



## Equality and Diversity Policy and Statement

<b>Lead Approver: Director of Resources, Austin O'Sullivan</b>				
<b>Cross referenced with these policies:</b> All policies in WALK including: Recruitment lifecycle Policy; Bullying, Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Victimisation Policy; Grievance Policy; Disciplinary Policy; Health and Safety Policy and Statement; Referrals Policy and Procedures; Learning and Development Policy; Investigations Policy; Complaints Policy for Service Users and Third Parties.				
<b>Previous policy name:</b> Equal opportunities and equal status policy				
<b>Version</b>	<i>Approved by Lead Approver</i>	<i>Approved by WALK Board (if applicable)</i>	<i>Launched Staff members</i>	<i>Operational Period</i>
Rev 1	15/09/2015	N/A	17/09/2015	Sept 2015 to be reviewed Sept 2016
Rev 2	04/09/17	N/A	10/09/17	Review sept 2018
Rev 2	17/09/18	17/09/18	28/09/18	Review Sept 2019

WALK's vision is an inclusive society where communities value and treat all people as equal citizens.

WALK's mission is to be a leader in a movement for change, empowering people with disabilities to live self-determined lives in an equal and inclusive society

### 1.0 Policy Statement:

It is the policy of WALK to promote equality and diversity across all organisational areas. WALK aims for full compliance with Equality and Diversity legislation. This policy directly supports WALK's vision and mission.

This policy outlines WALK's responsibilities to the following two distinct groups: - employees and potential employees of the organisation (through our equal opportunities statement) – the people we support, potential future users of our service and all third parties (through our equal status statement)

WALK promotes equality by removing discrimination in the workplace and focusses on the nine grounds of Gender, Civil status, Family status, Age, Disability, Sexual Orientation, Race, Religion, and Membership of the Traveller Community. Diversity aims to recognize, respect and value people's differences to contribute and realise their full potential by promoting an inclusive culture for all those involved with the organisation.

This policy affects all persons working for WALK and all persons who apply for employment in WALK.

### 2.0 Definitions:

**Equality** is not always about treating everyone the same – it is about treating people in such a way that the outcome for each person can be the same. This means putting things in place to support people to achieve similar outcomes. ([www.intercultural.ie](http://www.intercultural.ie))

**Diversity:** The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognising our individual differences.

These can be along the dimensions of the nine grounds. It is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment. It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.

### **3.0 Roles and Responsibilities:**

**The Board of Directors** review and sign off on this policy annually. They have an overarching remit to ensure WALK is working towards its mission and vision statement.

**The Management Teams** have a role in modelling and encouraging an open culture around equality and diversity. Further expectations of the management teams are outlined in more detail below.

**All staff** have a role in complying with all aspects of this policy, alerting their manager to any concerns and to encourage the promotion of equality and diversity for the people we support. Further expectations of staff are outlined in more detail below.

The **Equality and Rights Officer** is the Chair of the Equality and Rights Committee and has a role in supporting the development of a culture that promotes equality and diversity.

### **4.0 Procedures:**

WALK promotes equality and diversity by:

- Treating all organisation members and potential members fairly.
- Creating an inclusive culture for all organisational members.
- Enable equal access of opportunities for all so they can fully participate in the workings of the organisation.
- Enabling all organisational members to develop to their full potential.
- Equipping all organisational members with the skills to challenge inequality and discrimination.
- Ensure that organisational materials, including policies, procedures and processes, do not discriminate against any individual or group.
- Bullying, harassment or victimisation are considered as equality and diversity issues.

#### **4.1 Equal Opportunities Policy Statement**

WALK promotes diversity through providing Equal Opportunities. It is the policy of WALK to be an Equal Opportunities Employer that is committed to equality of opportunity for existing and potential employees.

This policy supports the creation of a workplace which provides for Equal Opportunities for all staff and potential staff and a place where their dignity is protected and respected at all times.

All persons regardless of **Gender, Civil status, Family Status, Race, Religious beliefs, Sexual Orientation, Disability, Age or Member of the Travelling Community** are provided with equality of access to employment and also encouraged and assisted to achieve their full potential.

WALK aims to foster a genuine culture of Equality.

**Employment Equality:** The Employment Equality Act 1998 promotes equality and prohibits discrimination in the workplace across the nine grounds of Gender, Civil Status, Family Status, Age, Disability, Sexual Orientation, Race, Religion, and Membership of the Travelling Community.

WALK, in terms of employment, aims to ensure that no job applicant or employee receives less favourable treatment on any grounds which cannot be shown to be justified. This applies to Recruitment and Selection, Training, Promotion, Pay and Employee Benefits, Employee Grievances and Discipline Procedures and any and all Terms and Conditions of Employment.

**Responsibilities:** The responsibility for ensuring the provision of equality of opportunity rests primarily with WALK as an employer. Managers and Supervisors have particular responsibility to engender respect for difference and to accommodate Diversity where appropriate.

All staff members have an important role to play in ensuring equality of opportunity throughout the organisation. It is also recognised that any individual employee acting on behalf of WALK has responsibilities in law and are:

- a) Required to co-operate with any measures introduced by the organisation to promote Equal Opportunities.
- b) Must not themselves, either directly or indirectly, discriminate against fellow employees or harass or intimidate them in any way.

**Structures:** The Senior Management Team (SMT) is responsible for ensuring that appropriate arrangements are in place for effective implementation, monitoring and review of this policy. An Equality and Rights Officer is resourced in order to support the SMT in this endeavor. WALK undertake an Equality-focussed reviews and prepare an action plan on foot of this and maintain a monitoring system.

**Recruitment and Selection:** WALK select those suitable for employment solely on the basis of merit. Please refer to the Recruitment Lifecycle Policy.

**Career Development and Training:** Opportunities for Career Development and Training are open to all and do not discriminate directly or indirectly on any of the grounds outlined in the Employment Equality Act 1998. All employees are provided with every opportunity to acquire the range of Training, Skills and experience necessary for their career development. Opportunities for training are based on the requirements of the job and career development are based on people's abilities and merit. The organisation is committed to a relevant Learning and Development Policy for all staff irrespective of background.

**Promotion:** All categories of staff are encouraged to prepare, plan and consider themselves for promotion. All employees are made aware of promotional opportunities and encouraged to compete. Conditions governing access to promotion competitions do not discriminate, directly or indirectly, on any of the nine grounds. Unnecessary barriers to promotion are removed and employees facilitated to compete by all means possible. Promotion and Re-grading is decided on objective criteria to the requirements of the job and is not influenced by any of the nine grounds.

**Grievance and Redress:** All grievances from employees in relation to Employment Equality or alleged discrimination is handled in accordance with grievance procedures. Any person who wishes to raise issues concerning alleged discrimination or unfairness should do so in the first instance by contacting their line manager.

We are committed to ensuring that all issues concerning alleged breaches of this policy are dealt with seriously, promptly and with appropriate regard for confidentiality.

**Harassment, Bullying and Victimisation:** WALK is committed to providing a safe and secure working environment that is free of harassment (including sexual harassment) and bullying and within which all members of staff are treated with dignity and respect. All employees have an obligation to prevent and eliminate bullying, harassment and sexual harassment. A specific harassment, sexual harassment, bullying and victimisation policy is in place.

**Review and Monitoring:** Progress in the areas of Equal Opportunities and Diversity are gauged through the continuous monitoring of the implementation of the Equality Action Plan. All aspects of this Equality Policy are monitored and reviewed by the Equality and Rights Officer.

#### **4.2 Equal Status Policy**

The Equal Status Acts 2000 and 2004 prohibit discrimination in the provision of goods & services, accommodation and in educational establishments. They are also designed to Promote Equality, Prohibit Harassment, Sexual Harassment & Victimisation and require reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities.

This Equal Status Policy is a statement of organisational commitment to Equality, Diversity and non-Discrimination for the people we support and other third parties from across the nine grounds covered by the legislation.

WALK adopted and implemented this policy after consultation about its content with staff and organisations and groups associated with WALK.

This policy identifies the commitment of WALK to combating discrimination, promoting equality and accommodating diversity; to outline the implications of this commitment for the organisation; and, to outline an implementation plan for the policy.

**Commitment:** We endeavour to provide an excellent service and to do this the expertise of all our staff is crucial. We seek to equip all our staff with the knowledge and expertise to deal confidentially with the issues involved and to be professional in dealing with the people we support and third parties. We desire to have a well-motivated workforce which takes pride in our work.

WALK seeks to ensure that the service provided:

- 1) Is free from discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment and victimisation.
- 2) Accommodates diversity across the nine grounds covered by the legislation.
- 3) Makes reasonable accommodation for end users with disabilities.
- 4) Is accessible and relevant.
- 5) Is delivered in a manner whereby all the people we support, service providers and employees are treated with dignity and respect.
- 6) ensure that all complaints by the people we support and third parties are treated with fairness and sensitivity and in as confidential a manner as possible.

WALK does not tolerate discrimination, sexual harassment, harassment or victimisation by employees and non-employees, such as the people we support and any other third party contacts of the organisation. Such behaviours may lead to the disciplinary action, up to and

including dismissal (in the case of employees), and to other sanctions such as suspension of contracts or exclusion from the premises (in the case of non-employees).

**Implementation:** This organisation seeks to ensure that the needs, identities, experiences and situations of the people we support and other third parties from the groups covered under equality legislation are taken into account in business planning, service design, and corporate development strategies.

Advertising and marketing materials communicate the commitment of the organisation to equality for all people we support and reflect and affirm the diversity of the organisation.

In its direct contact with the people we support WALK seeks to ensure that:

- 1) The people we support are dealt with in a considerate, courteous and open manner that is straight forward, consistent and professional.
- 2) The people we support are dealt with in a harassment free environment.
- 3) Language barriers are effectively addressed including the use of interpreters and other appropriate communication tools.
- 4) Reasonable accommodation is made for people with disabilities and for the wider diversity of the people we support. The organisation seeks to anticipate the requirements of the people we support and other third parties from across the nine grounds covered by the Equal Status Acts and to ensure that the people we support and other third parties are not excluded by physical, system, attitudinal or communication barriers.

**Responsibilities:** Senior management is responsible for implementing and overseeing all aspects of Equal Status approaches across WALK. All employees should seek to ensure that the people we support do not experience discrimination, that diversity is accommodated and that equality is promoted for all.

The Management team:

- Provide good example by treating the people we support with courtesy and respect.
- Promote awareness of the equality policies and procedures.
- Are vigilant for signs of discrimination and take preventative measures.
- Respond sensitively to any person we support who makes a complaint.
- Explains the procedure to be followed if a complaint is made.
- Ensure that any individual we support or other third party of the organisation making a complaint is not victimised for doing so.
- Monitor and follow up the situation after a complaint is made so that discrimination does not recur.

All staff must cooperate with the development and implementation of all policies, procedures and practices. Staff must familiarise themselves with WALK's Complaints Policy for Service Users and Third Parties.

**Communication:** The organisation is committed to the effective communication of this policy to staff, the people we support and all others who come in contact or may come in contact with the organisation. The policy is available on WALK's website and a printed off version is available in hard copy.

**Complaints:** A person can make a complaint under the complaints system for service users and third parties. The system for investigation is fair and sensitive and as confidential as possible. It involves a fair transparent investigation of all complaints and time scales within which a complaint receive a response.

**Reasonable Accommodation for people with Disabilities:** WALK has an obligation to reasonably accommodate people with disabilities by providing special treatment or facilities so that it is not impossible or unduly difficult for the person to avail of the service.

Staff do not use inappropriate or disrespectful language, speak too quickly or unclearly or provide information only in small print. More information on our interactions with the people we support is available through our Positive Behaviour Support policy.

WALK also seek to ensure that members of staff do not display patronising attitudes and make assumptions about people's abilities or inabilities.

WALK endeavours to ensure that the physical environment(s) is accessible and seek to avoid barriers such as narrow doorways, steep staircases, cluttered layout, poor lighting and signage. Services are provided using flexible systems, well briefed staff and straightforward procedures. Overall the organisation seeks to anticipate the requirements of the people we support with disabilities (including those with physical, intellectual and sensory disabilities and mental health issues) and to ensure that the people we support with disabilities are not excluded by physical, systemic, attitudinal or communication barriers.

**Monitoring and Review:** The organisation seeks feedback on this area from staff and the people we support.

**Communication of this policy:** This policy is communicated at every level within the organisation in a range of formats through various media.

**5.0 Audit and Evaluation:**

WALK may audit any aspect on the implementation of this policy. Various different methods may be employed to conduct any such audit including but not limited to observation, discussion with the people we support, discussion with staff and/or volunteers, review of paperwork. Any audit of this policy or part thereunder may be undertaken at any time and may be announced or unannounced. Any audit is sanctioned by a member of the Senior Management Team.