

# EastSide Good Relations Charter



EastSide  
Early Years  
Network



# Introduction

The EastSide Early Years Network (EYN) consists of c. 22 early years settings from across East Belfast – including pre-school, nursery, and day-care provision. Collectively these settings provide early years education, development, and support to children across the communities that make up this part of the city. The Network provides peer support, shares best practice and resources, facilitates training, and arranges events for member groups.

This Charter and Action Plan is designed to assist the early years settings associated to the EYN identify actions they can take to achieve the commitments set out to ensure that we are all doing everything we can to acknowledge, value and celebrate the continually increasing diversity of the community we serve.

This Charter and Action Plan were created through consultation with service providers and families within the EastSide Years Network and is intended to help guide organisations that strive for excellence in regards to Good Relations.

For the purpose of this document **Good Relations** is defined as the ***promotion of equality, respect and diversity.***

East Belfast is a vibrant and developing part of the city with an increasingly diverse population. The EYN has an ambition to play their part to the full to create a fairer, safer, accessible and inclusive community where everyone feels they belong, has a voice and an equal opportunity to succeed and thrive.

# Charter Commitments

We are committed to making a real difference by:

- Making each setting a welcoming place where everyone feels they belong;
- Inspiring trust and confidence in all the services we offer;
- Recognising, valuing and celebrating diversity;
- Building good relations and understanding between people;
- Promoting inclusion, participation and equal access; and
- Challenging discrimination, harassment, bullying, hate crime and victimization.

Settings which adopt this charter are committed to improving equality and promoting good relations across East Belfast in these six key areas which are outlined in detail.

## **1. Making settings a welcoming place where everyone feels they belong**

We want to promote a sense of belonging for communities including newcomers and those with less representation. We want individuals to see themselves represented and welcomed within early years settings and understand the positive effect this can create for the wider community.

## **2. Inspiring trust and confidence in all the services we offer**

We want to ensure that everyone, from the children who we care for to their parents and indeed the wider community around our settings know that they can expect fair treatment as a right when engaging with a charter affiliated setting. We all have a part to play in creating an environment in which our service users can have trust and confidence in all the services we have to offer. What options are available to help us achieve this may differ depending on the type of setting we are, but we must nevertheless do all we can to inspire trust and confidence with families, communities and staff.

## **3. Recognising, valuing and celebrating diversity**

In addition to the well-evidenced benefits that diversity can bring to organisations, there are many good reasons why we should support opportunities to celebrate the increasing cultural diversity of people in East Belfast.

Cultural competence in early childhood education is an opportunity to increase the sense of belonging of individuals while enabling groups of young people to become more aware of and engage positively with both our differences and our similarities. It is important that young children across East Belfast today grow up with an appreciation and respect for the diversity of cultures, races, abilities, genders and ethnicities that surround them.

Early childhood education provides the ideal setting for children to learn about different cultures and form friendships with people from a wide range of backgrounds. By promoting understanding of difference and diversity, early childhood educators can assist children and their families to build positive relationships with their local communities.

As individuals and organisations across East Belfast we also need to recognise that having an understanding and appreciation of the values, beliefs and practices of people who are from diverse backgrounds and who have had different experiences from our own can make a significant impact of wider social issues of poverty, health and quality of life.

#### **4. Building good relations and understanding between people**

A cohesive community is one where strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and socially within neighbourhoods.

No group should be marginalised or discriminated against because of their backgrounds and beliefs. This includes minority groups with little representation who may experience discrimination because of the small size of their community. We need to find ways of including hard-to-reach and seldom heard groups. Early Years setting can have a unique opportunity to engage with young children and their families in a safe and non-threatening environment as a form of community hub. This in turn can empower those people to build on positive relationships with other service providers and build up their sense of belonging and being part of the community in East Belfast.

## 5. Promoting inclusion, participation and equal access

We want all our associated settings to help create an environment where people from diverse backgrounds know and feel that they are properly included by encouraging interaction and participation. Participation is a genuine two-way ongoing dialogue and an opportunity for all users to play their part as much as possible in decision making in the services offered.

Equal treatment involves much more than simply treating everyone the same. It also entails understanding that for some more effort is necessary to meet their particular needs to ensure genuine equality of access or opportunity. This includes considering the need of those who come from a position of persistent and longstanding disadvantage.

## 6. Challenging discrimination, harassment, bullying, hate crime and victimisation

We expect all associated settings to take action to challenge discrimination, harassment, bullying, hate crime and victimisation. In order to be able to feel empowered to do this it is vital that there is a clear understanding of what these terms really mean, and that there are robust and straightforward processes in place to take action.

**Discrimination** - Discrimination is generally recognised in two distinct forms. Firstly, 'direct discrimination' occurs if you treat someone less favourably because they have, or you think they have a characteristic protected under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 - for example refusing to employ them or offer them a service that they would otherwise be able to receive. 'Indirect discrimination' is where a practice, policy or rule applies to everyone in the same way, but has a non-obvious disproportionate negative impact on some people - for example a dress code that restricts certain ethnic groups or faith communities more than others.

**Harassment** - is 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 for that individual.

**Bullying** - is undermining, humiliating or intimidating behaviour that is linked to an abuse of power. Although there is no legal definition of bullying, organisations such as early years settings are responsible for ensuring a safe and healthy working environment (Health and Safety at Work Act 1974). They also have responsibility to address workplace risks to health and safety (The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999) - which includes the negative impact of bullying in the workplace.

**Hate Crime** - is a criminal offence that is motivated by hostility or prejudice, based on disability, race, religion, sexual orientation or transgender identity. This includes where the victim is not actually a member of a group protected under Section 75, but is thought to be. Incidents against women that are motivated by misogyny are not currently included in hate crime legislation, but this is under review.

**Victimisation** - is treating someone badly because they have (or you think they have) made a claim or complaint of discrimination, or if they help someone who has been discriminated against.

# Charter Actions

There are six key areas that settings of different size or type can focus on to achieve the commitments of the EastSide Early Years Network Good Relations Charter. These actions should be about working towards realisation of the commitments detailed previously.

*It must be stated that the we recognise that these actions are to an extent aspirational, as we appreciate that buy in from senior management and available funding and resources will ultimately determine the ability of individual settings to implement what is detailed overleaf. The actions detailed are suggestions that may be used to help guide daily practice and planning where possible.*

Above all, this action plan encourages settings to consistently strive for excellence in good relations above and beyond their statutory requirements.

# 1. Recognise, support and empower those responsible for promoting equality and good relations in each setting

This charter would consider it best practice to allocate an identifiable person or group of people in your organisation who will take the lead in coordinating and promoting equality and diversity in the form of a Good Relations Lead. That individual/team would provide a central focus on reviewing relevant policies and processes, learning opportunities, training needs and courses for staff, and outreach activities to include family members to allow the setting to work towards individually tailored goals, and ensuring that everyone is kept updated and involved.

To carry out their role successfully the individual/team will need sufficient time, training and resources, plus support and 'buy-in' from both internal senior management and external funding providers and colleagues.

Everyone in the organisation should have an understanding of the part they play in promoting good relations as part of their role.

## **Recommendations:**

- 1.The setting has an equalities/Good relations policy that clearly details its commitment to fostering good relations. This policy is reviewed and updated regularly.
- 2.Each setting has a named Equalities/Good Relations Lead (or team). It is clear who this person is to both staff and service users.
- 3.Settings allocate resources and time for their equalities lead(s) to achieve their goals.
- 4.Senior Management and funders understand the importance of equality when making decisions.

## **2. Listen to and understand the diverse needs of all our users to ensure that our information, services, and practice are accessible and inclusive.**

Whilst it would be expected that settings meet the requirements outlined in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, settings can also try to understand other factors that may affect some users that could mean they might not be treated equally – e.g. being homeless, children in care and care leavers. In order to ensure equal access to services and opportunities some communities may need extra resources and consideration.

In terms of basic “musts”, the disability discrimination Act 1995 states clearly that it is unlawful to discriminate against anyone on the grounds below:

- refusing or deliberately omitting to provide any service which you offer to or provide to members of the public, or a section of the public
- providing service of a lower (inferior) standard or quality
- providing service in a worse manner
- providing service on less favourable terms
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In addition to ensuring that necessary adjustments are made to avoid the points above, setting should also ensure they are meeting the needs of people with sensory impairments, and recognise that some people have hidden impairments, learning difficulties and neurodiversity (covering conditions such as dyslexia, autism, ADHD etc) that may not be obvious or visible. By listening to and understanding the diverse needs of users, both children and parents/carers, settings can take positive steps to ensure that everyone is able fully participate in their services and educational activities e.g. by providing information in a variety of accessible formats.

Another key method of increasing accessibility and engagement is to ensure that, as far as possible, decisions should be made with the full and direct participation of people who are likely to be affected by them. Each setting would find it useful to be clear about the different levels of engagement (i.e. informing, consulting, participating, and co-producing) and when these are appropriate.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Settings' information is written in clear simple language and is available in different formats (e.g. translations, Braille, audio or large print if required).
2. Welcome signage and information should be available in a variety of languages relevant to the families attending the service.
3. Ensure that communication with parent/carers and children is a key practice of the setting. A dedicated method of communication for parents is recommended for example SeeSaw, Whatsapp or Tapestry.
4. Settings are aware of their service users' needs, backgrounds and their differing requirements, and nurture effective working relationships with diverse communities they interact with.
5. Settings take steps to evaluate the equalities profile of their service users to identify if any communities are under-represented, and develop an appropriate plan to improve communications and access if needed.
6. Settings use all available data and information about diversity across East Belfast to understand the needs of their service users.
7. Settings use all available feedback received from diverse communities to help shape future services and let everyone know what difference their opinions have made.
8. Settings provide appropriate opportunities for local communities from across the Section 75 categories to actively participate in and influence their decision-making.

# 3. Ensure equality of opportunity is integral to how the recruitment and treatment of staff.

Organisations are legally required to make sure that their staff are treated equally and are given the same opportunities regardless of their race, age, sex, sexuality, disability, or other protected characteristic.

This extends to recruitment and retention of staff, career progression, training and development, and the way we deal with grievances and disciplinary issues. All settings must take the necessary steps to ensure that they comply with this principle and treat all members of staff equally and fairly.

## **Recommendations:**

1. Settings will advertise job vacancies in a range of ways to ensure a wide pool of applicants.
2. Settings will make sure that job descriptions do not contain discriminatory statements or criteria.
3. Settings will provide suitable equality training for interview panels and will have a fair and transparent recruitment process.
4. Settings will make sure they have a complaints and grievance procedure in place.
5. Settings will include equality, diversity and good relations in their induction process.
6. Settings will ensure that necessary adjustments are in place to interview disabled applicants who meet essential criteria
7. Settings will promote flexible working patterns wherever possible to maximise opportunities for people with caring responsibilities.

# 4. Address all allegations of discrimination, harassment, bullying and victimisation in an effective and timely manner

All settings must make sure they have the policies and procedures in place to be able to respond effectively to incidents of discrimination, harassment, victimisation and bullying – so that unacceptable behaviour is dealt with immediately and appropriately.

Advice on recognising and reporting hate crime can be found here <https://www.psni.police.uk/crime/hate-crime/>

## Recommendations:

1. All settings have clear policies about what behaviour is unacceptable and straightforward procedures to ensure that allegations of discrimination, harassment and victimisation will always be taken seriously and dealt with promptly.
2. Settings will provide training for all staff to give them the confidence to report and challenge discrimination, harassment and victimisation – including domestic violence or abuse they may become aware of.
3. Settings should have a whistleblowing procedure to allow genuine concerns to be raised openly or confidentially without victimisation or other negative consequences.
4. Settings will not shy away from taking action against staff whose behaviour may be understood as discriminatory, harassing or belittling to service users and colleagues from diverse communities.
5. Settings will keep records on the number and type of complaints of harassment and the action taken to resolve them.

# 5. Play our part in promoting good relations between people from different backgrounds

Community cohesion cannot be imposed but settings have a role to play in working with other community groups and associations to progress initiatives to promote good relations and understanding between members of the local community across East Belfast with different backgrounds and beliefs for the benefit of all.

To carry out their role successfully the individual/team will need sufficient time, training and resources, plus support and 'buy-in' from both internal senior management and external funding providers and colleagues. Everyone in the organisation should have an understanding of the part they play in promoting good relations as part of their role.

## **Recommendations:**

1. Settings will work to engage with, coordinate with, and where possible have a presence at local multi-cultural community events.
2. Settings will provide opportunities for learning about different cultures, and including different key cultural celebrations dates in the curriculum for the children e.g. Chinese new year, Diwali, Ramadan etc
3. Settings will work to counter negative stereotypes and dispel myths in their learning and communications.
4. Settings will make use of diverse toys and teaching resources including books, dolls and songs to ensure that children from all backgrounds feel represented.
5. Settings will provide educational opportunities for service users and staff to increase knowledge of cultures, facilitating opportunities to learn from cultural natives where possible.
6. Where possible settings should facilitate conversations between parents/carers for example through provision of a parent's room, open door policies or parents/carer events.

## 6. Measure and share our progress and success

All settings should be fully transparent with their staff and service users about how well they are doing with improving equality and promoting good relations. Settings can also share relevant data with appropriate organisations across East Belfast to contribute to shared data benchmarking, which in turn would facilitate a richer and more complete data set on equality and promotion of good relations across East Belfast.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Settings should establish means to measure and review their success in meeting equality and good relations objectives and targets.
2. Settings should, as far as is reasonable, collect, collate and make available to relevant authorities diversity information about their staffing and service users.
3. Settings should regularly ask service users how satisfied they are with our services and analyse this by equalities groups.
4. Setting should share, where legally permitted, equality information with relevant partners to achieve shared goals.
5. Settings should publicise positive changes and initiatives made in response to feedback using a “we asked, you told us, we did” type system.
6. Share learning with the EYN to contribute to benchmarking and shared data.

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