



Equal Opportunity, Diversity and Dignity Policy

1. Introduction and statement of intent

Equal Opportunity policies are sometimes seen as an organisational chore; necessary to meet statutory or funding application requirements, but not as living documents that provide a framework for effective action. As an organisation established to champion effective equality, diversity and anti-discrimination practice in Shropshire, FRESH sees its Equal Opportunity, Diversity and Dignity Policy as one of our key foundations; a statement of what we are about and how we should be judged, and a template for developing our other policies and action plans. For FRESH this policy is a living document, and it matters.

Shropshire is a predominantly rural county, made up of one main town (Shrewsbury), several smaller market towns and numerous villages and hamlets. FRESH recognises that significant numbers of Shropshire's people face discrimination and are excluded from full participation in society and community because of the impact of rural isolation and poverty, and also by the way they are perceived and treated. This may be because of perceptions about their race or ethnic origins, religion, political beliefs, sex, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability (including mental illness), HIV status, marital status, responsibility for dependants, appearance, where and how they live, income or lack of it, social class or criminal record.

Prejudice and discrimination affect us all in different ways, especially in relation to the characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010, which makes it unlawful to discriminate directly or indirectly in recruitment, employment or the provision of services on grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, nationality, sex or sexual orientation. FRESH also sees social class (economic and social status) a key focus of discrimination.

In responding to the needs of Shropshire's people, FRESH will take account of the diversity that exists within their communities, and develop responses that enable all groups to participate equally in community life.

FRESH will work actively to secure equality of opportunity for its Members, employees, volunteers, Directors, service users and the wider communities of Shropshire.



2. General Principles

- 2.1. FRESH is an anti-discriminatory organisation, committed to working in ways that demonstrate fairness for all, and where equality and diversity are recognised, encouraged and valued and the concepts of both collective and individual responsibility are accepted by all.
- 2.2. We recognise that while legislation provides an essential framework, real progress in challenging discrimination and improving equality and diversity can be achieved only with a continuing commitment across all of our activities and areas of influence.
- 2.3. Everyone who works for and with FRESH is required to ensure that this policy is effective in promoting equality of opportunity, celebrating diversity and challenging and preventing discrimination and harassment.
- 2.4. Any failure by employees, volunteers, Directors, Members, or contracted service providers to comply with this policy will be treated as a disciplinary offence. Serious breaches of this policy will be treated as gross misconduct, and may render employees liable to summary dismissal. Members, volunteers, Directors or contracted service providers may be liable to summary termination of their involvement with FRESH.
- 2.4. FRESH will recruit, train, and develop its employees, Directors and volunteers solely on the basis of their merit, skills, qualifications and abilities. We will promote employees on the same basis, and will ensure that all of our services and relationships with other people and organisations are based on equity and fairness.
- 2.5. **What is discrimination?**
 - a) We understand discrimination as a **combination of prejudice and power**, which operates to disadvantage or oppress particular groups in society. We see it as a 'web', in which one form of discrimination is linked to all the others, and within which no one form is more important than any of the others; we do not believe there is or should be any hierarchy of discrimination.
 - b) **Direct discrimination** is where a person is treated less favourably than someone else in the same or similar circumstances, or keeping someone apart from other people solely because of perceptions about their age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion and belief, nationality, sex, gender, sexual orientation or social class.
 - c) **Indirect discrimination** is when a requirement or condition is applied equally to everyone, but in practice it disadvantages a particular group of people in a way that cannot be justified; for example an unnecessary physical or age requirement or language test



- d) **Abuse and/or harassment** are actions which amount to abuse of individuals or groups of people, based for example on their perceived membership of a national, social, racial or ethnic minority group, or their disability or illness.
- e) **Victimisation** is when someone is treated less favourably than others, or is discriminated against because s/he has tried to enforce or intends to enforce their rights against alleged discrimination
- f) **A hate incident** is one which is seen as motivated by prejudice or hate, either by the victim or by anyone else. If the victim doesn't want to complain, someone else may do so.

Any of the above forms of discrimination are unacceptable, regardless of whether or not there was an intention to discriminate.

3. FRESH Policy Statement

- 3.1. FRESH is an anti-discriminatory organisation, in which individual differences are seen as positive and people are encouraged and supported to contribute to the development and work both of their own communities and of FRESH.
- 3.2. We will meet the statutory equality and diversity obligations to our employees, volunteers, Members, Directors, contracted service providers, service users and the wider Shropshire communities. In addition to the Protected Characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010, we will have regard to the socio-economic background (class position) of our employees, volunteers, Directors, Members, contracted service providers, service users and local communities.
- 3.3. We will promote and maintain an inclusive and supportive working environment, which affirms the rights of individuals and groups to be treated fairly and with respect, and which affords them opportunities to fulfill their potential.
- 3.4. We respect people's social, cultural, religious, spiritual and political beliefs which do not adversely affect the rights of others.
- 3.5. We will promote diversity in our workforce (paid and unpaid), membership and governance, by recognising and encouraging the particular contributions that can be made by individuals with a wide range of backgrounds and experiences.
- 3.6. We will encourage self-awareness, and challenge stereotypical assumptions that reinforce prejudice and discrimination.
- 3.7. We recognise the rural nature of Shropshire, and will seek to ensure that attention is given to the issues of rural isolation and exclusion.
- 3.8. We will promote a better understanding of equality and diversity within Shropshire's diverse communities, and work to protect their human and civil rights.



- 3.9. In order to measure the impact of our work, we will monitor the backgrounds of people involved with FRESH.
- 3.10. Anybody who feels that they have been unfairly discriminated against in any way by FRESH, its employees, volunteers, Members, Directors or contracted service providers, has recourse through our Complaints Procedure to the Board of Directors to seek a resolution of their complaint.
- 3.11. This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure that we work with our communities and partners to turn these values and policies into practice.

4. Scope

This policy relates to the following aspects of FRESH's governance and work:

- **Workers** – FRESH's employees, individual Directors and volunteers:
 - ♦ We believe that no individual or group should be treated less favourably than others in employment, volunteering or access to services. Our employees and volunteers should reflect the diversity of those who use our services and of the wider population of Shropshire.
 - ♦ Employee appointments will be monitored to ensure no discrimination occurs at the point of selection.
 - ♦ We will use positive action to ensure that people from under-represented groups are encouraged to engage with us as Members, employees, volunteers and service users. In particular, we will state in all employment, volunteering and training recruitment advertising that: "FRESH is committed to equal opportunity and welcomes applications from all sections of the communities"
 - ♦ Where appropriate we will actively encourage and support volunteer recruitment from our Members and service users. Volunteers will be selected solely on the basis their suitability to carry out a task description for each role. Volunteer applications will be monitored for their sex, gender, ethnicity sexual orientation and disability.
 - ♦ Volunteers will be involved in making decisions and changes, especially when these are relevant to their FRESH roles and activities. Volunteers will be informed about what to do if they feel they are not treated fairly.
 - ♦ When volunteers leave, they will be encouraged to feed back on their time with FRESH
- **Governance** - our Board of Directors and any honorary or advisory positions on it.
- **Partnerships** - we will promote equality and diversity in our work with other agencies, organisations and individuals.



- **Legislative framework** - this policy meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and its Codes of Practice. In the conduct of all our activities we will introduce and implement procedures to prevent unlawful or unfair direct or indirect discrimination. and to minimise the risk of inappropriate behaviour.
We regard any discriminatory behaviour, including harassment and bullying, as extremely serious and as grounds for disciplinary action. This includes the dismissal of employees and the expulsion of Members, volunteers, contracted service providers and Directors.
- **Service delivery**
 - ♦ All services and activities provided or promoted by FRESH are covered by this policy.
 - ♦ When appropriate, we will provide translations of our literature and materials into the main languages of our service users, and we will offer interpreters where appropriate. This includes the provision of signing.
 - ♦ FRESH's services will be reviewed regularly and changed where necessary.
 - ♦ All contracted service providers will be required to support and promote our Equal Opportunities Diversity and Dignity Policy.
- **Office accommodation** - we will ensure that any premises used for our work are accessible and welcoming for members of all communities.
- **Purchasing** – we will not buy goods or services from organisations whose policies or activities are contrary to the principles outlined in this policy
- **Promotion of policy** - copies of this policy will be freely available to employees, volunteers, Members and any other interested parties.
- **Travel** - we will plan our services and activities to take account of access to public transport
- **Expenses** - all volunteers are expected to claim agreed out of pocket expenses

5. Responsibilities

5.1. The Board of Directors are responsible for:

- Communicating this policy to Members, employees, volunteers, employment and volunteer applicants, contracted service providers, suppliers and relevant others (such as agency workers and partners)
- Incorporating appropriate equality and anti-discrimination duties into job and task descriptions, and into the work objectives of all staff and volunteers
- Providing appropriate equality and anti-discrimination training and guidance, including induction and management courses.



- Monitoring training for equal opportunity and anti-discrimination content
- Ensuring that people involved in assessing candidates for FRESH recruitment or promotion are trained in non-discriminatory selection techniques
- Obtaining commitments from organisations such as subcontractors and agencies to comply with this policy in their dealings with FRESH, our workforce, our service users and the wider public
- Regularly monitoring, reviewing and updating our equality policies, procedures and day-to-day practice
- Creating and regularly reviewing our equality schemes and action plans
- Treating all forms of discrimination as disciplinary offences, and ensuring there is an effective procedure for Members, employees, volunteers, service users, contracted service providers and members of the public to pursue complaints of unfair discrimination
- Setting a good example by our own behaviour, and making sure that staff, volunteers, service users and contracted service providers know what standards are expected of them
- Providing a working environment that prevents harassment
- Taking action against anybody infringing FRESH's values and rules, including formal action in response to serious breaches of policy or procedure
- Checking when recruiting that the requirements in person specifications, job and task descriptions are necessary and do not reflect or perpetuate bias or stereotypes
- Creating and sustaining a climate in which people feel supported in raising a complaint if they believe they have suffered harassment or unfair discrimination
- Taking complaints seriously, and taking immediate, appropriate action to investigate and resolve them
- Reviewing complaints of bullying or harassment to check that the proper procedures have been followed and to identify and implement any lessons

5.2. Employees, volunteers and individual Directors are responsible for:

- Co-operating with reasonable measures to develop and monitor equality of opportunity
- Refraining from actions that are contrary to the letter or spirit of this policy, including especially not harassing, bullying, victimising, abusing or intimidating others



- Challenging and discouraging any discriminatory behaviour
- Not placing pressure on others to act in a discriminatory manner
- Resisting pressure to discriminate, and co-operating fully with any investigations into allegations of discrimination
- Informing the Society's Secretary or Chair of any action by a FRESH employee, volunteer, Director or contracted service provider which is contrary to this policy
- Providing constructive feedback and suggesting appropriate amendments to this policy

6. Review

- This policy will be reviewed annually by the Board on or around the anniversary of its adoption.
- Date of next scheduled review: November 2014

