security.
9. You are responsible for paying for your own internet costs.
10. You are to use passwords on all your devices as this controls who has access and improves confidentiality and security.
11. No phone or online video software is entirely secure. Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood) computer systems have strong internal security, which helps protect your privacy and confidentiality. Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood) will not be responsible for breaches of your confidential information if they are not the direct result of intentional misconduct of Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood). 10

## **Donor Privacy Policy**

The contact information we receive from you as a donor and the amount of your donation is the minimum required by Canada Revenue Agency for the issuance of an official tax receipt. We will not provide or share your personal information with third parties unless:

1. You authorize us to share the information.
2. Sharing the information is necessary to process a donation.
3. We are required to by law.

## **Who can I contact for more information about this privacy statement?**

If you would like to know more about Lutherwood's privacy policies or if you have any questions, concerns or complaints relating to Lutherwood's handling of personal health information, we invite you to contact our Privacy Officer, Sherrie Hyde, by email.

You have the right to complain to the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario if you think your rights have been violated at <https://www.ipc.on.ca/> or call 1-800-387-0073. For more information about your rights go to <https://www.ipc.on.ca/>

### **Please note:**

We use standard programs which will count and analyze a range of user activities in order to help us improve the website.

We reserve the right to modify our Privacy Policy from time to time without notice.

## **Risks and Benefits of Participation**

There are benefits and possible risks that you and/or your family may experience while participating in Housing Services at Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood). For example working with Housing staff may at times increase your focus on issues that are challenging or seem overwhelming. However, it is also our experience that this is a unique opportunity to set goals, learn more about community supports and services and meet personal aspirations with the support of your worker.

## **Client Complaints Process**

At times, you may feel upset or unhappy about what happens while you're involved with Lutherwood's programs and services. Exploring your thoughts and feelings, even when they are negative is important. If, however, you have major concerns and feel that they are not being addressed, you have access to the Client Complaint Procedures outlined below.

Where there is a concern about the service you are receiving, Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood) needs to know and is committed to resolving all complaints.

There will not be any negative consequences as a result of making a complaint in good faith. Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood) is committed to ensuring that the complaint procedure is carried out in a timely fashion while recognizing some time may be needed to bring the necessary people together.

Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood) will support you to choose a staff member who will assist you with the client complaint process. The staff member is responsible for ensuring your concerns are clearly and accurately communicated in writing, and that you are able to access external support at any time throughout the process.

**STEP ONE:** The first step to resolve complaints is for you to talk with your designated staff.

**STEP TWO:** If you are dissatisfied with the response and feel your concerns have not been satisfactorily resolved, we will support you in contacting a Program Supervisor, Manager or Assistant Director or Director in that order. Staff will facilitate contact between you and one of the above individuals in a way that best supports you and the circumstances involved.

**STEP THREE:** Ongoing unresolved issues may be escalated to the Chief Executive Officer, or his/her designate either by phone or in writing. Staff will assist you in making contact or by providing you with contact information. The CEO will review the issue, seek perspectives from those involved to help resolve the complaint in a timely and equitable manner.

Each step will be acknowledged within 3-5 business days and resolved within 14 business days from point it was acknowledged. If meeting defined timelines is not possible, you will be notified verbally or in writing that it will take longer and the reason for the delay.

If your concerns cannot be addressed at Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood), you may write to and/or call the Office of the Child and Family Services Advocacy. You can also, at any time, submit your concerns in writing to the Ombudsman, Member of Parliament or the Prime Minister. Starling Housing Services (formerly Lutherwood) staff cannot read this correspondence.