



## EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY

### 1. Our commitment

Our Equality and Diversity Policy sets out our commitment to creating an inclusive environment for everyone who works with, volunteers for, and accesses our organisation and services. We are committed to encouraging equality and diversity among all our people be they trustees, contractors, freelancers or volunteers and eliminating unlawful discrimination.

Recognising, embracing and valuing difference leads to improvements for all, including: a better and more vibrant working and volunteering environment, and the ability to attract the very best people to work alongside us in our mission to inspire children through music.

Whilst we are fully committed to compliance with all relevant equality legislation, (including the Equality Act 2010, Codes of Practice and best practice guidance), this policy builds on the statutory position to ensure effective policies and practice that promote equality and inclusion.

### 2. Principles

- We have a culture in which everyone is treated with respect, valued and rewarded for what they contribute, with zero tolerance of unfair discrimination at every level.
- We will ensure that all our people who work with or volunteer for us, as well as those who apply to work with or volunteer with us, are treated fairly and are not discriminated against on any grounds, including those protected by the Equality Act 2010.
- We always take any discrimination/sexual harassment complaints seriously, respond sensitively and quickly and, if proven, ensure that the action taken is prompt and effective.
- In seeking to achieve a diverse workforce at all levels, we will ensure that trustees, volunteers, contractors or sub-contractors will not be disadvantaged or treated less favourably because of conditions or requirements that are not related to the work.
- We will ensure that any volunteer or freelancer recruitment uses messaging and advertising methods appropriate to our target audience, including under-represented groups.
- We will not tolerate any behaviour from any of our people which breaches our Equality and Diversity Policy.
- Serious offences such as discrimination on protected grounds – including harassment, bullying, or victimisation will be treated as serious misconduct and may lead to the immediate termination of the freelancers contract for services, or termination from our volunteering service or access to our services, without notice.

- Every business case for change is subject to an equality review with the intention of identifying any positive, negative or neutral impact the proposal may have on people with protected characteristics (as defined in the Equality Act 2010). This includes any of our people who will be subject to the proposed changes or affected by them, service users, trustees, freelancers, volunteers and/or supporters as applicable.

### **3. How we will do this**

We are committed to providing equality of opportunity for all, irrespective of:

- age
- caring responsibilities
- disability
- economic hardship / poverty
- gender reassignment / gender identity
- marriage or civil partnership status
- pregnancy or maternity
- race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation.

We will pro-actively tackle discrimination or disadvantage and aim to ensure that no individual or group is directly or indirectly discriminated against for any reason in the course of working or volunteering with us or whilst accessing our services.

We will:

- ensure that all freelancers, volunteers and trustees are aware of the duty on them to treat each other with dignity at all times, and to never discriminate against or harass anyone associated with Voices for Life in any capacity.
- take seriously complaints of bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination by fellow freelancers, volunteers, customers, suppliers, visitors, the public and any others in the course of the organisation's work activities.

We all have a personal responsibility to:

- read and understand this policy and act in a manner that is consistent with our values and behaviours at all times

- complete mandatory equality and diversity learning when starting freelancing or volunteering with us, as well as completing refresher training on a periodic basis
- understand there could be legal implications personally (as well as for the Voices for Life), and that we could be held criminally liable for acts of bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination against anyone associated with the Voices for Life.
- understand that our responsibility extends to social events and contact with other freelancers, volunteers and trustees outside of the workplace if they are considered to fall within the course of working with, volunteering for, or in any other connection to the Voices for Life.

#### 4. Who this policy is applicable to

This policy is applicable to all freelancers, volunteers, and trustees.

#### 5. Definitions

**Equality** can be described as breaking down barriers, eliminating discrimination and ensuring equal opportunity and access for all groups both in employment, and to goods and services; the basis of which is supported and protected by legislation. Equality is about valuing a person ‘as an equal’ and treating people according to their needs and characteristics to achieve an equal or fair outcome – it’s not necessarily about treating everyone the same.

**Diversity** is defined as celebrating differences and valuing everyone. Each person is an individual with visible and non-visible differences and by respecting this everyone can feel valued for their contributions which is beneficial not only for the individual but for the wider organisation.

**Direct discrimination** occurs where a person is treated less favourably because of one or more of the protected characteristics set out above. For example, rejecting an applicant on the grounds of their race because they would not "fit in" would be direct discrimination.

**Indirect discrimination** occurs where an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice is applied equally to all groups of people but puts a particular group sharing a protected characteristic at a disadvantage when compared with other people. For example, a requirement to work full time may put women at a disadvantage because they generally have more childcare commitments than men. Such a requirement would need to be objectively justified.

**Discrimination by association** is a type of direct discrimination. It occurs where a person is treated less favourably because they associate with someone who possesses a protected characteristic.

**Perception discrimination** is also a form of direct discrimination against an individual because others think they possess a particular protected characteristic. It applies even if the person does not actually possess that characteristic. If you discriminate against people because you think they are transgender or LGBTQ, for example, then they will be protected even if they do not have these protected characteristics.

**Harassment** can be described as unwanted behaviour, including for example, emails, remarks or gestures, which are intended or have the effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that person. This can be related to gender, sexuality, race, religion or other “protected characteristics” and it includes, but is

not limited to, sexual harassment. Sexual harassment may be both an employment rights matter and a criminal matter, such as in the case of allegations of sexual assault. 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.

**Victimisation** broadly refers to derogatory treatment directed towards someone who has made or is believed to have made or supported a colleague's complaint under the Equality Act. It can also include situations where a complaint hasn't yet been made but someone is victimised or treated unfairly because it's suspected they might make one.

## **6. Monitoring**

We monitor the diversity of our people measuring and reviewing information such as age, disability, ethnic background, gender, religion or belief and sexual orientation to assist us in meeting the aims and commitments set out in this policy.

## **7. Breaches of this policy**

Whilst the aim of the policy is prevention, if you believe you have been the subject of discrimination, harassment or victimisation, you are encouraged to report it to the Executive Director.

Where possible you will be encouraged to deal with any minor breaches informally with support from the Executive Director. However, any serious breaches of policy such as discrimination on protected characteristic grounds and other serious offences including harassment, bullying, or victimisation will be treated as serious misconduct and may lead to the immediate termination of a freelancer's contract for services or termination from our volunteering service without notice.

## **8. Exceptions to this policy**

Discrimination by or against freelancers, volunteers and trustees is generally prohibited unless there is a specific legal exemption.

There are certain circumstances when organisations might be within their legal rights to treat an individual less favourably and where these instances will not be counted as discrimination.

## **11. Effective date**

Published date: July 2022

Review date: post 2 years

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