

## **North Staffs Mind**

### **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY**

#### **1. Declaration of intent**

1.1 North Staffs Mind (NSM) believes all people have the right to be treated fairly and with respect and is committed to taking positive action to fight unlawful discrimination in every aspect of its work. Fundamental to this is the commitment to ensure equality of opportunity both in the provision of services and as an employer.

1.2 Equal opportunities does not mean treating everybody the same – it means recognizing people’s differences and adapting the way we work in order to ensure that everyone is provided with a fair and equal chance.

1.3 NSM will challenge indirect discrimination which induces an adverse disproportionate impact on an individual or group of people because of their race, colour, ethnic or national origin, religion, faith, gender, disability or mental health problem, HIV antibody status, AIDS marital status, sexual orientation, age or occupational/economic status.

#### **2. The Scope of this policy**

2.1 This policy applies to all service users, applicants, volunteers and staff employed by NSM.

*Service users:*

2.2 We aim to provide quality services to all sections of the community. No person attempting to access a service shall be denied on the grounds of race, colour, ethnic or national origin, age, religion, faith, gender (including transgender), sexual orientation, marital status, HIV antibody status, AIDS, mental health problem, disability or occupational/economic status.

*Employment and volunteering:*

2.3 The aim of our policy is to ensure that no job applicant, employee or volunteer receives less favourable treatment on the grounds of race, colour, ethnic or national origin, age, religion or belief, faith, gender, sexual orientation, transgender status, marital status, HIV antibody status, AIDS, disability, mental health problem, or occupational/economic status. NSM will strive to redress any imbalance that may become evident.

#### **3. Equal Opportunities in Service Delivery**

3.1 NSM will aim to ensure that all its services are free from discrimination and fully accessible. We will achieve this by:

- a) Developing services in consultation with service users and other stakeholders. We will seek to include marginalised groups, particularly service users, in decision making, policy development and development of services.
- b) Providing services which are flexible and responsive to the changing needs of the community.
- c) Making information on services widely available, in appropriate formats, and where necessary targeted at groups which are under-utilising NSM's services to ensure maximum awareness of provision and increased take-up.
- d) Regularly reviewing and monitoring service delivery and customer satisfaction.
- e) Providing an accessible Complaints Procedure for service users to ensure there is no discrimination in service allocation and delivery.
- f) Developing an action plan to improve access to our services
- g) Developing positive action programmes to target and address the needs of any excluded groups that are not accessing NSM's services.
- h) Working with other organisations to publicise and extend our services
- i) Using equality impact assessments to improve our work by promoting equality and ensuring that policies/procedures do not discriminate against service users.
- j) Giving equal opportunities training to staff and volunteers to ensure they understand their obligations toward service users under this policy

#### **4. Equal Opportunities in Employment**

4.1 Selection for employment, promotion, training or any other benefit will be on the basis of aptitude and ability. All employees will be helped and encouraged to develop their full potential and the talents and resources of the workforce will be fully utilised to maximise the efficiency of the organisation.

4.2 Counselling staff employed by NSM will work to the BACP (British Association of Counselling & Psychotherapy) ethical framework. Partner organisations will be made aware of our position when undertaking joint work.

4.2 We make our policy real by:

- a) Operating fair and rigorous recruitment and selection procedures
- b) Recruiting in open competition, unless there is a legitimate business case not to.
- c) Training staff and managers in the requirements of the Equal Opportunities and Anti-Harassment Policies.
- d) Adopting an annual EO Action plan.
- e) Monitoring recruitment and periodically auditing the workforce.
- f) Undertaking staff and volunteer surveys.
- g) Having fair grievance and disciplinary procedures.

- h) Periodically reviewing terms and conditions of employment, policies and procedures to ensure there is no unfair bias.

## **5. Equal opportunities in recruitment**

5.1 NB This section considers the equal opportunities aspects of recruitment and should be read in conjunction with the detailed Recruitment and Selection Policy and Procedures within the Staff Handbook.

5.2 To ensure good equality practices, NSM will:

- Regularly review selection criteria (job description and person specification) to ensure that they are justifiable and necessary for the effective performance of the job.
- Involve no fewer than three people in the selection interview and recruitment process and have offered these individuals training in equal opportunities.
- Seek diversity within the composition of shortlisting/interview panels.
- Record reasons for selection and rejection of applicants for all vacancies.

5.3 There will be a written job description and person specification for every vacancy and new post. The job description and person specification shall be checked and agreed for direct and indirect discrimination, including culture-bound assumptions and ageism before the recruitment process commences. All jobs will be advertised in a way so as not to discriminate and will clearly state the minimum requirements for the post. Applicants will be made aware that general life experience and voluntary as well as paid work are valued at NSM. NSM has a detailed policy on the Recruitment of Ex-Offenders.

5.4 Staff and trustees responsible for short-listing, interviewing and selecting candidates will be clearly informed of the selection criteria and of the need for their consistent application, so that all applications are processed in the same way. Brief notes shall be made on each application indicating clearly why the applicant has or has not been short-listed or appointed.

5.5 Interviews for paid posts will be conducted by a panel of no fewer than three members, including where possible at least one man and one woman. Interview panels shall be suitably representative of the various ethnic groups within the membership of the organisation and wherever possible, shall include an external representative (eg, a service user or from a relevant funding agency). Members of staff will be involved at all stages of the selection process in an advisory role where service users are involved.

5.6 An open invitation will be given to short-listed applicants with a mental health problem or disability to discuss their specific needs and requirements. NSM will take all reasonable steps to ensure that the specific needs of disabled employees or employees with mental health problems are met.

5.7 During each interview, notes should be taken and at the end of the interview a form completed for each candidate, assessing their response to the topics and themes raised. These should be reviewed at the end of the interview process by the panel to see that each candidate has been fairly treated.

5.8 All questions that are put to the applicants will relate to the requirements of the job. If it is necessary to assess whether personal circumstances will affect the performance of the job (for example, if the job involves unsociable hours or extensive travel) this will be discussed objectively, without detailed questions based on assumptions about race, age, sex, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, disability or mental illness, children and domestic obligations. It is the responsibility of the Chair, or any other member of the Panel to stop inappropriate questions being asked.

5.9 Selection tests which are used will be limited to questions relating to the particular job requirements. The tests will measure the individual's actual or inherent ability to do or train for the role. Any selection tests that are used will be reviewed regularly in order to ensure that they remain relevant and free from any unjustifiable bias, either in content or in scoring.

5.10 An equal opportunities monitoring form should be included in the application packs for all posts advertised. The Equal Opportunities policy and the purpose of monitoring should be clearly explained on the form. Data provided by applicants on the monitoring form will not be considered as part of the short-listing process and all forms will be separated from the full applications on receipt at NSM.

5.11 EO monitoring data for each recruitment process undertaken will be compiled into a report for presentation annually to the Council of Management, when the trustees will take an overview on Equal Opportunities and Diversity issues and practices. NSM will regularly monitor the effects of selection decision and personnel practices and procedures in order to assess whether equality of opportunity is being achieved.

5.12 In addition, NSM will from time to time review:

- The gender and ethnic composition of the workforce of the organisation and changes in distribution over period of time, including monitoring the composition of the workforce;
- The selection decisions for recruitment, promotion, transfer and training according to the gender, age, racial group or specific disability/mental illness of candidates, and the reasons for those decisions;
- The selection criteria and personnel procedures to ensure that they do not include requirements or conditions which constitute, or may lead to, indirect or direct discrimination.

## **6. Equal opportunities in the recruitment of volunteers**

6.1 The principle of equal opportunities in recruitment shall apply to the recruitment of volunteers, within the separate procedure set out in the Volunteer Policy. Volunteer placements will be open to individuals irrespective of race, gender, disability, mental health problem, sexuality, religious background, age or marital status upon successful completion of a CRB check. The role specification will set out any equality dimensions and will be checked to ensure there are no discriminatory requirements. If, during the recruitment process, a volunteer demonstrates hostility to, or a clear lack of support for the Equal Opportunity policy, he/she will automatically be deemed to be unsuitable for a volunteer position at NSM.

## **7. Training**

7.1 NSM follows good practice to adopt a positive approach to promote equality and value diversity, and will remain vigilant towards improving equal opportunities and diversity training for its staff.

7.2 All new staff and volunteers will be provided with a thorough induction into the organisation, be made aware of training and development opportunities available to them, and be positively encouraged to take them up. A comprehensive induction checklist is available to record the induction process and allows for identification of immediate training/development needs at an early stage of their employment.

7.3 All staff and volunteers will receive training on NSM's Equal Opportunities and Dignity at Work (Anti-Harassment) policies, and be made aware of their rights and obligations within the policy.

## **8. Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures**

8.1 It will be made clear to all employees that discrimination, abuse or harassment on the grounds of race, age, gender, disability, mental health problem or sexuality – if proven – is a dismissable offence. NSM also has a Dignity at Work (Anti-Harassment) Policy, which should be considered alongside the Equal Opportunities Policy.

8.2 If an employee or volunteer believes they have been unfairly treated or harassed on any of the grounds covered in this policy, they should alert their manager or the Chief Executive, and if appropriate, use the grievance procedure.

## **9. Implementation**

9.1 Employment procedures and practices will be undertaken strictly in accordance with the following and all other ensuing relevant legislation:

- Equality Act 2010 which repealed some of the Acts listed below)
- Race Relations Act 1976, as amended in 2000 and 2003
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975, as amended in 1999, 2005
- Equal Pay Act 1970, as amended in 1984, 2003

- Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended in 2005
- Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974
- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003 and Sexual Orientation Regulations 2007
- Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
- Human Rights Act 1998

9.2 In order to implement this Equal Opportunities Policy NSM accepts that it needs to ensure that all members and staff involved in selection and recruitment within the organisation are given adequate and appropriate training in:

- I. Interview techniques
- II. Codes of practice
- III. Disciplinary and grievance procedures as contained in NSM policy documents.

## **10. Responsibility for the policy**

10.1 All staff, managers and trustees have a duty to implement NSM's Equal Opportunities Policy. The Chief Executive is responsible for the policy's day-to-day implementation and the production of an annual Equal Opportunities Plan to ensure that the policy has practical application and impacts on the working practices of the organisation. The Council of Management has responsibility for reviewing the policy as necessary.

10.2 NSM hopes that volunteers will actively support the Equal Opportunities Policy. In turn, NSM hopes to provide a working environment free of discrimination and harassment, which promotes equality of opportunity for volunteers.

10.2 Managers are responsible for ensuring their staff and volunteers receive induction, equal opportunities and anti-harassment training.

## 11. Review

11.1 NSM will monitor and review the effectiveness of the Equal Opportunities Policy and Equal Opportunities Action Plan on an annual basis. A report on overall activity/plans will be presented annually to the Council of Management.

## 12. Information

12.1 This policy forms part of the induction package and staff handbook. Copies will be made available to service users and other stakeholders on request.

Reviewed: August 2011