APPEER Connecting autistic girls and women

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policy V1.5

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to affirm Appeer CIC's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) across all aspects of our operations, employment practices, programmes, services and relationships.

This policy establishes the principles, responsibilities and practices that guide our approach to creating an environment where people are treated with dignity and respect, barriers to participation are identified and addressed, and individual differences are recognised and valued.

As a lived-experience-led organisation supporting autistic girls, women and their families, Appeer recognises the importance of neuro-affirming, accessible and inclusive practice. We are committed to challenging discrimination, promoting equity and ensuring that our services and working environments are as inclusive as reasonably practicable.

We will not unlawfully discriminate on the basis of any protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. We also recognise that people may experience exclusion or disadvantage for reasons beyond those specifically protected by law, and we seek to address these barriers wherever possible

2. Scope and Definitions

This policy applies to everyone working for, representing or acting on behalf of Appeer CIC, including:

- Employees, including permanent, fixed-term and casual staff.
- Directors and members of the Board.
- Volunteers, sessional workers and contractors.
- Applicants for employment and individuals undertaking recruitment or selection processes.
- People participating in Appeer programmes, activities and services, and their families or carers.
- Partners and other individuals working with Appeer, where relevant to our relationship with them.

The policy applies to our premises, online environments, events, communications, service delivery, recruitment and employment practices. Specific employment rights, legal duties and contractual obligations will be applied according to the relevant relationship and circumstances.

2.2 Definitions

Equality:
Ensuring that people are treated fairly and have access to their rights, opportunities and support without unlawful discrimination.

Equity:
Recognising that people have different circumstances and may require different forms of support or adjustment to achieve fair access and meaningful participation. Equity involves identifying and reducing barriers that disadvantage individuals or groups.

Diversity:
Recognising and valuing differences between people, including race, ethnicity, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion or belief, socioeconomic background, culture, lived experience and other aspects of individual identity and experience.

Inclusion:
Creating environments where people feel welcomed, respected, supported and valued, and can participate meaningfully without unnecessary barriers.

Intersectionality:
Recognising that different aspects of a person's identity and circumstances can interact, creating distinct experiences of advantage, disadvantage or exclusion.

Reasonable Adjustments:
Changes to working arrangements, environments, processes or service delivery that are reasonable and necessary to reduce or remove substantial disadvantages experienced by disabled people, in accordance with applicable legal duties.

3. Our Commitments to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

At Appeer, we are committed to creating a community where everyone feels valued, respected and included. We recognise that our work takes place within a diverse society and we actively celebrate difference while challenging barriers to equality and equity and are committed to the following:

3.1 Equity and Fairness

We will:

- Treat people with dignity, fairness and respect.
- Promote fair access to opportunities, services, support and development.
- Identify and address unnecessary barriers to participation and progression.
- Consider individual circumstances when making decisions and determining appropriate adjustments.

3.2 Valuing Diversity

We Will:

- Recognise and value the diverse backgrounds, identities and lived experiences of autistic girls and women, their families, staff, volunteers and professionals.
- Recognise that autistic people have varied experiences and support needs.
- Consider intersectionality, including how autism may be experienced alongside sex, gender, race, culture, sexuality, disability and other factors.
- Challenge stereotypes, assumptions and practices that may exclude or disadvantage individuals.

3.3 Inclusion in Practice

We Will:

- Recognise and value the diverse backgrounds, identities and lived experiences of autistic girls and women, their families, staff, volunteers and professionals.
- Recognise that autistic people have varied experiences and support needs.
- Consider intersectionality, including how autism may be experienced alongside sex, gender, race, culture, sexuality, disability and other factors.
- Challenge stereotypes, assumptions and practices that may exclude or disadvantage individuals.

3.4 Challenging Discrimination

We Will:

- Not tolerate unlawful discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation.
- Take concerns seriously and respond fairly, proportionately and promptly.
- Encourage staff, volunteers and community members to raise concerns and challenge exclusionary behaviour safely.
- Address concerns in accordance with relevant policies and procedures.

Further guidance is available in Appeer's Dignity at Work Policy, Complaints Policy and relevant employment procedures.

3.5 Accessibility

We Will

- Consider accessibility when planning sessions, events, recruitment, communications and resources.

- Identify and address barriers relating to physical access, sensory environments, communication, information and participation.
- Provide staff and volunteers with appropriate guidance, equipment and resources to support inclusive practice.
- Review accessibility arrangements in response to feedback and changing needs.

3.6 Continuous Learning

We Will

- Promote appropriate EDI awareness and autism-informed training.
- Provide fair access to training, development and progression opportunities.
- Listen to feedback from autistic people, parents and carers, staff, volunteers and professionals.
- Use learning from experience, feedback and concerns to improve our practice.

3.7 Accountability and Transparency

We Will

- Embed EDI considerations into relevant policies, programmes, recruitment and organisational decision-making.
- Maintain clear responsibilities for implementing and monitoring this policy.
- Review our practice regularly and address identified gaps.
- Share relevant learning and improvement actions in a way that respects confidentiality and data protection requirements.

4. Responsibilities for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

Everyone connected with Appeer has a responsibility to uphold our commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). We all have a role in ensuring that our services, employment practices, relationships and working environments are inclusive, accessible, respectful and free from discrimination. Specific responsibilities are outlined below.

Board of Directors

- Maintain overall governance oversight and accountability for EDI across the organisation.
- Approve the EDI policy and any material amendments in accordance with Appeer's governance arrangements.
- Ensure appropriate systems are in place to monitor compliance, identify risks and address concerns.
- Hold the CEO accountable for implementing the organisation's EDI commitments.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

- Provide organisational leadership for EDI and ensure the policy is implemented effectively.
- Ensure appropriate policies, procedures, training and reporting arrangements are in place.
- Promote inclusive employment practices and equitable access to Appeer's services and opportunities.
- Address significant EDI concerns, ensure appropriate action is taken and report relevant matters to the Board.

Managers and Team Leaders

- Embed EDI principles into day-to-day practice, service delivery and team management.
- Ensure staff and volunteers understand their responsibilities and have access to appropriate guidance and training.
- Model inclusive leadership and address discriminatory behaviour, exclusion or inappropriate conduct promptly and proportionately.
- Escalate concerns in accordance with Appeer's relevant policies and procedures.

Staff and Volunteers

- Treat colleagues, participants, families, visitors and partners with dignity, fairness and respect.
- Apply inclusive practices and make reasonable adjustments within their role and responsibilities.
- Complete relevant EDI training and follow organisational policies and procedures.
- Challenge or report discrimination, harassment, bullying or exclusion through the appropriate channels.

Everyone Involved with Appeer

This includes directors, employees, volunteers, sessional workers, contractors and others representing or working on behalf of Appeer.

Everyone is expected to:

- ✓ Respect individual differences, identities, experiences and perspectives.
- ✓ Contribute to a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment.
- ✓ Avoid discriminatory, harassing, bullying or exclusionary behaviour.
- ✓ Raise concerns about EDI through the appropriate reporting channels.
- ✓ Support Appeer's commitment to equity, accessibility, belonging and inclusion.

Appeer will take concerns seriously and respond in accordance with its relevant policies and procedures. Responsibilities will be proportionate to each person's role, authority and relationship with the organisation.

5. Practical Implementations

Appeer will put its EDI commitments into practice through the following arrangements:

5.1 Recruitment

We will seek to ensure that recruitment and employment practices are fair, transparent and accessible by:

- Using clear, accessible recruitment information and application processes.
- Considering adjustments to recruitment and selection processes where required.
- Using diverse recruitment panels where practicable.
- Applying consistent, role-related selection criteria.
- Promoting fair access to training, development and progression.
- Considering reasonable adjustments and flexible working requests in accordance with applicable legal requirements and organisational procedures.
- Addressing discrimination and inappropriate conduct through the relevant employment policies.

5.2 Training and Development

We will promote appropriate training and development in:

- Equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Autism-informed and neuro-affirming practice.
- Recognising and addressing discriminatory behaviour.
- Inclusive communication and accessibility.
- Unconscious bias and fair decision-making.
- Training requirements will be proportionate to roles and responsibilities, with additional guidance provided where specific needs are identified.

5.3 Inclusive Service Delivery

We will embed inclusive practice across our programmes, groups, events and activities by:

- Considering individual needs, preferences and barriers to participation.
- Providing appropriate communication and sensory adjustments where practicable.
- Considering cultural, linguistic, disability-related and other accessibility requirements.
- Reviewing programme arrangements in response to participant feedback.

- Supporting participation in ways that respect autonomy, dignity and individual differences.

5.4 Effective Communication

We will seek to ensure that written, verbal and digital communications are respectful, accessible and inclusive.

- This includes using clear language, considering alternative communication formats where appropriate, respecting individual communication preferences and avoiding assumptions or stereotypes.

5.5 Inclusive Working Culture

We aim to foster a workplace where staff and volunteers feel respected, valued and able to raise concerns without fear of unfair treatment or retaliation.

We will promote:

- Respectful professional relationships and appropriate boundaries.
- Neurodiversity-friendly working practices.
- Consideration of individual needs and circumstances.
- Fair access to information, resources and development.
- A culture where constructive feedback and concerns can be raised safely.

6. Raising Concerns and Addressing Discrimination

Appeer encourages concerns about discrimination, harassment, bullying, victimisation or exclusion to be raised promptly so that they can be considered and addressed appropriately.

6.1 How to Raise a Concern

Concerns may be raised with:

- The individual's line manager or relevant Programme Manager.
- HR, for employment-related concerns.
- The Compliance and Safeguarding Manager, where the concern falls within that role's remit.
- The CEO, where appropriate.
- The Chair of the Board or relevant Board sub-committee where the concern involves the CEO or cannot appropriately be addressed through the usual reporting route.

Concerns may also be raised through Appeer's formal Complaints Policy or relevant grievance, safeguarding or whistleblowing procedures, depending on the circumstances. Where a concern involves the person's usual point of contact, they should be able to use an alternative reporting route.

6.2 Concerns Involving the CEO

Concerns involving the CEO should be raised directly with the Chair of the Board or the designated Board contact, rather than with the CEO.

For this purpose, the designated contact is the Chair of the People and Culture Committee, who can be contacted at **Directors@appeer.org.uk.** The concern will be handled in accordance with the relevant organisational procedures and governance arrangements.

6.3 Responding to Concerns

Appeer will:

- Take concerns seriously and assess them fairly and proportionately.
- Maintain appropriate confidentiality, sharing information only where necessary.
- Record concerns and actions in accordance with relevant procedures and data protection requirements.
- Consider whether immediate safeguarding or other protective action is required.
- Ensure that concerns are referred to the appropriate decision-maker.
- Take appropriate action where discrimination, harassment, bullying or other unacceptable conduct is identified.
- Consider whether further support, training or changes to working practices are required.

Raising a concern in good faith should not result in retaliation or victimisation. Concerns will be managed fairly, recognising the rights and circumstances of everyone involved.

6.4 Incidents Involving Programme Participants

Where an incident involving a participant has a discriminatory dimension, staff should record and report it through the relevant incident-reporting or safeguarding procedures.

Appeer will consider the context, the needs and perspectives of those involved, any immediate risks and the appropriate response. Where suitable, constructive discussion and restorative approaches may support learning and mutual understanding.

These approaches will not replace necessary safeguarding action, formal investigation or other appropriate measures.

6.5 Complaints and Further Information

Anyone with concerns about equality, discrimination or inclusion in Appeer's activities or operations may use the relevant reporting route or Appeer's Complaints Policy. For employment-related concerns, the relevant grievance and employment procedures should also be followed.

For general questions about this policy, please contact:

CEO: **CEO@appeer.org.uk**

HR: **HR@appeer.org.uk**

7. Review and Monitoring

Appeer is committed to ensuring that this Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policy remains a practical, relevant and effective framework that informs our everyday practice, decision-making and service delivery. We will review and monitor the policy through the following arrangements.

7.1 Review and Approval

The policy will be formally reviewed at least annually by the CEO, HR and the Compliance and Safeguarding Manager, with input from the relevant Board sub-committees where appropriate.

Proposed amendments will be reviewed and recommended by the CEO, in consultation with relevant personnel, before being submitted for approval in accordance with Appeer's delegation of authority and governance arrangements.

Material policy changes must be approved by the Board of Directors or the relevant Board sub-committee where formal authority has been delegated. Minor operational or administrative amendments may be approved by the CEO where permitted under the scheme of delegation.

An earlier review will be undertaken where necessary due to changes in legislation, regulatory requirements, recognised best practice, identified risks or organisational needs.

All approved changes will be documented, and the policy version, approval date and next review date updated accordingly.

7.2 Accountability and Implementation

- The CEO is accountable for ensuring that the policy is implemented effectively across Appeer.
- The Compliance and Safeguarding Manager will support monitoring, identify relevant compliance risks and advise on actions required to address any concerns.
- Managers are responsible for embedding the policy into day-to-day practice, supporting staff and volunteers to understand their responsibilities, and addressing or escalating concerns appropriately.
- The Board of Directors will maintain appropriate governance oversight of EDI implementation, risks and significant issues arising.
- Any identified gaps in implementation will be addressed through proportionate actions, with responsibilities and timescales assigned where appropriate.

7.3 Data Collection and Evidence

Where appropriate, lawful and proportionate, Appeer may collect and review diversity data relating to staff, volunteers and programme participants.

This information may help us to:

- Identify potential under-representation and barriers to access.
- Understand patterns in participation, recruitment and engagement.
- Identify opportunities to improve accessibility and inclusion.
- Evaluate whether changes to our practices are having the intended effect.

Data will be handled in accordance with applicable data protection legislation and Appeers data protection policies. Where special category personal data is involved, appropriate lawful grounds, conditions and safeguards will be established.

Information will be reported in aggregated or anonymised form wherever possible, with access restricted where necessary to protect confidentiality.

7.4 Feedback and Reporting

We will seek and consider feedback from autistic girls and women, participants, parents and carers, staff, volunteers and relevant partner organisations.
Feedback and monitoring evidence may include:

- Participant and family feedback.
- Staff and volunteer feedback.
- Recruitment and workforce information.
- Participation and accessibility information.
- Complaints, incidents and reported concerns.
- Relevant compliance reviews and organisational learning.

Relevant findings, emerging risks and recommended improvements will be shared with the CEO and, where appropriate, the Board or relevant Board sub-committee. Information will be shared in a way that respects confidentiality and data protection requirements.

7.5 Continuous Improvement

Where monitoring or feedback identifies areas for improvement, Appeer will consider proportionate changes to its policies, training, recruitment, working practices, communications or service delivery.

Actions will be reviewed as appropriate to assess whether they have improved accessibility, inclusion and fairness. Through these arrangements, we aim to ensure that our commitment to EDI is reflected in the experiences of the people who work with, access and are supported by Appeer.

8. Related Policies and Documents

This policy should be read alongside relevant Appeer policies and procedures, including:

- Dignity at Work Policy.
- Complaints Policy.
- Grievance Procedure.
- Safeguarding Policies and Procedures.
- Whistleblowing Policy.
- Recruitment and Selection Policy.
- Data Protection and Privacy Policies.
- Reasonable Adjustments and relevant workplace procedures, where applicable.
- Staff Code of Conduct.

Where a concern falls within another policy or procedure, the relevant process will be followed alongside this policy as appropriate.

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION POLICY Version No: 1.4	
Summary:	Our policy detailing how we support equality, diversity and inclusion within Appeer.
Policy Owner:	Annaliese Boucher
Author:	Annaliese Boucher
Target Audience:	Beneficiaries and Staff
Approved and Ratified By:	Chair of People and Culture Board of Directors Sub-Committee
Version Date:	9th September 2026
Date of issue:	9th September 2026
Next Review Date:	**9th September 2026 or earlier if changes in Programmes or legislation**

Change Record				
Date	**Author**	**Version**	**Page/s**	**Reason for Change**
26th May 2021	**Jo Dilworth, CEO**	**1.1**	**Throughout**	**In-person Sessions starting and key changes needed**
1st December 2021	**Jo Dilworth, CEO**	**1.2**	**Throughout**	**Evolution of women's and teen Programmes and changes in admissions process**
20th March 2024	**Jo Dilworth, CEO**	**1.3**	**Throughout**	**Changes in role**
20th August 2025	**Annaliese Boucher, Business Manager**	**1.4**	**Throughout**	**Wording and clarifications**
14th January 2026	**Sarah Nolan**	**1.5**	**Throughout**	**Staffing changes**
10th September	**Annaliese Boucher, Lindsay Prior**	**1.5**	**Throughout**	**No material change.**