

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY

NOTE:

This policy must be read in conjunction with our Diversity Policy

1 POLICY STATEMENT

- 1.1** Age Concern Okehampton & Torrington is dedicated as an organisation to the eradication of discrimination in whatever shape or form it may arise. This is a statement of intent as well as commitment.
- 1.2** Age Concern Okehampton & Torrington intends to operate its Equal Opportunities Policy in a proactive (as distinct from reactive) manner. In practice this means striving to increase awareness of discrimination in all its forms and working towards its gradual elimination rather than attempting to rectify episodes as they arise. This intention has deep implications in relation to recruitment of staff and volunteers as well as in-service delivery and training.
- 1.3** Responsibility for the development and operation of our Equal Opportunities Policy is held primarily by the Board of Trustees with delegation to the Chief Officer for its day to day implementation. It is vital to stress that the Ownership of our Policy lies with all those who work for the aims and objectives of Age Concern Okehampton & Torrington whether in a voluntary or salaried capacity.
- 1.4** In operating this Policy, the Board of Trustees agrees to hold a regular review (at least once a year) to make such adjustments, alterations and additions as may be necessary.
- 1.5** It is emphasised that the main framework upon which this Equal Opportunities Policy is based can be identified in a wide range of legal enactment.

2 CODE OF PRACTICE

“Welcoming Diversity”

- 2.1** Discrimination, for the purposes of this Policy document, relates to a wide range of disadvantaged people some of whom are categorised below. As Age Concern Okehampton & Torrington principally targets its services at older people in the community, discrimination on the grounds of age should head this list. Specifically, we are committed to:
- a) Identifying and reaching out to those older members of our community who are least able to know about and access our services.
 - b) Refraining from ageist attitudes whether in print or verbally. Condescending or patronising approaches need to be balanced against the needs of those with demonstrable vulnerability.
- 2.2** Age Concern Okehampton & Torrington is implacably opposed to any form of discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin. We regard the numbers of citizens from black and other ethnic groups as irrelevant in this context. Racial comments and attitudes cannot be tolerated under any circumstances and, if proven to have occurred, will automatically result in disciplinary action.
- 2.3** We will carefully monitor our procedures to ensure that there is no room for discrimination against women on the grounds of sex or marital status. Wherever possible, child care needs will be taken into consideration in relation to hours of work, whether voluntary or salaried. Allegations or evidence of sexual harassment will be treated with the utmost seriousness and in confidence. Under no circumstances will harassment whether physical, verbal, by innuendo or humiliation be tolerated.
- 2.4** Discrimination against people with disabilities often arises in subtle as well as obvious ways. Age Concern Okehampton & Torrington will constantly monitor attitudes and procedures with a view to ensuring that services, recruitment (both of salaried and voluntary staff) and procedures are free of discriminatory practices. Additionally, wheelchair and other points of access to buildings and services will be assessed to provide the maximum possible accessibility. There is evidence that community based clubs and organisations for over 60s do not have a healthy track record in relation to their peers who have learning difficulties.
- 2.5** Sexual practices, provided they are within the law, must be regarded as a private and personal matter not open to outside criticism or ridicule. It is possible that clients, volunteers or staff may choose to "come out" regarding lesbian or gay orientation. Should this occur, it is imperative that everyone involved refrains from discriminatory behaviour.

In view of prevailing prejudices and misunderstanding around these issues they

should constitute a key area for training.

Additionally, there is much evidence that it is seen as distasteful for men and women in advanced old age to remain sexually active. This also is a discriminatory attitude that should not be tolerated.

- 2.6** Age Concern Okehampton & Torrridge rejects all forms of discrimination based on prejudice surrounding political or religious affiliations. Knowledge is the important factor here, particularly in relation to religious beliefs and observances that may not be familiar, such as those of ethnic minorities.
- 2.7** Occasionally, our work may bring us into contact with travellers of many descriptions, from the elderly "Roadster" to the younger, so called "New Age" groups. There is a long tradition of nomadic folk in our rural area. Age Concern Okehampton & Torrridge is pledged to respect the rights and lifestyle of travelling people, particularly as a group in our midst most likely to experience discriminatory practices from public agencies and the community.
- 2.8** Age Concern Okehampton & Torrridge already operates a Health and Safety Policy for its centres, staff and volunteers. It will be important to monitor and update this document regularly. Once a year is recommended. Good practices in Health and Safety also involve being mindful not to exhibit discriminatory behaviour towards staff, whether salaried or voluntary. Colleagues may develop long term illnesses or disabilities potentially affecting their work. Flexibility and understanding need to be exercised in helping them to cope with and resolve such developments. Aids related illness, in particular, requires maximum understanding, tolerance and team support.
- 2.9** In the area of Recruitment and Staff Selection we will ensure that Job Descriptions and advertisements for staff (salaried or voluntary) will reflect our Equal Opportunities Policy requirements. A copy of this document will be sent to all applicants together with the necessary forms and to potential volunteers at the appropriate time.

At interview, members of the Panel need to have a good grounding in the anti-discriminatory implications of this Policy to avoid asking inappropriate questions. Terms and conditions of Service for salaried staff should include a specific clause concerning our commitment to an Equal Opportunities Policy. Consideration should be given to the inclusion in Job Descriptions and advertisements of an emphasis towards positive recruitment from under represented and disadvantaged groups in the Community: e.g. members of ethnic minorities or post-retired members of society. Job Descriptions should contain a clause stating that failure to comply with our Equal Opportunities Policy may result in disciplinary action.

Age Concern Okehampton & Torrridge pledges to provide the opportunity for all Committee Members, staff and volunteers to have access to training in the implications of this Policy on a regular basis. It is suggested that the Committee should consider a mandatory process of ongoing training for salaried staff and certain categories of volunteers.

Additionally, we wish to demonstrate a commitment to regular training programmes for our committee, staff and volunteers to assist in developing sound practices in all aspects of our work.

