

**MISSING LINK**

**POLICY ON EQUALITIES**

#### 1.0 General

1.1 This policy applies to all Missing Link and to Next Link services. Hereafter, any reference to Missing Link applies to all the above services unless otherwise specified.

1.2 This policy is available to all interested parties and is issued to all service users, staff, applicants, and partner organisations.

1.3 Missing Link acknowledges that discrimination and prejudice exist. The aim of this policy is to challenge and end discrimination wherever it appears and to ensure that no one receives unequal or unfair treatment in their contact with Missing Link.

1.4 Missing Link requires all its partners to have their own Equalities policy.

#### STATEMENT OF INTENT

**2.0 Equal Opportunities Statement**

2.1 Missing Link wishes it to be known that it is wholeheartedly committed to equality of opportunity and will make all efforts to promote fair treatment and equal access in the delivery of any of its services and in its employment practices.

2.2 Missing Link is committed to challenging stigma and promoting positive images of the organisation and of service users from underrepresented groups in its publicity material.

2.3 Missing Link believes in the benefits of practising a policy of Equalities. These include:

* enhancing the achievement of the aims and goals of the organisation as outlined in the organisation’s Mission Statement and Core Values
* adopting the requirement that the organisation has a programme of continual review of best practice
* making the organisation more accessible to service users and enhancing customer satisfaction by meeting their needs
* making the organisation more appealing to potential employees who will work towards providing a better service.

2.4 This policy covers service users, applicants for services, applicants for employment, paid staff and volunteers, members of the management committee and contractors.

2.5 The aim of this policy is to ensure that all applicants, service users, potential and current employees receive fair and equal treatment in line with the aims and objectives of the organisation and the services operated. It is unlawful to discriminate against anyone with protected characteristics. With some exceptions, described in paragraph 2.6 below, no person will be discriminated against on the grounds of race, gender and gender reassignment, colour, national origin, nationality, cultural or ethnic background, sexual orientation, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy, responsibilities for dependants, age, religion, belief, HIV status, pregnancy and maternity rights, disability or human rights.

2.6 Missing Link accepts that in certain circumstances we will discriminate as many of our services are not open to men. In addition, some positions and services are dedicated to particular groups, for example we manage an accommodation scheme specifically for women who are black and employ a dedicated black worker in the support role. We have a South Asian crisis response service and employ dedicated South Asian support staff for those roles.

2.7 ‘Equal’ does not mean ‘the same’, and Missing Link recognises that equality requires differing approaches to ensure that any person or group of people are not discriminated against either directly or indirectly.

2.8 Missing Link believes that it has a responsibility not just to eliminate discrimination but to act positively to promote anti-discriminatory practice and to actively seek ways to be inclusive and to include groups who have not accessed our employment or services or have previously been under-represented in these areas.

2.9 Missing Link will take care that indirect discrimination does not feature in any aspect of its operations.

2.10 Discrimination will not be tolerated and appropriate action will be taken against any individual who breaches this policy according to the procedure. For staff, breaches of this policy will result in disciplinary action being pursued under the organisation’s ‘Disciplinary’ procedure. For service users, this will include referring to the terms of the user’s license or tenancy agreement in conjunction with the organisation’s ‘Warnings and Evictions’ procedure.

**PROCEDURES**

1. **Management Responsibility**

3.1 Missing Link has an appointed staff member with overall responsibility to ensure that this policy is implemented and monitored throughout the organisation. This person is the Director, who can delegate this responsibility to a named manager for the completion of certain tasks.

3.2 Senior Managers

Missing Link expects all senior managers to uphold the Equalities Policy in all aspects of its work. This includes ensuring that all employees are trained in the policy and procedures and that the services we offer and our employment practices honour the policy and commitment of the organisation to equalities. They have a duty to monitor all aspects of employees work in relation to equalities and to investigate and report to the Director on any breaches of the policy.

3.3 All staff

All employees have a responsibility to ensure that they understand and follow this policy. Their working practice should reflect a full commitment to equalities and to fair treatment to all. All employees have a responsibility to report any breaches of the policy or any discrimination towards other employees, service users or members of the public to their line manager.

**4.0 Target Setting and Monitoring**

4.1 Missing Link will set targets and monitor the effectiveness of the Equalities implementation plan by collecting and evaluating data on a quarterly basis. Targets are reviewed annually. This information will be used in the following ways:

* to monitor and evaluate the success of the organisation in achieving its aims and objectives
* to consider how effective the organisation’s policies and practices are in the achievement of its targets
* to plan for future services and performance
* to measure access to employment and services against which the performance of the organisation will be benchmarked

4.2 Monitoring information is collected and compiled in line with the characteristics described in paragraph 2.5 above and will include the following areas:

* applications for services and employment
* refusals of applications for services and employment
* starters and leavers for services and employment
* types of housing and accommodation offered
* service user engagement in overall services, including consultation forums
* positions of employment
* complaints
* harassment

4.3 The service manager for each area is responsible for the preparation of a report including a comparison of the information to current targets. This information is reported to the management committee and available in the annual report.

4.4 All records kept regarding the above are kept solely for the purpose of monitoring.

### 4.5 Evaluation of the monitoring information will include consideration of the following:

### whether there is a fair representation of people from all groups in the community, in line with the exceptions noted in paragraph 2.6 above?

### the level of customer retention and satisfaction

* the reputation of the organisation in the wider community and in the experiences of other professionals

### how the information compares to the current targets

**5.0 Employment Procedures**

5.1 Missing Link’s aim is that the composition of the organisation’s workforce at all levels should reflect that of the community. This is monitored annually according to information provided by Bristol City Council on the local population.

5.2 This section considers all aspects of employment from recruitment and selection to support, supervision and training; and conditions of service.

5.3 See Recruitment and Selection procedure for further information.

5.4 All staff are entitled to fair and equal treatment. Missing Link has a Policy on Harassment and a Grievance Procedure that staff are entitled to use if they feel that they have been discriminated against.

5.5 Missing Link values the contribution of staff and supports staff to gain knowledge and skills in their area and to achieve their professional goals. Missing Link has a ‘Policy on Staff Development’ which outlines how this is achieved.

**6.0 Service Delivery**

6.1 Missing Link’s service users represent a diverse group, with no one person’s needs being identical to another. In consequence, Missing Link does not believe that a ‘one size fits all’ approach is appropriate to meet the needs of individual service users. Service delivery is therefore tailored to the requirements of the individual.

6.2 In providing its services Missing Link aims not just to resolve instances of discrimination but to actively follow a policy of inclusion and equality of access to its services for all its actual and potential service users.

6.3 In doing so, Missing Link has policies which address this, as follows:

* Referrals and Selection, including the minimising of any instances of exclusion from its services.
* Allocations, which ensures that accommodation is allocated fairly and taking account of the individual’s needs and preferences.
* Health and Safety ensuring that all accommodation managed is fit to occupy and meets minimum requirements.
* Individual Support Plans.
* Service User Involvement.

6.4 Information regarding Missing Link services is available in other languages and formats upon request.

**7.0 Constraints**

7.1 Missing Link aims to remove the barriers to accessing services and to promote an environment where the service user feels safe and respected. This can be achieved through a variety of means including:

* developing a service ethos that challenges poor attitudes to, and the labelling of, clients with support needs
* presenting positive images of women and women with support needs in all aspects of its public image and in any direct work with service users
* raising awareness of the need to challenge the power in the client–staff relationship with support services being client led and not built around the culture of the organisation and staff preferences as to ‘how things should be done’
* ensuring that the service is flexible and responsive to the service users needs and wishes, and that she feels appropriately supported
* by considering the engagement of certain displaced groups within the user group and developing services sensitive to particular needs for their

inclusion, e.g. women from BME groups, lesbians, survivors of abuse and services for women with dependency issues

7.2 Environmental factors will be taken into consideration. This will be done by ensuring that the office location is accessible for the service users, close to public transport and with additional facilities e.g. comfortable meeting rooms, refreshments and child care facilities where appropriate.

**8.0 Planning Services**

8.1 Missing Link will continue to work towards identifying unmet need and to plan for future service provision for services that are attractive and meet the expectations and needs of the service user.

8.2 Missing Link will maintain active links with organisations working with minority and discriminated against groups with the aim of ensuring that information and referral pathways remain open, and that services can be developed around the needs of those groups.

8.3 Missing Link will undertake qualitative audits on all aspects of its service delivery on a regular basis and learn from what is already in place.

8.4 Missing Link will routinely consult and listen to service users to find out what they want and what they need, as well as what they don’t like. Missing Link will support service users in identifying what their preferences are where these are not clear.

8.5 Different ways of working with different individuals or groups will also be considered to enable services to reach a wider catchment.

#### 9.0 Supporting the Individual

9.1 As well as providing a positive environment and framework, Missing Link works with service users as individuals. Individual support plans are designed by the service user together with her support worker, and are used to tailor the support service towards what the service user’s goals are as identified by herself. In this way Missing Link actively promotes the empowerment of service users and an ethos that promotes self-help.

9.2 All service users are encouraged to be as independent as possible and good community based alternatives for greater integration and settlement are identified as part of any support plan.

9.3 The review of support plans allows service users to change over time and recognises that different needs can evolve and be addressed.

9.4 Missing Link aims to consider the needs of the service user as a whole and in the context of other issues in her life. This includes supporting service users who are not ready to address their issues and being aware that service users may have other demands on their time.

9.5 Missing Link recognises the role of other professionals involved in the person’s care and actively promotes joint work and good communication with other services whatever the range of support needs that the individual may have.

9.6 Missing Link is committed to ensuring that all staff are knowledgeable and have good and reliable resource information available to them so that they can offer service users increased choice.

#### 10.0 Participation

10.1 Missing Link’s ‘Policy on Service User Involvement’ outlines the mechanisms whereby service users are involved and consulted in the decisions taken regarding the running of the organisation and the delivery of services. Missing Link is committed to encouraging participation from service users and to removing constraints.

**11.0 Complaints**

11.1 All service users are entitled to fair and equal treatment. Missing Link has a Complaints Procedure that service users can access if they feel that they have been discriminated against.

**12.0 Legal Framework and Guidance**

12.1 This policy operates within and complies fully the legislative framework (see below) which makes it unlawful to discriminate against certain prescribed groups:

* the Equality Act 2010
* the Race Relations Act 1976 makes it unlawful to discriminate on the ground of race
* the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 makes it unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of gender [Missing Link operates as an exception to this under s.34]
* the Disabilities Discrimination Act 1995 makes it unlawful to discriminate on the ground of disability
* the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006

12.2 The following sources have been consulted in the drafting of this policy:

* Bristol City Council, South Gloucestershire and B&NES’ ‘Equalities Policy’
* Equal Opportunities Commission website and good practice guide
* Commission for Racial Equality website and good practice guide
* NHS National Institute for Mental Health in England website and consultation strategy
* Equal Opportunities policies of partner organisations

This statement should be read in conjunction with Missing Link’s:

* Anti Discriminatory Policy
* Anti Harassment Policy
* Child Protection Policy
* Vulnerable Adults Policy
* Reporting Racist Incidents Policy
* Complaints Policy
* Raising a concern Policy.

This policy has been endorsed by Carol Metters MBE (an appropriate senior member of staff) and has the full support of the management / board.

The policy was approved on June 13th 2013 following consultation with senior managers, workers, workers’ representatives, and trade unions.

Overall responsibility for the effectiveness of the policy lies with Barbara Reid (an appropriate senior member of staff). For more information, please contact this person:

Barbara.Reid@missinglinkhousing.co.uk

Signed 

Position Director

Date June 13th 2013