

EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY

1.0 General

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

1.2 This policy is publicly available to all interested parties and is issued to all service users, staff, volunteers, Management Committee members, applicants, partner organisations and third-party contractors used by us in delivering our services.

1.3 The aim of this policy is to promote fairness, equity, and inclusion by taking active steps to prevent and address discrimination wherever it occurs. Missing Link is committed to creating a respectful environment, promoting fair and equitable treatment for all, and responding efficiently to any instances of unfair or discriminatory behavior.

1.4 All contractors are required to adhere to this policy whilst on our premises and this is checked as part of due diligence.

1.5 All staff are expected to uphold this policy. Where conduct falls short of these expectations, the organisation will address it appropriately, which may include disciplinary action. This policy will be reviewed regularly to reflect ongoing learning and best practice.

1.6 All staff and volunteers are expected to work in line with Missing Link, Next Link and Safe Link's trauma informed approach, with the starting point being the survivor's lived experience. This is underpinned by BNSSG Trauma Informed Principles: Safety, Choice and Clarity, Collaboration, Trustworthiness, Empowerment, Inclusivity. Staff and volunteers will be trained on this approach during induction. Please also refer to [Guidance on the Working definition of trauma-informed practice](#).

STATEMENT OF INTENT

2.0 Equal Opportunities Statement

2.1 Missing Link recognises its responsibility to provide a framework for equitable practice, set out organisational values and intentions, reinforce accountability, and demonstrate a commitment to social responsibility

2.2 Missing Link welcomes its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 including the s.149 Public Sector Equality Duty and is committed to meeting them. Missing Link ensures the promotion of fair treatment and equal access in the delivery of its services and in its employment practices.

2.3 Missing Link recognises that certain groups and individuals in society are disadvantaged and face systemic discrimination and structural barriers.

2.4 Discrimination operates through commonly held assumptions and prejudices, which are reinforced by laws, rules and customs. Discrimination works by stereotyping people, by treating some people less favorably than others, or simply by ignoring them.

2.5 Discrimination can be direct, associative, perceptive, indirect, harassment or victimisation. (See glossary at end for definitions). All forms of discrimination are unacceptable, regardless of whether there was any intention to discriminate or not. Missing Link employees and volunteers are expected to act in accordance with this policy and to contribute to preventing discrimination through their conduct and decisions. In the first instance, employees and volunteers should draw the attention of their line manager to suspected discriminatory acts or practices or cases of bullying or harassment. If the matter concern their line manager then HR or a senior manager could be approached.

2.6 Missing Link aims to challenge stigma and represent all service users with dignity and respect across the organisation and in all materials.

2.7 Missing Link believes in the benefits of practicing a policy of Equity. These include:

- A commitment to the organisation's Mission Statement and Core Values
- Making the organisation more accessible to service users by removing barriers, bias, and discrimination. We aim to foster a culture that actively values and promotes diversity. .
- We aim to encourage, value and celebrate diversity and we recognise that talent and potential are distributed across the population. We believe it is in the best interest of this organisation to recruit and develop the best people for our jobs from as wide and diverse a pool of talent as possible.
- We are committed to a programme of continual review of best Equity and service delivery practice nationally and regionally and implementing changes to our own provision as necessary and appropriate.

2.8 This policy applies to all individuals connected with Missing Link including employees, volunteers, management committee members, service users, and applicants for employment or services and should be observed in all organisational activities and related social functions. .

2.9 We are committed to promoting equity, respect, and inclusion across all areas of our organisation. In line with the Equality Act 2010 and our organisational values, we will strive to ensure that no one is treated unfairly or discriminated against on any grounds. 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.

2.10 It is unlawful to discriminate against anyone with protected characteristics. With some genuine exceptions, described in paragraph 2.9 below, no person will be discriminated against on the grounds of age, gender, disability (including physical, sensory, specific learning disabilities, mental health issues and long term medical conditions), gender reassignment, race (including colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origins), religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, cultural background, responsibilities for dependents, serving and former members of the Armed Forces and their families, HIV status. This list is not exhaustive.

2.11 Equalities legislation provides for specific or allowable exceptions to be made where services are to be provided for specific groups within the overall umbrella of the legislation or within the varying types of protected characteristics.

We run some services that are for women only, in line with equality law. Other services are open to people of any gender. Where an individual approaches us and we are unable to offer a suitable service, we will ensure they are supported by signposting them to an appropriate organisation.

2.12 In addition, some positions and services are dedicated to particular groups, for example we manage an accommodation scheme specifically for women who are from a Black or racially minoritised (Global majority) background and employ a dedicated Black and racially minoritised worker in the support role. We have dedicated South Asian and Eastern European crisis response services and employ dedicated staff for those roles. We have dedicated Victim Services for men so they can choose if they want to work with a man or women, or the specialist Black and racially minoritised or LGBTQ+ staff.

2.13 The organisation recognises its responsibility not only to challenge and reduce discrimination but also to promote anti-discriminatory practice. We are committed to actively seeking ways to be inclusive and to reach groups who have been under-represented or have not previously accessed our services or employment opportunities.

2.13 Missing Link continuously reviews its service provision and samples service users' experiences to ensure that indirect discrimination does not feature in any aspect of its operations.

2.15 Discrimination is not 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.

2.16 Missing Link will ensure that staff, volunteers and service users will not be victimised for raising concerns about any form of discrimination or harassment, or instructed or put under pressure to discriminate against, or harass someone.

2.17 Missing Link is committed to creating a culture of respect and psychological safety with an environment which is free from unwanted conduct that violates the dignity of staff and volunteers.

2.18 Missing Link will follow the recommendations and guidance of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, in all its employment policies, procedures and practices and in dealing with clients and members of the public.

3.0 Legal Framework and Guidance

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

- (a) The Equality Act 2010;
- (b) the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974;
- (c) the Employment Rights Act 1996;
- (d) the Human Rights Act 1998;
- (e) the Part-Time Workers (Prevention of Less Favorable Treatment) Regulations 2000;
- (f) the Fixed-Term Employees (Prevention of Less Favorable Treatment) Regulations 2002;
- (g) the Work and Families Act 2006; and
- (h) any other relevant legislation in force from time to time relating to discrimination in employment and the provision of goods, facilities or services.

PROCEDURES

4.0 Management Responsibility

4.1 The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) has overall responsibility to ensure this policy is implemented and monitored throughout the organisation. The CEO may delegate this responsibility to Senior Managers for the completion of certain tasks.

4.2 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 honor 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 CEO any breaches of the policy.

4.3 All staff and volunteers

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

5.0 Equality Target Setting

5.1 Review and Monitoring

5.2 Missing Link sets targets and monitors the effectiveness of the Equalities Policy 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 improve performance in service delivery and in achieving our objectives within this Equalities Policy document;
- to measure access to employment and services against which the performance of the organisation will be benchmarked.

5.3 Monitoring information is collected and compiled in line with the characteristics described in paragraph 2.8 above and includes the following areas:

- applications for services, employment and volunteering
- refusals of applications for services, employment and volunteering
- starters and leavers for services, employment and volunteering
- types of housing and accommodation offered
- positions of employment
- complaints/compliments
- harassment
- service user profile
- service user engagement in overall services, including consultation forums
- Management Committee members and volunteers

5.4 Implementation

5.5 The Service Manager for each area is responsible for the preparation of a quarterly report including a comparison of the information to current targets. This information is reported to the management committee.

5.6 All records kept regarding the above are kept solely for the purpose of monitoring and in line with our Data Protection Policy.

5.7 Evaluation of the monitoring information includes 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 2.9 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

5.8 Appropriate action plans will be drawn and agreed by the Senior Management Team to address under-representation or potential discrimination.

6.0 Employment, Recruitment and Training

6.1 Missing Link's aim is that the organisation's workforce at all levels should reflect that of the community. This is monitored annually according to information provided by the local authority demographics information.

6.2 This policy covers recruitment and selection, pay and benefits, leave and flexible working arrangements, dress codes, availability of facilities, training and development, promotion and transfer, grievance and disciplinary issues and treatment of employees when their contract ends. Further details on recruitment processes can be found in the organisation's Recruitment and Selection Policy.

6.3 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.

6.4 Missing Link values the contribution of staff and supports staff to gain knowledge and skills in their area and to achieve their professional goals.

6.5 Missing Link will ensure that all new employees, volunteers, and Management Committee members receive an induction that includes this policy.

6.6 Equity, diversity, and inclusion training will be provided to all staff, volunteers, and Management Committee members through ACAS e-learning, with completion recorded in individual training plans or records. Training may include general equalities awareness, cultural diversity, hate crime awareness, and more specific sessions such as non-discriminatory recruitment, unconscious bias, and anti-racism training

6.7 Missing Link will ensure we follow non-discriminatory recruitment methods including advert wording, colours and fonts and person specifications:

- by ensuring that posts are advertised in such a way as to encourage applications from groups experiencing discrimination; adverts will be placed in local press, job centres, targeted media and Voscur/VANs etc.
- by preparing job descriptions which clearly set out what the worker is to do, and person specifications which recognise that relevant experience can be as valuable as qualifications or previous paid employment;
- by ensuring that in all selection procedures only factors relevant to the requirements of the post are considered, and that the spirit of the policy statement is adhered to;

6.8 Recruitment monitoring at all stages of the process including job applicants, those shortlisted and those successful at interview will be undertaken and the data analyses on an annual basis. Any necessary corrective actions will be implemented such as where advertisements are placed, to ensure action is taken to address any under-representation or potential discrimination.

6.9 Missing Link will ensure we carry out all necessary checks to ensure an applicant's eligibility to work in the UK is satisfied.

6.10 Missing Link will ensure employees that undertake the same work or work of equal value will receive the same rate of pay and benefits regardless of any protected characteristics.

7.0 Disability, Accessibility and Reasonable Adjustments

7.1 The Equality Act 2010 defines you as disabled if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities. This covers physical, sensory, and mental impairments with substantial and long-term effects. However, at Missing Link we acknowledge that some chronic, temporary, or fluctuating conditions may be included even if individuals do not self-identify as disabled.

7.2 Missing Link will ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to the business premises and working arrangements for disabled job applicants and employees, and employees who become disabled during the course of their employment.

7.3 Missing Link will seek advice where appropriate to ensure premises and services are accessible to staff and service users, for example from the Access to Work scheme run by the Job Centre Plus.

8.0 Service Delivery

8.1 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.

8.2 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.

To support this commitment, Missing Link has a range of related policies, including:

- 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.

8.3 Information about Missing Link's services is available in a range of languages and formats to ensure accessibility for culturally and linguistically diverse communities and individuals .

9.0 Constraints

9.1 Missing Link aims to remove barriers to accessing services wherever possible and to promote an environment where every service user feels safe, respected, and valued. This will be achieved through:

- fostering a service ethos that challenges poor attitudes and the labelling of clients with support needs
- presenting positive and empowering images of women and women with support needs across all aspects of its public profile and service delivery
- raising awareness of power dynamics within client–staff relationships
- ensuring that services are client-led and not shaped solely by organisational culture or staff preferences
- providing services that are flexible, responsive, and shaped by the needs and wishes of service users
- developing services that are sensitive to the diverse needs of displaced and underrepresented groups, including but not limited to Black and racially minoritised women, LGBTQIA+ survivors, and women with dependency issues.

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

10.0 Equality Improvement Action Plan

10.1 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.

10.2 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.

10.3 Missing Link undertakes qualitative audits on all aspects of its service delivery on a regular basis and learns from what is already in place.

10.4 Missing Link routinely consults and listens to service users to find out what they want and what they need, as well as what they don't like. Missing Link supports service users in identifying what their preferences are where these are not clear.

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

11.0 Supporting the Individual

11.1 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 their support worker, and are used to tailor the support service towards the service user's goals as they have identified them. In this way Missing Link actively promotes the empowerment of service users and an ethos that promotes self-help.

11.2 Missing Link will ensure that employees are aware of the preferred communication methods of service users and communicate in the method and language of the service user's choice; and that employees will be appropriately trained and knowledgeable with the necessary communication skills. We will ensure that employees use language and expressions that are readily understandable and appropriate to service users.

11.3 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. This may involve engaging support from community organisations.

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

12.0 Participation

12.1 Missing Link's Service User Participation and Consultation Policy outlines the mechanisms whereby service users are involved in and consulted with 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.

13.0 Complaints

13.1 Missing Link has a Complaints Policy and Procedure that service users can access if they feel that they have been discriminated against or treated unfairly. This includes all aspects of discrimination and harassment.

13.2 Missing Link will treat seriously any complaints of discrimination and will take prompt and proportionate action in response

13.3 All complaints made by external parties will be investigated in accordance with Missing Link's Complaints Procedure and the complainant will be informed of the outcome.

13.4 In the event of an investigation concerning a complaint against an employee, Missing Link's Grievance Policy and Procedures will be followed and any action necessary dealt with under Missing Link's Disciplinary Procedure.

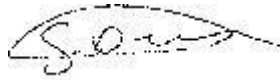
13.5 Complaints will be monitored annually and any outcomes/action recorded.

14.0 Policy review

14.1 This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis or earlier if required in light of changes in legislation.

14.2 Associated policies will be updated accordingly.

This policy has been endorsed by Sarah O'Leary (an appropriate senior member of staff) and has the full support of the management / board.



Signed
Position Chief Executive
Date 16th September 2025

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

- Dignity at Work and Anti-Harassment Policies
- Safeguarding Children Policy
- Safeguarding Adults Policy
- Reporting Racist Incidents Policy
- Confidentiality Policy
- Data Protection and Information Governance Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Raising a concern Policy
- Grievance Procedure
- Disciplinary Procedure
- Recruitment and Selection Policy
- Referrals and Allocations Policy
- Service User Consultation and Involvement Policy

Copies are available on request.

Glossary

Protected Characteristics

The protected characteristics as listed in the Equality Act 2010 are sex, sexual orientation, marriage or civil partnership, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, age, disability, pregnancy and maternity.

Disability

Under the Equality Act 2010, a person is disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

This definition includes both visible and non-visible disabilities, including neurodivergent conditions (such as autism, ADHD, or dyslexia), chronic illnesses, sensory impairments, and mental health conditions.

Gender reassignment

A person has the protected characteristic of gender reassignment if they are proposing to undergo, are undergoing, or have undergone a process (or part of a process) to reassign their sex by changing physiological or other attributes of sex. Medical supervision is not required.

This also includes non-binary and gender diverse people who are taking steps to affirm their gender.

Race

Race includes colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origins. A racial group can be made up of two or more different racial groups (e.g. Black Britons).

The term "race" is used in line with the Equality Act 2010, though the organisation recognises that "racially minoritised" and "Global Majority" may be preferred when discussing systemic inequity and representation.

Religion or belief

Under the Equality Act 2010, religion includes any religion, as well as the lack of religion. Employees or jobseekers are protected if they do not follow a certain religion or have no religion at all.

A religion must have a clear structure and belief system. Belief means any religious or philosophical belief (or lack thereof).

To be protected, a belief must be a weighty and substantial aspect of human life and behaviour.

Sexual orientation

Including, but not limited to, bisexual, gay, heterosexual, and lesbian people. This includes people who identify as asexual, pansexual, queer, or who are exploring or questioning their sexual orientation.

Direct discrimination

Occurs when someone is treated less favourably than another person because of a protected characteristic they have.

Associative discrimination

Discrimination against someone because they are linked or associated with another person who possesses a protected characteristic.

Perceptive discrimination

Discrimination against an individual because others think they possess a particular protected characteristic, even if they do not.

Indirect discrimination

Occurs when a condition, policy, rule, or practice applies to everyone but places people with a protected characteristic at a particular disadvantage and cannot be justified as proportionate or necessary.

Harassment

Unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment.

Harassment can include verbal, non-verbal, or physical behaviour and can occur in person or online.

Victimisation

Occurs when an employee is treated badly because they have made or supported a complaint about discrimination or harassment, or raised a grievance under the Equality Act, or because they are suspected of doing so.

Positive action

Some people with protected characteristics are disadvantaged or under-represented in some areas of life or have particular needs linked to their characteristic. They may need additional support or encouragement to have the same opportunities as others.

The Equality Act 2010 allows organisations to take proportionate steps to help people overcome these disadvantages or meet their needs.

Positive action is distinct from positive discrimination, which is unlawful under the Act.

Equity

Equity recognises that individuals and groups experience different barriers and starting points. It involves actively addressing systemic inequalities and redistributing resources, opportunities, and power to achieve fair outcomes.

Equality

Equality means ensuring everyone is treated the same and has the same rights and opportunities. It assumes a level playing field, which may not account for existing disadvantage or structural barriers.

Inclusion

Inclusion means creating an environment where everyone feels respected, valued, and able to contribute fully. It moves beyond representation to focus on belonging and equitable participation.

Global Majority

A term used to describe people who are Black, Brown, Indigenous, or otherwise racialised. It reflects that the majority of the world's population identifies within these groups, reframing "minority" narratives.

Neurodiversity

The understanding that neurological differences such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and others are natural variations of the human brain rather than deficits. Neurodiversity emphasises acceptance, understanding, and accommodation.

Unconscious Bias

Unconscious attitudes or beliefs that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions without conscious awareness. Addressing unconscious bias involves reflection, education, and structural change.

Cultural Competence

The ability to understand, respect, and respond effectively to people from all cultural backgrounds in a way that recognises and values diversity.

Some definitions in this glossary draw on statutory language from the Equality Act 2010 and widely recognised sector frameworks (e.g. ACAS, EHRC, and CIPD guidance)