Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy

Play North West CIC (trading as Play Northwest)
Company No.: 15796794
Policy version: 1.1 (updated 2026-10-25: adjustments, monitoring, complaints timescales and digital services added; 1.0 adopted 2026-10-10)
Adopted: 2026-10-25, by both directors
Review date: 2027-10-25 (annual review)
Equality lead: John Paul Randles, Director
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1. Why this policy matters to us

We exist to reach people who traditional services have missed: people with mental health challenges, children, young people and adults with SEND, and people who have fallen through the gaps. Inclusion isn't an add-on to our work; it is the work. This policy sets out how we make sure everyone can take part, work with us, and be treated fairly.

2. Our commitment

- Everyone is welcome. No musical experience is needed, and we meet people where they are.
- We will not discriminate against anyone because of a protected characteristic, or for any other unfair reason.
- We will make reasonable adjustments so that disabled people can take part fully.
- We will actively remove barriers (cost, confidence, communication, access) rather than wait to be asked.
- We value the different backgrounds, experiences and abilities people bring, and we challenge discrimination, harassment and prejudice when we see it.

3. Legal framework

This policy is informed by:

- **The Equality Act 2010**, which protects people from direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation because of the nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race (including colour, nationality and ethnic or national origin), religion or belief (including no belief), sex, and sexual orientation. It also places a duty on us to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people.
- **The Children Act 1989 & 2004** and our Safeguarding Policy, where equality and safeguarding meet.
- **UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018**, for any equality monitoring information we collect, as set out in our Data Protection Policy.

We go further than the law requires. We also consider people facing disadvantage that the Act does not list, such as care leavers, carers, people affected by poverty or homelessness, people with experience of the criminal justice system, and people living in areas of high deprivation.

4. Who this policy covers

Participants of all ages, parents and carers, directors and board members, staff, freelance facilitators, sessional workers, volunteers, people and organisations who refer participants to us, partner organisations, venues and contractors, and anyone who contacts us.

It covers all our activity: in-person sessions, events and showcases, recruitment, our website, and our digital apps (Connect & Support UK and WorkPathway UK).

5. Taking part in our sessions

- **Cost:** we keep sessions free or low-cost where funding allows, and offer bursary places so cost is never the reason someone can't take part.
- **Referrals:** we accept referrals from schools, the NHS, social workers, support workers and community organisations, as well as self-referrals and drop-ins.
- **Groups:** we run mixed groups by age and background, unless a group is designed for a specific need, and use language, music and examples that reflect the people in the room.
- **Access and sensory needs:** we ask about access, health and sensory needs at registration, and plan each session around them. Participants can take a break or step out at any time without explanation.
- **SEND:** our sessions are designed to include children, young people and adults with SEND, informed by the founder's lived experience as a parent of an autistic child. We shape sessions around each person rather than expecting them to fit a fixed format.
- **Communication:** we use plain English, offer information in other formats or languages on request, and our website has a read-aloud option.
- **Venues:** we choose local community venues on public transport routes with accessibility in mind, and check access arrangements before a programme starts.
- **Under-18s:** we work with parents and carers so young people can take part safely, in line with our Safeguarding Policy.
- **Listening:** we ask participants what would make sessions work better for them, and act on it.

6. Reasonable adjustments

We ask every participant, before they start, what would help them take part, and make reasonable adjustments at no cost to them. Adjustments we can offer include:

- a quieter space, breaks, or the option to step out at any time
- ear defenders and control over volume levels
- visual guides, step-by-step demonstrations, and extra one-to-one time
- a support worker, parent or carer attending alongside the participant
- a visit to the venue before the first session
- adapted equipment where we can source it

Information people share about their needs is kept confidential, in line with our Privacy Policy and Data Protection Policy.

7. Digital services

- We design our website and apps to be accessible, including read-aloud support.
- We keep the core crisis and wellbeing features of Connect & Support UK free to use.

8. Working with us

- **Recruitment:** roles are advertised openly with clear role descriptions, and selection is based on the skills, experience and values the role needs. We welcome applications from people with lived experience of the issues our programmes address.

- **Reasonable adjustments:** we make adjustments for disabled staff, freelancers and volunteers at interview and in work.
- **Fair treatment:** pay and opportunities are decided fairly and consistently.

9. Our board

We are recruiting independent board members, prioritising people with lived experience of mental health services or SEND, so that the people we serve help shape our decisions. Recruitment will be open, with a published role description, and board members will declare any conflicts of interest.

10. Harassment and bullying

We will not tolerate discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation in our sessions, our workplace, or online. This includes offensive comments, jokes, lyrics or behaviour aimed at someone's identity. Each programme starts with a group agreement, written with participants, about how everyone treats each other.

If it happens in a session, the facilitator will step in straight away, speak to the people involved, and record what happened.

11. Equality monitoring

We check who we are reaching so we can spot groups we are missing and improve.

- We invite participants and applicants to complete a short, optional monitoring form (for example age range, postcode area, disability or SEND, ethnicity, sex, and how they heard about us).
- Every question includes "prefer not to say". Nobody has to answer to take part.
- Monitoring information is kept separately from names, and only reported as anonymous totals, including in reports to funders.
- The directors review the totals at the end of each programme and record any actions, such as new referral partners or venue changes.

12. Raising a concern

Anyone who feels they have been treated unfairly can raise it by:

1. speaking to the session facilitator or any member of the team, or
2. emailing hello@playnorthwestcic.com or calling 07808 238730, or
3. using our Complaints Policy.

A director will acknowledge the concern within 5 working days and aim to give a full response within 20 working days, in line with our Complaints Policy. Concerns about discrimination will be taken seriously, investigated promptly and kept confidential as far as possible. Nobody will be treated less favourably for raising a concern in good faith.

If a concern also involves risk of harm to a child or adult at risk, our Safeguarding Policy takes priority.

13. Responsibilities

Who	Responsible for
Directors	Approving this policy, making sure it is followed, handling complaints of discrimination, and reviewing it every year. John Paul Randles leads on equality.
Facilitators and freelancers	Running inclusive sessions, making adjustments, and reporting any discrimination or harassment they see.
Volunteers	Treating everyone with respect and raising concerns with a director.
Participants	Treating others with respect during sessions, in line with the group agreement.
Partners and venues	Working in line with this policy when delivering with us.

14. Training

Everyone who delivers sessions reads this policy and receives induction on it alongside safeguarding training, and refreshes it when the policy is reviewed.

15. Related policies and review

This policy works alongside our Safeguarding Policy, Data Protection Policy, Privacy Policy, Complaints Policy and Accessibility statement.

It is reviewed every year, or sooner if the law changes or we learn something that means it should change.

Adopted by the directors of Play North West CIC on 25 October 2026: John Paul Randles (Director) and Andrew Reeves (Director).