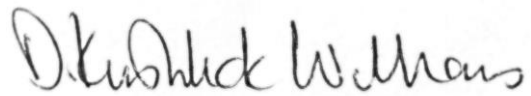


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Equality and Diversity Policy

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Limited Company No: 1693876

Equality and Diversity Policy Statement

Markfield is committed to striving for inclusion and equality of opportunity for everyone. Our local community is hugely diverse and has a broad range of talent, potential and needs. We value this diversity and aim to have a workforce that is representative of our community in order to secure the widest pool of talent possible.

We recognise that there is much disadvantage and discrimination in society. In particular we recognise that many disabled people and their families face discrimination. Our charity's mission is to work to overcome this discrimination and promote the inclusion of disabled people.

We will take a stand against prejudice and unlawful discrimination based on the characteristics of: disability, sex, race (including ethnic origin, colour, nationality and national origin), age, sexual orientation, gender re-assignment, pregnancy, marriage & civil partnership, religion or belief.

We will respect our employees, volunteers and service users as unique individuals, and will not make stereotypical assumptions about the character traits or beliefs of individuals or groups based on their ethnicity, age or sex.

Our Equality and Diversity Policy reflects Markfield's commitment to equal opportunities and our aim to treat fairly all service users, potential service users, employees and potential employees. This policy describes the actions we will take to promote equality, diversity and inclusion, both in the employment of staff and also in the way we provide our services.

Everyone working and volunteering at Markfield is expected to work in accordance with this policy. We will also promote the values of equality and diversity to service users and visitors.

Responsibility for implementation and review of this policy

We will review this policy regularly and update it in line with changes in legislation and guidance on good practice. We will check regularly to make sure that the way in which we work is promoting equality and diversity in practice.

Markfield's Director together with the Senior Management Team are responsible for ensuring that this policy is implemented, and for co-ordinating regular reviews of the policy (every two years) with input from the Trustees and staff team.

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1. Legal framework

We take into account the following current legislation and guidance within our Equality and Diversity Policy. We will review our policy regularly to make sure it keeps up to date with legal changes.

Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act harmonises and replaces previous legislation, including the Race Relations Act 1976 and Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The Equality Act covers the same nine characteristics that were protected by previous equality legislation:

- race
- age
- disability
- sex
- sexual orientation
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- religion or belief

These are termed 'protected characteristics'. The Act extends protection against indirect discrimination and discrimination by association, harassment and third party harassment to cover all the groups with protected characteristics.

For details of the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 see:

www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=3017

2. Opposing racism and reducing unconscious bias

Racism is the belief that different groups have innately superior or inferior traits according to their ethnicity, cultural heritage or country of origin. Racism has deep roots within our society, and is most often directed against people from black and other ethnic minority backgrounds. Migrants and religious communities such as Jews and Muslims are often also the targets of racism. On an institutional and a society level, practices and policies can unfairly advantage some and disadvantage others, based on ethnicity.

Racism can be perpetrated in an overt deliberate way, and can also happen more subtly or inadvertently (see more below). And it can be the indirect result of a policy or practice which negatively impacts disproportionately on a particular ethnic group, even if this effect was unintended, for example due to ignorance about cultural differences.

Markfield is opposed to and will work to eliminate all forms of racial bias, whether conscious, unconscious or indirect, in the way we employ staff and run our services.

Unconscious bias

Everyone's unconscious thoughts can be influenced by prejudices that we may not even realise we have. For example, we may be drawn to favour others who share similar characteristics to ourselves, or make unthinking stereotypical assumptions based on skin colour, sex, age, appearance, accent, etc. Everyone can be affected by unconscious biases, and in the workplace these biases can unfairly influence decisions on recruitment, promotion, staff development, and the provision of services. Where biased thinking affects decisions on equal treatment in relation to the nine protected characteristics under the Equalities Act (see page 4), it can constitute unlawful discrimination.

Actions to mitigate bias

We will take steps to mitigate negative impacts from unconscious bias. Evidence shows* that the negative impact of unconscious bias on decision making in the workplace can be mitigated by doing the following:

- decision-makers being aware of the potential for bias
- making a conscious effort to treat everyone as individuals, rather than making prior assumptions about a person's qualities or attitudes based on a group identity characteristic, such as skin colour, sex, etc
- improving communication, and deepening understanding about and respect for different cultures
- not rushing decisions and taking time to properly consider issues
- systematically justifying decisions (eg. on recruitment and promotion) on the basis of evidence, and recording the reasons for decisions.

**see ACAS guidance [Unconscious bias / Acas advice and guidance / Acas](#)*

2. Promoting equality and inclusion in the provision of services

Markfield works with people with a wide range of needs. Some will identify themselves to be disabled or 'neuro diverse' (meaning they have a difference in terms of their thinking and learning styles). We recognise that disabled and autistic people often face barriers to participating in society. We strive to make our services accessible to those who find it difficult to take part in mainstream activities because of social or physical barriers.

Below we describe the key ways we will promote our services and work to meet the needs of disabled people and their families.

Assessing and meeting different needs

When we assess the needs of those joining our clubs and sessions we will identify

with input from the person and their family /circle of support, what their support needs are, including the communication system they prefer to use (eg. Makaton). We will take this into account in planning how we work with each person, and will provide training to staff accordingly.

We will make the signage around the building, for example the fire action and first aid points, accessible using words and symbols.

Accessible publicity

Publicity about our services is distributed to local organisations and networks such as schools, libraries, health centres and other community centres on a regular basis. Markfield will ensure that our publicity materials promote positive messages on diversity and inclusion. We will produce information that is clear, jargon-free and easily understood, and wherever appropriate will support this with symbols and picture based communication. All our publicity materials use 'FS Mencap' font which is designed by MENCAP to be accessible for people with a learning disability.

Each service manager is responsible for maintaining records of current service users, identifying unfilled capacity, and looking for any patterns that show whether particular sections of the community are not accessing our services. They will use this information to plan where the services are publicised, and/or any other actions needed to improve access to services from particular groups.

Translation & interpreting

For Deaf service users or those with English as a second language we will do our best to ensure that interpreters are available for sessions and meetings where needed, so people can participate and make informed choices. Information about Markfield services can be translated on request into other community languages.

Subsidised and free places

Markfield will endeavour to offer free or subsidised places to those without Local Authority (LA) funding whenever we can secure funding for this. We also support parents/carers and service users to make applications and appeals relating to LA Personal Budgets to fund services.

Transport

Markfield is committed to promoting the independence of disabled people, and we therefore encourage the independence of our service users in their transport as far as possible. We encourage adult service users to travel independently if possible and we provide travel training to help them achieve this, and we encourage parents and carers to bring their children and young people to Markfield. We recognise that for some a lack of transport provision can make it difficult or impossible to use our services. Markfield's Transport Policy sets out how we will provide support with transport (eg. minibus, taxis, travel training).

Resources for sessions

We aim to create an atmosphere at Markfield that is friendly, caring and accepting. Service users are encouraged to have a positive self image. Resources for sessions need to be accessible and designed to meet the needs of a diverse user group.

The Service Managers will co-ordinate:

- regular reviews of the toys and session equipment and materials and plan what is needed to meet users' needs, taking into account their wishes and views. This includes thinking about equipment and toys that meet the sensory needs of autistic and other neuro-diverse people, and materials that reflect and represent diversity – for example a range of children's books so service users can see images of people who look like them.
- a plan for efficient food shopping for sessions, to provide meals and snacks that promote healthy eating, meet service users' cultural needs, and take into account food intolerance and allergies.

Gender equality and respect for diverse identities

We want Markfield to be an inclusive place where everyone feels comfortable to 'be themselves' and to express their own identity. We reject the constraints of rigid gender-role stereotypes (eg. the notion that there is a 'right' and a 'wrong' way to be a girl or boy, man or woman). In our sessions we will make choices of different activities and toys available to all, to avoid promoting rigid gender stereotypes and avoid giving children and young people the impression, either overtly or implicitly, that certain clothes or activities are 'supposed to be' exclusively for girls or boys.

We aim to create within our sessions and our workplace culture a positive and inclusive atmosphere for LGBT young people and adults, both staff and service users. We will sensitively support anyone who is experiencing feelings of questioning or distress about gender identity, in line with our staff support systems and safeguarding protocols. We recognise that autistic young people are statistically more likely to experience gender dysphoria and to identify as transgender. Some dysphoric young people may go on to transition as adults, while for others their dysphoria may resolve during adolescence. In supporting young people we will liaise where appropriate with parent/carers and other professionals, and follow Government guidance¹.

We recognise that having the option of accessing single-sex spaces and service provision is important in certain circumstances, in particular for women and girls, in order to ensure their safety and dignity. We will offer the choice of single-sex spaces and service provision where this is needed and is proportionate, in line with the provisions in the Equalities Act 2010. For example, a service user who needs help with personal care may prefer to have a staff member of the same sex to support them with this, and their choice must be respected. We provide the choice of both single-sex and gender neutral facilities for changing/toileting.

Consultation and participation

Markfield works to promote positive attitudes to disability and support disabled people and their families to take an active part in their local communities. We actively encourage the involvement of service users in designing, running, monitoring and reviewing our services and activities.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plan-your-relationships-sex-and-health-curriculum#using-external-agencies>

The ways service users will be involved will include the following:

- We aim that at minimum of a quarter of places on our Executive Committee are filled by those with personal lived experience of disability, either themselves or their family, and/or current or former service users.
- Direct involvement through participation groups which devise their own projects (e.g. IYA youth participation group).
- Involvement of service users in delivering training (eg. on autism)
- Through seeking regular feedback from service users (see more below).

Support to participate

In order to assist service users to participate actively in the above forums we will endeavour to provide support to enable them to do this, where it is needed. This support can include the following:

- Support for those with literacy difficulties. We will provide individual support to enable them to access written documentation such as Executive Committee papers
- Payment of travel and childcare expenses to eg. enable Executive Committee members to attend meetings.

Service user involvement and feedback

We will actively seek feedback from service users about the quality of our services, and their suggestions for how they would like them to be improved, and involve service users in planning the development of services. The ways in which we will seek service user feedback will vary according to each service; the methods used will include:

- Asking for feedback informally from service users, parents and carers in the course of sessions.
- Surveys and questionnaires, including symbol-based questionnaires for younger and non-verbal service users.
- Games designed to give service users a way to express what they like and don't like about the services they use.
- Open days advertised to service users and the local community, where we will invite people to feedback about the services, and access to them.
- We will invite service user feedback via the Markfield website.

Service managers are responsible for ensuring that users are regularly given the opportunity to give feedback, and for designing tools to do this. Each service manager must report to the Senior Management Team on the feedback gathered about the services they are responsible for any action points to change or develop services in response to user feedback. These will be incorporated into Service Delivery Plans, which are also reported annually to trustees.

Responding to complaints

We view complaints from service users as a form of feedback which should be responded to by staff in a constructive way – i.e. as a spur to reflect on, change and improve our services where applicable. Complaints will be dealt with promptly, and in an open, honest and accountable way under the procedures set out in the Complaints Policy.

Community participation and influence

Markfield has a key role to play in supporting disabled people to participate in community life, in promoting community cohesion, and tackling social exclusion. The ways in which we will work towards this include:

- Staff and service user attendance at relevant local forums to: increase opportunities for service users; to raise awareness of Markfield services; help co-ordinate services locally; build up contacts; advocate for the rights of disabled people and their families and promote positive attitudes toward disability and inclusion.
- Supporting service users to join local and national disability/carers forums.

3. Recruitment, selection and development of staff

Markfield aims to be an Equal Opportunities Employer. We value diversity and aspire as an employer to have a team of staff and volunteers that is broadly representative of the diversity within our community. The detailed policy and guidance on how Markfield undertakes the recruitment, selection, management training and development of staff is set out in the following separate policies:

- Recruitment & Selection Policy
- Staff Training and Development Policy
- Supervision and Appraisal Policy
- Disciplinary and Grievance Policy.

The underlying principle in relation to the recruitment and management of staff is that all decisions are based on merit (with the exception of limited necessary exemptions allowed under the Equality Act, such as sex-based exemptions). The criteria used to define 'merit' are based on the requirements of each job role, as set out in the Job Description and Person Specification.

We will avoid all forms of unlawful discrimination in relation to: pay, terms and conditions of employment, dealing with grievances and discipline, redundancy, requests for flexible working, and selection for promotion, training or other developmental opportunities. Managers and staff will be inducted in the Equality and Diversity Policy.

Monitoring diversity in the workforce

We will seek to gather and record equalities data from those who apply to work at Markfield and who are appointed or promoted, on: ethnic background, disability, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, religion, and gender identity. Workforce equalities statistics will be reported to the Executive Committee annually.

Recruitment

We will seek to advertise job opportunities as widely as possible, using a range of media and networks, aiming to reach all sections of the community.

Reasonable adjustments for disability

Markfield will take all reasonable steps to meet any necessary special requirements to enable candidates with disabilities to have equal opportunities apply for and carry out jobs. The potential adjustments include not only adaptations to physical space adjustments but also recognition and accommodation for neuro-diverse conditions (eg. dyslexia, autism, ADHD). Staff are responsible for discussing with their line manager any adjustments they may need (eg. alternative communication methods, provision of special IT or other equipment, or adjusting hours of work).

Valuing diversity of viewpoints

As well as seeking diversity in our workforce in terms of innate characteristics, such as ethnicity and sex, we also value diversity of viewpoints within the staff team. Staff are encouraged to offer their views and perspectives about the ways that the organisation and services are run, and management will listen to and fairly consider everyone's views when making decisions. We aim to have a workplace culture where everyone feels free to say what they think, and understands and accepts that others' views may differ from theirs. When people's opinions differ we will seek to reach a consensus for action through respectful and open discussion.

4. Combatting bullying, harassment and victimisation

Markfield aims to create an environment for staff and service users that is free of bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination, promoting dignity and respect for all, and where individual differences and the contributions of all staff are recognised and valued.

Bullying is defined by the Anti-Bullying Alliance as: the repetitive, intentional hurting of one person or group by another person or group, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power. We recognise that sometimes behaviour seen as 'bullying' could be unintentional and triggered by the person's communication difficulties or sensory needs, and when seeking a resolution we need to try to address the causes for the behaviour. Forums such as our service team meetings and practice supervision provide a way for the staff team to discuss and develop strategies to sensitively resolve issues of conflict between service users. *See also Markfield's Anti-Bullying Policy.*

Harassment occurs when someone engages in unwanted conduct which has the purpose and effect of violating someone else's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. Harassment may include offensive jokes, personal insults, persistent criticism, unwanted physical contact or 'freezing' someone out. Harassment and bullying can cause fear, stress, anxiety and physical sickness. It is not only the intention behind an action that defines whether it is deemed as harassment, but also the effect it has on the recipient.

Markfield is committed to preventing such unacceptable behaviour. We will take seriously and investigate all complaints of bullying, harassment, victimisation and

unlawful discrimination by fellow employees, service users, visitors and any others in the course of the organisation's activities.

We will take action if staff, volunteers or service users are found to have behaved in a discriminatory or bullying manner. Allegations of discrimination which are contested will be investigated according to due process and the case will be assessed on the basis of evidence, and the person accused will be given a right to respond in a fair hearing. In the case of staff alleged to have engaged in bullying or harassment we may take action under the disciplinary procedures and/or provide mediation or training. For a volunteer we may end the placement if necessary. For a service user we will take steps to support them to understand and abide by our equality policy.

5. Routes to redress

If service users, visitors, or candidates for jobs feel that Markfield has not acted in accordance with this Equality and Diversity Policy, they can use our complaints procedure to raise concerns. Workers and volunteers can use the grievance procedure to raise concerns.

See also the policies on Disciplinary & Grievance, and Complaints.