

Equal Opportunities Policy

SEN-den's mission, as a not-for-profit, community interest company, is to provide play, information, and support services to families in Enfield who have young autistic children; we define "young" as children aged 8 and under.

SEN-den (play, info, support) CIC recognises and upholds the Equality Act 2010, and the nine protected characteristics – age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

1. General Statement

1.1 In delivering its mission, SEN-den is committed to achieving equal opportunities in its services and when involving volunteers and other therapists or professionals to deliver activities for families. No service user, volunteer, therapist or other professional should receive less favourable treatment because of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, or HIV/Aids status, or any other criterion not relevant to the point at issue.

1.2 Directors and volunteers of SEN-den and any therapists or other professionals we work with accept responsibility to promote equal opportunities and challenge discrimination wherever it occurs.

1.3 Directors, volunteers, therapists and other professionals we work with, and service users of SEN-den must all ensure that no service user, volunteer, therapist or professional we work with receives less favourable treatment than any other, on the grounds stated in paragraph 1.1 of this policy.

1.4 Autism is an extremely broad, spectrum condition which affects every single autistic child differently, typically in terms of their sensory needs and preferences, how they communicate, and their behaviours in a group setting. Hence, we recognise that the children's activities that SEN-den offers will not be suitable for every single young, autistic child living in Enfield.

2. Volunteers

2.1 SEN-den is committed to equal opportunities and diversity. This commitment extends to our volunteers and we welcome everyone from our community as a volunteer.

2.2 SEN-den values difference, and recognises the value that the different backgrounds, skills, outlooks, and experiences of volunteers bring to the organisation.

2.3 All applications from potential volunteers will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and careful consideration will be given as to whether any adjustments that are required to support the volunteer to feel comfortable and be effective in their role, are reasonable, and proportionate, within the context of a very, small organisation with extremely limited supervision capacity.

2.4 SEN-den will bring this policy to the attention of all those in the organisation responsible for recruiting volunteers, to potential and actual volunteers, service users, therapists, and other professionals we work with, and will provide such training as is necessary to ensure that the policy is effective and that everyone is aware of it.

2.5 SEN-den will not tolerate behaviour that contradicts the letter or spirit of this equal opportunities policy.

3. Service Delivery

3.1 SEN-den is committed to equal opportunities and diversity in its service delivery. All activities and services will be advertised as widely as possible to ensure that the widest community can gain access to the services / activities we provide.

3.2 Services provided by SEN-den value difference, and recognises the value that the different backgrounds, outlooks and experiences of varied service users will bring to our activities / services.

3.3 Where an activity offered by SEN-den is unsuitable for particular autistic children, SEN-den will endeavour to signpost families to alternative activities that may be more suitable. Where alternatives are limited, or even non-existent, SEN-den will highlight, in its ongoing rights-based advocacy work with statutory providers, that autistic children with higher needs are currently underserved, and they have a duty to facilitate play and leisure opportunities for these children.

3.4 SEN-den will bring this policy to the attention of all therapists and other professionals we work with to deliver our services and / or activities to families. SEN-den will not knowingly work with agencies or individuals who do not support this policy. SEN-den's Directors, volunteers and service users will promote equal opportunities and challenge discrimination if it occurs.

4. Use of Language

4.1 SEN-den's Directors, therapists and other professionals we work with, volunteers and service users will avoid, and challenge, the use of language which, in any way, belittles or attacks individuals on the grounds stated in paragraph 1.1 of this policy, or for any other reason which is likely to cause distress, hurt or offence.

4.2 SEN-den's Directors, volunteers and service users will avoid, and challenge, the use of language which, in any way, belittles or attacks groups of people on the grounds stated in paragraph 1.1 of this policy, or for any other reason which is likely to cause distress, hurt or offence, whether people belonging to those groups are present or not.

4.3 While SEN-den recognises and values diversity of opinion, one of the fundamental principles underpinning our mission and ethos is that we help families to accept and embrace their child's autism. We do not believe that autism is a condition that can be treated, and we will not facilitate or encourage discussions about interventions to cure autism. We will instead encourage parents and carers to support and accept their child(ren)'s autism as a lifelong, form of neurodiversity.

5. Harassment / Bullying

5.1 SEN-den defines harassment as *“unwanted conduct that has the purpose or the effect of violating dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading or offensive environment”*. This can include sexual harassment e.g. innuendo, suggestive remarks or gestures, display of explicit or suggestive drawings or written material, unwanted touching or comments about appearance; racial harassment e.g. racist jokes, abusive remarks, and gestures; and comments which make a person feel undermined or uncomfortable because of who they are.

5.2 SEN-den recognises diversity of opinion and values freedom of expression and is aware that the language used to describe autistic individuals varies - and is in evolution. As an example of this, there is a greater emphasis currently on concepts such as neurodiversity. This means that parents and carers may have different opinions and preferences around the language that is used to describe their children e.g. my child *has autism*, I have a child *with autism*, my child *is autistic* etc. These are all acceptable and we will not tolerate service users judging, berating, or making other service users feel uncomfortable, about the language that they choose, and prefer, to use - so long as it is not overtly offensive, as per 4.1 above.

5.3 SEN-den defines bullying as *“shouting or swearing at people, persistent or unwarranted criticism, ignoring or excluding people, sabotaging or impeding work or activities, removing areas of responsibility without explanation, or imposing excessively demanding tasks with the expectation of failure”*.

5.4 SEN-den will not tolerate harassment or bullying of, or by, any Director, therapist or other professional, volunteer or service user, and will ensure that such behaviour is confronted and dealt with.