



# Equality & Diversity Policy

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<b>Links or overlaps with other strategies/policies:</b>	<p>Staff Handbook</p> <p>Volunteer Handbook</p> <p>Disciplinary &amp; Grievance Policy</p> <p>Complaints Policy</p> <p>Code of Conduct</p>

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## Policy Statement

BfN has a strategic commitment to delivering infant feeding support that addresses the inequalities in access, outcomes, relevance and impact. The Breastfeeding Network (BfN) is committed to promoting equality of opportunity, access and participation across all areas of its work. This includes but is not limited to how we deliver our services, how we work with volunteers, employees and colleagues in organisations we work with, and how we recruit and support our staff.

Staff, volunteers and families who need our services may experience different barriers to participation, some of which are visible and some of which are not. BfN is committed to identifying and addressing barriers so that everyone has the opportunity to engage with our work.

All staff and volunteers are expected to work in alignment with our Code of Conduct, which outlines the charity's shared commitment to develop and deliver relevant services where people feel safe, respected and included.

## What we mean by Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Equality means ensuring people are treated fairly and have equal access to opportunities and services.

Diversity means recognising, respecting and valuing differences between people, including their backgrounds, experiences and perspectives.

Inclusion means people feel welcomed, respected and able to participate fully, and barriers are actively identified and addressed.

## Why this matters to BfN

As a charity, we measure our success by the impact we contribute to, particularly for groups in society who are traditionally under-served by and experience inequalities in infant feeding support.

The Board agrees and monitors progress towards Equality and Inclusion priorities (covering services, governance and operations). Our Code of Conduct requires every staff, volunteer member, and BfN as a charity to work in line with our values. These underpin our commitment to equality and inclusion, specifically: being respectful, listening and adapting to the families we support; being respectful of colleagues and treating them fairly and being committed to staying relevant to the needs of the families we support by learning, improving, protecting good practice and avoiding doing harm.

Valuing diversity strengthens BfN and improves the way we work. A diverse and inclusive organisation is better able to understand the needs of the communities we support and to deliver services that are effective, relevant and accessible.

By bringing together different perspectives and experiences, we are able to:

- be better informed
- make better decisions
- build trust and confidence in our work
- improve the quality and impact of our services
- Ensure that BfN reaches, is relevant to, engages and works collaboratively with a wider demographic

BfN recognises that not all groups have equal access to services, employment or development opportunities. Some individuals may be under-represented or face additional barriers.

## Legal framework

This policy is underpinned by the Equality Act 2010, which protects individuals from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society.

BfN will comply with relevant equality legislation, including but not limited to:

- The Equality Act 2010
- The Employment Rights Act 1996
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Part-Time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000
- The Fixed-Term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002
- The Civil Partnership Act 2004
- The Work and Families Act 2006
- The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act

Where appropriate, BfN takes proportionate steps (positive action) to encourage participation from under-represented groups, in line with the Equality Act 2010.

## Types of discrimination

Discrimination can take different forms. The main types are set out below:

- **Direct discrimination:** treating someone less favourably because of a protected characteristic
- **Indirect discrimination:** where a policy, practice or way of working applies to everyone but disadvantages a particular group
- **Harassment:** unwanted behaviour related to a protected characteristic that has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading or offensive environment
- **Victimisation:** treating someone unfairly because they have raised, or supported, a concern or complaint under this policy

## Protected characteristics

The Equality Act 2010 protects individuals from discrimination based on the following characteristics:

- **Age** - People of all ages may have different needs, experiences and access to services.
- **Disability** – A physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term impact on day-to-day activities.
- **Gender reassignment** – Where a person is proposing to, proposing, undergoing, or having completed a process to reassign or acquire their gender.
- **Marriage and civil partnership**- Protection applies to people who are married or in a civil partnership.
- **Pregnancy and maternity** - Includes pregnancy, maternity leave and the period after returning to work. BfN recognises the importance of supporting parents and ensuring fair treatment during this time.
- **Race** – Includes colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origins.
- **Religion or belief** – Includes any religion, philosophical belief, or lack of belief.
- **Sex** - Refers to sex at birth or biological sex.
- **Sexual orientation** – Includes lesbian, gay, bisexual and heterosexual people.

## Our commitments

BfN is committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion across all areas of its work, including governance, employment practices, service delivery and its relationships with volunteers, employees and colleagues external to the charity.

We aim to ensure that all individuals are treated fairly and with respect, and that no one is unlawfully discriminated against on the basis of a protected characteristic.

### **Reasonable adjustments**

BfN will seeks to make reasonable steps to remove barriers for individuals with disabilities or health conditions.

This may include adjustments to working arrangements, training, communication methods or service delivery, depending on individual needs.

### **Inclusive practice and service delivery**

BfN's services are delivered to families in a diversity of communities, including differences cultural background, in financial, material and educational opportunity, family structure, parenting approaches and lived experience.

BfN aims to target and take positive action to address barriers that families who need our services face in accessing the information and support they need, and the opportunity to volunteer and access our training.

BfN seek to understand the perspectives, barriers and contributions of these families at all stages of service design, delivery, review and where appropriate, exit and to support staff and volunteers to apply the values and behaviours outlined in the Code of Conduct and supporting materials, throughout their practice.

### **Fair employment and volunteering practices**

BfN will ensure that:

- roles are designed and advertised in a way that is accessible and encourages applications from a diverse range of people, including under-represented groups
- job descriptions and person specifications focus on the skills and experience required for the role, recognising that relevant experience may be gained in different ways

- selection decisions are based only on factors relevant to the role recruitment, selection and progression decisions are based on merit
- policies and practices are applied fairly and do not disadvantage any group
- volunteers and staff are given equal opportunities to develop
- recruiters are supported to design and implement recruitments processes that are fair and mitigate the risk of potential bias
- where appropriate, decisions may be reviewed or moderated to ensure fairness

### **Training and awareness**

BfN will provide appropriate training and guidance to support the effective implementation of this policy, particularly for those with responsibility for recruitment, management and front-line service delivery.

### **Monitoring and continuous improvement**

BfN will use a variety of data and feedback e.g. from recruitment, training, complaints and grievances, monitor how this policy is applied in practice and to update BfN's Equalities and Inclusion priorities.

Data and feedback will be used to identify patterns, improve practice and inform future actions, in alignment with BfN's Information Governance policy.

### **Raising concerns and complaints**

Concerns can be raised by anyone who experiences or witnesses treatment or behaviour that is not in line with this policy.

Employees should raise concerns in line with the Grievance Procedure.

Volunteers and service users should raise concerns through the Complaints Policy.

If a concern is raised, BfN will:

- Acknowledge, take the concern seriously and handle this sensitively
- Investigate promptly and fairly
- Take appropriate action where concerns are identified
- Protect individuals raising concerns in good faith from retaliation

BfN is committed to ensuring that all individuals are treated with dignity and respect. Behaviour that is inconsistent with this policy, including discrimination, harassment or victimisation, may be addressed under the relevant procedures and may result in disciplinary action.

## Responsibilities

All staff, volunteers and those representing BfN are expected to:

- act in line with this policy and the Code of Conduct
- challenge or report behaviour that does not align to this policy

Managers and coordinators are responsible for:

- promoting adherence to this policy and the Code of Conduct
- addressing concerns appropriately
- seeking advice where needed

The Chief Executive and Board have overall responsibility for ensuring this policy is implemented and reviewed.