



EQUALITY & DIVERSITY POLICY

INTRODUCTION

Voluntary Action South Leicestershire, hereinafter referred to as the Organisation, strives for high standards both as an employer and as a provider of services. In so doing, we recognise the need for encouraging diversity and wholeheartedly support a policy of equal opportunities in all areas of our work and responsibilities.

1. This policy provides guidance to enable all who work with or for the Organisation to comply with anti-discrimination legislation. The policy will also address anti-discrimination issues involving areas that currently fall outside any legislation.
2. Failure to follow the procedures in the policy may lead to disciplinary or other appropriate action.
3. The Organisation's aims and objectives will be achieved through action planning, effective monitoring and a willingness to tackle problems where they arise. The Organisation is committed to reviewing this policy on an annual basis. Through our training, publications, interaction with members and other activities, the Organisation will ensure those we work with know our statements of policy.
4. The Organisation will regularly review the implementation of its Equality and Diversity Policy and strategy. Where evidence is found of ineffectiveness, immediate remedial action will be taken to ensure implementation.
5. The Organisation urges staff and trustees /volunteers to be aware of the less obvious types of discrimination which result from general assumptions and pre-conceptions about the capabilities, interests and characteristics of individuals.

DEFINITIONS

1. **Equal Opportunities** ensure that policies, procedures and practice within the Organisation do not discriminate against any of the people within it. It is about treating people fairly and equally regardless of who they are, their background or their lifestyle.
2. **Diversity** ensures that all people are valued as individuals and are able to maximise their potential and contribution to the Organisation and to the community. It recognises that people from different backgrounds can bring

fresh ideas and a different approach, which can make the way we work and learn more fun, more creative, more efficient and more innovative.

3. **Direct Discrimination**, as defined in law, occurs when an individual is dealt with less favourably than other people on the grounds of: race, ethnic or national origin, disability, sex, actual or perceived religion or belief or sexual orientation. However in terms of this policy the definition is taken to be wider and includes for example: colour, nationality, marital status or caring responsibility, age, mental health, political, class, HIV status, employment status, unrelated criminal convictions, union activities.
4. **Indirect Discrimination** occurs when a provision, criterion or practice puts people of a particular group at a disadvantage and is not justified in relation to the job, for example a rule about clothing that disproportionately disadvantages a racial group cannot be justified.
5. **Victimisation** means that if a person has made or is making an accusation of discrimination in good faith, it is unlawful to discriminate against them for having done so, or because they intend to do so or it is suspected that they intend to do so. People must be able to act against unlawful discrimination without fear of reprisals.
6. **Harassment** means unwanted conduct based on race, sex or age etc. which has the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person. Harassment can be sexual, racial, directed against people with disabilities or indeed related to any characteristic exhibited by the individual. (See the Organisation's Harassment Policy for guidance where harassment has occurred).
7. **Positive Action** refers to measures taken to assist employees who have been under-represented in specific areas to acquire a level of workplace knowledge and competencies that are comparable with 'representative' employees. These measures could take the form of additional training or providing the job application form in other languages to encourage applicants from these communities. 'Positive discrimination' at the point of selection for work is not legally permissible.

POLICY STATEMENTS

VASL's Commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

VASL's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion enables the Organisation to link with the diversity of our communities and to attract volunteers, staff and clients from diverse backgrounds. This inclusive approach embraces all people, regardless of their backgrounds. It encourages a variety of ideas and perspectives, increases employee engagement, improves decision making and problem solving and, importantly, increases the reputation of VASL, and helps to achieve support for funding.

Diversity

1. The Organisation will actively encourage diversity to maximise achievement, creativity and good practice and to bring benefit to individuals and communities.

The Organisation encourages all people it works with and for to contribute to an environment in which people feel comfortable expressing how they feel and what they need, knowing they will be treated with respect and that their contribution will be valued. The way we work, train and learn within the Organisation reflects both the Mission and Objectives of the Organisation and the spirit and intentions of equality legislation. The Organisation will make reasonable adjustments to working practices, equipment and premises and offer, where appropriate, additional support to trustees/volunteers and staff to ensure they are able to take a full and active part in the Organisation's work. The Organisation will endeavour to deliver services in a way that genuinely recognises the importance of an inclusive society that brings opportunities and access, not barriers to individuals.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

1. The Organisation is an equal opportunities employer and provider of services. In pursuit of this diversity it will ensure that no job applicant, volunteer, employee, user of services or member is discriminated against directly, indirectly, by association or perception because of disability, gender (including gender reassignment), race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, marital status or civil partnerships, responsibility for dependents, sexuality, pregnancy or maternity, age, trade union activity, political or religious, agnostic or atheist beliefs and (unrelated to the post) criminal convictions. The Organisation will not tolerate any form of harassment or victimisation. No person will, be disadvantaged by conditions or requirements which cannot be shown to be justifiable.
2. This principle applies to all aspects of Voluntary Action South Leicestershire's activities as an employer and provider of services, including recruitment, promotion, transfer, training, benefits, facilities, procedures and all terms and conditions of employment.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aims and objectives of the Equality and Diversity Policy are:

- To encourage, promote and celebrate diversity in all our activities and services
- To ensure equal access to jobs, volunteer opportunities and training and development
- To harness the talents of all people from diverse backgrounds and to foster good relations within the Organisation and externally
- To ensure compliance with legislation on discrimination and equality including Equal Pay Act 1970, Sex Discrimination Act 1975, Race Relations Act 1976, Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and its subsequent implementation, Employment Rights Act 1996, Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000,

Employment Act 2002, Race Relations Act 1976 (Amendment) Regulations 2003, Religion or Belief Regulations 2003, Sexual Orientation Regulations 2003, Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 and The Equality Act (2010)

- To promote equal opportunities in other areas not currently covered by legislation.
- To create environments free from harassment and discrimination and to respect the dignity of every individual involved with VASL.
- To maximise the use of resources in the best interests of staff, volunteers and service users.
- To confront and challenge all types of discrimination, harassment and victimisation where and whenever they arise whether it be between colleagues, volunteers, or in any other area relating to the Organisation's work.
- To make a willingness to accept and implement this policy to be a necessary qualification for any position in the Organisation.
- To ensure, through positive action and so far as is practicable, that all the Organisation premises and services are accessible to all people.
- To ensure that employment and advancement within the organisation is determined by objective criteria and personal merit.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: EXPECTATIONS

The Organisation recognises that passive policies do not provide equality and the Organisation will seek to promote equality and diversity within the following framework of responsibilities.

Responsibility for implementing and developing the policy rests with the Trustees. The overall co-ordinating responsibility for equal opportunities and management of diversity is delegated to the Charity Manager. However, the Organisation believes that all who work with or for the organisation have an individual responsibility: to accept the policy and ensure a personal involvement in its application; to co-operate actively to ensure that the environment we desire is a reality. Therefore the Organisation requires individuals:

- to implement measures introduced by the Organisation to ensure equality of opportunity, diversity and non discrimination.
- not to harass, abuse or intimidate any other employee or volunteer on the grounds of race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin; sex; marital or civil partnership status or caring responsibility; sexual orientation; age; physical, sensory or learning disability; mental health; political or religious beliefs; class; HIV status; employment status; unrelated criminal convictions; union activities.
- to inform management if they suspect discrimination or harassment is taking place.

The Organisation requires its Line Managers:

- to ensure that proper records of employment decisions are maintained and regular reviews of employment practices are carried out.

- to ensure that grievances are dealt with in a fair and consistent manner and in line with the Organisation's Grievance Policy and Procedure.
- to ensure that individuals within their area are aware of their legal responsibilities, and the organisation's Equality and Diversity Policy.
- to promote actively the benefits of employee and volunteer diversity, in employment, services and training.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: RECRUITMENT AND PROMOTION

1. The Organisation strives to ensure that our trustees and staff reflect the diversity of the wider community.
2. Clear and accurate information on vacant posts should be available through advertisement, job descriptions, person specifications and interview. Vacancies should be advertised sufficiently widely to reach the widest possible range of candidates, either internal and/or external.
3. All recruitment material should not imply any preferred group, unless a genuine occupational qualification exists limiting a post to a particular group.
4. Applicants will be informed, through all recruitment material of the Organisation's commitment to Equal Opportunities and Diversity and the existence of this policy.
5. Person specifications may include 'essential' and 'desirable' requirements that are necessary and justifiable. Care, and advice where necessary, is needed to ensure these are not discriminatory.
6. Staff should be encouraged to discuss their development and training needs through a process of regular support and annual appraisals.
7. Job titles that are discriminatory should be avoided.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: INTERVIEWS AND SELECTION

1. In line with the intentions of this policy, efforts must be made to select a recruitment panel which is inclusive in terms of gender, disability and ethnicity.
2. The short listing panel will select candidates on the basis of an objective assessment of their match with the requirements as described in the job description and person specification; this will not take into account the gender, name, race, religion or belief, possible disability or age of the candidate.
3. The interview panel must take extreme care not to ask discriminatory questions which do not comply with the Organisation's Equality and Diversity Policy Statements, e.g. questions relating to race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin; sex; marital or civil partnership status or caring responsibility, sexual orientation, age, physical, sensory or learning disability, mental health, political or religious beliefs, class, HIV status, employment status, unrelated criminal convictions, union activities.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: TRAINING

1. In line with the intentions of this policy, Voluntary Action South Leicestershire will not discriminate in the provision of training courses/ development opportunities wherever possible.
2. Appropriate training will be provided to enable trustees, staff, volunteers to perform their jobs effectively. The training offered will take into account the needs of all people.
3. Briefing on this policy will form part of the Induction Procedure for trustees, staff, and volunteers.
4. All staff and Trustees will be required to undertake Diversity Training as part of their induction and ongoing development.

ENFORCEMENT

The Organisation recognises the need for a continuing commitment to genuine equal opportunities and diversity within the organisation. The effectiveness of the policy's aims and objectives can only be judged by how the policy operates in practice.

POLICY ENFORCEMENT – GRIEVANCES

1. Any staff member who feels they have been a victim of discrimination or unfairly treated in a way contrary to the intention of this policy should raise the issue through the Organisation's established Grievance Procedure.
2. Any volunteer or service user who feels he/ she has been unfairly treated in a way contrary to the intention of this policy should make a complaint through the Organisation's management, who must report any such complaint to the Trustee Board.
3. Any job applicant who believes that he/ she has been treated unfairly and contrary to the intention of this policy should raise the issue with the Charity Manager.

POLICY ENFORCEMENT – DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURE

1. Any member of staff found to be in breach of this policy will be subject to disciplinary action in line with the Standard Terms of Employment.
2. All incidents of direct discrimination are disciplinary offences and will be dealt with under the Disciplinary Procedure.
3. Incidents of indirect discrimination will be investigated to determine whether they should be dealt with under the Disciplinary Procedure.
4. Incidents of victimisation or harassment will be dealt with in accordance with the Organisation's Harassment Procedure. Where incidents of victimisation and harassment are proven, the issue will be dealt with under the Organisation's Disciplinary Procedure.
5. Any Trustees found to be in breach of this policy will be counselled on his/her actions and may, where necessary, be removed from the Organisation's Trustee Board .
6. Any volunteer or service user found in breach of this policy will, where appropriate, be counselled on his/her actions and may, where necessary, be asked to discontinue as a volunteer, service users may be refused future services from the Organisation.

MONITORING

1. The Organisation regards the collection/analysis of data as vital in informing change and improving performance. Where appropriate, statistics on the Organisation's services will be collected and analysed in relation to equality and diversity matters. We will review employee turnover and seek information on reasons for leaving. Local and national data or statistics will be used to benchmark our performance.

2. The Trustees will review annually equality of opportunity relating to the Organisation services. Recruitment and selection procedures will be monitored and reviewed annually by the Charity Manager who will report to the Trustee Board. All aspects of personnel policies and procedures shall be kept under review to ensure that they do not operate against the Equal and Diversity Policy.
3. In order to determine the impact of this policy it is important that a monitoring system be developed which will measure commitment, progress and effectiveness. The Diversity and Equality Policy will be monitored and reviewed as follows:
 4. Equality and diversity will be an agenda item at the Organisation team meetings and in supervisions.
 5. The Trustee Board will undertake an annual policy review. All relevant parties will be encouraged to submit comments for consideration.
 6. The review recommendations will be presented to the next Trustee Board meeting for their comments and ratification.
 7. Where it appears that there may have been or there is a breach of the policy, the Trustee Board will investigate the circumstances and action will be taken to counter any proven breach of policy.
 8. If it is found that the policy is excluding or discouraging the development of trustees/volunteers or staff or restricting service users, the Trustee Board should take positive action to re-adjust the policy.