Equal Opportunity Policy

1. Equality, Inclusion & Diversity

The purpose of this document is to make clear Choose Love’s commitment to the principles of equality and diversity. Choose Love is fully committed to the aim of preventing and eliminating discrimination in its internal policies and practices, its recruitment, and in the provision of its services to all its partner organisations.

The purpose of our policy is to:

● provide equality, fairness, and respect for all in our employment, whether temporary, part-time, or full-time

● not unlawfully discriminate because the Equality Act 2010 protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race (including colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origin), religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation (“protected characteristic”).

● oppose and avoid all forms of unlawful discrimination. This includes pay and benefits, terms, and conditions of employment, dealing with grievances and discipline, dismissal, redundancy, leave for parents, requests for flexible working, and selection for employment, promotion, training, or other developmental opportunities

Choose Love also expects all our colleagues to treat all those they have contact with during their professional lives in a way that avoids discrimination and promotes equality and diversity. We recognise the barriers some groups face and are committed to working to eliminate such disadvantages wherever it has the power to do so. Our company policies and procedures, when reviewed, are assessed to ensure their adherence to our equality and diversity policy.

2. Our Commitment

We are committed to:

● Encourage equality, diversity and inclusion across our working environment, partnerships, and suppliers.
● Create a working environment free of bullying, harassment, victimisation, and unlawful discrimination, promoting dignity and respect for all, and where individual differences and the contributions of all colleagues are recognised and valued.

● Our commitment includes training our line managers and all colleagues about their rights and responsibilities under the equality, diversity, and inclusion policy. Responsibilities include colleagues conducting themselves to help our company provide equal opportunities in employment, and prevent bullying, harassment, victimisation, and unlawful discrimination.

● All colleagues should understand they, as well as their employer, can be held liable for acts of bullying, harassment, victimisation, and unlawful discrimination, in the course of their employment, against fellow employees, customers, suppliers and the public.

● Take seriously complaints of bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination by fellow employees, customers, suppliers, visitors, the public and any others in the course of the organisation’s work activities. Such acts will be dealt with as misconduct under our Choose Love grievance and/or disciplinary procedures, and appropriate action will be taken. Particularly serious complaints could amount to gross misconduct and lead to dismissal without notice.

Further, sexual harassment may amount to both an employment rights matter and a criminal matter, such as in sexual assault allegations. In addition, harassment under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 – which is not limited to circumstances where harassment relates to a protected characteristic – is a criminal offence.

● We have a zero-tolerance policy towards all forms of discrimination and bullying and harassment. If discrimination is alleged, it will be investigated, and disciplinary action may be taken as appropriate (for all permanent employees).

Our Codes of Conduct for all colleagues make clear that discriminatory actions and those which do not recognise and appreciate the value of diversity are unacceptable behaviours. It should be noted that Race includes colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins under section 9 of the Equality Act 2010.

At Choose Love we operate a separate Bullying and Harassment Policy which provides further guidance on those forms of behaviour. To ensure our commitment is brought to life we have implemented the Equality and Diversity Officer and the Equality and Wellbeing committee.

We have appointed an Equality and Diversity Officer (EDO). The EDO leads a dedicated Equality Diversity and Inclusion Committee, which comprises members of the Executive Leader Team (ELT), Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and colleagues who volunteer their time. The committee meets bi-monthly and seeks to implement our annual equality, diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) objectives through specific initiatives and programmes of work that relate to both internal operational ways of working and our external facing work. The EDO will report on EDI issues to the ELT on a regular basis, to track progression, development, and support with the delivery of strategic projects.

Our EDO and EDI committee will be available to offer advice on EDI issues to our leadership and management roles who are seeking to resolve issues, or more generally, as appropriate, where EDI issues potentially arise.
3. Legislation

It is unlawful to discriminate against individuals in the circumstances set out in the Equality Act 2010. It is also unlawful for public bodies to discriminate against individuals in the enjoyment of their rights under the European Convention on Human Rights on any ground under the Human Rights Act 1998. No aspect of Choose Love’s policy detracts in any way from an individual’s right to present a claim in the Employment Tribunal, County Court or any other Court or Tribunal which deals with the enforcement of any of the provisions of the Equality Act, Human Rights Act, or other legislation.

Prohibited Conduct

Choose Love is opposed to all forms of discrimination, including:

a. **Harassment**: where a person engages in unwanted conduct in relation to a protected characteristic or of a sexual nature, which has the purpose or effect of violating that other person’s dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for him or her;

b. **Direct discrimination**: Where a person is treated less favourably because of his or her protected characteristic;

c. **Discrimination arising from a disability**, where a person is unjustifiably treated less favourably because of something arising in consequence of his or her disability;

d. **Indirect discrimination**: Where a provision, criterion or practice which cannot be justified is applied equally to all groups but has or would have a particular disadvantage for a group with a protected characteristic.

e. **Victimisation**: Where someone is treated less favourably than others because he or she has acted under the Employment Act, including making any allegation of unlawful conduct under the Employment Act;

f. **Breach of a reasonable adjustment’s duty**: Where there is a failure to comply with a duty to make reasonable adjustments to alleviate disadvantage to a disabled user of Choose Love, arising from his or her disability; and

g. **Discrimination by association** where someone is discriminated against because of their association with (such as their familial relationship with) a disabled person.

Individual responsibilities.

We encourage all colleagues and volunteers to have a personal responsibility to comply with this policy and to do their best to ensure that it is applied in their day-to-day work. They must not discriminate or help others to discriminate. We encourage our teams to champion choosing love above anything else, through their behaviour, attitude and conduct.

All colleagues have a right and duty to raise any concerns regarding a fellow colleague member’s failure to comply with this policy. Choose Love is committed to ensuring that no-one who raises an issue under this policy in good faith should be subjected to any detriment as a result.

Any victimisation of complaint, witness, or anyone else involved in the investigation of a complaint will also be viewed as a disciplinary matter. Breaches of this policy by colleagues may result in disciplinary action as set out in the applicable Disciplinary Procedures.

Management Responsibilities
The members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Executive Leadership Team (ELT) have special responsibilities for ensuring the effective implementation of the policy. They are required to apply the policy in the exercise of their managerial responsibilities. This may cover not only day-to-day working but also other areas including:

Advertising vacancies;
   a) the recruitment process for colleague and volunteers;
   b) the terms on which employment is offered and
   c) the training and promotion of all colleague.

**Recruitment**

Choose Love is committed to complying with fair recruitment obligations and principles in all its recruitment decisions, with respect to colleagues and volunteers. The respective policies governing recruitment for each of these groups complies with these principles.

**Reasonable Adjustments**

When it comes to reasonable adjustments Choose Love is committed to making reasonable adjustments to remove or reduce substantial disadvantage for disabled people working within Choose Love or using its services. Colleagues or volunteers with specific requirements should make requests to their line manager initially for reasonable adjustment decisions. All requests for reasonable adjustments will be considered on a case-by-case basis, with the advice and assistance of the Human Resources team and where it is not possible to make the adjustment requested viable alternatives will be discussed with the applicant.

The managers alongside our Human Resources (HR) team are responsible for considering whether a colleague with disabilities requires assistance during an emergency evacuation and if so whether a personal emergency evacuation plan is required for the individual/s concerned. Other examples of the sort of reasonable adjustments that we might make are:

- Providing information in alternative formats (e.g., large prints, Braille, etc);
- Providing auxiliary aids e.g., induction loops and;
- Providing a reader or interpreter.

In assessing whether an adjustment is reasonable, we will follow the guidance given by the Equality and Human Rights Commission to the effect that “When deciding whether an adjustment is reasonable, service providers can consider issues such as the cost of the adjustment, the practicality of making it, health and safety factors, the size of the organisation, and whether it will achieve the desired effect. ... In considering what is reasonable, you may consider factors such as your organisation’s financial resources: generally, more is expected of larger organisations.”

**Training**

Choose Love encourages and supports everyone in the organisation to attend courses on equality and diversity issues both to raise awareness and to ensure that the implementation of our policies and procedures is effective.

Equality and diversity training is provided for:
   a) all colleague members who are part of the interviewing process or on an interview panel.
b) leaders and manager colleagues

c) Colleague members likely to be involved in the adjudication of complaints, grievances
and/or disciplinary matters; and

All colleagues will receive regular training and/or briefing on equality and diversity issues as part
of the colleague training strategy to raise awareness of workplace issues and ensure the delivery
of a non-discriminatory quality service in all areas of work conducted.

The results of any monitoring procedure will be reviewed at regular intervals to assess the
effectiveness of the implementation of this policy. Consideration will be given, if necessary, to
adjusting this policy to afford greater equality of opportunities to all Choose Love partnership.

This Equal Opportunities Policy is a working document that provides a framework in which Choose
Love will carry out all its activities. To ensure that this policy is consistently applied, the work and
activities of the organisations will be monitored and reviewed in the context of this policy which
will be revised as and when necessary.

Approved By Choose Love Board Member May 2023 - To be reviewed May 2024