



Equal Opportunities Policy

January 2014

Refer:

Professional Boundaries

Anti-hetero

Disability policy

HIV status

Legislation:

Gender Equality Act 2004

Equality Act 2006

Racial & Religious Hatred Act 2007

Criminal Justice Act 2003

Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974

Data Protection Act 1998

General Statement

Wear Valley Women's Aid (W.V.W.A.) acknowledges that certain groups and individuals in society are oppressed and discriminated against. We are committed to challenging social inequalities.

We have a clear understanding of diversity and inclusion matters, recognising that certain groups/individuals are marginalised in society.

In accordance, Wear Valley Women's Aid intends to demonstrate that our service provision, access to our service, policy decisions, and the appointment of workers, volunteers and management members is consistent with our commitment to equal opportunities and anti-oppressive practice.

All groups and individuals working with, alongside or for W.V.W.A. must declare support for this aim.

Anti-oppressive/anti-discriminatory ethos is integral to service provision within Wear Valley Women's Aid.

Vision Statement

Wear Valley Women's Aid exists to maximise the well being of women and children. In pursuing this aim, it will strive for a just and inclusive society which gives everyone equality of opportunity.

We are committed to:

- promoting equal opportunities in every aspect of our work
- espousing values reflecting diversity, encouraging fairness and justice
- wanting equal chances for everyone to work, learn and live free from discrimination and victimisation
- to combating discrimination in all its forms throughout the organisation and to use its position and influence, wherever possible, to help overcome discriminatory barriers

In seeking to achieve this vision, Wear Valley Women's Aid will strive to:

- encourage equality of opportunity for all people and actively promote good relations and positive relationships
- eliminate any conditions, procedures and individual behaviour that can lead to oppressive/discriminatory attitudes and behaviour, even when there was no intent to discriminate, with particular regard to:

**RACE, GENDER, DISABILITY, SEXUALITY, AGE, RELIGION AND BELIEF,
EMPLOYMENT ISSUES**

While recognising that individuals may experience disadvantage on more than one level, we strive to:

- offer Domestic Abuse services fairly to women, ensuring that anyone in contact with the organisation is treated with respect, making provision for those groups within the community whose needs and expectations are less well met.
- comply with all legislation dealing with discrimination and the promotion of equality, following the codes of practice issued to support this legislation
- ensure all employment policies, procedures, guidelines reflect and reinforce Wear Valley Women's Aid's commitment to equality
- ensure mechanisms are in place for responding to complaints of discrimination and harassment from employees, service users, other individuals and organisations.
- encourage disadvantaged groups and individuals to utilise the service
- make this policy known to all involved in Wear Valley Women's Aid
- operate procurement practices and partnership arrangements that ensure others commissioned to provide services for W.V.W.A. have similar policies covering equality of opportunity
- review it annually, but periodically if necessary

Wear Valley women's Aid's services must be accessible to and appropriate for all members and service users, working within it and wishing to use services.

W.V.W.A. will take all reasonable steps to ensure its employment arrangements are accessible, and that service users feel that their particular needs are met.

In seeking to achieve this, W.V.W.A. will strive to:

- facilitate physical access into the building where possible. If unable to it will provide a reasonable alternative method of making the service required available e.g. signposting to a partnership organisation adapted for those service users with specific mobility difficulties
- monitor and evaluate accessibility to make improvements, consulting with service users and partner agencies.
- use communication methods that are appropriate and sensitive
- publicise how the service can be accessed
- improve the accessibility of employment arrangements or physical features of the workplace to meet the needs of staff and service users with disabilities or other needs
- work with partner agencies to enhance access,
- explore multi-channel access to information and services that extends choice and convenience to our service users

Introduction

W.V.W.A. aims to become an organisation in which anti-oppressive practice is inherent; understanding the need to promote equality of opportunity is key.

The purpose of this policy is a guiding document so that we do not discriminate against people, either directly or indirectly in the provision of services or the employment of staff.

This policy attempts to ensure that no-one applying for a job, employed by or in receipt of our services is treated less favourably owing to their **race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins, gender, religion, marital status, sexuality, disability, health status, HIV status, age.**

No-one should be disadvantaged by conditions which they identify and can justify.

- W.V.W.A. Equal opportunities policy extends to the following areas of practice:
 - service delivery
 - communications
 - membership of management, student placement, volunteers
 - recruitment of staff
 - conditions of service
 - staff development and training
 - OCN accredited education and training

The equal opportunity implications of all issues that W.V.W.A. discusses or works on must be made explicit to all involved and who come into contact with the organisation.

The management group has ultimate responsibility for the implementation of the organisation's Equal Opportunities policy. The staff team are responsible for the day to day application of the policy.

W.V.W.A.'s policy will be made freely available to all within the organisation and to any other interested parties.

Implementation of all parts of this policy has the highest priority with the management group and staff of Wear Valley Women's Aid. Full implementation will be constrained only by W.V.W.A.'s ability to allocate/identify resources. Where necessary, .V.W.A. will fundraise for specific pieces of work.

1. Code of practice – service delivery

W.V.W.A. aims to ensure that all service provision is made in accordance with our commitment to equality of opportunity.

W.V.W.A. must ensure that its services are accessible and relevant to the needs of all its service users.

W.V.W.A. will regularly survey the needs of its users and monitor their needs against existing service provision. A range of appropriate methods should be developed for assessing the needs of all W.V.W.A.'s service users.

W.V.W.A. aims to ensure that its service users have access to its services. W.V.W.A. will strive to use venues for meetings, training courses and other events which are fully accessible to people with disabilities. If an event or meeting arranged by W.V.W.A. is scheduled to take place in an inaccessible venue, on notification of an access/special needs problem W.V.W.A. undertakes to move the meeting to a fully accessible venue.

W.V.W.A. aims to ensure that its service users have economic access to its services.

W.V.W.A. aims to ensure that its service users are not discriminated against in any other way in gaining access to its services.

W.V.W.A. will monitor access of take-up of its services and produce regular reports for the management group.

W.V.W.A. reserves the right to refuse services to agencies/organisations and individuals who do not espouse equal opportunities principles.

W.V.W.A. will actively seek out and use consultants and trainers from the groups identified in the introduction to the policy as being subject to discrimination.

All volunteers, students and individuals from outside agencies entering the refuge to provide services will be issued with good practice guidelines and required to sign an agreement which states that they support and will work within W.V.W.A.'s policy and will challenge behaviour contrary to it.

W.V.W.A. will not knowingly use the services of any contractor not committed to the principle of equality of opportunity.

2. Code of practice – communications

W.V.W.A. aims to ensure that any written or visual material produced by or on behalf of the organisation uses non-discriminatory language and is in plain English, or can be translated where appropriate if necessary, or produced in formats appropriate to individual's needs.

In respect of the service users, including those under-taking training, W.V.W.A. must ensure that it challenges and does not reinforce stereotypical images.

W.V.W.A.'s equal opportunities policy should be advertised in job advertisements, in material sent to applicants applying for posts, promotional literature and given to all employees, management members, students and volunteers. It must also be available

to the residents within the refuge, and all persons participating in training provided by WVWA.

The annual report should contain a section reviewing the implementation of the Equal Opportunities Policy.

3. Code of practice – W.V.W.A.’s membership

W.V.W.A. aims to ensure that its actual management group reflects under represented groups of women.

Copies of W.V.W.A.’s policy will be freely available to its members and there is a requirement of all members to support the policy. Failure to do so may constitute ineligibility for membership of the organisation.

W.V.W.A. will offer appropriate advice, information and support to other agencies wishing to develop an equal opportunities policy or wishing to improve an existing policy.

W.V.W.A. aims to encourage all its members to participate in management and policy formulation.

W.V.W.A.’s management, volunteers, students, service users and staff team should contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of the Equal Opportunities Policy.

4. Code of practice - W.V.W.A. management group

Management group members must affirm their commitment to W.V.W.A.’s Equal Opportunities Policy when joining the group or standing for re-appointment.

The group should aim to readdress any imbalances in its composition, positively encouraging individuals from under represented groups.

All new group members will be asked on joining if they have any specific needs, or if there is anything which can be done to ensure that they are able to fully participate in the work of the management group. However, the responsibility to identify needs is not solely down to the individual, and all efforts will have been made to facilitate an environment in which the individual can function.

Officers and members of the group will receive clear written information about their role, powers and responsibilities.

In line with W.V.W.A.’s training and development strategy, new members will undergo an induction.

W.V.W.A. aims to make training opportunities available to all members.

Opportunities will be made available for potential members to observe meetings to learn roles.

Consideration will be given to the location of the meetings so as to not discriminate against members who have particular needs.

Timing, frequency and duration of meetings should be flexible and regularly reviewed.

During meetings the Chair will encourage participation from all members and seek to avoid meetings being dominated by one person or clique.

Decision making process must include reference to equal opportunities implications

5. Code of practice – recruitment

General

The following steps and procedures will be followed when there is a vacancy to be filled in the organisation:

Preparation

- advertising
- job description
- person specifications

Recruitment procedure

- advertising
- information for candidates
- short listing
- informal visits by candidates with specific needs/disabilities
- informal session
- interview(s)
- references

W.V.W.A recognises that in order to implement an Equal Opportunities Policy in relation to recruitment and selection, training in equal opportunities methods is essential for all members of staff and management members who will be responsible for the process.

Preparation

While it is often the case that there is a need to fill a vacancy as soon as possible, W.V.W.A. recognises that this should not be the reason for cutting corners in procedures. In order to be in a position to recruit for any post, it is essential that the following should be in place and reviewed annually.

- a. up to date job description (electronically filed)
- b. core group trained in equal opportunities recruitment procedures from which an interview panel can be selected
- c. an up to date list of publications and local organisations representing minority groups to be used to advertise the post.
- d. A job application form with accompanying monitoring form which allows applicants to be short listed solely on the basis of skills and experience.

Job description

- a. every job must have a job description, written in a clear and concise manner.
- b. A job description should be based upon a job analysis which should include: (electronically filed)
 - The purpose of the post
 - A list of tasks to be done, divided into primary and secondary tasks and listed in order of priority
 - The lines of responsibility i.e. to whom the worker is accountable and any supervisory responsibilities where appropriate.

Person Specifications

- a. every job must have a person specification based on the job analysis and job description. Every requirement must match items from the job description. Requirements will usually include the following categories:
 - attainments (minimum education/training qualifications)
 - experience (minimum number of years in particular work area) Type of experience
 - skills/abilities (communication, literacy/numeracy levels)
 - disposition (self reliant, team player)
 - circumstances (driver)
 - knowledge (specific/general)
 - attitudes (in relation to discriminated groups)
- b. items in the person specification must be capable of objective assessment either on the basis of previous or other experience, or from information provided by references, or from a piece of work done as part of the recruitment procedure or other similar evidence.
- c. items listed as ‘essential requirements’ are those which applicants must fulfil in order to be short listed they should therefore reflect the minimum requirements necessary to do the job.
- d. items listed as ‘desirable requirements’ are those which should be used to select between candidates who fulfil all essential requirements
- e. a clear distinction should be made between ‘potential’ and ‘actual’ attainment – that is, it is important to determine whether particular skills or experience are essential for the post-holder to have acquired already, or whether the potential to learn, given the appropriate training, is adequate.

Recruitment procedures

Advertising

- a. a post must never be advertised without checking if the job description and person specification are up to date and relevant.
- b. all permanent posts must be advertised
- c. all temporary posts (full time or part time) if more than 6 months duration must be advertised in the press. Temporary full time post of less than 6 months and part time jobs of posts more than 3 months must be advertised in local job centres or local networks.
- d. jobs should be advertised in a representative cross section of the press and local networks in order to reach a wide range of people including minority groups.

Information to candidates

The following must be supplied to all applicants:

- application form and monitoring form
- equal opportunities general statement
- job description, person specification and background information
- details on access to W.V.W.A.'s premises with an invitation to those who would need special provision to discuss their needs with staff.

Short listing

Application forms will be opened by a person not involved in the recruitment process

- monitoring forms will be removed from applications immediately and stored separately
- each application will be marked with a reference number on each page
- the sheet giving the personal details and references will then be detached

The interview panel should draw up a list of candidates for interview based on the essential requirements in the personal specification

Only applicants who meet all or most of the designated essential requirements should be selected. Under no circumstances should new requirements be introduced at this stage.

Desirable requirements should only be introduced at this stage if a large number of applicants fulfil essential criteria.

Applicants with unspent criminal convictions should not be discriminated against on the basis of their convictions, if they fulfil all the essential requirements. They must be short listed unless the post is exempt under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974

Applicants with disabilities who fulfil all the essential requirements must be interviewed irrespective of any requirement to adapt the building or facilities should they be successful. Where there is doubt about the candidates suitability for employment because of the nature of the disability, further advice must be sought about the disability and the adaptations or facilities which would be required to facilitate that candidate's take up of the job.

Reasons for rejection or selection should be recorded for one year.

A short listing record form must be used.

An informal visit by candidates with disabilities

Candidates with disabilities will be invited to visit the premises of W.V.W.A. for the purpose of allowing the candidate to assess its suitability as a work environment.

Members of the interview panel may be involved in such a visit.

Information session

The purpose of the information session is to answer candidates questions about the job, premises and the organisation. It should be made clear that this session is separate from the selection process.

The information session must be conducted entirely independently from the formal selection at interview. No member of the interview panel may participate in the informal visit.

The information session should be conducted by management members and where possible should include a member of the staff team.

If a candidate declines an invitation to the information session this in no way prejudice their application for the post.

The information session must be conducted in a relaxed atmosphere and must not put a candidate under pressure. There must be no exchange of information about the candidates between members of the interview panel and anyone involved in the information session.

Interviews

All members of the interview panel must have participated in the preparatory work in selection.

- agreeing the job description
- agreeing the content and the placing of the advert
- short listing candidates
- preparation of questions for interview

If this is not possible a minimum of two members of the panel must be involved in all of these steps.

The aim of the interview is to assess the applicant's ability for the job as defined by the job description and the person specification using the information on the application form as a basis, and to provide an opportunity for the applicant to clarify their understanding of the nature of the job, the work of the organisation, terms and conditions of employment etc.

The interview panel must meet in advance in order to draw up a list of questions to be asked of all candidates. All questions must be based on the requirements of the person specification. The substance of the questions must not vary according to any perceived characteristic of the applicant such as ethnic origin, sexuality, race, disability or age.

Each member of the interview panel must have at the interview the following documents:

- job description
- the candidate's application form
- the person specification assessment form on which to record their assessment of the candidate

If the panel want the candidate to complete some form of test, e.g. competency in typing, it is essential that the methods of assessment are agreed beforehand, candidates should be told if they are to be given a test as part of the process.

Each interview panel member must complete a person specification form for each candidate. The selection decision must be made on the basis of the extent to which candidates meet the requirements of the person specification. If the candidate is unsuccessful, the reason must be recorded on the assessment form.

Assumptions must not be made about what a candidate with disabilities can or cannot do. The interview must concentrate on the person's abilities. At the end of the interview, questions may be asked about the nature of the disability and further advice may be sought, including that of the applicant's doctor/other practitioner if she agrees to this for which W.V.W.A. will pay a fee if necessary.

Selection decisions must not be influenced by any felt need for candidates to 'fit in' with existing staff 'profiles' within the organisation e.g. race, sexuality, age etc.

All application forms and interview notes must be kept for 6 weeks after the end of the recruitment process. Information from monitoring forms must be kept no longer than 1 year.

Letters of rejection must be sent as soon as possible. The letter must include a name and telephone number of the person to contact if further information/appraisal is required.

References

References will not be taken until the job is offered to an applicant subject to them being satisfactory.

Persons given as referees must be sent copies of the job description and person specification and asked to comment upon the candidate's ability on the basis of these.

No appointment will be confirmed without satisfactory references. If an unsatisfactory reference is received this must be discussed by the interview panel so that their decision can be reviewed in light of the new information.

Monitoring

It is W.V.W.A.'s policy to monitor the equal opportunities aspect of the recruitment process. The information recorded is for 3 main reasons:

- to provide statistics
- to be used in the case of grievance
- to provide a basis upon which W.V.W.A. can be review and improve the recruitment and selection procedure.

Documents needed for the monitoring process are:

- the job description and the person specification
- the monitoring form
- the short list record form
- the person specification assessment form

A thorough analysis of the recruitment and selection process must be done after the process is completed and reported to the entire management. A review of the process should take place on an annual basis after completion of two recruitment procedures, or whichever is the longest period.

All relevant documentation should be kept no longer than 1 year.

6. Code of practice – staff development and training

Wear Valley Women's Aid acknowledges the crucial role of training and development for staff, volunteers, students and management group members to enhance personal growth, development and performance, and to enable the achievement of W.V.W.A.'s aims, objectives and work programme.

In line with W.V.W.A.'s staff supervision, support and appraisal practices, each member of staff will have an appraisal undertaken by a senior manager on the completion of their probationary period. During the probationary period, a review will be held at 6 months. Staff appraisals and reviews will be used to identify staff training and development needs.

The management will monitor training uptake by staff on an annual basis.

In line with W.V.W.A.'s staff supervision, support and appraisal practices, staff will be supervised through monthly meetings with senior managers.

The management will assess its needs and the needs of the staff in relation to equal opportunities training and if necessary such training will be arranged and relevant staff team members asked to attend.

Members will participate in a full discussion of W.V.W.A.'s equal opportunity policy at each annual review.

Training will be made available to any staff supervising paid workers, and volunteers.

A budget will be allocated for staff training and development and will, as far as possible, be set in relation to training needs identified.

Consideration will be given to staff requiring childcare costs/provision to enable them to attend courses away from the North East and outside normal working hours.

Staff and management are encouraged to share their knowledge/skills and experience with each other and where possible training will be available to enhance their ability to do so.

W.V.W.A. will consider giving with or without pay time off for staff to attend education day release courses. Staff should make applications to Senior Managers.

All new staff will undergo a formal induction process.