

## **ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY**

### **North Staffs Mind's approach to accessibility for our clients and service users**

North Staffs Mind considers the accessibility of our services in a range of ways and is committed to overcoming barriers to access whether they be physical and environmental, cultural and attitudinal, or involve information and communication.

We have both an Equality and Diversity Policy and an Anti-discriminatory Practice Policy which describe how we will approach and tackle these areas. We recognise that there are limitations to aspects of the accessibility we currently provide and are continually working to overcome them.

### **Equality and Diversity statement of intent**

North Staffs Mind believes all people have the right to be treated fairly and with respect and is committed to taking positive action to maintain awareness of and counter discrimination or address discrimination in every aspect of its work. Fundamental to this is the commitment to ensure equality of opportunity both in the provision of services and as an employer.

Ensuring equal opportunities does not mean treating everybody the same – rather, it means recognising people's differences and adapting the way we work in order to ensure that everyone is provided with a fair and equal chance.

North Staffs Mind will challenge indirect discrimination which induces an adverse disproportionate impact on the mental wellbeing of an individual or group of people. This can, for example, be because of, but is not limited to, race, colour, ethnic or national origin, religion, faith, gender (including gender reassignment), disability or mental health problem, HIV antibody status, AIDS status, marital status, sexual orientation, age or occupational/economic status.

### **Our Strategy**

#### **Equality and Diversity in Service Delivery**

North Staffs Mind's Equality and Diversity Policy recognises and addresses the need for our services to be accessible to all people who wish to access them.

We recognise that the locations of our service delivery are key to accessibility and that we will continue to research options for venues which are appropriate for the service user who may, for physical, financial or cultural reasons, struggle to access a centralised service.

Aspects of accessibility we address and will continue to address include:

- How people can understand our purpose as an organisation and the services that we provide
- How people can use the services that we provide
- How people can contact us and feed back on the services that they receive

We are aware that there are currently limitations to accessibility to some of our services and will continue to address these. These are addressed in more specific detail in our Strategic Action Plan (below).

- We recognise that language is a key aspect of accessibility and offer information and communication in different accessible formats.
- We ensure flexibility in hours of availability of service provision and an accessible appointments procedure.
- We ensure that Information on how to access our services is widely available.
- We recognise that giving our service users the opportunity to feed back on the services they receive and to make changes based on this feedback is of fundamental importance.
- We see training in Equality and Diversity topics as central to our strategy and we will ask staff, trustees, and service users to share information about current training opportunities.

### **Accessible Information**

North Staffs Mind's counselling services identify need at various points - on the telephone when someone rings to refer, at the initial assessment (whether in person or by phone), and during ongoing counselling as further needs become clear.

All our interactions with people are aimed at offering a person-centred service that meets an individual's needs, and much of our information is provided verbally and in a style that meets the client's requirements.

We are able to provide information in large print and via email and have accessed BSL interpreters and advocates where client need in this area has been identified. Given that our counselling service is a talking therapy service, there is a threshold of understanding and ability to take part in the therapy which has to be met. Therefore, someone with very profound learning disabilities would not normally be accessing the service, for example.

We make use of visual and creative means of interacting with people in counselling itself. We try to keep all written communication in plain English. Information leaflets in both print and electronic format are distributed to other services as well as being available on our website.

### **Strategic Action Plan**

We are developing a strategic action plan to address all aspects of accessibility across North Staffs Mind that will be reviewed together with this strategy on an annual basis. Specific aspects of the plan will be reviewed on a quarterly basis by the User Engagement Co-ordinator and the Equality and Diversity working group.

Areas the Plan will cover:

- We will prioritise identification of a person's first language and will establish appropriate contracts and working relationships with interpreter services where necessary. We will ensure we know which languages are spoken within the staff group. Where necessary we will engage professional interpreters to support clients accessing services.
- The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in our moving many of our services to the telephone or video. We recognise that not everyone has access to Zoom or Microsoft Teams for reasons of cost and/or IT knowledge and will work to address these issues.
- We have a Plain English Complaints Procedure which is available in all our waiting areas and on our website.
- We are aware our client group does not at present fully reflect the local community and we find it a challenge to engage certain demographics within the local community. We are aware of the importance of matching the services we provide to the demographics of our local communities and will continue to regularly monitor any gaps in our services. We will do this via data from local Joint Strategic Needs Assessments, local Clinical Commissioning Groups, and the latest census data from 2011 and the forthcoming census of 2021.
- We encourage applications in terms of staff and volunteer recruitment from people who speak other languages including Polish, French, Urdu, Punjabi, Turkish and British Sign Language (BSL).
- We aim to promote our services to local agencies that cater for specific communities, for example, DEAFvibe and dDeaflinks Staffordshire for people with hearing loss, and Age UK Staffordshire for older people.
- We offer appointments in the evenings, outside of school hours and on Saturday mornings for people who would otherwise find it difficult to access our services.
- We input at a strategic level to the project board of VOICES, a partnership of voluntary, community, and statutory organisations in Stoke-on-Trent funded by the Big Lottery Fund that is committed to making services for people with multiple needs more effective.
- EO monitoring data is compiled into a report for presentation annually to the Council of Management, when the trustees will take an overview on equality and diversity issues and practices. We also review our policies to ensure they do not discriminate against our service users.
- Service managers and the training and development lead will work with the Chief Executive to develop the training programme for each year. Training will be regularly offered to staff on a variety of issues which include equality and diversity issues, including awareness training about Unconscious Bias, White Privilege and Being an Ally.

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