

Equality, Fairness and Diversity Policy

Equality, Fairness and Diversity Policy Statement

The Voluntary Network welcomes and values difference. Equality of opportunity is at the heart of all we do. We treat everyone with respect and offer equal chances to participate.

To help us achieve this we have a strategy for equality of opportunity and diversity. This will develop and inform our thinking, governance, management and practice.

The Voluntary Network has high standards. We will investigate and take action on any reports of practice, which trustees, staff, volunteers, clients and passengers believe to be unfair or discriminatory. A commitment to equal opportunities is at the heart of our work.

Context & legislation

As an employer and service provider The Voluntary Network is required to comply with anti-discrimination legislation. It is also firmly within our ethos and values as an organisation to ensure that all staff, volunteers, families, funders and other stakeholders are confident that we will treat everyone with fairness, dignity and respect.

The Equality Act 2010 is a consolidating Act introduced to bring together all the various threads of discrimination under one statute.

The Act defines nine protected characteristics –

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion and belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

The policy also reflects The Voluntary Network commitment to the Human Rights Act 1998, the extension of the law on harassment and the Equality and Human Rights Commission's Codes of Practice for Employment, Equal Pay and Services, Public Functions and Associations.

The Voluntary Network is committed to a culture that does not tolerate victimisation, harassment or bullying and has policies in place to confirm this commitment and guide procedures should such incidents occur. All staff are made aware that unfair or discriminatory treatment of another individual will result in the consideration of disciplinary proceedings and will normally be treated as serious misconduct warranting dismissal.

This is a mandatory policy, the details of which should be known to everyone involved in the scheme and should be embedded in every aspect of the work. The policy will be regularly reviewed to ensure it remains fit for purpose and reflects appropriate Equality law.

Procedures

1. Trustees

1.1 Trustees are responsible for ensuring that the scheme meets its legal responsibilities, including those relating to Equalities legislation. All trustees accept and work to the Equality, Fairness & Diversity Policy and monitor its implementation in the day to day work of our services.

1.2 Membership of The Voluntary Network Board represents as wide a cross-section of the community served by the scheme as possible, including statutory and voluntary agencies.

1.3 Trustees endeavour to ensure that the time, place and conduct of meetings enable all trustees and potential members to have an equal opportunity to be involved.

2. Employment practices

Recruitment and selection

The Voluntary Network follows national guidance on recruitment procedures, and in particular:

2.1 All job advertisements and job descriptions state that The Voluntary Network is committed to equal opportunities.

2.2 Job descriptions, person specifications and application forms are reviewed as each vacancy arises to ensure they are directly relevant to the post. Consideration is given as to whether the job can be shared and whether working hours can be flexible.

2.3 Application forms ask only for information relevant to the post – health questionnaires are not used until after a conditional offer of employment is made.

2.4 All vacant posts are advertised as widely as appropriate for the job in order to encourage applications from all sections of the community.

2.5 Information sent to applicants includes a job description, person specification detailing essential and desirable attributes and the Equality, Fairness and Diversity statement and monitoring form.

2.6 Monitoring forms are separated from the application before short-listing and used only after the selection process for monitoring purposes.

2.7 Short-listing and selection for the post is carried out objectively on job related criteria, specified in the job description and person specification and in accordance with The Voluntary Network guidance. Trustees or staff with knowledge of a candidate will use only the applicant's application form to judge suitability for short-listing. The exception being where that knowledge is connected with safeguarding.

2.9 The person specification indicates which requirements are essential and which are desirable. Only essential criteria are considered in the first round of short-listing.

2.10 Interview questions relate directly to the person specification, job description and application forms. Questions are not varied according to the age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage/civil partnership, pregnancy & maternity, race, religion & belief, sex, sexual orientation or circumstances of any applicant.

2.11.1 References are taken up after interview but information given to candidates at all stages explicitly states that any offer of employment will be subject to satisfactory references.

2.11.2 The reference request or proforma requires referees to confirm whether or not they are aware of any safeguarding concerns relating to the individual in relation to children or vulnerable adults.

2.11.3 References are judged as satisfactory if they have been verified by the scheme. These should include at least one professional reference (previous employer wherever possible; school, college or other professional such as a church or faith leader or a volunteer supervisor).

2.12 Reasonable travel expenses are offered to all applicants attending interviews.

2.13 All short-listed applicants are advised of the result of their interview in writing.

2.14 Decisions taken at short-listing and interviewing are recorded. Feedback is made available to unsuccessful interviewees on request.

Employment

2.16 Each newly appointed member of staff receives a planned induction tailored to the requirements of the job and to individual needs.

2.17 All staff should be informed of the routes of access to the Trustee Board

2.18 All staff have equal and fair access to learning and development opportunities. Individual training needs and opportunities for development are identified, discussed and met as appropriate within the capacity of The Voluntary Network resources.

2.19 Appropriate consideration will be given to the individual circumstances of a member of staff within the scope of the Equality Act, providing the needs of the scheme are met. This may include actions such as reasonable adjustment to the employee's working environment or flexible working patterns.

2.20 The Voluntary Network is committed to ensuring that all employees have a workplace free from victimisation, bullying and harassment, are made aware of the relevant policies and procedures and know how to report incidents.

3. Working with volunteers

The Voluntary Network volunteers are a vital and invaluable resource. By giving of their time, experience and skills so freely they allow us to not only support our users but reach those that would not accept a service from a paid member of staff. Therefore, although within the scope of the Equality Act volunteers do not have the same rights as employees, The Voluntary Network will always treat its volunteers with equality and fairness and welcome diversity.

3.1 All volunteers are expected to accept and work to the Equality, Fairness & Diversity policy, a copy of which will be provided as part of the induction process.

3.2 Volunteers are recruited from as wide a range of backgrounds as possible, taking into account the composition of the catchment area.

5.3 Where appropriate, former users of the scheme will be enabled to become volunteers.

5.4 DBS checking is an essential part of the procedure for recruiting volunteers. The Disclosure and Barring Service and Recruitment of Ex-Offenders policies play an important part in decisions made during the selection process.

5.5 The individuality and differences of volunteers are respected and selection of volunteers will be based on the experience and skills of each individual.

5.6 Volunteers' expenses are paid promptly on receipt of relevant documentation.

5.7 Regular support and supervision is provided to all volunteers in line with Home-Start UK guidance.

6. Training

6.1 All trustees, staff and volunteers undertake training in equal opportunities awareness training and implementation of the Home-Start Blaby District Oadby & Wigston Equality, Fairness & Diversity Policy.

6.2 Trustees new to recruitment and who are involved in recruiting staff undertake training on recruitment and selection.

6.3 Trustees are aware of their responsibilities both in encouraging all staff to participate in training to meet their development needs, and in ensuring sufficient budgetary provision.

6.4 All training offered by the scheme reflects this policy at all times.

6.5 The volunteer course of preparation raises awareness of values and attitudes, the meaning of equality and diversity, the different types of discrimination and includes a session on equal opportunities issues. The content and materials of all courses encourage anti-discriminatory practice ensuring that inappropriate statements and practice are challenged.

6.6 All outside speakers are made aware of the Equality, Fairness and Diversity Policy Statement . Home-Start Blaby District Oadby & Wigston invites a diverse range of speakers from their community to the scheme.

6.7 Home-Start Blaby District Oadby & Wigston offers all volunteers the opportunity for ongoing training within the organisation or externally and makes provision within its budget for this expense. The individual needs of participants are taken into consideration in the design of courses and in the choice of venue.

7. Monitoring

7.1 Performance in relation to this policy is monitored through the Home-Start Quality Assurance self assessments and reviews.

7.2 Regular surveys are done to measure progress. Action plans are then drawn up to inform Home-Start Blaby District Oadby & Wigston planning and targets.

7.3 Monitoring forms used at recruitment are analysed to improve future recruitment.

This policy is operated alongside Home-Start Blaby District Oadby & Wigston's policies on:

- Criminal records checks
- Disability
- Expenses
- Harassment
- Human Rights Policy
- Managing referrals and waiting lists
- Recruitment of ex offenders
- Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children
- Safer recruitment and selection
- Safeguarding vulnerable adults
- Staff development
- Supervision of staff
- Supervision of volunteers

The following Intranet workspaces provide more detailed information and guidance to support schemes in ensuring their practice meets our high standards in Equality & Diversity: -

- Governance and Management
- Recruiting and Managing Staff
- Recruiting and Managing Volunteers
- Supporting Families
- Volunteers and Families

There are also checklists that schemes can complete to help identify that they are following good practice guidelines. These include

- Access to services
- Service provision
- Trustees
- Employment
- Working with volunteers

Please also refer to the Home-Start Volunteer Preparation Course Guide

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