1. **Introduction**

SARSVL recognises that a robust diversity and inclusion strategy is central to non-hierarchical feminist practice and ensures that we live the SARSVL values in all that we do.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all staff, volunteers and service users are treated fairly and with respect in an inclusive environment that is free from prejudiced attitudes and abuse. In accordance with the Equality Act 2010 SARSVL will not discriminate against staff, volunteers or service users on the grounds of the protected characteristics. These are;

* Age
* Disability (including long-term illness and mental ill health)
* Gender reassignment (for transgender women)
* Marital status (including civil partnerships and same sex marriage)
* Pregnancy and maternity
* Race
* Religion or Belief
* Sexual orientation

In addition to the protection of these characteristics, SARSVL will not discriminate on the grounds of the following;

* Being a Romany Gypsy, Scottish, Irish or Roma Traveller
* Being a non binary person who identifies with our woman-only ethos
* HIV/AIDS Status
* Nationality
* Nation of origin
* Being a carer
* Previous substance misuse
* Class
* Trade Union activity

1. **Sex Discrimination**

As a specialist women-only service, SARSVL will discriminate against men on the grounds of Sex (known as gender identity, referring to male or female) as stated in the Equality Act (2010). This ensures that we will not directly employ men or recruit them as volunteers to deliver our services (this does not apply to men who may be contracted as freelancers to perform scheduled and unscheduled remote work to our premises or equipment).

Being a woman is a Genuine Occupational Requirement (GOR) of employment with SARSVL as defined in the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and the Equality Act (2010). Men who apply to volunteer with SARSVL will also be discriminated against as SARSVL is a women-only organisation. Men will however be welcomed as ‘Friends of SARSVL’ in to casual time-limited fundraising roles that are managed off-site in the community.

Men will not be permitted to collaborate with or contribute to any events that involve our service users.

1. **Transgender and Non Binary Inclusion**

SARSVL recognises that transgender women and girls have a right to self-identify and access women-only services in accordance with the Equality Act (2010). SARSVL is committed to supporting service users at any stage during their transition. Transgender and non binary women are welcome and encouraged to seek support from SARSVL, or to work with us in paid or unpaid roles.

We trust that non binary service users are accessing the support that they feel is right for them, with the knowledge that we are provider of women-only specialist services. If a non binary person agrees with this approach and wishes to access our services, they will be supported to do so.

Transgender women are under no obligation to disclose the status of their gender identity to us and will not be pressured to do so. Any disclosures will be treated in the strictest confidence and remain on a ‘need to know basis’ as agreed by the service user and the relevant staff member or volunteer in each circumstance.

As a specialist women-only organisation, our services are not intended for men and this includes transgender men. If a service user informs us that they are intending to transition to become male, we will signpost him to alternative and appropriate sources of support.

1. **Commitment**

All SARSVL women have a responsibility to uphold a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination on the grounds of the Protected Characteristics and must be able to identify and challenge any behaviour that contravenes this. SARSVL will use a Diversity and Inclusion Strategy in support of this policy to inform and guide its work as an organisation. This strategy will be devised and maintained by the Board on an annual basis, with input from service delivery leads and relevant sub groups.

The Diversity and Inclusion Strategy applies to staff, volunteers and service users and is committed to the following;

* To work together in a way that is non-hierarchical, feminist and inclusive in an environment that promotes the value of individual difference
* To ensure that our services are accessible and relevant to the diverse communities of women and girls in Leeds
* To establish and maintain a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination, bullying and harassment of any kind toward staff and volunteers, with clear procedures to deal with such incidents
* To undertake rigorous Equality Impact Assessments that scrutinise our recruitment practices and service delivery methods at regular intervals
* To provide training, development and progression opportunities that allow all SARSVL women to participate in and contribute to the success of the organisation.
* To elect a Board of Trustees whose members are representative of the communities we serve and who are committed to promoting diversity and inclusion.
* To ensure that women from marginalised groups are represented across the organisation and can succeed in paid and unpaid roles

1. **Creating an Inclusive Environment**

We will to create and sustain an inclusive environment for everybody at SARSVL and the women and girls we support. We will achieve this by learning together, sharing feedback and working toward continuous improvement. All SARSVL women will be treated fairly and with respect in an environment that is free from discrimination. All staff will be encouraged to progress their professional development so that the talents and resources of the workforce can be deployed efficiently.

An inclusive environment allows staff and volunteers to ‘bring their whole selves’ in to the organisation This means that women can feel comfortable being themselves at SARSVL without the fear of prejudice from other SARSVL women, our service users or supporters.

Open communication and trust helps to forge relationships that foster inclusion. Service activities, supervision meetings and volunteer review meetings can be used to encourage inclusivity and respectful working relationships across the organisation.

1. **Board Responsibilities**

The Board must lead by example in support of diversity and inclusion across the organisation and encourage all SARSVL women to take matters of diversity and fairness seriously so that SARSVL can create and sustain inclusive environments in which we can live our values.

The Board will nominate a named lead to champion diversity and inclusion throughout the organisation. This member will act as a first point of contact for issues and project work relating to diversity and inclusion within SARSVL.

1. **Staff Responsibilities**

All staff are responsible for helping to create and sustain an inclusive workplace that recognises and supports difference. This includes differences in how people look, what their cultural practices are, how old they are and what their sexual orientation is.

All staff with a line management responsibility should be able to identify and describe the protected characteristics and understand their duties of care toward the staff that they line manage. Staff with a line management responsibility must ensure that any problematic behaviour that could jeopardise or undermine inclusion in any way is investigated and prevented from recurring, in accordance with SARSVL’s Code of Conduct. Senior Staff and Volunteer Co-ordinators must challenge any behaviours of concern using a zero-tolerance approach by identifying and challenging them promptly. If staff see or hear unacceptable behaviour and do nothing about it, they are condoning the behaviour and allowing an exclusionary and discriminative culture to develop.

1. **Unacceptable Behaviour**

Everybody is responsible for ensuring that unacceptable language, assumptions and behaviour are challenged, regardless of whether it is a Trustee, staff member, volunteer or a service user who is behaving unacceptably. When this persists, it is the responsibility of the appropriate SARSVL woman to ensure that action is taken to resolve the issue in a timely manner.

Cases of discrimination, bullying and harassment toward a staff member will be investigated in accordance with the Bullying and Harassment Policy. Where discrimination on the grounds of the Protected Characteristics is deemed to have taken place, this will be viewed as gross misconduct in accordance with the Disciplinary Policy. Furthermore, any act of discrimination, bullying or harassment will be considered to be an act of Gross Misconduct and disciplinary action will be taken accordingly, irrespective of whether a grievance has been raised.

1. **Service Users**

SARSVL is led by the women and girls that we support and creating an inclusive environment for service delivery is a priority. All service-delivery staff and volunteers are responsible for ensuring that services are provided for in a way that promotes diversity and respects the diversity of existing and potential service users.

Service users and clients of the SARSVL Helpline, Advocacy and Counselling services will be consulted with in accordance with the Service User Involvement Policy to ensure that our services continue to be led by the women we support.

SARSVL reserves the right to withdraw our services from any service user who demonstrates persistent disregard to the Diversity and Inclusion agenda or makes persistent attempts to bully or harass a volunteer or member of staff on the grounds of the Protected Characteristics.

1. **Monitoring Equality Data**

SARSVL will collect and retain Equality monitoring data from service users, volunteers, employees and prospective employees (job applicants) in accordance with data protection law. Only data that is going to be used will be collected and stored confidentially before being destroyed in accordance with SARSVL’s Record Keeping Policy.

Upon appointment to a paid or voluntary role, women will be invited to disclose information relating to the following Protected Characteristics;

* Age
* Ethnicity
* Disability
* Marital Status
* Religion or Belief
* Sexual Orientation

This data will be collected and analysed to ensure that SARSVL adequately reflects the communities that we serve and to highlight any underrepresented groups to inform recruitment strategy for paid and unpaid work. In addition, data will be collected from prospective employees (job applicants) to ensure that SARSVL is an employer of choice for diverse communities including Disabled, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME), Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) women, older women and women of all faiths and none.

Monitoring Reports will be reported to the Board, using anonymised data. Anonymised comments recorded during the Exit Interview process will also be retained for the purpose of internal reporting, if relevant to issues of diversity and inclusion.

Equality data is also collected from service users to ensure all frontline services are being accessed by a diverse range of women and will inform the Service User Involvement strategy. The collection and monitoring of this information is the responsibility of the relevant service co-ordinator.

1. **Training and Development**

All SARSVL staff and volunteers are expected to have a good understanding of diversity and inclusion and be able to apply this to their day to day work. Staff will be supported and encouraged to access resources which help them to develop their understanding of a range of topics that relate to diversity and inclusion in order to create and sustain an inclusive service environment. Everybody is encouraged to use their initiative to do this and share resources which enhance learning together.

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