

Volunteer Equality & Diversity Policy

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Volunteer Equality & Diversity Policy

1. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY?

- Equality does not mean 'everybody being the same'. It is about recognising that individual volunteers are different yet treating all with an equal level of respect and ensuring equal access to opportunities, education and training, goods, services and facilities.
- Diversity is about seeing the bigger picture. It means recognising, respecting, valuing and drawing on the positive aspects of differences. Diversity fosters an environment that recognises the contribution that every individual volunteer makes or can make to Group Hug. It promotes dignity and respect. Embracing diversity benefits Group Hug, staff, learners, customers, clients and the individual volunteer.

2. WHAT DOES AN INCLUSIVE AND DIVERSE VOLUNTEER INVOLVING GROUP HUG, THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE OR GROUP LOOK LIKE?

An inclusive and diverse volunteer environment is one where the principles of fairness, respect, equality, dignity and autonomy are promoted and are part of everyday goals and behaviour. The following are found in an inclusive and diverse volunteer environment:

- There is a welcoming culture where everyone is treated with respect and dignity and everyone feels valued.
- Policies are in place concerning equality and human rights. A positive volunteer working environment, dignity at work, volunteer welfare and fair recruitment practices are all evident.
- Group Hug has a zero tolerance towards any acts of discrimination or harassment by or against volunteers and other stakeholders including the public.
- The leadership of Group Hug and volunteers are all aware of the inclusive values of Group Hug and are actively consulted and involved in policy development.
- Training is offered to all.
- The volunteer workforce is representative of the local community or service users, or if not, under-represented groups are encouraged to apply.
- All volunteers are encouraged to develop and progress. Any barriers faced by specific groups are identified and action taken to address them.
- Group Hug is aware of any potential tensions within the volunteering environment and takes action to anticipate and address them. Everyone is encouraged to raise concerns at an early stage and is aware of the procedure should they wish to make a complaint.

3. DOES THE LAW PROTECT VOLUNTEERS?

No, not exactly. Volunteers are not protected by law in the same way as paid employees. The Equality Act 2010 applies to employees and Group Hug providing a service. Volunteering could be considered as a service and as such, Group Hug, involving volunteers should still protect volunteers from discrimination, harassment or victimisation on the grounds of the protected characteristics.

The Equality Act 2010 is the law which bans unfair treatment and helps to achieve equal opportunities in the workplace and in wider society. The Act brings together for the first time the legal requirements that the private, public and voluntary sectors need to follow. It replaced all previous equality law including:

- Equal Pay Act 2010
- Sex Discrimination Act 1984
- Disability Discrimination Act 2010

The Equality Act protects people from discrimination based on 'protected' characteristics. These characteristics vary depending on whether the role is as an employee or a volunteer (service user).

There are eight protected characteristics of people who use services, such as volunteers':

- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sexual orientation
- Sex (gender)
- Age

4. WHAT ARE OUR RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER THE LAW?

- All employers and service providers have a responsibility under the law to treat their employees and service users (including volunteers) fairly.
- Group Hug is a service provider who provide services to the general public, regardless of whether this is free or paid for. Volunteering could be considered a service.

5. WHAT ARE THE MAIN BARRIERS TO EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY?

Some groups of volunteers may be treated less favourably than others through prejudice-based discrimination, but this may also happen as a result of ignorance or unnecessary rules. Equality legislation recognises seven types of discrimination:

- **Direct discrimination** - where someone is treated less favourably than another person because of a protected characteristic.
- **Associative discrimination** - this is direct discrimination against someone because they are associated with another person who possesses a protected characteristic.
- **Discrimination by perception** - this is direct discrimination against someone because others think that they possess a particular protected characteristic. They do not necessarily have to possess the characteristic, just be perceived to.
- **Indirect discrimination** - this can occur when you have a rule or policy that applies to everyone but disadvantages a person with a particular protected characteristic.
- **Harassment** - this is behaviour which is deemed offensive by the recipient. People can now complain of the behaviour they find offensive even if it is not directed at them.
- **Harassment by a third party** – Group Hug are potentially liable for the harassment of their staff or volunteers by people they don't have direct responsibility for, i.e., a service user.
- **Victimisation** - this occurs when someone is treated badly because they have made or supported a complaint under this legislation.

6. CAN POSITIVE ACTION BE TAKEN?

Positive action, or positive discrimination as it is sometimes called, is not legal under the Equalities Act. We are not able to select our volunteers based on any of the protected characteristics listed above over another volunteer who has more experience or more relevant skills. The only situation where we are able to choose a volunteer who has a particular characteristic is if there are two volunteers who are equally able and/or qualified to fulfil the role.

Group Hug can recruit specifically from a certain group if there is a 'business reason'. For example, a helpline aimed at women suffering from domestic abuse may only recruit female volunteers.

However, we may actively encourage certain groups of people to apply to volunteer. The project may decide to actively recruit for male volunteers from the local community because of the demands of a certain group. Once they start the recruitment process, they must be treated equally to everyone else.

7. WHY MONITOR VOLUNTEERS?

We do not have to monitor equality and diversity, but it can be a positive way of demonstrating commitment to promoting equality and diversity of opportunity in volunteering. Monitoring can help to determine the success of policies and practices adopted to maintain or promote equality.

8. WHAT CAN BE MONITORED?



It is up to Group Hug to decide which factors will be monitored. Typically, this includes sex, disability, race, sexual orientation and age. By collecting and monitoring data over a period of time it should be possible to see an increase in the number of volunteers.

9. WHY WOULD VOLUNTEERS DISCLOSE PERSONAL DETAILS?

Some volunteers may feel the questions they are being asked are personal and may be reluctant to respond openly and honestly. It is also important to be aware that some volunteers may be particularly sensitive around equality and diversity questions, for example regarding sexual orientation, civil partnership status, disability or political opinion. Group Hug will always be open about why we are collecting the information and how we will use it and store it.

Volunteers can choose not to complete a monitoring form. It should be made clear that not completing all, or part, of a form will not affect the chance of obtaining a volunteering opportunity and that anything included on the form will be treated in the strictest confidence.

10. IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY

This Policy shall be deemed effective as of 16th May 2021. No part of this Policy shall have retroactive effect and shall thus apply only to matters occurring on or after this date.