



EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY

POLICY STATEMENT ON EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Hackney SEND Parent Carer Forum (HSPCF) recognises that all parents and carers of a child or young person with Special Educational Needs or a Disability (SEND) living in or receiving services in the area have an equal right of access to become a member of the forum. This policy governs the internal operations of Hackney SEND Parent Carer Forum while hosted by City & Hackney Carers Centre. Legal and financial responsibilities held by the Host remain subject to the Hosting Agreement.

The Forum will adhere to the legislative framework complying with:

- The Equality Act 2010 (See Annex 1.1 and 1.2)
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- Equality and Human Rights Commission Codes of Practice (See Annex 1.3)

And:

We work in alignment with the principles of the Public Sector Equality Duty, actively working to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.
- Advance equality of opportunity.
- Foster good relations between diverse groups of people and the communities we work with.

The way we work is not only governed by the legislation that outlaws discrimination and promotes equality but also reflects and embodies the core values of the Forum. HSPCF operates in a way that recognises the importance of inclusion, bringing opportunities and access to all individuals.

We are committed to promoting equality, valuing diversity, ensuring accessibility, and respecting human rights. Our mission is: to influence social change to create a fairer and safer society.

THE FORUM WILL

a) Take pro-active steps to address discrimination, harassment, bullying, and victimisation in all its forms in membership management, volunteer management, employment practices and in all areas of our work.

b) Ensure that everyone directly associated with our organisation – members, volunteers, staff, contractors, local strategic partners, associates, and visitors are aware of our commitment in these areas and how this policy affects them.

c) Identify and take positive and practical steps, to remove any barriers to the participation of people who are currently underrepresented as members, volunteers, staff, local service users, or associates.

d) Look to develop and maintain a (voluntary and/or paid) workforce that reflects the community within which we serve.

e) Ensure that there are clear procedures to ensure compliance with relevant legal requirements (e.g., recruitment) and that members, volunteers, staff, and associates are offered training to put these procedures into practice.

f) Ensure that the accessibility of our buildings (if applicable), events and information is routinely reviewed and improved, where possible.

g) Ensure that volunteers and staff receive appropriate support, training, and advice to aid them to deal sensitively with challenging equalities issues.

h) Develop internal working arrangements and structures that will aid in the promotion of anti-discriminatory practices, and the sharing of effective practice to this end.

i) Enable volunteers, staff, associates, and parent carer members to have equal access to relevant training and opportunities for development and ensure that terms, conditions, volunteer, and employment practices do not discriminate against any group.

j) Ensure that forum leaders (Steering Group members) and managers establish and maintain suitable systems to ensure that Hackney SEND Parent Carer Forum can effectively monitor and evaluate compliance and progress in relation to promoting equality of opportunity.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND DISCRIMINATION

The HSPCF is committed to equal opportunities. We recognise and embrace our responsibility to promote equality of opportunity for staff, service users and others associated with the organisation. This means that the HSPCF (Steering Group) will ensure that none of our members, volunteers, paid employees, contractors, strategic partners, or organisations with whom we work is unfairly discriminated against on the grounds of their 'protected characteristic' including:

- Age
- Disability (including mental health and those with hidden disabilities)
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage or civil partnership
- Pregnancy or maternity
- Race (including: colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin)
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation.

In addition, we will not discriminate on the grounds of social standing, status, responsibility for dependents, social class, employment status, or unrelated criminal convictions.

The HSPCF is an anti-discriminatory organisation committed to influencing social change, the promotion of equal opportunity and the elimination of all forms of discrimination and harassment covered by the Equality Act 2010 (See Annex 1.1 and 1.2) including:

- Direct Discrimination
- Indirect Discrimination
- Discrimination by Perception
- Discrimination by Association
- Victimisation
- Harassment

We recognise the diverse types of discrimination related to protected characteristics and what prevents individuals and groups gaining equal access to society's resources and services. We are committed to taking practical steps to address inequality and discrimination by following relevant legislation and developing best practice.

It is our policy to redress the balance, as far as is lawful, in favor of all underrepresented and disadvantaged groups. We recognise that "positive action," to meet the needs of specific groups facing discrimination, can make a practical contribution to addressing discrimination and inequalities.

We define “positive action” within the context of the Equality Act 2010: Positive action enables an employer or an organisation to increase participation from a wider section of society through opportunities such as training and mentoring schemes. Examples of positive action could include training and mentoring schemes for under-represented groups.

Hackney SEND Parent Carer Forum commits itself to taking positive action to ensure that its activities and provision of services, its recruitment procedures for volunteers, staff and its recruitment of Steering Group members are within the spirit and letter of current legislation and our Equalities Policy.

ACCESS TO AND PARTICIPATION IN SERVICES

The HSPCF recognises the need to ensure that all parents and carers with a child or young person aged 0 to 25 with SEND in Hackney can be members and contribute to the development of the forum.

We primarily aim to increase our membership and extend our reach amongst underrepresented and disadvantaged groups who face discrimination and inequalities to ensure a representative voice in the Hackney area.

To achieve this the forum will:

- a) Develop and implement anti-discriminatory strategies and positive action programs as part of its work and promote these throughout all the spheres of influence available.
- b) Ensure it represents a broad and balanced range of views which consider the varying needs of different individuals and groups.
- c) Identify the needs of people who are underrepresented in our work and will strive to represent their views to the service providers who meet those needs.
- d) Ensure the Steering Group Representatives are aware of our commitment to equal opportunities and familiar with the contents of this policy document.
- e) Provide support for disabled groups and individuals through the provision of ‘reasonable adjustments’ (See Annex 1.4) to ensure that our services are accessible to people with disabilities by proactively ensuring accessible venues for our events, ensuring that our training events are adjusted where necessary to meet the needs of disabled participants.

THE FORUM ENVIRONMENT

We aim to ensure that all people will receive a positive welcome from their first point of contact with the Forum.

We aim to create and sustain a working environment free from oppressive attitudes and surroundings in which people working with us, members, volunteers, staff, contractors, associates and local strategic partners feel comfortable and are not exposed to any form of harassment (including racial or sexual harassment) or to stereotyped attitudes and beliefs.

BREACHES OF POLICY

All members, volunteers, staff, associates, and partners have a right to make a complaint if they consider this policy has been breached. Complaints should be made under the procedures set out in our Complaints, Grievance, and Internal Disciplinary policy and Procedures.

PUBLICITY AND PUBLIC LIAISON

We will provide information and resource materials which are free from images, language or attitudes which are: ageist, disability, heterosexist, racist, sexist, or Transphobic.

All external communications, including social media posts and comments, publicity materials, press releases and advertisements will reflect a commitment to equal opportunities and will promote equality of access to the forum's membership.

COMPOSITION OF THE HACKNEY SEND PARENT CARER FORUM, RECRUITMENT, PROMOTION AND DEVELOPMENT

The composition of the Steering Group, parent representatives, staff, and volunteers should reflect the diversity and needs of our parent carer communities, including those who are underrepresented and those who experience discrimination and inequality.

To achieve this, we will:

- Conduct a regular review of the composition of the forum to identify which communities are underrepresented.
- Steering Group members will endeavor to take appropriate action to recruit new members to ensure equal representation in the forum's decision-making processes.

Hackney SEND Parent Carer Forum will ensure all its recruitment and selection practices are following principles of fairness and equality of opportunity, and fully in compliance with all relevant legislation.

We will seek to remedy any significant underrepresentation and to eliminate direct and indirect discrimination.

Decisions taken throughout the recruitment process will be recorded in a standard format and used to evaluate the effectiveness of the process in ensuring equality of opportunity.

We will ensure that training, promotion, and development opportunities are offered on a basis that can be shown to be non-discriminatory.

We appreciate the skills and value that volunteers and staff with caring responsibilities and dependents bring to the forum, and we are committed to enabling those volunteers and staff to work within the forum.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Steering Group will have responsibility for the implementation and monitoring of this policy and for the development of any further equal opportunities initiatives.

We will seek to obtain equality and diversity information from volunteer and paid staff and candidates for the purpose of monitoring and reporting purposes. This will be requested on a voluntary basis, via a data monitoring form. These will be reviewed by the Steering Group every 12 months.

We will take corrective action where any issues are found. Equality and diversity information gathered may also be used to support the process of tendering for new business or funding. Any such data will be anonymised and processed following HSPCF's Data Protection Policy and Privacy Notice.

RESPONSIBILITY AND COMMUNICATION

THE STEERING GROUP:

Is responsible for ensuring that Hackney SEND Parent Carer Forum meets its responsibilities and legal obligations in relation to equality legislation, ensuring the Forum works in line with this policy and that the policy is communicated to staff, volunteers, parent representatives, and members.

When made aware of harassment, bullying, or discrimination will take appropriate action in line with this policy, regardless of whether the alleged victim has raised an official complaint.

ANNEX 1.1 - THE EQUALITY ACT 2010, PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS

The Equality Act 2010 brought together all existing equality legislation and offers protection from discrimination to people with “protected characteristics”. The protected characteristics are:

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

ANNEX 1.2 – DISCRIMINATION

To understand current equality legislation, the following is an explanation of the types of unfair treatment that can occur:

DIRECT DISCRIMINATION - occurs when someone treats another person less favorably because of a protected characteristic or an assumption about one of the above, e.g., a Black candidate being refused a job, even though they are the best candidate, purely because of the perception that they may not fit in with the rest of the team.

DISCRIMINATION BY ASSOCIATION – discrimination against someone because they are associated with a person who has a protected characteristic. For example, an employee who is unfairly treated because they have a disabled child - can claim discrimination.

DISCRIMINATION BY PERCEPTION – is discrimination against an individual because other people think they possess a protected characteristic, e.g., a heterosexual employee being unfairly treated on the basis that others think they are gay can claim discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation.

INDIRECT DISCRIMINATION – is when a condition, rule, policy or practice disadvantages people who have a protected characteristic, e.g., a manager asking that employees work on Friday evenings to meet the demands of high workload may discriminate against Jewish people who wish to commence the Sabbath at sunset. However, indirect discrimination can be objectively justified, e.g., if there is an absolute organisational necessity for staff to be available to work at a certain time.

HARASSMENT - is unwanted conduct relating to a protected characteristic which is intended to violate another's dignity or to create an offensive, hostile, humiliating, or degrading environment for that individual. E.g., an employee being continually teased by colleagues about their gender reassignment. This is a subjective test, which means that it is not what you consider to be offensive; but what the person to whom you say or do something considers offensive. If you feel that you are being harassed, you should raise the issue via the Bullying and Harassment Policy.

VICTIMISATION - it is a discriminatory act to treat anyone less favorably if they have made (or are suspected of having made) a complaint, or raised a grievance under the Equality Act, about discrimination during either present or previous employment, or they intend to make a complaint, or they have assisted someone else's complaint by giving evidence or corroborating a story.

ANNEX 1.3 - EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

For more information on the Equality and Human Rights Commission - Equality Act Code of Practice please visit their website:

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/equality-act-codes-practices>

ANNEX 1.4 - REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

A reasonable adjustment is defined by the UK Government here:

<https://www.gov.uk/reasonable-adjustments-for-disabled-workers>

For more information on reasonable adjustments visit the EHRC website:

<https://equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/what-are-reasonable-adjustments>