

GENERAL STATEMENT

The Voluntary Service Association Ltd aims to be an equal opportunities employer and service provider. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the organisation does not discriminate directly or indirectly. The organisation has a positive commitment to oppose all forms of discrimination and will work towards promoting equal opportunities for all, irrespective of race, colour, gender, age, class, educational attainment, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, religion, trade union activity, dependent status, or contact with mental health services. We also promote diversity by respecting and valuing the differences of individuals and welcome the different contributions, perspectives and experience that all people in the community have. Equality and diversity are central to the organisation's vision and operation.

SCOPE OF POLICY

This policy is mandatory and binding for all people employed or volunteering at the organisation or using its services. The overall responsibility for ensuring adherence to the implementation of the policy lies with the Board of Trustees with delegated responsibility to the Chief Executive Officer. Staff and volunteers must adhere to the policy at all times and breaches of the policy will be considered serious and may result in disciplinary proceedings.

The Voluntary Service Association Equal Opportunities Policy covers the following organisational and employment practice:

- Advertising and selection of staff, volunteers and trustees
- Recruitment, support and training for staff and volunteers
- Criteria for service users
- Workplace discipline
- Monitoring
- Planning and development

I. Advertising

All vacancies will be advertised in as wide a variety of publications and websites as possible and response from these will be monitored to ensure that they are successful and cost effective and to exclude those that are not. The publications should include newspapers read by as many disadvantaged groups as possible and all adverts should include a short statement of the Equality and Diversity Policy.

Approved publications for the organisation include: The Guardian; The Voice; Lewisham Talking Newspaper. Approved website: Jobs in Charities. This list is neither exhaustive nor inclusive. Efforts will always be made to advertise in local community publications including those which reach the disadvantaged groups stated above. Advertisements must be directly related to the job description and person specification and concentrate on requirements essential to the post. Organisational jargon should be avoided and advertisements should be written in plain English.

2. Recruitment

Staff

All staff must have a person specification based on job descriptions. A Recruitment Sub Committee must agree staff job descriptions and person specifications. We take up two references for all paid Staff; one of which (if applicable) should be a current or last employer.

Person specifications should only list academic qualifications if they are essential to the post. Factors in addition to qualifications and/or work experience, especially voluntary work, should be taken into consideration and given weight in assessing candidates only at the selection stage.

The shortlisting panel will score applications according to the criteria set out in the Person Specification. Equal Opportunities monitoring forms should be removed before the panel meet.

All questions at interview must relate to the points on the Person Specification and scored individually by members before total scores are added together. The post should be offered to the highest scoring candidate. The final decision must not discriminate on any grounds outlined in this policy.

Consultants

External consultants will be given a project brief based on person specification. Vacancies will be advertised where possible, or, consultants will be invited to tender based on Equal Opportunities principles outlined in this document.

Volunteers

Every reasonable attempt will be made to ensure that volunteers are recruited from as wide a range of sources as possible. All volunteers must have a person specification based on task descriptions. Volunteers will be asked to provide details of two referees to whom we can apply for references regarding their suitability for voluntary work for the areas they have chosen. We do not arrange DBS checks for volunteers as a matter of course; only where there is a statutory obligation due to the nature of the work e.g. working directly with children or vulnerable adults.

When interviewing potential volunteers, the same principles should be adopted as staff recruitment, in terms of ensuring that volunteers meet the criteria of the Person Specification. Volunteer interviews however, should be more relaxed and informal giving the potential volunteer ample opportunity to ask questions, enabling them to make an informed decision regarding their voluntary placement and to familiarise themselves with the ethos of the organisation.

3. Criteria for Service Users

Service users are referred to the Centre by Social Services, Health Centres, General Practitioners, Local churches and other voluntary agencies. The Centre will also take self - referrals. All service users are accepted according to the individual projects criteria and based on the principles outlined in this document.

4. Support and Training

Appropriate training opportunities will be made available to all members of staff and volunteers (including the Board of Trustees), based on the individual's role/post and organisational requirements.

5. Workplace Discipline

Staff and volunteers are expected to abide by this policy and disciplinary rules at all times. Harassment or victimisation of any staff member, volunteer or consultant, will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

Any person who feels they have been unfairly harassed or victimised can seek redress through the organisation's grievance procedure.

6. Monitoring

Statistics gathered on staff, volunteers and service users will be monitored regularly, including Equal Opportunities and diversity monitoring, to ensure that they are representative of the local population and do not discriminate or exclude. Monitoring forms will be analysed and statistics produced. Statistics will be presented to the Board of Trustees on a half yearly basis. Where there is an imbalance in the monitored statistics, reasons will be sought as to why, and necessary action will be taken to redress the situation. This may include re-examining job descriptions, person specifications, advertisements and publicity materials sent directly to referrers and/or individual service users, to ensure that they are not a barrier to people from the underrepresented groups.

7. Planning and Development of Provision

The Association aims to be an equal opportunities provider. The organisation will show commitment to equality and diversity by:

- Engaging with and involving the local community in identifying needs and organising services to meet them.
- Ensuring all services and the building are as accessible as possible, making reasonable adjustment where necessary
- Making special or separate service provision arrangements where appropriate
- Providing clear and meaningful information about services which are accessible and meet community needs

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY OBJECTIVES

VSL as a Service Provider is committed to providing responsive and accessible services by:

- Being community focused, engaging with and involving communities, making changes to services as needed;
- Ensuring that our services are as accessible as possible, making special arrangements where appropriate;
- Providing clear and meaningful information about our services in an accessible and meaningful way to meet the community's needs;
- Consulting all sections of the community on service needs and involving existing service users in changing or designing new services;
- Monitor and evaluate take up of services to ensure they do not discriminate or exclude

VSL is committed to ensuring equal and appropriate treatment of staff and volunteers by:

- Implementing recruitment and selection procedures which are non-discriminatory and encourage applications for paid and volunteer roles from all groups in the community
- Ensuring that staff and volunteers have fair access to learning and development opportunities appropriate to their role
- Providing a safe and accessible working environment that values and respects the identity and culture of each person
- Creating a culture and working environment free from discrimination, harassment or violence
- Ensuring effective communication and involvement of staff and volunteers in delivering and developing the work of the VCC

Any developments of the organisation and its services will be based on the principles outlined in this document.

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