

# RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK POLICY

This policy sets out Dorset Reclaims position concerning relationships at work. It is intended to provide guidance where personal relationships overlap with working relationships, and to ensure that individuals do not become involved in situations where a conflict of interest may arise or where they may become vulnerable to accusations of bias or prejudice. It is also to avoid the conferring of an unfair advantage or disadvantage, real or perceived, on volunteers or staff arising from such a personal relationship.

## Definition of a close personal relationship

For the purposes of this policy, a close personal relationship is defined as a

- close personal friendship
- family relationship
- romantic/sexual relationship
- business/commercial/financial relationship

While not all situations raise a conflict of interest, and may prove to be a benefit to the organisation, this may not always be the case. The implications of close personal relationships at work can include:

- an effect on the trust and confidence of colleagues in relation to a conflict of interest, fair treatment, or their own ability to discuss issues openly
- perception of outside agencies and individuals regarding the professionalism and fairness of the organisation
- operational issues affecting the ability to deliver our services
- conflicting loyalties and breach of confidentiality

These provisions are intended to avoid any possible accusation of bias, favouritism or prejudice. They are also intended to ensure that all volunteers and staff feel confident of fair treatment without the fear that a close personal relationship will influence either their or their colleagues, treatment or broader working relationships.

## Relationships between staff and volunteers

Members of staff have a professional and ethical responsibility to protect the interests of the volunteers with whom they work. The relationship is not generally an equal one. Staff embarking on a close personal relationship with a volunteer may consider this to be consensual and equal, however such relationships can carry considerable risk. The volunteer may feel isolated from their peers, and become extremely distressed should a relationship end, adversely affecting their mental or physical health.

The member of staff may find themselves the subject of a complaint of harassment if the volunteer decides that the relationship is not truly consensual or if the relationship breaks down. Such relationships can impact adversely on other volunteers and staff, since they can create tension, rumours, secrecy and perceptions of preferential or different treatment. Problems of this kind can result in complaints from third parties, either individuals or agencies, and the lowering of the reputation of the organisation as a whole.

While most volunteers are over 18 and regarded as adults in law, some volunteers may be immature in their capacity to embark into relationships, this may be especially so with volunteers who may be regarded as vulnerable adults where the inequalities may be even greater.

Having taken all these factors into account, together with the nature of our business and with whom we work, the following form the basis of our position concerning relationships between staff and volunteers:-

- Staff should not enter into a business, commercial or financial relationship with a volunteer which could compromise, or could be perceived to compromise, their position, or that of Dorset Reclaim
- Close relationships of a romantic/sexual nature are strongly discouraged
- Close relationships of a romantic/sexual nature between staff and volunteers under the age of 18 or who may be considered vulnerable adults, are normally forbidden and will lead to disciplinary action being taken against the member of staff. In this context, vulnerable adults include those with learning disabilities and those with mental health problems affecting their ability to make sound judgements. It also includes those vulnerable due to their current or previous use of drugs/alcohol.

Any member of staff engaged in a close personal relationship with a volunteer must inform their Depot Manager or Project Manager of their situation. The manager will work with, and advise the member of staff regarding the situation.

## Relationships between members of staff

It is not uncommon for close relationships to develop between people who work together and such relationships need not present any difficulty and in some cases may positively add value to the organisation. Relationships between staff may cause concern where there is a potential for a conflict of interest, breaches of confidentiality or with regard to financial or audit requirements.

Such situations will be handled with care and sensitivity in the interests of all concerned and we will ensure that any approach or actions are not unfair or discriminatory by avoiding the assumption at the outset that the working relationship will be unsatisfactory.

The following guidelines have been adopted to avoid such difficulties:-

- Where a close personal relationship exists or develops between any two members of staff, this must be declared to the Depot Manager/Project Manager who may need to review the existing reporting structure or operational requirements with regard to audit/finance requirements
- Where a close personal relationship exists or develops that involves the Project Manager, the Chair of the Management Committee will be informed who may wish to take any appropriate measures
- Where a close personal relationship exists or develops between two members of staff and interferes, or is reasonably perceived to interfere with the work of that team or group, then it may be necessary to explore the possibility of one party being moved to a different area of work or location.

It is acknowledged that work related friendships are quite naturally formed in the workplace and any employee is expected to exercise judgement as to whether or not the friendship has developed to an extent that it could be described as a close personal relationship that could potentially raise any issue, which this policy seeks to address. If any employee is in any doubt, they should discuss the situation with the Project Manager who will offer advice and guidance.

Where any issues identified cannot be managed effectively to the agreement of all parties, there should be no assumptions made on gender, status or grade as to who may be the most appropriate employee to move, where a move can be offered. Care will be taken to avoid discrimination and ensure the views of the individuals are taken into account, balancing this with the needs of the service and the issues that present themselves.

Any failure to disclose a close personal relationship will be considered a serious matter and may result in disciplinary action.

## Relationships between staff / volunteers and clients

Members of staff and volunteers have a professional and/or ethical responsibility to protect the interests of the clients with whom they work. A member of staff or volunteer embarking on a close personal relationship with a client may consider this to be consensual and equal, however such relationships can carry considerable risk.

The volunteer or member of staff may find themselves the subject of a complaint of harassment if the client decides that the relationship is not truly consensual or if the relationship breaks down. Such relationships can impact adversely on other volunteers and staff, since they can create tension, rumours and secrecy. Problems of this kind can result in complaints from third parties, either individuals or agencies, and the lowering of the reputation of the organisation as a whole.

Some clients may be more vulnerable than others, due to age, ability or background and the issue of using an organisation such as Dorset Reclaim to target individuals for personal relationships is unacceptable.

Having taken all these factors into account, together with the nature of our business and with whom we work, the following form the basis of our position concerning relationships between staff/volunteers and clients :-

- A volunteer or member of staff should not enter into a business, commercial or financial relationship with a client which could compromise, or could be perceived to compromise, their position, or that of Dorset Reclaim
- Close relationships of a romantic/sexual nature are strongly discouraged
- Close relationships of a romantic/sexual nature between staff/volunteers and clients under the age of 18 or who may be considered vulnerable adults, are normally forbidden and will lead to disciplinary action being taken against the member of staff or the volunteer being asked to leave the organisation, together with any necessary agency being notified. In this context, vulnerable adults include those with learning disabilities and those with mental health problems affecting their ability to make sound judgements. It also includes those vulnerable due to their current or previous use of drugs/alcohol.

Any member of staff or volunteer engaged in a close personal relationship with a client must inform their Depot Manager or Project Manager of their situation. The manager will work with, and advise the member of staff regarding the situation.

## Recruitment and appointment of employees

To avoid any accusation of bias, an employee must not be involved in any appointment process where they are related, or have a close personal or business relationship outside work with the individual being considered for appointment.

## Involvement in employment issues

Again, to avoid any accusation of bias or unfair treatment, an employee should not be involved in any decisions relating to discipline, promotional or pay adjustments for any other employee where there is a close personal relationship

## Others affected by relationships

Others who feel they are affected by a close personal relationship at work, either volunteer or member of staff, should at all times feel they can approach either their Depot Manager, Project Manager or member of the Management Committee to discuss their concerns.

The Management Committee has adopted this policy on  
The 19<sup>th</sup> May 2008.

Signed: Chairman