

THE ACTION GROUP'S EQUITY AND INCLUSION PROGRESS REPORT TO THE BOARD

- 2022 / 2023 -

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INTRODUCTION

The Action Group is committed to being an inclusive employer and provider of services. Since 2018 we have worked alongside Stonewall to develop our policy and practices around being a good employer and provider of services for people who identify as Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer (LGBTQ+). This led to us attaining silver status on Stonewall's workplace equality index. Work to maintain and develop this good practice is ongoing.

In 2021 TAG created a part-time equalities officer post to help drive progress. The officer has a remit to progress all Equity Diversity and Inclusion workstreams but was asked to focus specifically on improving our inclusivity for Black Asian and Minority Ethnic people and help us progress as an 'anti-racist' organisation. (Anti-racist means opposing racism and promoting racial equality). Therefore, the report that follows is mainly focussed on progression made in this area

Context to progressing within diversity at TAG

The Action Group's data is poor but the data we do have suggests that our staff may not reflect the communities we serve. From analysis of data in 2022, we only know that 4% of our workforce is made up of Black Asian Minority Ethnic people when 18% of people living in Edinburgh (where the majority of our activity takes place) identified as being Black, Asian minority Ethnic at the 2011 census. (It is worth noting that diversity in the other areas we operate in are much lower than 18% (Falkirk 5% - East Lothian, Midlothian, West Lothian all under 5%). However, it is also worth noting that the 2021 census is expected to show an increase in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic populations over all.

Again, data is poor, but the data we have, suggests that Black Minority Ethnic People are also not adequately reflected in positions of management and seniority at The Action Group.

INTRODUCTION

Suspected lack of diversity within workforce is mirrored in support services: That we know of, only 4% of people who receive support from HAACS and CAATs identify as Black Asian or Minority Ethnic. It is worth noting that these low statistics will likely also reflect the additional barriers that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities can face when trying to access their rights and support services through social work. Diversity stats for Real jobs (13%) and Advice (16%) are more encouraging.

Lack of diversity in the third sector isn't an issue that applies to the Action Group only. An organisation called 'Charity So White' developed in 2019, to spark a conversation about racism in the charity sector. It developed in response to the discovery of training materials by Citizens Advice titled 'Barriers to working with BAME communities'. A slide included deeply concerning racist stereotypes about Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, reducing diverse groups to generalisations about 'low levels of literacy' and 'intrinsically cash-centred cultures.'

People from Black Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, began to speak up about their negative experiences of working in the charitable sector. 'Charities so White' calls for organisations to: acknowledge that institutional racism exists in the third sector; to have honest and critical conversations about racism; to give Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities 'a seat at the table' and commit to prioritising anti-racist work.

Why does it matter?

The Action Group is an organisation established around the ethos of social justice. Our vision is that people with learning disabilities and support needs encounter no barriers to their chosen lifestyle. We want to ensure this includes all diverse groups- including people from Black Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

Lack of diversity in our workforce and leadership means we do not benefit from the lived-experience, diverse cultures and insight that could enrich us and help us develop to be an even better employer and provider of services .

THEMES OF WORK

TAG's overall aim is to have a more diverse and inclusive workforce: by recruiting and retaining more Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff we will ensure that we reflect the communities that we serve - making us a better provider of services and a better employer and benefitting from a wider range of perspectives.

Therefore, some work strands have focussed on having a more diverse reach when recruiting. Other work streams have focussed on making The Action Group a more welcoming and supportive place to work for Black Asian and Minority Ethnic staff (including making sure that all staff and people we support, have a better understanding of Equality and how to respond to discrimination).



External

Consultations to help us understand our areas of development and partnership working



Safe Spaces

Conversations with staff of colour to help us support them better

Senior staff work

Anti-racism and inclusion discussions - to set the standard for The organisation

Internal work

Anti-racism training development, policies, Equality Network, Inclusion sessions



PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Communications were sent out to organisations based in the Edinburgh area who support Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people - Saheliya, Intercultural Youth Scotland, SCOREscotland and Amina. This was to explore how we could attract communities they are working with, to apply for work at The Action Group.

SCORESCOTLAND

SCOREscotland are a social justice organisation who work to address the causes of racism. They responded to the communication, and a session at SCORE Scotland's office was arranged to speak to people who use SCORE's services about The Action Group, and a possible career in the Care Sector in Feb 2023.

This was delivered by a presentation and Q&A with around 20 people who attended SCORE's lunch club

Attendees were also invited to speak about any concerns or barriers which they may face in applying for work with The Action Group.

OUTCOME

Two people stated that they were ready to apply but wanted to know if The Action Group can sponsor workers - this query has been passed to HR. One person spoke of her intentions to go to the Instant Interview day. Two other people sent queries by email. This relationship will be maintained with regular visits to SCORE Scotland and posters and flyers with a named contact, and regular email communications about Action Group vacancies.

SCOREscotland
breaking barriers. changing lives

Have you ever thought about working in the Care Sector?

Recruitment Information Session

Monday 6th February, 11.30am - 1pm during lunch club
Lunch will be provided

THE Action GROUP

Come and ask any questions about Support Work!

About The Action Group

The Action Group have been supporting disabled people and their families in the Edinburgh area for more than 40 years, and we want our workforce to be as diverse as the community who we serve.

Work with us

- Instant Interview Days
- Full paid training
- Supportive organisation
- Fun and varied role
- Living Wage Employer
- Fair Work Employer

WHALE Arts Centre
Ask Adil for details

External

Internal work

CEMVO

Work continues with CEMVO Scotland - is a national intermediary organisation and strategic partner of the Scottish Government Equality Unit - in several strands:

- **Policies** - CEMVO provided feedback on policies and the inclusion of Human Right's legislation. This is to ensure that The Action Group follows best practice on policy development based on new Scottish Government legislation.
- **A Zero Tolerance Approach** to discriminatory behaviour was added to our Dignity at Work Policy. Based on feedback from managers, this gives guidance about how to respond to incidents of discrimination from people we support or family members.
- **"Experiencing discrimination"** was placed as a risk factor on Lone Working Risk Assessments. This allowed additional risks for anyone with Protected Characteristics to be discussed.
- **Human Rights-based Data** - CEMVO gave a session to the Equality Officer and HR representatives about using PANEL principles (Participation, Accountability, Non-Discrimination and Equality, Empowerment and Legality) to improve The Action Group's monitoring of demographic data using a Human Rights-based approach. This is to ensure that the Action Group can better understand if there are any barriers at any stage of the employment process for any groups. A **campaign** has been developed to capture this data - this will be communicated to staff after final approval.
- **Recruitment** - A further meeting with CEMVO and HR representatives has been arranged to explore The Action Group's recruitment processes to ensure that they are accessible to all communities.

Funding applications

A joint application with Saheliya (an Edinburgh-based organisation who specialise in mental health support for Black and Asian Minority ethnic women) was submitted to the Workplace Equality Fund (WEF) in April 2022. This application was to fund a full-time Equality Officer to deliver a joint Employability Project: where women who use Saheliya's service would be coached into employment with The Action Group.

This would have increased the diversity within The Action Group workforce and also increased community knowledge about Disability and support services.

Sadly competition for the funding was significant and the application was not successful, and no feedback was offered to improve future applications. The WEF has not yet opened for this year - there are reports from the Scottish Government about budget cuts so it is unclear if this fund will be available in future.



Events and Activities

Equality Network

Ongoing discussion about these topics surrounding diversity and inclusion

Management to prioritise diversity issues and understanding our lived experience

According to our Safe Space Conversations, our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff felt that having a space for ongoing discussions about Equality was important so that the organisation learned more about their lived experiences - see quotes. This Equality Network meetings were an avenue for those voices to be heard.

Event attendance has been especially challenging over the past year - staffing shortages have meant that teams have had to prioritise covering support services with little spare time for attending Network meetings.

People who we support showed less interest in virtual meetings in early 2022, yet have not always had support at the time of meetings to attend in person.

However, Equality Network meetings were held for:



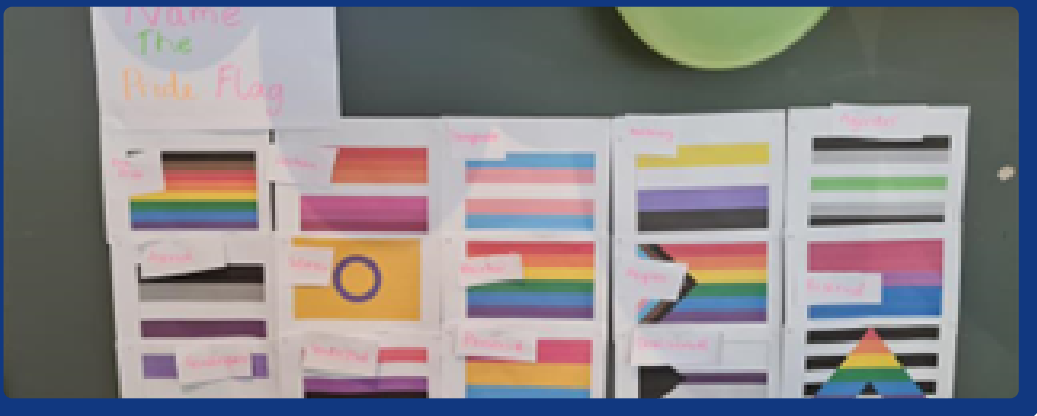
Neurodiversity Celebration week – with 6 neurodivergent staff attending to discuss their experiences of being a neurodivergent staff member in a virtual meeting



Pride – with staff and people we support singing karaoke and enjoying snacks and games at the Portobello hub. This was The Equality Network’s first in-person meeting.



Black History Month – sadly this had to be cancelled due to illness, but was rearranged as part of Human Rights Day in December.



EQUALITY NETWORK MONTHLY MEETING

Monday 30th January
Portobello Hub

January's meeting is to plan future activities

1.30pm - 3pm

Passionate about equality issues? Join us on the last Monday of every Month at the Hub.

Network meetings began again in January 2023, and were scheduled to be held monthly at The Hub. A monthly newsletter has also been developed to communicate Equality work to staff.

All meetings are advertised on Teams, ASC, Facebook and in the weekly communication pack. Network meetings and events ensures that The Action Group is seen to stand in solidarity with marginalised staff. During our Safe Space conversations, it was clear that staff feel seen if their workplace values their diverse backgrounds.

Protected Characteristic Channels were launched on Teams. These were to facilitate discussion, networking and support between staff of different Equality groups. A small number of staff have joined these groups, however these will be re-advertised via the Newsletter and during relevant Inclusion events.



Equality Newsletter February 2023

INCLUSION SESSIONS

At the Action Group we want to have a statement that lets everybody know they are welcome and will be appreciated for who they are. Gayle and myself met people we support at Duke Street to talk about what it meant to be included. This is so that we have right words in our statement. The people in Duke Street said that Being Included covers themes like communication, feeling safe, equality and fun!

EQUALITY NETWORK MEETING FEBRUARY IS LGBT HISTORY MONTH

Are you an equality ally, but not sure how to talk about it? Join us for our monthly Equality Network meetings - in Feb the theme is LGBT History. Open to all staff and people we support
Monday 27th February
1.30 - 3pm at The Hub

WORK WITH CEMVO

The Equality Officer and HR have been working with CEMVO, a capacity-building organisation working to support Ethnic Minority people in the voluntary sector. This has been to make our policies more inclusive, improve our recruitment of Minority Ethnic people and improve our demographic data collection.

STAFF NETWORKS

STAFF ARE WELCOME TO JOIN EQUALITY NETWORKS FOR PROTECTED CHARACTERISTIC GROUPS - PLEASE [CLICK HERE FOR DETAILS](#)

In March we'll be celebrating International Women's Day, International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the beginning of Ramadan

If you have any questions about any Equality issue, please feel free to email Laura at: equality@actiongroup.org.uk

External Activities

The Equality Officer attended the staff conference, Livingston Pride with two people who we support in June, the Milan Mela in July and Fresher's Fair at Livingston College in September.

As well as showing The Action Group's commitment to Equality, attendance at these events were also as outreach for recruitment and community support.



ANTI-RACISM TRAINING

Learning and Development is crucial to developing a fair and safe work space for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff.

The equalities officer has designed relevant, high-quality anti-racism training content, which grounds anti-racism in the Scottish climate, and in a disability context.

Our online training platform LMS was seen as the best way of ensuring that this content is accessed by all staff and was viable for the longer term. To make the training as engaging and meaningful as possible, L&D started the task of animating the training in the summer of 2022. This is a very lengthy procedure, where a few seconds of video takes hours of work.

The first module of the training course is animated and on LMS, with the course animations, supplementary videos, short quiz and discussion forum. This has been shared with Team Managers and will be communicated to the wider staff team by the middle of April.

The second module's animations will take a month, however at the end of the process The Action Group will have an anti-racism training course which is specific to our values as an organisation. This will become part of the mandatory training package, and staff will also be able to use it to teach the people we support about anti-racism.

As the course was originally designed to be a face-to-face session, the material developed will be used to deliver anti-racism training to external third-sector organisations – this is being piloted in March 2023.

INCLUSION STATEMENT

Internal
work

Senior
staff
work

The Action Group worked with Mahogany Inclusion Partners in 2021 – 2022. Part of this work was to develop an Inclusion Vision and Mission statement. This statement is a wide-ranging commitment by The Action Group to put inclusion at the core of everything we do - in how we work with others, when we are making decisions, in our policies, in our communication and when working with external partners. People thrive when they feel safe to be their authentic selves at The Action Group.

In early 2022 a session was held with senior managers and Mahogany to develop a mission statement with Title, Deadline, Vision and Mission sections. To remain true to our commitment to inclusion, it was decided that everyone would get a chance to vote on the final sections of the statement which was piloted at the staff conference.

However, It became evident that the language of the Vision and Mission statement sections was inaccessible to the people we support, and that it was hard to choose from the sections if the journey to get there was unknown.

Therefore, Inclusion Sessions were co-designed and delivered with the Inclusion Officer to explore Being Included, Vision and Mission, and finally the words that people wanted to use for the Statement. This took participants on a journey using arts and craft, games and quizzes which increased their understanding, to empower them to answer the question. This method can be used as a framework to get meaningful engagement and inclusion – and have fun!

The session was piloted at The Studio and received glowing feedback from the people there. Their guidance enabled us to strengthen the sessions and deliver them in a shorter form at the Duke Street Day service – their input gave us some brilliant words for the Inclusion statement.

The session will be repeated with the Healthy Living Group in West Lothian in March, and at one further day centre in Edinburgh after this. The Inclusion statement will be launched by mid May 23.

Gayle and myself would like to give a special thanks to David Irvine who sadly passed away.

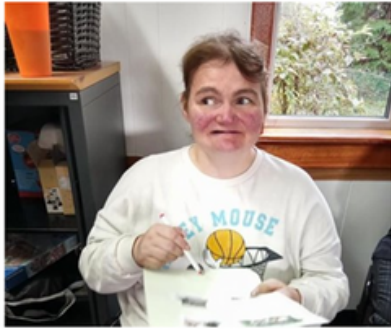
Through our sessions at The Studio, it was clear to see his passion and commitment to the Studio, the people he supported and the staff around him.

We could see how much David cared, and how much the people who he supported trusted and cared for David in return.

He was a shining light and we are grateful for getting the chance to work with him. His energy and humour filled the room and the world was a better place for having him in it.

STUDIO SESSION

“These sessions make me feel included!”



DUKE STREET SESSION

“When I started my transition, my support worker helped me to feel safe”



FUTURE WORK

·**Human Rights-based data Campaign** – when launched in April and after sufficient data is collected, The Action Group has the opportunity to develop an Intersectional Pay Gap report, which can analyse any barriers in application, recruitment, retention and pay of staff from any Protected Characteristic group, and interactions of discrimination (for example, what would be the pay and experiences of a Black disabled female staff member compared to a white male). This would mean that The Action Group could accurately outline any barriers within the organisation, and develop targeted actions to counter these.

·**Funding** – explore external funding available to extend the Equality Officer role and resources.

·**Anti-racism training** – complete and release module 2 of the LMS training by the beginning of May. Develop The Action Group's capacity to provide external anti-racism training for the Third Sector.

·**Continue Equality Network meetings** in the Prentice Centre, and find a core of people we support and staff to become Equality Champions.

·Continue development of partnerships with SCOREscotland, and circle back to previous organisations.

Hear from BAME people we support (and their families) to gain better understanding of their experience.

