



## **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR CLIENTS POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

This policy was approved by the  
Management Committee of Foyle  
Women's Aid on

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Women's Aid in Northern Ireland is the lead voluntary organisation addressing domestic violence against women and children, recognising it as one form of violence against women. The overall aim of Women's Aid is to eliminate domestic violence, and to challenge the attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate it.

Ten local Women's Aid groups across Northern Ireland are all members of the Federation and deliver a range of specialised support services to women and children who have experienced domestic violence.

Foyle Women's Aid is committed to ensuring that all current and potential clients have equal access to all services. This policy takes into account the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, aimed at ending the discrimination which many disabled people face in accessing goods, facilities and services; and acknowledges the Commission for Racial Equality's Rented Housing Code of Good Practice (which includes hostel accommodation).

## 2.0 POLICY STATEMENT

- 2.1 The Management Committee of Foyle Women's Aid is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and equal access for women and children to all its services, and equal treatment in respect of the quality of services provided, regardless of:

- perceived religious or political affiliation,
- marital or family status,
- those with caring responsibilities,
- sexual orientation,
- disability,
- age,
- nationality,
- race or ethnic origin.

Foyle Women's Aid is opposed to all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination.

- 2.2 This policy should be read in conjunction with the following organisational policies:

- Code of Conduct
- Confidentiality
- Safeguarding & Protection
- Whistleblowing

### **3.0 IMPLEMENTATION**

- 3.1 The Director has specific responsibility for the effective implementation of this policy. Each Line Manager also has responsibilities and all staff are expected to abide by the policy.

In order to implement this policy, Foyle Women's Aid will ensure that:

- 3.2 All staff are made aware of the Equal Opportunities for Clients Policy through induction training;
- 3.3 All staff understand and promote the policy, and are able to fulfil their responsibilities to clients. Appropriate training and guidance on equality issues and non-discriminatory practice will be provided for all staff;
- 3.4 All clients are made aware of the Equal Opportunities for Clients Policy as soon as practicable after taking up services;
- 3.5 Foyle Women's Aid will endeavour to ensure that the necessary adaptations are made to existing premises to install and/or improve disability access;
- 3.6 All the services provided by Foyle Women's Aid are widely advertised and/or promoted through campaigns and advertisements in the local press/media. Posters, leaflets and information contact cards are displayed in a broad range of statutory and community facilities;
- 3.7 Information leaflets on Women's Aid services are produced in a range of languages, which reflect the current diverse ethnic groups in the population of Northern Ireland (e.g. Hindu, Cantonese, Urdu, Arabic and Portuguese). Women's Aid liaises with umbrella organisations working to address the needs of ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland to raise awareness of domestic violence and to promote its services. Women's Aid aims to provide information on its services in languages for which there is a need and demand in Northern Ireland; and
- 3.8 Women's Aid maintains a website ([www.womensaidni.org](http://www.womensaidni.org)), which provides information on the range of services available to women experiencing, or at risk of, domestic violence across Northern Ireland. It also provides information and statistics on domestic violence. Links to related websites and local Women's Aid groups' websites are available.

#### **3.9 24-Hour Domestic Violence Helpline**

Women's Aid operates a 24-hour domestic violence helpline. The service is open to anyone affected by domestic violence. It offers:

- Assistance, support and crisis intervention for abused women;
- Information and guidance to all agencies relating specifically to domestic violence;
- Signposting to relevant support agencies for men calling the Helpline;

- A mini-com service to callers with hearing difficulties; and
- An interpreting service to callers whose first language is not English.

### 3.10 **Refuges, Advice Centres, Resource Centres and Administration Offices**

Foyle Women's Aid ensures that all its premises are accessible. Women's Aid recognises that all their premises should be accessible to people with a disability. All refuge premises are wheelchair accessible and provide at least one accommodation unit specially adapted for wheelchair use.

Foyle Women's Aid will endeavour to make the necessary adaptations to existing premises to improve disability access.

Foyle Women's Aid will maintain a neutral and non-threatening environment in all its premises. The display of any national, political or religious flags, emblems and posters, and the circulation of sectarian materials will be prohibited.

The display and circulation of any materials which are likely to give offence or cause apprehension to any individual or group because of their religious belief, political opinion, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, nationality, race or ethnic origin will be prohibited.

The articulation of slogans, songs, or comments which are offensive or which reinforce stereotypes will be challenged.

In respect of services for children, all children will be respected and their individuality and potential recognised, valued and nurtured. Childcare facilities offer a variety of play equipment and materials, which enable children to explore, acknowledge and value similarities and differences between them and others.

3.11 Foyle Women's Aid will promote this policy in all its premises and ensure that clients are made aware of it.

3.12 In order to promote and comply with good practice on equal access (including such areas as communications, training and policy & procedures), Foyle Women's Aid will work closely with, and take advice from, the following agencies:

- Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)
- Equality Commission
- Disability Action – Women's Aid is a member of the Disability Action Business Support Scheme, which offers advice and guidance on compliance with issues of access.

Women's Aid will consult regularly with clients to take their views and comments on issues of equal access in all our services. Where gaps and/or improvements are identified, action will be taken to make the necessary changes. In addition, we will assess the effectiveness of our policy and

practice with minority communities of interest through our work with Disability Action and NICEM.

- 3.13 Any breach of this policy will be regarded as misconduct and may lead to disciplinary action.

#### **4.0 COMMENTS & COMPLAINTS**

- 4.1 Foyle Women's Aid encourages open communication and involvement by clients in the organisation. It is important that good communication is encouraged between all staff and residents in accommodation, users of all other services and members of the general public, with whom our work brings us into contact. Comments and/or complaints help the organisation to improve, and further develop practice and service.
- 4.2 Any client who believes that they have been treated unfairly has the right to make a complaint through the procedures outlined in the Comments & Complaints Policy & Procedure. All clients have access to the Comments & Complaints Policy.
- 4.3 A breach of the Equal Opportunities for Clients Policy & Procedures will be regarded as misconduct and may lead to disciplinary action.
- 4.4 Any other comments or complaints in relation to this policy should, in the first instance, be raised with the Director, who will carry out an investigation in line with the Comments & Complaints Policy.
- 4.5 When responding to complaints, staff will be open and accepting of the individual's right to complain and avoid being defensive, making it clear that all complaints are taken seriously and will be investigated.
- 4.6 Residents of accommodation and users of all other Women's Aid services have the right to expect confidentiality in the handling of their complaints or any complaints made against them.
- 4.7 Clients should not suffer a penalty for making a complaint. Every effort will be made to ensure that users making complaints will not be victimised. Any complaint of victimisation will be dealt with seriously, promptly and confidentially.

#### **5.0 MONITORING & REVIEW**

- 5.1 The procedures will be reviewed on a regular basis to identify areas for improvement and, where appropriate, to make changes.