



turn a frown upside down

Equal Opportunities Policy

It is the policy of Befriend A Child that all eligible persons shall have equal opportunity for employment/volunteering/training on the basis of their ability, qualifications and fitness for work. Befriend A Child is fully committed to this policy. Accordingly, there must be no direct or indirect discrimination against any eligible person on the grounds of race, religion, sex, marital status or sexual orientation, in the field or recruitment, promotion or training. Similarly, there must be no discrimination against disabled people.

All employees of the Organisation will receive a copy of this document. Thereafter it is the responsibility of each individual to comply with the spirit as well as the letter of all relevant legislation, and establish and pursue an effective policy of promoting equal opportunities.

The existence of the law cannot by itself ensure that any policy of non-discrimination will work effectively. The policy can only be achieved if staff, at all levels, are aware of the forms which unfair discrimination can take, to guard against them and avoid any action which might influence others to discriminate unfairly. Persons in positions of specific responsibility particularly have a duty to ensure neither they, nor their staff, discriminate directly nor indirectly on any of the grounds itemised in paragraph 1.

Discrimination can be overt and direct, but will usually arise in a more subtle and unconscious form, which might not be easily perceived. It might arise from general assumptions about capabilities, characteristics and interests of particular groups, which are allowed to influence the treatment of individuals or groups in areas such as recruitment and promotion. Some examples are:

- Preconceptions about the relative characteristics, potential or abilities of men and women
- Unwarranted assumptions about motivation of men and women to advance
- Unwarranted assumptions or enquiries about the future mobility of women candidates on hypothetical circumstances
- Unwarranted assumptions about the effects of disability
- General assumptions about inability to communicate that are based on subjective reactions to foreign or regional accents or a speech impediment rather than an evidence of actual inability

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEN AND WOMEN

Under the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, it is unlawful to discriminate in the employment field against men and women on the grounds of sex and against married persons. It is the policy of the Organisation that all eligible persons shall have equal opportunity for employment/volunteering/training, on the basis of their ability, qualifications and fitness for the work, unless a post is restricted to one sex within the exceptions permitted by the Sex Discrimination Act whether in recruitment, training, promotion, assessment or in any other way. Equally, there must be no indirect discrimination. This occurs when a requirement or condition is allowable if it can be shown to be justifiable irrespective of sex of person to whom it is applied. To claim indirect discrimination, an individual must show that the requirement or condition is detrimental because they cannot comply with it and because it is unreasonable and unjustifiable. The policy builds on the statutory position in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The intention of the Organisation is to comply with the spirit as well as the letter of legislation and to establish and pursue an effective policy promoting equal opportunities. It also claims to reduce job segregation (that is where people of one sex are concentrated in particular areas of work) and to make best use of the potential of all employees, volunteers and trainees, men and women

RECRUITMENT

The Directors and Executive Committee will ensure that staff involved in recruitment will be given guidance in interviewing techniques. This should include advice on the avoidance of discrimination and the impropriety of asking women questions about domestic commitments, which would not be asked of a man applying for the same job. The Organisation will endeavour to assign employees, volunteers and trainees in such a manner that women and men alike, have opportunities to undertake a variety of tasks including the most demanding duties.

COMBINING WORK AND DOMESTIC RESPONSIBILITIES

It is in the interest of the Organisation to retain trained and experienced staff where possible. Consistent with the justifiable needs of the work and of staff generally, efforts will be made to enable staff to reconcile work with their domestic responsibilities. Advice on such matters as a maternity leave, part-time work, job sharing and special leave can be obtained from the Committee.

RACE RELATIONS

In Great Britain, it is unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of colour, race, nationality or ethnic origins under the Race Relations Act 1974. It is Befriend A Child policy that there must be no racial discrimination against any eligible person whether in recruitment, training, promotion or in any other area.

UNCONCIOUS DISCRIMINATION

Care should always be taken to guard against the more subtle and unconscious varieties of discrimination, which may not be easily perceived. These may result from allowing general, but unfair, assumptions about capabilities, characteristics and interests of particular groups to influence the treatment of those individuals or groups. It may also take the form of applying conditions or requirements, without considering whether they operate to the disadvantage of particular groups. Unconscious discrimination may show itself in several ways, for example:

- Staff may be directed into particular types of work on the basis of general assumptions without sufficient regard to the particular attributes and abilities of the individuals;
- Preconceptions about the ability of ethnic minority staff to supervise may be allowed to affect recruitment or promotion to supervisory positions;
- The allocation of work, and the recruitment or promotion of ethnic minority workers into particular posts may be affected by unwarranted assumptions about reactions of other staff and/or members of the public;
- There is a risk that 'double standards' may be used according to the ethnic or natural origins of individuals;
- Assumptions about command of English or ability of ethnic minority staff to communicate that are not based on evidence of actual ability may affect decisions on recruitment, promotion or posting.

COMPLAINTS OF DISCRIMINATION

The normal grievance procedure will apply but, in addition, staff have the right to request a formal written explanation of treatment, which they believe to be discriminatory. All staff should be aware that any acts of discrimination will be regarded as serious matter and may be treated as a disciplinary offence.

Employees who think they may have been discriminated against and who consider that they have failed to secure adequate redress have a legal right to take their case to an industrial tribunal.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment is contrary to Befriend A Child policy that all staff should be treated equally irrespective of sex; it may also involve breaches of the Sex Discrimination Act.

Therefore, actions which can be described as sexual harassment are not acceptable and may be treated as a disciplinary matter, sexual harassment can, in general, be distinguished from acceptable behaviour in that it involved unreciprocated and unwelcome actions, attention, comments or behaviours which are of a sexual nature and are deliberate or persistent. Although there is no legislation against discrimination on grounds of sexual preference, harassment arising out of such discrimination may also be regarded as an offence under the normal disciplinary rules. While some forms of sexual harassment such as assault are obvious other are much less so. These may include sexual innuendo, unsolicited comments, suggestions that sexual favours may further an individual's career and displays or sexually offensive or pornographic material. Perceptions of what constitutes sexual harassment may vary from one person to another. It may for example be acceptable to

remark upon someone's appearance when it is clear that this will be welcome. However, persistent or inappropriate remarks of this type, which are neither invited nor welcome, may well cause offence and embarrassment. This type of behaviour could, therefore, amount to sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is upsetting to the recipient and can undermine respect between colleagues and create an unpleasant atmosphere. It can also be a sensitive issue about which the victim feels unable to approach the offender, make a complaint or even turn to a colleague for support. All staff have an obligation to ensure that they do not sexually harass colleagues.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF LINE MANAGERS AD COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Line Managers and Committee members can do much to discourage sexual harassment and prevent it from taking place. In particular they should:

- Take prompt action to stop sexual harassment as soon as it is identified i.e. point out that such behaviour is unacceptable;
- Ensure that potentially offensive or pornographic material is not displayed in the work place;
- Make clear to all staff that this kind of behaviour is not acceptable and, where necessary, will be treated as a disciplinary matter.

COMPLAINTS ABOUT SEXUAL HARASSMENT

In some cases, where staff find it difficult to discuss a complaint with line management or their colleagues, they may wish to seek the confidential advice of a Committee Member. Members of the Committee will give advice and assistance to anyone wishing to make a complaint and, if requested, will try to resolve it informally, consulting with line management and others as appropriate. Formal complaints of sexual harassment should be made through the normal grievance procedure.

Line managers and others involved in complaints should always respect confidentiality and not make prejudgements. Care should be taken to ensure that the career and reputation of neither part are unjustly affected.

CONCLUSION

This policy has been agreed by the Directors and Executive Committee of Befriend A Child Ltd, who affirm their full support for the principle of equality of opportunity and are concerned that there should be a practical and generally accepted programme of action. The Organisation is committed to ensuring its full implementation with the necessary support of staff at all levels.

Responsibility for ensuring the implementation of Equal Opportunities Policy for Befriend A Child lies with the Directors and Executive Committee or persons designated by the Committee.