

**NORTH DERBYSHIRE
WOMEN'S AID**

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY

(Revised February 2007)

INTRODUCTION

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This policy covers service delivery, personnel practices and management of the organisation and applies to service users (women and children plus male victims on an outreach basis via North Derbyshire Domestic Abuse Outreach Services – see separate Equal Opportunities Statement), workers, management members and volunteers, unless otherwise stated. It is intended to form the basis from which to build and develop comprehensive equality practices.

The policy will be underpinned with procedures to ensure a consistent approach to implementation of the policy. It will also require regular and systematic monitoring and review in order for us to assess progress and plan ahead.

In order for this to happen the following procedures have been put in place:

- * Recruitment and selection procedures
- * Grievance and disciplinary procedures
- * Complaints procedures
- * System of feedback from service users (i.e. customer satisfaction)
- * Timetabled system of monitoring and review

STATEMENT OF INTENT

North Derbyshire Women's Aid's refuges, floating support service and advice centre are run as women only services. The organisation only employs female staff, operating under the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 & 1986 Section 7 (2)e in terms of employment and service provision. North Derbyshire Women's Aid will adhere to the requirements and guidance contained in the following pieces of legislation (and any subsequent amendments to them) in all of its work:

- The Race Relations Act 1976
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- The Employment Equality(Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
- The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006
- The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation Regulations) 2003
- North Derbyshire Women's Aid will also adhere to the Commission for Racial Equality's Code of Practice for Employment, 1983.

We are against all forms of oppression to women and their children and we are committed to challenging the ways in which society works in support of that oppression.

The organisation aims to enable survivors of domestic abuse to develop their potential and to overcome abuse and its effects, within an environment, which is anti-oppressive and non-abusive.

North Derbyshire Women's Aid wholeheartedly supports equality of opportunity for all and opposes all forms of discrimination on the grounds of race, disability, nationality, age, marital status, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, HIV/AIDS status, trade union membership, class, transexuality, political beliefs, mental health, culture, or whether or not someone has children. This applies to all aspects of receiving services, including application, referral, acceptance into refuge or floating support, needs assessment, individual support planning, risk assessment, consultation, involvement, move-on and after-care.

At the Advice and Drop In Centre, every possible step will be taken to ensure that an open door policy is maintained and that all service users are treated on an equal basis as part of a total quality service. Women and children seeking access to North Derbyshire Women's Aid's services will not be disadvantaged by conditions or requirements which cannot be shown to be justifiable. This policy will be communicated to all women within the refuges as part of the admission process and throughout any development work with the residents, ex-residents and all other service users.

We are committed, wherever practicable and within the framework of the law, to achieving and maintaining a workforce which reflects the aims of the organisation. We will implement equality practices and procedures in order to ensure that individual workers are treated equally and fairly and that decisions on recruitment and selection are based on objective material. Furthermore, we intend to underpin our equal opportunities policy and practices with positive action where necessary in overcoming under-representation within the organisation.

Every member of the organisation has a responsibility to implement this policy and equality training will be delivered to all members of the organisation.

In order to achieve these aims North Derbyshire Women's Aid will:

- Conduct staff recruitment in a way that will ensure that selection is based in merit.
- Provide equal opportunities training for workers, management committee members and volunteers.
- Seek to deal swiftly and fairly with any accusation of harassment of one employee by another employee, volunteer or service user in whatever form it may occur and whether direct or indirect.
- Undertake risk and needs assessments regarding admissions and strive to offer an open door policy providing a service to people experiencing domestic abuse based on the needs of the individual wherever possible.
- Seek to deal swiftly and fairly with any accusation of harassment of one service user by another service user, volunteer or employee in whatever form it may occur and whether direct or indirect.
- Provide a friendly, welcoming environment that, wherever possible, meets the cultural/religious needs of the individual.
- Evaluate the services in response to feedback from service users.
- Agree an action plan containing clear, measurable and achievable targets.
- Monitor and evaluate the policy on a regular basis.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY

AGE

ALL SERVICE USERS

NDWA does not discriminate on the grounds of age and such discrimination will be challenged. However, because we are trying to maintain a non-threatening environment for women, we do not admit boys of 18 years or over into the refuges.

MEMBERS

Workers, volunteers and management members need to be over 18 years old to be able to take legal responsibility. Therefore we will not accept applications for membership or employment from under 18s.

We will not normally employ people above pensionable age – this does not affect management members or volunteers.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

WELCOMING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

We recognise that children have often not been actively involved in the decision to come into the refuge and may experience difficulties because of this. Therefore we will make a special effort to welcome children into the refuge and to give them the information they need. To this end we will produce a welcome pack.

SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

NDWA will deliver provision of quality children's services that meet the needs of individual children. We will work with mothers in the refuges to provide a variety of play activities and outings, counselling and support, advocacy, developmental/educational work and equal opportunities awareness raising, using multi-racial resources (books, toys etc.). We will also support children who have lived with or are living with abuse or violence through outreach work, floating support and at the Advice Centre (e.g. art therapy).

CONSULTATION

We will aim to enable children in the refuges to voice their opinions and feelings and to ensure that they have a role in the decision making process through regular children's meetings, house meetings and one to one contact with workers. Children receiving a service from outreach workers, or via art therapy will also be consulted about the service they are offered as appropriate.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S RIGHTS

We recognise that children have rights as individuals and we have developed a Child Protection Policy to ensure that these rights and the safety of all children using our service are protected. We have developed a Children's Charter based on the Child Protection Policy to ensure that all children and other residents have an understanding of children's rights within the refuges.

MONITORING AND EVALUTION

Work with children will be reviewed annually. We will work towards identifying ways in which children can give feedback on the services they receive e.g. evaluation forms, drama, play, drawing, art, informal conversations.

WOMEN WITHOUT CHILDREN

Women without children are not discriminated against by NDWA in terms of refuge provision and people without dependent children have equal rights of access to the services we provide.

CLASS

NDWA does not discriminate, either in terms of employment or service provision, on the grounds of class. We will include class (self-definition) on recruitment monitoring forms. We will challenge discrimination against people on the grounds of class.

EMPOWERING WORKING CLASS SERVICE USERS

We aim to empower working class service users and to fight for their better access to education, employment and economic status.

NOT JUST A WORKING CLASS ISSUE

We do not believe that domestic abuse is only a working class problem, and, while we recognise that middle class people experiencing domestic abuse may have other options available to them, we remain committed to providing services to all women who are escaping domestic abuse.

CROSS CULTURAL ISSUES

RESPECT

NDWA will seek to address the needs of individuals at the same time as fostering self-esteem, encouraging respect for all cultures and celebrating differences.

NO ASSUMPTIONS

We will not make assumptions about people's beliefs on the basis of cultural background.

EMPOWERMENT

We will seek to empower people to make their own choices within their culture and, if necessary, support them in challenging oppressive ideas and behavior.

DISABILITY

NDWA recognises that people with disabilities are severely disadvantaged within society and will take steps to ensure that women with disabilities receive equal treatment through the organisation's employment practices (including recruitment and selection) and when receiving services from the organisation.

ACCESS

We will work towards a situation where NDWA premises, structure, meetings and activities are accessible to all women and children.

EMPLOYMENT

Women with disabilities are under-represented within NDWA and we will work towards increasing the employment opportunities for women within the organisation.

REPRESENTATION

Women with disabilities are under-represented on the Management Committee and among the volunteers, and we will work towards increasing representation among women with disabilities.

DISABILITY AWARENESS TRAINING

We will raise awareness about disableism by ensuring that all members of the organisation receive disability awareness training.

DRUG AND ALCOHOL PROBLEMS

Please refer also to North Derbyshire Women's Aid's Drug Policy.

ADMISSIONS

NDWA recognises that the dual pressures of oppression and poverty leave many people very vulnerable to developing drug or alcohol problems. Therefore NDWA will actively challenge discrimination against women who are or have been experiencing domestic abuse with drug or alcohol problems and will where possible offer access to NDWA's services to service users with such problems who are escaping domestic abuse. However, due to our limited resources, the fact that we do not provide 24-hour staffing of the refuges, and a realistic assessment of the support we can provide, it will be necessary to refuse admission to the refuges and / or refer some women on to specialist agencies. We may refuse admission to the refuges if this is necessary to protect the safety of the woman herself, the other residents or staff and members of NDWA.

Using or bringing illegal drugs on to NDWA premises may lead to immediate eviction from the refuges or being asked to leave the Advice Centre. If drug use away from NDWA premises leads to residents breaking sections of the license agreement, this will lead to warning letters or evictions as appropriate. If a service user chooses to address their drug use while resident at NDWA, or while using another part of the service, workers will offer support and advice (within the terms of the license agreement) and referral to specialist agencies as appropriate.

SUPPORT

Whatever provision is made for a service user in this situation, if they are escaping domestic abuse then it will be appropriate for NDWA to continue to offer support as domestic abuse may be the underlying cause of their problems.

EMPLOYMENT

North Derbyshire Women's Aid's approach to equality of opportunity with regard to employment is as follows:

- As a women's organisation, North Derbyshire Women's Aid will only employ women as per section 7(2)e of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975.
- North Derbyshire Women's Aid will strive to achieve representation of all sections of the community at all levels within the organisation and within all types of work carried out.
- Applicants for paid staff posts, women seeking to volunteer and women seeking a place on the management committee will receive equal treatment regardless of their race, age, disability, sexuality, nationality, religion or cultural beliefs.
- Conditions or requirements that cannot be shown to be justifiable will not disadvantage applicants.
- Selection criteria and procedures will be reviewed regularly to ensure that individuals are selected on the basis of their relevant merits and abilities.
- All employees will receive equal treatment regardless of their race, age, disability, sexuality, nationality, religion or cultural beliefs. This applies to all other aspects of employment including, induction, probationary period, training and development, support and supervision, appraisal, promotion, remuneration, redundancy, re-deployment, disciplinary action and dismissal.

HIV/AIDS

North Derbyshire Women's Aid believes that service users have the right to privacy over their HIV/AIDS status, i.e. the right not to disclose their HIV positive status.

CHALLENGING DISCRIMINATION

If it is known that a service user has HIV or AIDS they will not be discriminated against, and if there is discrimination it will be challenged and could result in withdrawal of service /eviction /dismissal. Awareness training will be offered to all residents and members of the organization and other service users as appropriate.

SUPPORT

Within NDWA's available resources, we will provide support, information, and counselling or further help for anyone requesting it. We will also seek to provide access to complementary services elsewhere.

EMPLOYMENT

Becoming HIV positive or developing AIDS will not affect employment rights or prevent women being recruited to the organisation as workers, support workers or management members.

HEALTH AND CARE

No service user will be discriminated against on health grounds in general, and everyone who wants it will be offered appropriate support via the Advice Centre, within the refuge, on an outreach basis or, if 24 hour or specialist care is needed, by referral to a more appropriate agency.

MARITAL STATUS

NDWA will not discriminate on the grounds of marital status. We will not discriminate on the basis that someone is married, single, divorced, separated, and living with someone, living alone. Any such discrimination will be challenged.

MENTAL HEALTH

ADMISSIONS

NDWA recognises that the dual pressures of oppression and poverty leave many people very vulnerable to developing mental health problems. Therefore NDWA will actively challenge discrimination against women who are or have been experiencing domestic abuse with mental health problems and will where possible offer access to NDWA's services to people with such problems. However, due to our limited resources, the fact that we do not provide 24-hour staffing at the refuges and a realistic assessment of the support we can provide, it will be necessary to refer some people on to specialist agencies. We may refuse admission to the refuges if this is necessary to protect the safety of the woman herself, the other residents or staff and members of NDWA.

SUPPORT

Whatever provision is made for a person in this situation, if she is escaping domestic abuse then it will be appropriate for NDWA to continue to offer support, as the domestic abuse may be the underlying cause of their problems. We will aim to give appropriate support to children of service users who suffer from mental health problems and will work with their parents/carers to seek help from specialist agencies.

NATIONALITY

NDWA is committed to offering support to people experiencing domestic abuse who do not have British nationality. However, due to financial constraints, we are currently only able to offer refuge space to one family at a time (with a six month break in between) with no recourse to public funds. Otherwise (at the Advice Centre, via outreach and floating support) we will ensure the equal access to services for people from other countries who are escaping from a violent partner. In such cases we will support a person facing deportation while residing in this country.

CAMPAIGNING

We defend the right of any person escaping domestic violence to seek leave to remain in this country and will implement this policy by supporting local and national campaigns.

POLITICAL BELIEFS

NDWA is committed to Women's Aid Federation England aims and principles. Although we do not discriminate on the grounds of political beliefs we will take action if those beliefs lead to the harassment of or discrimination against service users, staff or members.

RACE

Racial discrimination and prejudice pervade society and severely disadvantage Black, Asian and other ethnic minority people. NDWA will take steps to ensure that Black, Asian and other ethnic minority women receive equal treatment through our employment practices and when receiving services.

CULTURAL NEEDS

NDWA will work to ensure that the refuges reflect the cultural needs of residents. While delivering all services we will be aware and sensitive to the needs of individuals and work to ensure that these needs can be met.

DEVELOPMENT WORK WITH BLACK, ASIAN AND PEOPLE FROM OTHER ETHNIC MINORITIES

NDWA will carry out marketing, development and outreach work targeted at Black, Asian and other ethnic minority women to encourage them to become involved in the work of the organisation as volunteers, and to ensure that local people are aware of the services offered by NDWA.

ANTI-RACIST TRAINING

NDWA will raise awareness about racial and cultural issues by ensuring that all members of the organisation receive appropriate training.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

NDWA aims to ensure that staff, volunteers and service users do not impose their beliefs on others. We will challenge any discrimination on the grounds of religious or non-religious beliefs.

SERVICE USERS

Service users are an important part of the organisation of NDWA and we will actively take steps to ensure that their views and opinions are taken into account.

COMPLAINTS

We have a complaints procedure, which forms part of the license agreement for refuge residents, and is explained to each woman on admission, is on display at the Advice Centre and is explained to floating support and outreach clients.

PARTICIPATION

We have a Client Participation Policy, which aims to increase service users' participation in the organisation.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

NDWA does not discriminate against people on grounds of sexual orientation.

CHALLENGING HOMOPHOBIA

We will take steps to challenge homophobia, enabling people to recognise the invisibility and the oppression of lesbian, gay and bi-sexual people.

TRAINING

We will actively challenge heterosexist attitudes and behavior within the organisation with the aid of training, access to positive images and information.

ACCESSIBILITY

We will promote ourselves as an organisation that is open and welcoming to lesbians and bi-sexual women and their families.

LESBIAN AND BI-SEXUAL MOTHERS

NDWA believes that lesbian and bi-sexual mothers, should not be discriminated against with regard to having residency of their children. To this end we will support service users in court cases around this issue and support local and national campaigns in defense of lesbian and bi-sexual mothers.

TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP

NDWA encourages all workers to join a Trade Union (usually UNISON). Workers, volunteers and management workers will not be discriminated against for Trade Union membership or non-membership.

TRANSEXUALITY

NDWA recognises that some people, transsexuals, feel uncomfortable with and want to change the sex that they were assigned at birth.

MEMBERSHIP AND SERVICE PROVISION

NDWA will not discriminate against transsexuals requiring admission to the refuges or to use the Advice Centre or the floating support service, who identify their gender as female.

CONFIDENTIALITY

People have the right to confidentiality regarding the sex they were originally assigned.

TRAINING

In order to combat prejudice NDWA will endeavour to raise awareness of transsexuality and related issues.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY

RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

1. The Recruitment and selection policy and procedure sets out the process in detail. The main elements in terms of anti-discriminatory practice are set out below.

2. Advertisement of posts:

Unless there are exceptional circumstances, all posts will be advertised both internally and externally in the local (and where appropriate national and/or specialist) press.

Regular liaison will be undertaken with local race equality and disability organisations to ensure that people from ethnic minority groups and disabled groups are encouraged to apply.

3. Wording of advertisements:

Job descriptions and supporting information will not contain any unnecessary stereotypes or expectations about the future post holder.

In line with our responsibility under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, North Derbyshire Women's Aid will make any 'reasonable' adjustment to overcome any factor which puts a disabled employee or job applicant at a disadvantage.

4. Ethnic monitoring of applicants and recruits:

Recruitment packs will include an ethnic monitoring form that asks for details such as age, sex, ethnic origin and disability. This will be separated from the main form for monitoring purposes before the form is sent to those responsible for short listing. The details on the monitoring sheet will be collected and analysed against the profile of people actually obtaining jobs. Where people from under represented groups do not appear to be applying for, or gaining particular posts, action to redress the imbalance will be taken by encouraging applications from those groups.

5. Short listing:

Short listing will always be carried out by at least two members of North Derbyshire Women's Aid

6. Selection:

Selection will be on the basis of job experience, qualifications and supporting details provided by the applicant on her reasons for applying for the job.

7. Interviews:

Interviews will always be conducted by at least two members of staff/management committee members who have been trained in interviewing techniques, and in the application of the equal opportunities policy. Where appropriate, interviews will be backed up by practical tests of ability - e.g. literacy and numeracy. The decision on whom to appoint must be agreed by a majority of the interviewers and be in accordance with the Recruitment and selection policy and procedure.

OTHER ASPECTS OF EMPLOYMENT

8. The following policies and procedures cover other aspects of employment and staff are expected to follow these conscientiously:

- Training and development
- Support and supervision
- Staff appraisal
- Disciplinary and grievance

9. Anyone who feels they have been discriminated against in any of the above areas should discuss this with their line manager. If this does not resolve the concern, the staff member may raise a formal grievance as per the Grievance policy and procedure.

ACCESS TO AND RECEIPT OF SERVICES

10. The following policies and procedures cover all aspects of accessing and receiving services and staff are expected to follow these conscientiously to ensure that people seeking to use and using North Derbyshire Women's Aid's services are not discriminated against:

- Access and referral
- Needs assessment and individual support planning
- Risk assessment

11. North Derbyshire Women's Aid will take action against any member of staff, volunteer, management committee member, service user or visitor who commits any form of discrimination based on race, age, disability, sexuality, nationality, religion or cultural beliefs.