4.3. Equal Opportunities Policy

Created: 10 July 2021

OUR COMMITMENT

Big Leaf Foundation is committed to providing equal opportunities in employment and volunteering and to avoiding unlawful discrimination. This policy is designed to help us put this commitment into practice.

We are also committed to ensuring that the work environment is free of harassment and bullying and that everyone is treated with dignity and respect. Please see our Anti-harassment and Bullying Policy, which deals with these issues.

THE LAW

It is unlawful to discriminate directly or indirectly in recruitment or employment because of a ‘protected characteristic’. The Equality Act 2010 defines the protected characteristics as being:

* age
* disability
* sex
* gender reassignment
* marriage and civil partnership
* pregnancy or maternity
* race (which includes colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origins)
* sexual orientation
* religion or belief.

Discrimination after employment may also be unlawful, for example refusing to give a reference for a reason related to one of the protected characteristics.

It is also unlawful to discriminate against a service user in the provision of services or to fail to make reasonable adjustments to enable a person to participate.

Types of unlawful discrimination

* **Direct discrimination** is where a person is treated less favourably than another because of a protected characteristic. However, discrimination may be lawful if you can show that a protected characteristic is central to a job. This is known as an ‘occupational requirement’. One example might be if we wish to stipulate that only women can apply to work with female victims of sexual violence. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has further information on [when equality law may be different](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/situations-where-equality-law-different).
* **Indirect discrimination** means putting in place, a rule or policy or way of doing things that has a worse impact on someone with a protected characteristic than someone without one, when this cannot be objectively justified.
* **Harassment** is where there is unwanted behaviour related to a protected characteristic (other than marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity) which has the purpose or effect of violating someone’s dignity or which creates a hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. It does not matter whether or not this effect was intended by the person responsible for the conduct.
* **Associative discrimination** is where the individual treated less favourably does not have a protected characteristic but is discriminated against because of their association with someone who does e.g. the parent of a disabled child.
* **Perceptive discrimination** is where the individual discriminated against or harassed does not have a protected characteristic but they are perceived to have a protected characteristic.
* **Third-party harassment** occurs where an employee is harassed by third parties such as service users, due to a protected characteristic.
* **Victimisation** is treating someone unfavourably because they have taken some form of action relating to the Equality Act i.e. because they have supported a complaint or raised a grievance under the Equality Act 2010, or because they are suspected of doing so. However, an employee is not protected from victimisation if they acted maliciously or made or supported an untrue complaint.
* **Failure to make reasonable adjustments** is where a rule or policy or way of doing things has a worse impact on someone with a protected characteristic compared with someone who does not have that protected characteristic and the employer has failed to make a reasonable adjustment. While the Equality Act refers to reasonable adjustments with regards to disability, it may also be discriminatory to ignore making reasonable adjustments for people with other protected characteristics (for example to enable someone to respect a religious belief, providing gender neutral toilets, making adjustments for a woman experiencing severe menopausal symptoms etc).

Reasonable adjustments

A ‘reasonable adjustment’ is a change to remove or reduce the effect of

* an employee’s disability so they can do their job
* a job applicant’s disability when applying for a job

What is reasonable will depend on the circumstances of each case, but adjustments could be to:

* the workplace (making changes to overcome barriers created by the physical workplace)
* the ways things are done (where the disabled job worker is put at a substantial disadvantage by a provision, criterion or practice).
* Providing extra equipment or getting someone to assist the employee or job applicant

When deciding whether an adjustment is reasonable we will consider:

* how effective the change will be in avoiding the disadvantage the employee would otherwise experience
* its practicality
* the cost
* our resources and size
* the availability of financial support.

The overall aim will be, as far as possible, to remove or reduce any substantial disadvantage faced by a staff member or job applicant which would not be faced by a non-disabled person.

RECRUITMENT

Big Leaf Foundation’s recruitment practices aim to attract applicants with the knowledge, skills and experience required for the job role, irrespective of an applicant’s background.

We also recognise that a diverse team supports us to better understand the needs of a diverse range of beneficiaries and stakeholders. We may therefore **take positive action to improve diversity among our staff** e.g. we might state in a recruitment advertisement that we encourage people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds to apply. But any positive action will stop once the role has been advertised and it is then up to each individual to apply with the successful applicant appointed on their own merit.

In some instances, a protected characteristic may be necessary for a particular role. If an ‘occupational requirement’ is to be applied to a job, this will be stated in the recruitment advertisement. If we are in doubt as to whether it is appropriate to apply an occupational requirement to a role, we will seek specialist advice.

We will also take steps to anonymise applications before shortlisting and we will ask interviewees whether any adjustments are needed to participate in the selection process.

Below are some examples of how we aim for equality within recruitment.

Equal opportunities in employment

We will avoid unlawful discrimination in all aspects of employment including recruitment, promotion, opportunities for training, pay and benefits, discipline and selection for redundancy. Person specifications will avoid any unnecessary requirements (those unrelated to effective performance) that may otherwise have deterred applicants. We will base decisions on objective criteria. We will make reasonable adjustments in recruitment as well as in day-to-day employment.

Service users, partners, suppliers and others

We will not discriminate unlawfully against service users using or seeking to use the services we provide. If you are bullied or harassed by a service user, partner, supplier, contractor, visitor or others, or if you witness someone else being bullied of harassed, you are asked to report this to your manager who will take appropriate action.

Training

We will provide information and guidance to those involved in recruitment or other decision making where equal opportunities issues are likely to arise to help them understand their responsibilities and to avoid the risk of discrimination.

Your responsibilities

All staff are responsible for supporting the organisation in meeting its commitment and avoiding unlawful discrimination. If you experience a level of discomfort or disagreement with

something that happens when you are at work, you are encouraged to bring it to the attention of a manager or trustee as appropriate. It is possible that others are not aware or have not considered the impact of their actions, have not understood our policy, or possibly our practices need to be updated.

If you believe that you have been discriminated against you should report this to your line manager or the trustees. We take any complaint seriously and you will not be penalised for raising a grievance, even if your grievance is not upheld, unless your complaint is both untrue and made in bad faith.

If you witness what you believe to be discrimination you should report this to your line manager or the trustees as soon as possible.

Employees can be held personally liable as well as, or instead of, the organisation for any act of unlawful discrimination. Employees who commit serious acts of harassment may be guilty of a criminal offence. Acts of discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation against employees or service users are disciplinary offences and will be dealt with under our Disciplinary Procedure. Discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation may constitute gross misconduct and could lead to dismissal without notice.

MONITORING AND REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed annually, to judge its effectiveness and will be updated in accordance with changes in the law. We will report to the Board of Trustees on any actions or activities undertaken to improve equality of opportunity. Any information provided by job applicants and employees for monitoring purposes will be used only for these purposes and will be dealt with in accordance with our Data Protection Policy.

NOTES:

* For the purposes of this policy ‘Staff’ refers to consultants, employees, trustees and volunteers.
* This policy is based on a template provided by NCVO KNOWHOW and HRServicesPartnership and has been modified and adapted to consider Big Leaf Foundation’s specific context and practices.
* For more information on equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace, please see <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/your-team/hr/equality-and-diversity/equality-and-diversity>