



Equal Opportunities & Diversity Policy

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Policy Statement

Autism Bedfordshire is committed to encouraging equality and diversity for both our staff and volunteers and the children in our care. Autism Bedfordshire is committed to eliminating unlawful discrimination.

The aim is for our workforce to be truly representative of all sections of the community and our service users, and for each employee to feel respected and able to give their best. In providing services and support, Autism Bedfordshire is committed against unlawful discrimination to our service users and the public.

Purpose

The policy's purpose is to:

- provide equality, fairness and respect for all in our employment, whether temporary, part-time or full-time .
- not unlawfully discriminate because of the Equality Act 2010 protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race (including colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origin), religion or belief, sex (gender) and sexual orientation.
- oppose and avoid all forms of unlawful discrimination. This includes in pay and benefits, terms and conditions of employment, dealing with grievances and discipline, dismissal, redundancy, leave for parents, requests for flexible working, and selection for employment, promotion, training or other developmental opportunities.

Our Commitment to Equal Opportunities and Diversity

Autism Bedfordshire commits to:

- encourage equality and diversity in the workplace as they are good practice and make business sense
- create a working environment free of bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination, promoting dignity and respect for all, and where individual differences and the contributions of all staff are recognised and valued.

This commitment includes training managers and all other employees about their rights and responsibilities under the equality policy. Responsibilities include staff conducting themselves to help the organisation provide equal opportunities in employment, and prevent bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination.

All staff should understand they, as well as their employer, can be held liable for acts of bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination, in the course of their employment, against fellow employees, customers, suppliers and the public.

- take seriously complaints of bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination by fellow employees, customers, suppliers, visitors, the public and any others in the course of the organisation's work activities.

Such acts will be dealt with as misconduct under the organisation's grievance and/or disciplinary procedures, and any appropriate action will be taken. Particularly serious complaints could amount to gross misconduct and lead to dismissal without notice

Further, sexual harassment may amount to both an employment rights matter and a criminal matter, such as in sexual assault allegations. In addition, harassment under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 – which is not limited to circumstances where harassment relates to a protected characteristic – is a criminal offence

- make opportunities for training, development and progress available to all staff, who will be helped and encouraged to develop their full potential, so their talents and resources can be fully utilised to maximise the efficiency of the organisation
- decisions concerning staff being based on merit (apart from in any necessary and limited exemptions and exceptions allowed under the Equality Act)
- review employment practices and procedures when necessary to ensure fairness, and also update them and the policy to take account of changes in the law
- monitor the make-up of the workforce regarding information such as age, gender, ethnic background, sexual orientation, religion or belief, and disability in encouraging equality and diversity, and in meeting the aims and commitments set out in the equality policy

Monitoring will also include assessing how the equality policy, and any sporting action plan, are working in practice, reviewing them annually, and considering and taking action to address any issues

Rights and Responsibilities

Autism Bedfordshire recognises the rights and responsibilities of the individual granted to all people under the laws of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the European Union and as enshrined under the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, and will endeavour to apply these to all of its activities.

Monitoring

Autism Bedfordshire recognises that the achievement of equal opportunities is a dynamic process. To ensure the effectiveness of this policy, the Board of Trustees monitors the implementation throughout the Charity and the activities and actions of its employees.

Employment

Autism Bedfordshire is committed to giving fair conditions of service to all employees and volunteers and to developing new policies and procedures in areas not covered and which may be identified as necessary. Those involved with advertising, recruitment and selection will be made aware of our Equal Opportunities Policy and our obligations under the law.

Volunteers with Special Needs

Autism Bedfordshire is committed to giving fair conditions to all volunteers. Volunteers with special needs are welcome to volunteer at all our activities and in the office. We can support one volunteer who needs considerable additional intensive help in order to fulfil their roles and

responsibilities at each venue. We can support further volunteers with special needs at each venue if they are able to fulfil their roles and responsibilities without additional intensive support from the Senior Team Leader, Team Leader(s).

Children and Adults Accessing our Services

Children have access to a wide range of activities and toys which reflect all cultures and backgrounds. We promote a true image of all cultures and ethnicities.

Why do we need an Equal Opportunities Policy?

- In order to make full use of the talents of all those involved with Autism Bedfordshire.
- To provide the same opportunities for everyone.
- To encourage self-awareness within the children in our care and improve self-esteem.
- To improve our management practice.
- To strengthen our reputation as a fair and caring organisation.
- To attract and retain staff, volunteers and learners.
- To ensure that all aspects of our work do not infringe the law.

Who is responsible for the Equal Opportunities Policy?

Responsibility for implementing the Equal Opportunities Policy rests with the Trustees. However, we are all responsible for ensuring that our behaviour is not unfairly discriminatory and we could be personally liable at law for discriminatory actions.

Legislation

- Race Relations Act 1976
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- Equal Pay Act 1970
- Disability Discrimination Act 2005
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
- Employment Equality (Religion/Belief) Regulations 2003
- Gender Recognition Act 2004
- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006
- Equality Act 2006
- The Sex Discrimination Acts 1975 and 1986 (SDA)
- Ex-offender Legislation
- Race relations (amendment) Act 2000
- Disability Code of Practice 2002
- Special Educational Needs & Disability Act 2001
- Children's Act 1989 & 2004

It is our policy to ensure that our recruitment, selection, employment and management practices comply with both the letter and spirit of these and any other relevant legislation.

Main Points

In the employment or in the provision of business and services Autism Bedfordshire will not unlawfully discriminate directly or indirectly on the grounds of sex, age, sexual orientation, transgender, marital status, race, colour, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, offender status, or disability.

(Everyone must comply with this legislation and ignorance of the law is no defence.)

Who Enforces the Laws?

- OEC – Equal Opportunities Commission
- CRE - Commission for Racial Equality

Festivals

Autism Bedfordshire will show respectful awareness of all the major events in the lives of the children and families who attend sessions, and in our society as a whole and we welcome the diversity of backgrounds from which they come. Out of respect for all faiths we will ensure any such activities will be educational.

Respect

All children will be respected and their individuality and potential recognised, valued and nurtured. Activities and the use of play equipment offer children opportunities to develop in an environment free from prejudice and discrimination. Appropriate opportunities will be given to children to explore, acknowledge and value similarities and differences between themselves and others.

Resources

Resources will be chosen to give children a balanced view of the world and an appreciation of the rich diversity of our multi-racial society. Materials will be selected to help children develop their self-respect and to respect other people by avoiding stereotypes and derogatory pictures/language or messages about any group of people.

Discriminatory Behaviour/Remarks

Discriminatory behaviour/ remarks are unacceptable at Autism Bedfordshire. Our response will aim to be sensitive to the feelings of the victim(s) and to help those responsible to understand and overcome their prejudices.

Language

Bilingual/multi-lingual children are an asset to Autism Bedfordshire, they will be valued and their languages recognised and respected.

Food

Where food is provided cultural and dietary needs will be met. Medical needs will be respected and documented in partnership with parents/carers.

Grievance & Disciplinary Policy

The equality policy is fully supported by senior management and has been agreed with the Board of Trustees.

Details of the organisation's grievance and disciplinary policies and procedures can be found at: <https://www.autismbedfordshire.net/governance-and-policies>. This includes with whom an employee should raise a grievance – usually their line manager.

Use of the organisation's grievance and/or disciplinary procedures does not affect an employee's right to make a claim to an employment tribunal within three months of the alleged discrimination.