

2. Policies

2.1. Equal Opportunities Policy

Introduction:

- a. There are powerful processes at work in society, which prevent people from certain sections of the community from having access to the same services and opportunities as others. These processes – economic, social, and cultural – are embedded in organisations and institutions generally. The result is that individuals and groups are demeaned and/or discriminated against on grounds of age, class, culture, gender, marital status, physical disability, race, religion, or sexual orientation. In the same way that these processes operate generally, Confide recognises that they may also operate in our service, possibly through a lack of awareness.
- b. This policy uses an equal access model of equal opportunities, which takes indirect discrimination as its starting point and seeks to remove the barriers within the processes, that limit opportunities in the first place. To achieve this, positive action is encouraged in the policy, which is action to ensure that people are aware of the opportunities that are available and have equal access to them, but do not give them preferential treatment.
- c. The law currently covers the fields of employment and the provision of services in accordance with current BACP guidelines:
 - i. It is **unlawful** to discriminate on the grounds of gender, marital status, ethnic group, race, colour, nationality, trade union membership, or being pregnant.
 - ii. It is **sometimes unlawful** to discriminate on grounds of religion, political belief, physical disability or being an ex-offender.
 - iii. It is **not technically unlawful**, but not good practice, to discriminate on grounds of age, sexual orientation, or being HIV positive, where this is not relevant to doing the job.

(ii) Policy:

- a. Confide intends to strive to develop policies and establish practices to ensure that all concerned with the agency are offered equal opportunities and are not demeaned.
- b. It is the policy of Confide to work continuously towards the improvement of practice in the area of equal opportunities in a way that informs all the work of the agency.
- c. Confide will base its practices in counselling, training, management, and employment on the Ethical Framework of the BACP and will use procedures, publications, and forms which are as fair, transparent, available, accessible, and publicised as possible.
- d. There will be regular monitoring, evaluation and review of the policy. Where needs for training are identified, regular training will be provided, and positive action will, where possible, be taken within the resources of Confide. Changes designed to correct the disadvantage of any one group will be considered in relation to their impact on others in line with the Equality Act 2010.

The following guidelines cover the implementation of the policy in the following areas:

Governance and Management, Counselling, Employment, and People with a disability.

(iii) Guidelines: Governance and Management:

- a. An understanding and commitment to equal opportunities will be attributes to be borne in mind when members are appointed to the Management Committee.
- b. The Management Committee will strive to ensure that training in equal opportunities and anti-oppressive practice is made available to management, supervisors, counsellors, and all other team members.
- c. Confide will strive to promote equal opportunities wherever it may have influence.

(iv) Guidelines: Counselling

- a. Confide will offer its counselling services to everyone assessed as able to make use of them: where appropriate, people will be re-referred on clinical grounds if Confide's services are deemed unsuitable for their needs.
- b. For clinical/legal reasons, Confide is not able to accept as clients, young people under the age of 18.
- c. When publicising or representing Confide's services through networks likely to reach potential clients, Confide will strive to take positive steps to increase accessibility to those services by underrepresented groups.

- d. Receptionists will be trained in how to respond in a non-discriminatory way when receiving enquiries from potential clients, and in how to be responsive to people's needs, with periodic reviews.
- e. Pre-counselling information provided for clients will aim to make clear the extent and limits of the service and how access is obtained, and of Confide's intention to offer equal opportunity of access within these.
- f. Confide is committed to the provision of counselling services regardless of individual financial circumstances, so long as funds are available. All clients (excluding Stonepillow service users) are asked to make some financial contribution towards their counselling; this is carefully negotiated with each client.
- g. Serious attention will be given to particular requests or indications of need on the part of potential clients for a counsellor with particular attributes (e.g. age, gender, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, religious affiliation). At the same time, it is recognised that there is limited counsellor availability, and such requests may not be met. The intake worker will make the parameters clear to the client when such requests are made.
- h. Counsellors and supervisors are expected to be alerted to prejudice and stereotyping both within themselves and in their work with any client/counsellor, and especially to how language and behaviour embody such attitudes. Counsellors and supervisors are expected to adopt a model of counselling which is appropriate to a multicultural society and acknowledges and values differences.
- i. Clients will be informed of Confide's complaints procedure and how to access it.

(v) Employment

- a. Confide aims to treat all existing and prospective volunteers and contracted workers with fairness, respect, and integrity, and to combat any discrimination or oppression of any individual or group. The posts of Director, Supervisor, and Counselling Co-ordinator are constitutionally held by members of a Christian denomination. Counsellors are asked to be aware of and open to spiritual values.
- b. In recruitment practices, all materials will ensure that, as far as possible, decisions are based on objective and job-related criteria.
- c. The Equal Opportunities Policy will be an integral part of any induction program for recruits.
- d. Confide's Grievance and Complaints Procedure will be readily accessible to all personnel.

(vi) Guidelines: People with a Disability:

- a. Confide will strive to ensure that anyone with a disability concerned, or who would be concerned, with Confide, as a client, trainee, volunteer, or team member, will, so far as reasonably practicable, receive as good a service as someone with no disability.
- b. Access for people with limited mobility is available.
- c. Intake workers are trained to ask if a potential client has any special needs.
- d. Publicity material is available in large-print format.