

# **Equality and Disability Action Plans 2018-2023**

March 2018

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We will consider any request for this document in another format or language.

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## Introduction

We Bernard Mitchell and Peter Reynolds – Chair and Chief Executive of the NIGALA –are committed to promoting equality and good relations. We recognise that we have to do more to promote positive attitudes and to encourage the participation of people with a disability in public life.

We want to make sure we do this in a way that makes a difference to people. We will put in place what is necessary to do so. This includes people, time and money. Where it is right to do so, we will include actions from this plan in the yearly plans we develop for the organisation as a whole. These are called ‘corporate’ or ‘business’ plans.

We will also put everything in place in the organisation to make sure that we do what we have to under the law. This includes making one person responsible overall for making sure we do what we say we are going to do in our Equality and Disability Action Plan.

We will make sure we let our staff know of what is in our plan. We will also train our staff and help them understand what they need to do.

The person in our organisation who is responsible for making sure that we do what we have committed to do is Sinéad Casey. When you have any questions you can contact Sinéad at:

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## **Who we are and what we do**

NIGALA is part of health and social care in Northern Ireland. We were set up in November 1996.

NIGALA is a special agency which employs social workers, called Guardians, to advise the courts of children's wishes and feelings and to independently represent and safeguard the interests of children in care and adoption proceedings in Northern Ireland.

## **We do things like:**

- Read the Trust files to understand what work has been undertaken with the family and the decisions made and plans for the child.
- Appoint a Solicitor, someone who knows about the law, to help the court understand all about the child and make good decisions about the child's care.
- Assist the court to make sure that all the right information is available and avoid delay in making decisions.

As an organisation we have a number of important issues that we have to manage such as:

- Finance: Making sure that we spend the money that we get from the Department well and provide a good quality service.
- Information Technology: Using computers to support the work that we do.
- Managing Information: Ensuring that the personal and sensitive information that we have is safe, secure and only available to people who need it.
- Human Resources: Employing staff, taking care of their salaries, general wellbeing and providing support for them to do their job.

## How people can be involved in our work

There are a number of ways in which people can be involved in the work of the Northern Ireland Guardian Ad Litem Agency. NIGALA engages with relevant stakeholders from the HSCT's, Judiciary, Solicitors and relevant organisations e.g. Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC) and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) to inform and influence practice developments.

The Agency developed "About Me" and "About Court" resources for Guardians to use with children and young people to support their engagement and participation in court proceedings. The resources were piloted and feedback from children and young people was incorporated into the documents. The consultation process involved educators in the learning disability sector who provided tools and images used for children and young people with learning needs.

A young people's forum is being piloted to involve young people inform and support practice developments in NIGALA. They produced "My Expectations" 15 top tips for professionals working with children. Forum participants will be actively involved in the forthcoming NIGALA conference on 17/11/17 "21 Years of Representing Children and Young People – What have we learned and Can we do Better?"

NIGALA has to follow the law under **Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998**. It says that in our work we have to promote equality and good relations. We have to treat people fairly and take account of their differing needs and to make things better for staff and people who use our services. It also says that we have to build better relationships between different groups of people.

There are nine different equality groups that the law requires us to take account of:

- Gender (and gender identities)
- Age
- Religion
- Political opinion
- Ethnicity
- Disability
- Sexual orientation

- Marital status
- Having dependants or not.

There are three good relations groups we need to consider:

- Religion
- Political opinion
- Ethnicity.

We also have to follow the law under the **Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006**, which says that we have to:

- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and
- Encourage participation by disabled people in public life.

This includes people with any type of disability, whether for example, physical disabilities; sensory disabilities; autism; learning disabilities; mental health conditions; or conditions that are long-term. Some of these disabilities may be hidden, others may be visible.

Both pieces of legislation require us to develop an action plan: an Equality Action Plan and a Disability Action Plan. We have to send these plans to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and then report every year on what we have done.

## **How we reviewed our last plans and developed these new plans**

In developing these plans we looked at what we have done so far to promote equality and good relations, to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and to encourage their participation in public life.

We asked all teams in our organisation to consider the following questions:

- What has worked well?
- What hasn't worked well?
- What lessons have we learned?
- Did we do what we said we would do?
- Has this made a difference for people in the way we thought it would?

For the new plans, we asked them to consider two questions:

- In your area of work, what are the key issues for people in the equality groupings?
- What can you do to address these issues?

We encouraged our staff to look at a range of sources of information such as:

- New research or data
- Equality screening exercises that have been completed
- Their professional experience and knowledge
- Issues raised in consultations or through other engagement with staff and service users.

We also learned from what we heard when we:

- Held coffee mornings to talk with staff about issues important to those who have a disability and those who care for somebody who has a disability
- Surveyed staff to find out what they think an Employer of Choice for people who have a disability or those who care for somebody with a disability looks like
- Spoke with the members of our staff disability network “Tapestry” to find out what we should do to promote equality for those who have a disability and those who care for somebody who has a disability
- In collaboration with our colleagues in the Health and Social Care Trusts ran an engagement event with people from different equality groupings to find out what they think we could do to better promote equality.

We also read up on what the Equality Commission says would be good to do. All this helped us think about what else we could do to make a difference.

We then consulted publicly on our draft plans. When we started the consultation we informed all consultees on our consultation list of the details of the consultation and how people could engage with us directly or respond in writing. We invited consultees to attend one of two consultation events, one in Belfast and one on Derry/Londonderry. In addition we offered to meet in person with anyone preferring to do so.

We engaged closely with Tapestry, our Disability Staff Network, in the development of our Disability Action Plans. We also drew on the learning from

a survey that we carried out with our staff who have a disability or who care for someone who has a disability. The survey focused on what would made an organisation an “Employer of Choice” for them.

## **What we have done so far**

This is some of what we have done to promote equality.

- We produced a signposting resource for our staff. It provides information on support networks in the community for people from each of the nine equality groups. We update this resource every year.
- We put in place an Accessible Formats Policy; this policy relates to all of the nine equality groups including age, gender, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political opinion, dependants, religion and marital status. It addresses specific needs in relation to sensory impairment, learning disability, sexual orientation, older people, younger people, translation and interpreting for minority ethnic groups and more general literacy levels that are of particular importance.
- We compiled a directory of resources and services to assist staff access information in respect of the Section 75 groups.
- We undertook “An evaluation of Social Work practice in the Northern Ireland Guardian ad Litem Agency in Working with Children and Families from Black and Ethnic Minority Communities in Northern Ireland”. The findings were published in the Child Care in Practice Journal 30/11/16.
- We devised a policy to inform the appointment of Solicitors from the NIGALA Solicitor Panel to support an equitable and transparent process. This is reviewed by the Senior Management Team and an anonymised report is issued to Solicitor bi-annually.

This is some of what we have done to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage the participation of disabled people in public life.

## **Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people**

- To date, we have held seven disability awareness days for our staff. Each looked at different disabilities: Epilepsy, Sight loss and blindness, Depression, Hearing loss and deafness, Learning disabilities, Cancer, and Arthritis and Musculoskeletal conditions. Information was e-mailed to our staff and displayed within the organisation. With our colleagues in the NI Practice and Education Council for Nursing and Midwifery we also hosted a number of information sessions for staff involving speakers and volunteers from local voluntary groups.
- We developed an e-learning resource on disability. It is available to all Health and Social Care staff. This was identified as one of our mandatory e-learning training inputs.
- We include the disability duties in all Equality Awareness and Equality Screening Training that the BSO Equality Unit delivers.
- We have delivered training sessions on mental health awareness to our staff, including on mental health first aid, mindfulness and managing stress; and courses for staff who are carers.
- We developed a staff resource on disability etiquette, a resource and checklist on how to positively portray people with a disability in their work.
- We have checked our website to make sure it is accessible.

## **Encourage the participation of disabled people in public life**

- We participate in a disability work placement scheme together with our Health and Social Care partner organisations. To date, the Scheme has provided between 5 and 15 placements for people with a disability in our organisations every year. NIGALA facilitated a placement in 2015/16.
- We have developed standards and guidance for the involvement of people with a disability and a checklist for organising inclusive meetings.
- We have put in place a process for publishing screening templates as soon as they are completed. A disability organisation had suggested that we do so. We do the same for publishing the quarterly screening reports.

- We developed a resource for line managers on reasonable adjustments for staff with a disability.
- We set up a disability network for our staff. Part of the role of this network is to raise disability issues with decision makers in our organisation.

## **What we have learned so far**

### **Monitoring**

Even with proactive encouragement, our staff seem reluctant to declare their disability. We need to keep working on this, including trying to find out why staff do not declare their disability. We will work closely with our disability staff network on this.

### **Placements**

The placement scheme was evaluated each year and changes were made in the next year's scheme to improve the experience for participants. We will carry this learning into our new plan. Managers and staff who have been involved in the scheme to date have told us that they have gained a better understanding of disabilities through working side by side a person who has a disability. Many have been impressed by the attitude and performance of the individual on placement.

### **Awareness Days**

We have found that attendance at awareness events is greatest when the subject is most relevant to staff. This can be because they have the condition themselves or they know or work with someone who has the condition. We will continue to ask staff which areas relating to disability they would like more information on.

### **Training**

We have found that our e-learning training on Disability is a really useful resource to train our staff. We have also found that sometimes we need to run

specific training courses, for example on autism awareness or deaf awareness when the need is identified. We will continue to take this approach of a combination of e-learning and classroom based training. People have told us that they take away a lot from sessions that are delivered by people with a disability themselves.

## **What is in the new plans?**

There are two separate tables below. The first table lists all the actions that we will undertake to promote equality and good relations. This is our Equality Action Plan. The second table describes what we will do to promote positive attitudes towards people with a disability and to encourage their participation in public life. This is our Disability Action Plan.

In both plans we also say what difference we hope to make and when we will plan to complete these actions.

## **How we will monitor**

Every year we write up what we have done. We also explain when we haven't done something. We send this report to the Equality Commission. We also publish this report on our website:

<http://www.nigala.hscni.net/>

We have a look at the plans every year to see whether we need to make any changes to them. If we need to, we write those changes into the plans. Before we make any big changes we talk to people in the equality groupings to see what they think.

When we finish an action we take it off the plans for the next year. That way we will keep our plans up to date. They will show what we still have to do.

After five years we will look at our plans again to see how we have done. We will also see what else we could do.

Whenever we develop or look at our plans we will invite people who have a disability to help us.

The plans are also available on our website: <http://www.nigala.hscni.net/>

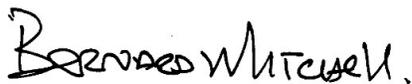
We send our plans to all organisations and individuals on our consultation list when we have finalised them and also when we have made major changes to them.

To find out whether what we do makes a difference, we will do a number of things, for example:

- For training and awareness events, we ask our staff about what learning they are taking away with them and what they may do differently as a result of what they have learned.
- We do a survey with people from a particular equality group after we have delivered an action targeted at them to ask whether they feel better supported as a result.
- We check summary figures to see whether, for example, more people from a particular under-represented group are availing of a service after promoting it to them specifically.

You can find further information on how we will monitor each action in the plans themselves.

**Signed by:**



**Mr Bernard Mitchell**

**Chair**

**Date: 30 March 2018**



**Mr Peter Reynolds**

**Chief Executive**

**Date: 30 March 2018**

**Equality Action Plan 2018-2023:  
What we will do to promote equality and good relations**

<b>Action Point</b>	<b>Intended Outcome</b>	<b>Performance Indicator and Target</b>	<b>By Whom/ When</b>
<p>1. NIGALA has distinct responsibilities specific to children as defined under the governing legislation-The Children (NI) Order 1995 and The Adoption (NI) Order 1987. The importance of engaging with and consulting children to receive feedback to reflect on their experience of and develop the service is a shared interest that can be developed with other organisations.</p>	<p>Collaboration with the Patient and Client Council (PCC) and the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) initially in the development of our website to signpost children and young people to relevant supports and services and draw on each other's resources.</p>	<p>Child and user friendly website with signposts to relevant services and supports provided by other organisations.</p>	<p>Corporate Services Manager and Assistant Director (Public and Personal Involvement lead). 2020</p>

<p>2. Revise and implement guidance to achieve consistent corporate branding to ensure that our website and all the information (operational and corporate) generated by the Agency is accessible and complies with best practice guidance.</p>	<p>All information and materials produced by NIGALA comply with Agency guidance.</p>	<p>Consistent house style (font, format) in compliance with Agency guidance.</p>	<p>Corporate Services 2020</p>
<p><b>Carers</b></p> <p>3. Review the caring responsibilities of staff with/ without dependents.</p> <p>4. Promote information for staff who are carers on available</p>	<p>Staff who are carers feel more supported in the workplace</p>	<p>Sickness absence of carers is reduced.</p> <p>Retention of staff who are carers.</p>	<p>NIGALA/ BSO HR with support by Equality Unit 2018/19</p>

<p>policies and measures that might meet their needs; including sign-posting to relevant support organisations.</p> <p>5. Identify any gaps in available support for staff and explore how/if these could be met within existing policy and resources.</p>			
<p><b>Gender Identity</b></p> <p>6. Deliver awareness and training initiatives to relevant staff as part of the roll-out of the Gender Identity and Expression Employment Policy</p>	<p>Staff who identify as transgender and non-binary feel more supported in the workplace</p>	<p>90% of relevant staff have been trained.</p>	<p>BSO HR with support by Equality Unit March 2020</p>

<p><b>Training/Practice development</b></p> <p>7. Making a Difference – e-learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add module to suite of mandatory training for all staff</li> <li>• Deliver on training targets</li> </ul>	<p>Increased staff awareness of equality and human rights.</p>	<p>Making a Difference e-learning included in mandatory training for all staff.</p> <p>75% in the first year and 100% thereafter of staff have completed the e-learning module.</p>	<p>BSO HR with support by Equality Unit 2018/19</p>
<p><b>Domestic Violence</b></p> <p>8. Undertake awareness raising relating to new support mechanisms (developed by BSO) to support staff with experience of domestic violence</p>	<p>Staff with experience of domestic violence are better supported</p>	<p>Awareness raising undertaken with 100% of staff</p>	<p>BSO HR with support by Equality Unit March 2020</p>

## Disability Action Plan 2018-2023:

### What we will do to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage the participation of disabled people in public life

Action Point	Intended Outcome	Performance Indicator and Target	By Whom/ When
<p><b>Awareness Days</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Raise awareness of specific barriers faced by people with disabilities including through linking in with National Awareness Days or Weeks (such as Mind your Health Day)</li> <li>2. Link the Awareness Days to the Agency's Health and Wellbeing Strategy.</li> </ol>	<p>Increased staff awareness of the range of disabilities and needs.</p> <p>Information and materials provided through the awareness days is collated and stored centrally for ease of access and future reference.</p>	<p>Two annual awareness days profiled</p> <p>&gt;50% of staff participating in the evaluation indicate that they know more about people living with disabilities as a result of the awareness days.</p> <p>Staff have access to relevant information and support services.</p>	<p>NIGALA</p> <p>Annually</p>

<p><b>Placement Scheme</b></p> <p>3. Consider how the organisation can create and promote meaningful placement opportunities for people with disabilities in line with good practice and making use of voluntary expertise in this area.</p>	<p>People with a disability gain meaningful work experience. Staff gain insight into the reality of the supports and adjustments required to enable a person with a disability gain employment opportunities.</p>	<p>Placement considered and where possible offered each year.</p> <p>Feedback indicates that placement meets expectations</p>	<p>NIGALA Annually</p>
<p><b>Tapestry</b></p> <p>4. Promote and encourage staff to participate in the disability staff network and support the network in the delivery of its action plan</p> <p>5. Nominate a Disability Champion at Senior Management.</p>	<p>Staff with a disability feel more confident that their needs and experiences are understood and inform relevant planning and decision-making.</p> <p>Staff with a disability feel better supported.</p>	<p>Tapestry meeting notes indicate that actions to support staff have been delivered</p> <p>Attend six monthly Disability Champions Forum meeting</p>	<p>NIGALA Annually</p> <p>NIGALA Disability Champion</p>

	Commitment to inform and influence collaborative actions to support the disability duties.	and contribute to co-ordinated actions and initiatives.	
<p><b>Monitoring</b></p> <p>6. Encourage staff to declare that they have a disability or care for a person with a disability through awareness raising and providing guidance to staff on the importance of monitoring.</p> <p>7. Prompt staff to keep their personal equality monitoring records (via self-service on new Human Resources IT system) up to date.</p>	<p>More accurate data in place. Greater number of staff feel comfortable declaring they have a disability.</p> <p>Create an open and inclusive workplace culture that is proactive in supporting staff with a disability.</p>	<p>Increase in completion of disability monitoring information by staff to 90%</p> <p>Annual reminder issued to staff to update their personal details on HRPTS .</p>	<p>BSO HR with support by Equality Unit</p> <p>Annually</p>

8. Review staff profile data and sickness absence information to consider patterns /trends.	Devise guidance for Managers on reasonable adjustments	Targeted support for and effective management of staff with a disability to reduce recurrent absence.	BSO HR and NIGALA Corporate Services Manager/Assistant Director 2019/20
<b>Training</b> 9. In collaboration with disabled people design, deliver and evaluate training for staff and Board Members on disability equality and disability legislation.	Increased staff and Board Member awareness of the range of disabilities and needs.	All staff trained (general and bespoke) within 2 years through eLearning or interactive sessions and staff awareness initiatives delivered Training evaluation forms	BSO Equality Unit Annually
10. Sign up to Mental Health Charter and Every Customer Counts	Agency commitment to creating an open and inclusive workplace culture which displays respect for those with mental ill health. Supports and complements NIGALA's Health and Wellbeing initiatives.	Absence figures reduced Increase in % of staff who declare that they have a mental health condition	BSO HR with support by Equality Unit March 2020

