

Ambitious about Autism **Statement on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

Context

One of our core values is that 'we value difference'. We strive to live by this value every day and in all that we do; but we recognise it's not enough and it's time for us to up our game even further. We are ambitious in name and this should include ambition in equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). We must do and want to do much more. It is part of our core purpose to be an organisation that champions and supports diversity. Race is an integral part of this that needs far greater attention. We serve and work with people from all backgrounds and we are motivated and energised by the opportunity to improve outcomes for everybody within our charity, education sectors and wider society.

We understand that to achieve meaningful and lasting change around equality and diversity we need a proactive and comprehensive approach that:

- Is embedded throughout our organisation and strategy,
- Is championed by our Board and leadership
- Takes into account people's views and experiences and the external context.
- Must result in a range of actions that deliver clear and measurable benefits, that are reviewed, appraised and reported to our key stakeholders.

Below we have described some of the things we have done to date to address equality, diversity and inclusion and what we plan to do next. This action plan will be replaced by a full strategy.

Governance and leadership championing change

We are clear that the Board and leadership of this charity is accountable for this change. We can delegate some responsibilities and seek support, but we must champion this issue and drive change.

What we do now:

- We champion our values including 'we value difference' throughout our organisation and ensure that equality and diversity is taken into account in our plans, policies and ways of working.
- We carry out regular reviews of our board's performance, supported by independent consultants, against the Code of Governance, which includes equality and diversity.
- We have an organisation-wide EDI Group
- We have worked to ensure our recruitment at Board, Governor and Executive levels is open and inclusive. We have always worked hard to ensure that there are people with lived experience of autism¹ on our Board and Governing Bodies and we have historically had good diversity in other areas. More recently we have not achieved this, and recognise this a weakness that we must address, especially around race.

What we will do next:

- Our Executive Leadership Team (ELT) will lead the EDI strategy with input and support from the EDI Group.
- We will develop a comprehensive EDI strategy that assesses and evidences our starting point, includes the full scope of the organisation's work, has clear action plans, timescales and stretching and measurable targets for the leadership and board to monitor and review.
- Consciously focus on all areas of diversity.
- Ensure our Boards and senior leaders have routine training and development around equality and diversity issues, including specifically about race, and seek expert advice where we lack it.
- Ensure any future trustee, governor and leadership recruitment focuses on increasing the pool and appointment of diverse candidates at all senior levels in the organisation.
- Ensure that EDI is on the Board and Executive agendas at every meeting.
- Listen, learn from others, collaborate, be open to challenge and make change happen.

¹ Parents and carers of autistic children and young people, and autistic people.

Diversifying and developing our people

We are committed to an inclusive working environment in which everyone feels they belong without having to conform. We want our people to know that their contribution matters and that they can perform to their full potential, regardless of their background, identity or circumstances. We have fair policies in place. We are committed to creating a more fair and compassionate culture within our organisation in which everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

What we do now:

- We have open and accessible recruitment processes, with training for all recruiting managers.
- We are accredited under the Disability Confident scheme at leadership level and a member of the organisation Purple².
- We provide equalities training for all staff on induction.
- We invest in in-house and external leadership and management development training for existing and future managers, in good supervision, and learning and development programmes.
- We run a cross-organisational Staff Council that inputs into plans and policies and identifies and champions staff ideas and issues. Our Staff Council supports the development of our approaches and tests and challenges our practices
- Through our annual staff survey we monitor staff feedback and identify areas for improvement, including examining the results from different staff groups.

What we will do next:

- Ensure all existing staff have further training on equality and diversity, including re-launching unconscious bias training, and enhancing our training for senior managers, so that everyone understands and prioritises diversity issues in their day-to-day work and creates a culture that is inclusive. This will not be a one-off, but an ongoing commitment.
- Review and update our Equality and Diversity policy, and ensure that there is awareness, understanding and fair application of policies across the organisation.
- Upgrade our recruitment materials and processes further to ensure we attract and hire candidates from diverse backgrounds based on their strengths and values.
- Hold focus groups with staff, with external support, to get their feedback on our approach to equality and diversity, taking an intersectional approach but initially focusing with the lens of race, to input into our strategy.
- Use the results of the staff survey as one of the sources of evidence for our EDI strategy and ensure there are clear and measurable actions to address areas for improvement.
- Develop a learning and development strategy that supports staff development and retention to create pathways for development and internal progression where available.
- Create a new management and development programme that will also focus on developing talent and future leaders. This programme will focus on continuing to develop internal leadership within the organisation, which will increase comprehensive awareness that it is the role of leaders to take responsibility and drive the culture of the organisation to be more diverse and inclusive.
- Work with our staff and external stakeholders to renew our Disability Confident accreditation; seek further accreditation and join networks that will enhance our performance in diversity and inclusion.
- Pilot programmes that specifically support the wellbeing and development of staff with protected characteristics. We understand this to be one of the critical enablers of shifting the dial on the

² Purple is an organisation to bring disabled people and businesses together to change the conversation about from disadvantage and inequality to value and potential. Purple membership signals commitment to disability inclusion. Purple provides expert support and consultancy and a network like minded organisations.

workforce race equality agenda, we can then shape interventions in a way that will tackle the root causes of issues in the workplace.

Leading best practice in our education and training services

Our education and training services support diverse groups of children and young people. They all embrace 'valuing difference' at their core and recognise that there is more that they can and want to do to enhance outcomes of all young people.

What we do now:

- Monitor, report and evaluate the profile of pupils/learners and their progress and outcomes by group. Each setting also has a self-evaluation and development plan that is updated and reviewed by its Governing Body termly, based on data.
- Deliver curriculum content on British Values and on diversity in an accessible format.
- Celebrate and mark key events throughout the year, like Black History Month.
- Signed up the Rights Respecting Schools accreditation scheme for TreeHouse School.
- Work to recruit staff who come from diverse backgrounds to reflect the communities that we serve.

What we will do next:

- Review the top-level values in our settings which will inform all their work.
- Review the curriculum in each setting to enhance its focus on diversity, especially race.
- Ensure that diversity is on the agenda of senior leadership and Governing Body meetings and we interrogate our data on progress rigorously for each group.
- Work with parents/carers to understand their context and needs, so we able to meet them more flexibly.
- Expand our calendar of events and speakers to educate on and celebrate diversity, especially race.
- Continue to support our staff on how issues of discrimination and disadvantage impact on the lives our children and young people and how to better address these issues in our settings.
- Explore signing up for Rights Respecting Schools for all our settings.

Enabling the ordinary to be possible for children and young people with autism

Autistic children and young people face significant barriers in all aspects of their lives which can result in poor life-long outcomes. They experience high rates of exclusion from education, poor transitions into further/higher education or training and loneliness and isolation from their communities. This results in poor mental and physical health and life-long social and financial exclusion. Identity is made up of many parts, and the intersectionality of autism with other protected characteristics and vulnerabilities produces social inequalities.

What we do now:

- We support and empower our Youth Council and Youth Network to share their experiences, views and ideas with us to inform our plans and work.
- We influence national policy and practice to enable autistic young people to have better life outcomes and a voice.
- We train organisations in the education, health, arts and youth sectors and employers to better include autistic young people.
- We run an Employ Autism programme to enable young people to make the transition from education to employment.

What we will do next:

- Ensure that all of our national influencing and enabling work takes into account all areas of diversity and particularly champion autistic young people from a black and minority ethnic background who experience the greatest exclusion.
- Work with other organisations to understand and challenge how intersectionality may create advantage and disadvantage for children and young people.

- Support our Youth Council to build upon the diversity that already makes up their membership.
- Review all of our training and development materials to reflect the diversity of need and audiences.

This plan has been reviewed by our Board and Executive leaders and progress against this plan will be reviewed termly. We welcome support, challenge and any ideas around our approach. This is a step on a journey of change, and we know that this may need to change further.