

LIDAS

Equal Opportunities Policy

PURPOSE:

To establish the policy and procedure of LIDAS with regard to equality of opportunity in respect of staff, volunteers, service users and others who visit LIDAS premises.

PART ONE – POLICY STATEMENT

1. Declaration of Intent

LIDAS is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and to challenging all forms of discrimination. This includes discrimination on the grounds of age, religion, race, cultural or ethnic origin, disability, nationality, sexuality, marital status and responsibility for children or other dependants.

We aim to ensure that no LIDAS member, job applicant, employee, students, volunteers, users of the service, agencies or other groups that we work with receive less favourable treatment on any grounds.

We want to make sure that equal opportunities become a reality in practice and not simply a paper commitment. Other policies have been written with reference to this policy.

The purpose of the Equal Opportunities policy is to set out clearly and comprehensively the steps LIDAS intends to take to ensure equality of opportunity and to combat direct and structural (indirect) discrimination. This includes consideration of employment practice, management practice and service provision.

2. Responsibility for Implementing Equal Opportunities in LIDAS

The responsibility for implementing the Declaration of Intent lies with the whole Membership of LIDAS, although within the Membership the elected Management Committee is expected to carry our employer's responsibilities. They may also delegate some of the tasks involved to paid staff or volunteers or to sub groups within the Management Committee (MC).

The Declaration of Intent will be posted publicly in the centres and in the refuge and will also be made known to all members of the organisation, employees, students, volunteers, and service users in the refuge. Acceptance of the policy is a condition of the membership of LIDAS.

Implementing the policy involves:

- Ensuring that the records and information systems are set up to monitor the equal opportunities policies. This may include index cards, user surveys, feedback forms, monitoring forms, questionnaires, interviews and other information systems;
- Ensuring that the management group, the staff, volunteers and users know how the policy works and the process for developing and reviewing it and identifying the need for training workers so that they can understand their responsibilities;
- Ensuring that those aware of discrimination taking place or those experiencing discriminatory harassment or bullying know the actions that can be taken. This can include use of the Complaints, Grievance and Whistleblowing Policies.
- Examining the composition of the work team, management group and any sub-groups and working parties;
- Reviewing the recruitment procedures;

- Establishing systems to monitor the delivery of services;
- Reporting to the management group on the progress of implementing the policy.

The MC may decide to appoint a named equal opportunities officer from the MC or from the staff group. This officer is hereby given:

- Time to perform their duties effectively;
- The ability to report directly to the management group;
- Powers necessary to investigate any alleged discrimination;
- Power to examine all relevant written material in the group.

They should also be given a written report on any implications for equal opportunities arising from a discipline or grievance procedure. If there is no named equal opportunities officer, the MC as a whole must take responsibility for initiating and for carrying out or co-ordinating these tasks.

LIDAS recognises and acknowledges that members of minority groups should not have to take on an extra burden challenging discrimination within the group. There should be no assumption that a member of a minority or discriminated against group will take the position of equal opportunities officer or carry out related work, simply because she is from that group. The delegation of such tasks should be based on skill, knowledge and willingness to take on the work.

LIDAS will adhere to the requirements and guidance contained in the following pieces of legislation (and any subsequent amendments to them) in all of its work:

- The Equal Pay Act 1970 (Amendment) Regulations 2003
- The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (Amendment) Regulations 2003
- The Race Relations Act 1976
- The Race Relations Code of Practice
- The Race Relations Action (Amendment) Regulations 2003
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Employment Equality (Religion and Belief) Regulations 2003
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- Code of Practice on Racial Equality in Housing

LIDAS will observe, as far as possible, the Commission Racial Equality's Code of Practice in employment (1983).

Service users, staff, volunteers and MC members who consider that they have suffered from unequal treatment on any grounds listed above may make a complaint, which will be dealt with under either the complaints procedure (for service users) or the relevant grievance procedure (for others).

3. Review

The implementation of this policy must be reviewed annually to see what changes have resulted, and to analyse failures and successes. All contracts, guidelines, licence agreements etc., should be similarly reviewed to see where they actually or potentially discriminate. This review may be done by MC holding an annual equal opportunities review meeting, with participation by representatives of staff and volunteers as well as the MC.

4. Policy Statement on Employment

This area of the policy covers recruitment and employment practices, from vacancy advertising, selection, recruitment and training to conditions of service and reasons for termination of employment.

4.1 Aims

- To help LIDAS to be an equal opportunities employer and to ensure that no job applicant or employee receives less favourable treatment on the grounds of race, colour, ethnic, social or geographical origin (including being a traveller) creed, disability, sexual orientation, or marital status;
- To ensure that LIDAS recruits fairly and without discrimination;
- To ensure that LIDAS treats all staff and volunteers fairly and without discrimination;
- To ensure that LIDAS's recruitment and employment practices take into account the range of relevant skills and experience service users may have gained outside paid employment.
- To ensure that LIDAS as an organisation is able to monitor and improve employment practices in order to increase equality of opportunity and reduce discrimination.

4.2 Guidelines on Recruitment

4.2.1 Reviewing Job Description and Person Specification

When a job becomes vacant, the Management and staff group or staffing sub-group will review the area of work concerned and will decide whether the job needs to be reorganised or modified, and whether a part-time, full-time or job share is most appropriate, taking into account the provisions of the E.O.P. and the needs of LIDAS.

A Recruitment Panel will be appointed which will be responsible for all aspects of the selection procedure from the checking of the person specification and the job description to the final selection. Where possible, the recruitment panel will also plan the induction programme.

At least one member of every recruitment panel should have participated in equal opportunities interviewing and general interviewing techniques training programmes. Members of staffing sub group should encourage all staff and MC members likely to be involved in recruitment to take up such training, by drawing their attention to relevant training and taking any necessary steps to enable particular service users to participate in this training.

Recruitment panels should consist of not less than three and not more than five service users. All recruitment panels should aim to include adequate representation of disadvantaged groups and service users with other specialised knowledge or experience as outlined in the Declaration of Intent.

Before any job is advertised, a job specification must be drawn up. This should outline the essential qualifications and attributes necessary for the job. The recruitment panel should check the job description and person specification for direct or indirect discrimination, including unnecessary qualifications, age barriers or culture bound assumptions. Applicants should be made aware that general life experience, the work of motherhood and voluntary work, as well as paid work, are valued.

4.2.2 Advertising Vacant Posts

All jobs must be advertised as widely as possible, except possibly in the appointment of temporary workers, and must be advertised where possible in the specialised minority press. Adverts should clearly state the minimum requirements for the post. Adverts should also state that LIDAS is striving to be an equal opportunities employer, and positively welcomes applications from black and ethnic minority service users, service users with disabilities, etc.

Adverts for paid and unpaid work should usually be placed on noticeboards for service users at the refuge and centre. All vacancy advertisements will include an appropriate short statement of equal opportunity.

4.2.3 Shortlisting and Interviewing

The selection process should be carefully structured in an attempt to eliminate the influence of prejudice, both conscious and unconscious. Checklists should be used to evaluate each candidate according to criteria agreed in advance. The categories in the checklists should be checked each time they are used to make sure that they relate to necessary skills and qualities only. When shortlisting, brief notes should be made on each application, indicating why the woman was or was not shortlisted according to areas of skill or experience required.

During the interview, a form should be completed on each candidate, assessing their response to the topics and themes raised. These should be reviewed at the end of the interviews by the panel, to see that each candidate has been treated fairly. The reasons for completing the form during the interview must be explained to each candidate before the interview begins. All interviews should aim to last the same length of time.

Questions on the following topics should never be asked in an interview. Any candidate who is asked these questions has the right to refuse to answer.

- Marital status
- Sexual orientation
- Occupation of partner
- Health
- Number or age of children and domestic arrangements.

No assumptions should be made about any of these, nor should prior information held about these be taken into account when making an appointment. The candidates should be given adequate information including the opportunity to ask questions about the practical requirements of the job, as well as having the job description including hours required. They should be offered the job only on the basis of ability to do the job and on the understanding with the applicant that she is able to work for the time and under the conditions specified. If the applicant raises any questions about the conditions of work that can be changed without altering the general terms and conditions of employment or the level of service to users and other staff, the recruitment panel should consider whether those changes could be made before making a final decision. If necessary, they should defer making a final decision until further investigation of possible changes to the conditions of work. These might include adaptations to premises to improve accessibility or negotiating work hours.

4.2.4 The Aims of Monitoring Recruitment (this section is for inclusion on any monitoring form)

LIDAS wants to ensure that service users from all sections of the community can apply for jobs with us. We therefore want to find out more about who is and who is not applying for posts in the organisation.

We need the help of all applicants to posts in our organisation to gather this information. We would also like to gather information from service users who make initial enquiries about jobs with us but then decide not to apply. We therefore ask all service users enquiring about jobs with the organisation and particularly those applying for jobs to complete this monitoring form, which is kept separately from the job application form and is anonymous. The selection panel for each job will not have access to these forms during the recruitment process.

4.2.5 Monitoring Forms

An equal opportunities monitoring form should be included in each application pack. The form should explain clearly what the purpose is, by including the declaration of intent of this policy and the paragraph above. Candidates should be asked to indicate their age, ethnic origin, and sexual orientation and to note any disability. It should be made clear that statistics from this information are kept and not names and confidential details. The recruitment panel should monitor this process by analysing the forms after the final selection has been made and the offer accepted. They should present a report, including an analysis of this information, to the Management or relevant sub group or equalities officer as agreed.

4.2.6 Other Information about Recruitment

Information (e.g. job description) sent out to service users responding to job adverts should include details of possible access problems at the Refuge and the Centres for service users with disabilities. All letters inviting shortlisted candidates for interview should include information about the access to the interview venue.

The successful applicant will be offered a planned Induction Programme. See recruitment process for further details.

4.3 Guidelines on Training and Conditions of Service

We aim to ensure that candidates for a post will not be rejected because they have special training needs, providing they are in other ways suitable.

Proper implementation of the E.O.P. will mean that all employees, volunteers and members of the organisation will be given access to training and development. New staff should be made aware of the training opportunities available to them and be positively encouraged to take them up. Staff should be encouraged to take up training that will enhance their work performance and career prospects.

All staff, volunteers and Management members should be given information about the standards they should be able to expect from the organisation and from individuals in it and about what to do if they feel that they have not been treated according to those standards. This means ensuring that everyone in the organisation should be given a copy of the relevant Code of Practice and Discipline and Grievance procedures and opportunities to discuss these.

4.4 Other employment Related Guidelines

4.4.1 Trade Union Activities

LIDAS will not discriminate against any staff member because of their trade union activities/membership.

4.4.2 Physical Access

A positive attempt will be made to provide necessary facilities for anyone who requires special work or living arrangements as a result of a disability.

4.4.3 Monitoring Data about Employees

The composition of the group of the whole LIDAS collective will be monitored regularly in order to evaluate the progress of the policy.

All employees and job applicants' will be asked to complete a monitoring form designed to gather information about racial origins, age, sexual orientation and disability. This information will be collected on a separate form from any other and kept entirely separately from all other data about that employee. The information should be collected anonymously wherever possible. This is not possible if the information is collected one form at a time, by collecting one for each member of staff as they become employees. The data in almost all categories, will also change for all staff over time. To deal with these problems, the M.C. could ask the whole staff group to complete a new form each time a new member of

staff joins the organisation. They should be allowed to do so without putting their names on and with the option to complete the form on the computer. The previous set of forms should then be destroyed without keeping any copies. Data can then be updated again, keeping the statistics gathered from previous sets of forms to compare with.

In order to make the E.O.P. a reality in employment, monitoring procedures must be implemented, but the information needed will be given voluntarily and will be kept under conditions of strictest confidentiality and security. Everyone giving such information will be assured of this confidentiality.

4.4.4 Analysing Monitoring Data

Monitoring should apply to management members, volunteers, service users using the Refuge and Centre and other members of the organisation (if they are willing) as well as to job applicants and paid workers.

Such records will be analysed regularly and appropriate follow-up action taken. Factors to be monitored include:

- Are black service users, lesbian service users or service users with a disability, etc. applying for posts?
- Are they being shortlisted?
- Are they being appointed?

The Management may then decide, on the basis of information gathered from monitoring forms, to consult specialist groups to find out the possible reasons why some service users may not be applying for jobs with LIDAS. They may also decide to consult existing staff, volunteers, specialist consultants and past employees or volunteers. They may also consult relevant research or other resources. Above all, the organisation and those involved in recruitment should try to learn from each recruitment and improve practices in order to promote equal opportunities and make them a reality.

4.4.5 Disciplinary Procedures

It will be made clear to all paid and unpaid staff, MC members, residents and students that discrimination, abuse or harassment on the grounds of age, race, ethnic origin, class, disability, sexuality, religion, nationality, marital status or responsibility for children if proven may be an offence of gross misconduct, as referred to in the grievance and disciplinary section policies, codes of practice, conditions of LIDAS membership and licence agreement.

5. Policy Statement on Management

This part of the policy covers management of the organisation, from composition of the membership of the Management, decision-making, access to committee meetings and training of committee members.

5.1 Aims

- To recruit M.C. members as widely as possible service users from all sections of the community, including survivors of domestic abuse.
- To ensure that the different components of its management structure, i.e. the management group, staff, volunteers, members, sub-groups and working parties, reflect the diversity of people who are discriminated against and the different sections of the community.

5.2 Membership of the Management Committee

LIDAS regularly review the membership of the M.C., criteria for selection and other recruitment practices to ensure that all eligible groups are represented.

This may include:

- Consulting groups on how to make LIDAS more relevant to groups facing disadvantage;
- Translating written material into other languages, and onto tapes;
- Aiming publicity material at certain types of organisation;
- Organising open days and seminars to explain the work of LIDAS. With this option it may be necessary to make sure that there are relevant interpreters present.

Service users are recruited as Management members on application. We recognise however that service users who are already in the organisation recruit potential members from amongst their friends and colleagues. This may mean that we are unintentionally narrowing down our field for recruitment and allowing an unintentionally discriminatory way of recruitment. We will advertise widely for new MC members, particularly if monitoring reveals that particular groups are under-represented on the committee.

We shall also support and help development of members and volunteers by ensuring that they receive the training they need, including management skills. We will also review regularly how volunteers are used and ensure that they are managed and supported and given further training and development that they need.

At present we can have up to ten service users on the committee. When vacancies arise we will recruit new members. In the implementation of our equal opportunities policy we will attempt to publicise the recruitment of members as widely as possible in order to have a representative committee of the users of the service.

If necessary, the M.C. may decide to co-opt additional members to ensure that minority groups are represented.

5.3 Training for Management Group Members

LIDAS shall provide training for M.C. members in relation to its equal opportunities policy. The M.C. has a responsibility to initiate and organise such training regularly. This will include management skills relating to equal opportunities legislation. All members should know of their obligations under the Sex Discrimination Act 1975; the Race Relations Act (amended) 2000, the Equal Pay Act 1970; the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and the Human Rights Act 1998.

5.4 Decision Making

LIDAS shall regularly review its formal decision making procedures to ensure that they do not discriminate against service users from specific groups. Informal decision making amongst more experienced or long standing members of the organisation may lead to discriminatory practices and deny the less powerful members full involvement in the management of the organisation. We aim to make decisions in an open, democratic manner, taking into account all relevant views and information.

Wherever possible we will do the following:

- 1 Ensure that all those who are in anyway affected by decisions to be made are consulted about their views in ways that enable them to give those views freely;
- 2 Ensure that decisions are made after (if necessary and possible) agreeing the criteria by which they will be made, the likely effects of each choice on the organisation, resources and people involved and affected;
- 3 Ensure that meetings are as welcoming and enjoyable as possible;
- 4 Ensure that everyone attending has had adequate information and opportunity to consider that information.

We will also follow good practice in our meetings. This will include:

- 1 Effective chairing of meetings, which means that the Chair of each meeting should prepare the agenda in advance, have read all relevant papers, keep to time, allow all those who need or wish to make their views known, stop discussion about matters that are not relevant and ensure that decisions are recorded accurately;
- 2 Agreeing whether a particular meeting is quorate, whether a unanimous decision is required and if a majority decision is required, what majority;
- 3 Recognising that there are tensions and contradictions involved in participatory decision making and working towards consensus. For example if a unanimous decision is required for a particular change to take place and one person objects, that means in effect that that one person has made the decision.

5.5 Accessibility

The timing and location of special events shall be decided in such a way as to make them more accessible to people with disabilities. Whenever possible we shall provide crèche or childminding facilities at meeting and training courses.

In considering the timing of events, we shall bear in mind service users with children and the dependants who often find it difficult to attend evening meetings and many service users who do not like travelling after dark. Wherever possible and necessary we shall arrange lifts for all service users attending an evening event, particularly one that finishes late in the evening and also provide transport for people with limited mobility. We will also stick to time limits agreed for meetings and review our meeting skills if they are not finished in the time allowed.

5.6 Affiliation to Other Organisations

LIDAS shall first examine the equal opportunities policy of organisations of which they are considering affiliating to or becoming a member. We may also affiliate to particular organisations whose work helps us to fulfil our equal opportunities policies, for example, by giving us information on how to improve our delivery of equal opportunities.

6 Policy Statement on Service Delivery

6.1 Aims:

- To ensure that LIDAS services are known about by as many sections of the community as possible.
- To ensure that the services offered are relevant to the majority of users.
- To ensure that service users' specific cultural needs are catered for.
- To ensure that the wishes of service users and children are respected, their rights and needs met.

This area of the policy covers service delivery from publicity and information about the services to interpretation services, referrals and admissions, users needs including different cultural needs, children, and living conditions. LIDAS recognises that groups and individuals may experience discrimination on the grounds described above and that their access to services, power and resources may be limited by this discrimination. It may be that we have in the past unintentionally prevented access to minority groups of people who receive information about our services. We will attempt to implement practices within this policy that will ensure our services are accessible to all sections of the community.

LIDAS also recognises the diversity of experience amongst service users who experience discrimination on similar grounds, and acknowledges that many service users experience discrimination on multiple

grounds. We will attempt to cater for the specific needs of black and other ethnic minority service users, including their cultural and emotional needs. LIDAS recognises the oppression suffered by young people of all ages including the very young. We will attempt in the provision of our service to combat this oppression by respecting and empowering the young people who come to us. We will also ensure that we recognise and care for the educational and emotional needs of the children involved.

6.2 Guidelines for Carrying out Equal Opportunities in Service Delivery

6.2.1 Children's Protection from Discrimination

All children in the refuge have the right to safety from discrimination grounds of class, race, gender, ability, religion, sexual orientation or sexuality.

Children may experience discrimination from other children, staff or volunteers or service users living in the refuge. Work with children should aim to be inclusive and supportive of difference, and children should be encouraged to develop their own sense of self worth. Staff and volunteers should ideally have training in non-discriminatory working.

6.2.2 The Public Image

LIDAS shall strive to create an image of the refuge as an organisation representative of all sections of the community so that it can appeal to a broader base of the community.

We shall do this by encouraging representatives from groups facing disadvantage to sit on the management committee. We will monitor and review our services regularly to find out who is and is not using our services or activities at present. This will help us clarify which new users and communities we should try to reach. As far as possible it is the aim of LIDAS to adapt the services so that they are relevant to the majority of service users who use the service.

6.2.3 Identifying Needs

LIDAS will consult with groups, or organisations representing them, by arranging meetings or open days to tell them of our services and determine their needs and establish how our services may be adapted to meet those needs. Any recommendations made in the consultation process will be incorporated into our services. We shall also make these recommendations publicly available so that we can monitor and demonstrate the progress in making changes.

LIDAS shall ensure that they monitor the users of their service to ensure that no group is being left out. The statistics should cover the age, race sexuality, disability, ethnicity and the place, county or district from where she has come.

6.2.4 Evaluating Services

We shall inspect the services we provide to ensure that we are not discriminating against any minority group. We shall also determine how they may be adapted to combat discrimination. The setting up of any new project will automatically include a discussion of how equal opportunities will be promoted or safeguarded.

LIDAS does not have adequate resources to guarantee to be everything to all service users. Therefore if it becomes apparent that the needs of a particular group for service users are not being met or when planning a new project to meet the needs of a particular group of people, LIDAS will need to judge if it is the most appropriate one to offer such assistance. It may be better to help the people concerned to set up their own services or to establish a joint project with an existing group. The first step may be to hold a meeting with the elders or leaders of the group in question. Examples of unmet needs may be support for service users with alcohol, drugs and other solvent dependency problems.

Discussion of any proposed new projects should be discussed with likely users. The viability of the project and ways to secure funding for the project will be considered.

6.2.5 Monitoring the Services

We shall periodically examine who uses our services to see whether we are meeting the needs of the different sections of our community. User surveys or equal opportunities monitoring forms will be used to do this. We will explain to users why we are monitoring the services and explain that their participation is voluntary.

6.2.6 Complaints

LIDAS has a complaints procedure for service users to use if they feel that they have been discriminated against. We shall ensure that the procedure is well advertised. Any direct or indirect discrimination and victimisation by a member of staff against any user or by a member of the management group against any member of staff or user is a disciplinary offence.

6.2.7 Referrals

We aim to provide a service for all service users and children in the area and beyond who need our services. However, as described above we cannot guarantee that we can do this for everyone at all times, partly because of limited space. We will aLIDASys respond to relevant requests for emergency accommodation sympathetically and where possible provide accommodation at the refuge. However, LIDAS retains the right to exclude anyone who places any or all of the residents in danger or who is likely to cause an undue risk to the security of the refuge. Anyone who has been refused admission to or asked to leave the refuge or other services because of their behaviour can request that this decision be reviewed. They can also make use of the LIDAS Complaints procedure. A copy of this should usually be given to the woman concerned when she is asked to leave or as soon as possible afterwards.

6.2.8 Publicising Services

We undertake to make sure that all relevant referral agencies know about our services. We will make every possible effort to ensure that information about the refuge is widely available and not only at the main referral agencies and the police, but at GPs and surgeries, schools, colleges, market places, hair salons, day centres, service users's organisations and organisations for specific groups of service users, churches and other places of worship, etc.

Any information leaflets and publicity material shall not use jargon, but simple English so that everyone easily understands them, especially by people whose first language is not English. Where possible we shall translate information into other appropriate languages.

When promoting our services we shall contact those groups that represent people who suffer discrimination to make them aware of our services. As far as it is practicable such groups shall be invited to our Annual General Meetings, open days, courses and other public events. We shall put on our mailing list all relevant disadvantaged groups and ethnic minority press.

We aim to make sure that service users from all sections of our communities are:

- Aware of our existence;
- Aware of what LIDAS does;
- Aware of how to get access to our services.

6.2.9 The Open Door Policy

We will endeavour to accept and provide refuge for any woman from Lincolnshire who needs it in an emergency situation until space can be found for her elsewhere. However, we cannot jeopardise the safety and security of the refuge, residents and staff. This includes adhering to the Health and Safety policy and any limits on numbers staying in the refuge.

We will work with other relevant organisations such as mental health services, drugs or alcohol related services and social services to help ensure that support given to all service users experiencing domestic abuse is appropriate, whether or not the service users concerned use our services. This includes general awareness raising with specific organisations, for example, on the nature and effects of domestic abuse and the need for confidentiality. It may also include working together to help support or protect particularly service users.

We will consider offering our services to all and no-one will be refused help outright without an exceptionally good reason. This support may include outreach support or group work, even if another agency steps in.

6.2.10 Policy on Interpreting and Translating Services

If a service user cannot speak English, or if their first language is not English, we will make all possible steps to find interpreters (for speech) and translators (for written word, for example, filling in forms). We will liaise with the local authority to ensure that we know what languages are spoken in the local population and to make sure that all staff know how to contact and use interpreting and translating services.

We are aware that in some circumstances the interpreter can be a risk for the service user affected by domestic abuse. We know that sometimes interpreters may be telling them things we haven't said or giving their own opinion based on their own assumptions and prejudices. Interpreters may also pose a security risk for the service users if the local population of speakers of their language is very small. Every effort should be made to ensure that this does not happen, for example, by working with the local authority on screening and training for interpreters, using interpreters from out of the local area or from a different community to the service user, using Language Line (telephone interpreting).

Where resources allow, publicity information shall be translated into languages representative of the different sections of the community. Even if this is not possible special effort shall be made to publicise the services to ethnic minority groups in the community.

6.2.11 Cultural Needs

LIDAS shall make every effort to make sure that the organisation as a whole and individuals working within it are aware of the specific needs and experiences of service users from specific cultural groups and of the services and organisations available to meet those needs.

We recognise that contrary to many assumptions, from all the available evidence it seems that domestic abuse takes place in every culture, including all those in the UK, whether indigenous or not. Users of our services come from every culture and so we should not make assumptions about domestic abuse and culture. Service users may have specific experiences of domestic abuse and seeking help that are related to their culture or to particular needs. From all the available evidence, there is resistance in some form against domestic abuse in most or all cultures, depending on the level of repression in particular states. Staff and volunteers should therefore not assume that domestic abuse is universally accepted in a particular culture. If a woman from a particular culture has left an abusive partner this is in itself evidence that it is not universally accepted.

LIDAS is absolutely committed to the principle that everyone should be safe from violence, threats and fear in their homes and relationships, regardless of culture or beliefs about relationships and gender roles. Staff and volunteers should make it clear when appropriate that domestic abuse is never acceptable and that we are here to support all service users affected by it whatever their family structure or culture.

Service users seeking refuge from their abuser are trying to protect themselves and their children, not escaping from their culture. They may choose to change how they express their culture or they may not. This should make no difference to the level of protection and support we provide. However, it may mean that some service users will prefer to be supported by organisations or individuals better able than we are to understand these decisions and the culture concerned. We will help each woman using our services to

make informed choices about her future and about her needs and wherever possible ensure that those needs are met.

A common relevant misunderstanding is the assumption that arranged marriages are aLIDASys enforced and therefore inherently abusive. This is not so. Arranged marriages are not the same as enforced marriages, they are simply another way of making the decision about how to start a permanent relationship in which to bring up a family. Just as with non-arranged marriages, some are abusive and some are not. Enforced marriages, where the woman or both parties have no say in the decision or are forced by threats or violence to co-operate are not the same as arranged marriages, although some that are described as arranged may in fact be enforced. We recognise that abuse may take place in all forms of marriage and relationship and that all those experiencing this abuse have rights to support and protection.

6.2.12 Living Arrangements

LIDAS shall look at its living arrangements including eating, sleeping and cooking, bathrooms, etc. to ensure that the needs of the individual woman are taken into account. This may involve setting aside suitable space for Moslems in the month of Ramadan to fast and pray or ensuring that service users from certain religions with eating restrictions or vegetarians do not have to share same cooking utensils with others.

6.2.13 Anti-Discrimination in Service Provision.

LIDAS recognises that service users with disabilities (including invisible disability), working class service users, lesbians, black service users and service users from other minority groups are discriminated against. We recognise the double and multi discrimination that they suffer and that as service users they too suffer the social attitudes that deprive service users of opportunities and of realising their full potential. We recognise that this discrimination is based on false assumptions, myths and stereotypes about lesbians, black service users, disabled service users and working class service users and that it is widespread.

It is part of our policy to actively encourage these groups of service users to join the management group, to apply for jobs and to use our services.

We shall do this by:

- 1 Making use of the resources available to improve access to our premises;
- 2 Having relevant literature / publicity and positive images around for service users using the refuge and centres, volunteers, workers and management group members.
- 3 Constructively challenging stereotyped images.
- 4 Challenging behaviour which is discriminatory.
- 5 Making positive links with relevant agencies which specifically work with service users from minority groups, with lesbians and disabled people.
- 6 Having relevant literature, toys, positive images and other cultural items and food for children using the services.
- 7 Supporting lesbian mothers in child and family court proceedings, where appropriate, and supporting any of the committee members in this position.
- 8 Providing the same family related benefits (e.g. compassionate leave) for lesbian employees as for their heterosexual colleagues.

6.2.14 Responsibility for Dependants

We recognise that service users with dependants may face discrimination and that responsibility for dependants is very much an assumed role. Dependants may be children, old people, people with

disabilities. It will be part of our policy to counteract this by:

- 1 Providing flexi-employment practice.
- 2 Having adequate maternity / childcare leave for both natural and adoptive mothers.
- 3 Recognising different family structures and in particular the child care responsibilities of service users for children they are co-parenting.

We acknowledge the rights of all the above groups including MC members to attend management meetings and in recognition of their caring responsibilities it will be part of our policy that the appropriate provision will be made to enable all service users to attend the above meetings.

Agreed: July 2011
Review due: July 2014