



Homeless Link

# **Promoting inclusion within services**

Steps workers can take to actively tackle oppression and discrimination in services

# Introduction

This guidance focuses on how individuals and teams can deliver more equitable support, and promote inclusion, by reflecting on their day-to-day practice. Central to this is how practitioners can commit to delivering **anti-oppressive practice**. Anti-oppressive practice consciously takes account of the impact of power, inequality and oppression on people delivering and accessing services.

Causes of discrimination and inequality are structural in nature and as such can only be addressed by widespread social political and economic change, and collective action.

Nonetheless practitioners can commit to deliver anti-oppressive practice, which can make an important contribution in creating accessible and inclusive support and services.

This guidance is structured as follows:

## 1) **Context: power, oppression and dominant culture**

This section explores how power and oppression operate at an organisational and individual level. It considers how organisational culture can affect the composition and delivery of services and provides reflective questions for workers to consider how organisational culture may influence the accessibility of services.

## 2) **Reflective worksheets:**

This guidance includes three worksheets that frontline workers and managers can work through individually or as a team to take action to improve inclusivity of practice and services:

### 1. **Worksheet 1: power and oppression.**

This section focuses on power structures in society, and how this affects the workplace. It provides questions to help practitioners and managers to consider their own power, and how this affects the support and services they deliver. Through identifying the power they hold, workers can consider how that power can be shared, and inequalities redressed.

### 2. **Worksheet 2: anti-oppressive practice, cultural competence and cultural humility**

Framed around cultural competence and cultural humility this section provides tips for staff and managers to deliver anti-oppressive practice throughout their work.

### 3. **Worksheet 3: inclusive service design and delivery**

Actions individuals and teams can take to consider how inclusive their service delivery is, and the changes they can make.

## Context: power, oppression and dominant culture

**Power** is a concept that has come to possess numerous meanings. Generally, it refers to the ability or capacity to do something or act in a particular way, or the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behaviour of others or the course of events. Power can take various forms: power over, power to, and power from.<sup>1</sup>

**A dominant culture** is a culture that has established its own norms, values, and preferences as the standard for an entire group of people. Preferences and norms are imposed regardless of whether they contradict what is usual for other members of the group. The group tends to accept and adopt these behaviours and practices, even if they aren't shared. An example of dominant culture in the UK is Christian values and practices, which influence daily life: public holidays are organised around the Christian calendar.

- What are other dominant cultures in the UK?
- How does dominant culture in the UK affect the development and design of institutions, organisations and services?

**Dominant cultures within the workplace:** an organisation's leadership and staff, values, traditions, beliefs, relationships, attitudes and behaviours all contribute to a working environment and set a workplace culture. In a non-profit context, organisational culture is usually closely tied to its vision and mission. While often well-meaning, the non-profit sector is not immune to developing unhealthy cultures. Dominant cultures in the workplace are also influenced by dominant cultures at a societal level.

What are well intended dominant cultures/narratives in the charity sector?

- **Going above and beyond:** expectations of flexibility while working long or unsocial hours. This can exclude people with health needs, people with children or dependents, create or encourage a culture of burnout and create a culture of individual blame when expectations aren't met.
- **Expertise of workers:** this can mean neglecting expertise/experiences of those with lived experience. This can lead to a culture without reflection or curiosity and an assumption that workers know best. This may lead to judgement on how people should lead their lives, and lead to a culture of client disempowerment or worker saviourism.
- **Altruistic/selfless work** based on personal and organisational value systems; this can create an expectation that the workforce is engaged 'for the good' not for the money. This can develop an ethos that workers should expect/accept low pay and limited workplace benefits and exclude those who can't afford to live on certain allowances from the workforce – particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

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<sup>1</sup> Kloos, B., et al (2012). Community psychology: linking individuals and communities. Wadsworth Cengage.

Can you think of any other dominant cultures or narratives within the voluntary and community sector? How may this affect people working in or accessing services? Consider the [protected characteristics](#).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [www.equalityhumanrights.com/equality/equality-act-2010/protected-characteristics](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/equality/equality-act-2010/protected-characteristics)

## Worksheet 1: power and oppression

**Power over** is the ability to compel or dominate others, control resources, and enforce commands. Power is a commodity.

**Power to** is the ability of people to pursue personal and/or collective goals and develop their own capacities.

**Power with** is collective or shared power that grows out of collaboration and relationships.

**Power within** is a person's sense of self-worth.

**Oppression** refers to **systemic discrimination** where one social group is subordinated while another is privileged: the injustice targets or disproportionately impacts specific groups of people. Oppression is maintained by a variety of different mechanisms including social norms, stereotypes and institutional rules.

### Addressing power imbalances in practice

Acknowledging and addressing power imbalances is integral in **anti-oppressive practice**. It also sits at the core of **trauma informed approaches**. At the centre of trauma awareness is a recognition that those who have experienced or are experiencing trauma experience a lack of control. Trauma informed practices focus on preventing re-traumatisation through addressing this lack of control through prioritising:

- Physical, psychological and emotional safety
- Relationships between staff and clients through:
  - Transparency
  - Client choice: to reduce power differentials between staff and individuals using services.
  - Shared decision making

Central to any anti-oppressive, and trauma informed practice is centring and promoting the power and voices of those using services.

**“the definition and critical analysis of oppression has left out the complexity, voices and lived experiences of individuals who have been severely impacted by injustice and oppression...”** – Bell Hooks



# Worksheet 1: power and oppression continued

## Reflecting on your own experiences

By considering your own experiences of power, or lack of power, and your relationship with power, you can increase your understanding of how people experience the delivery of services.

- In what situations have you felt you've held power? In what situations have you felt you haven't held power?  
What factors contributed to the feeling that you did or did not hold power?
- What would have made a difference to you when you didn't hold power? What could have made your experience better?

## Who has what power when?

Considering how choice and power are enacted in the workplace can help identify opportunities to redress power imbalances.

- What decisions do you make on a daily or weekly basis?
- What decisions can people accessing your service make? What policies or processes might limit their ability to make decisions?
- What opportunities are there to collaborate with clients? Is there anything you can do to expand these?
- What happens when a quick decision needs to be made? When you are supporting someone who is in crisis or is unsafe, who has the power? What impact does that have on the support offered.

## Tips: power sharing


The following are ideas on how individuals and teams can redress power imbalances within their services. Central to this is client voice.

- Increase client choice, for example by allowing people to choose which staff they work with and in what way.
- Ask individuals for their opinion on what is needed/how the service should be run in a meaningful way. Seek opinions in a number of ways for example through resident meetings, experts by experience panels, one-to-one sessions, and through feedback boxes. Ensure these feedback mechanisms are accessible, inclusive and easy to use. People may want to communicate their ideas in different ways, and it's important to create plenty of spaces that will support people to contribute, for example through formal and informal spaces.
- Communicate how and why a service runs the way it does. If there are rules explain what they are trying to achieve and how having the rules will achieve this (if there isn't a clear reason, consider dropping the rule).
- Ensure language does not dehumanise, stereotype, or 'other' individuals accessing services. Challenge discriminatory language used by others, including other services.
- See Homeless Link's [Co-production resources](#) for further ideas and information.

## Worksheet 2: anti-oppressive practice, cultural competence and cultural humility

Work to deliver anti-oppressive practice can be uncomfortable: it asks workers to acknowledge their own attitudes, prejudice and decisions and how, even inadvertently, an individual/team may have caused or contributed to harm affecting others. It is necessary, however, in order for individuals and organisations to deliver services that are inclusive to the communities' they represent and work for.

**Anti-oppressive** practice takes account of the impact of power, inequality and oppression on people, and actively combats these. Approaches can include:

- Recognising the personal, cultural and structural barriers that people face.
- Recognising our own place in culture and structure – and how this might affect other people around us.
- Recognising how people's personal characteristics are used to stereotype or limit them.
- Working to understand someone's experience of oppression, understand and appreciate their strengths, and empower them to realise their rights. 

### Cultural competency

Cultural competency emphasizes the need for workers to be aware of, and responsive to cultural perspectives and backgrounds. The focus of cultural competency is to improve knowledge, attitudes and skills of practitioners, to improve the supports they deliver and individuals' experiences of services.

### Cultural humility

Cultural humility involves entering a relationship with another person with the intention of honouring their beliefs, customs, and values. It involves an ongoing process of self-exploration and self-critique combined with a willingness to learn from others.

Practitioners and managers can utilise learning from both **cultural competency** and **cultural humility approaches**, to develop their delivery of anti-oppressive practice. Skills and knowledge training is an important first step. Engaging in a cultural humility approach supports the embedding of this knowledge into practice, recognising that anti-oppressive practice is an ongoing process of learning and development.

It may be that you are unable to change a policy, or that certain decisions aren't within your remit, but there are commitments you can make in your own practice and work. The table below offers some suggestions for practitioners and managers.

**Cultural competency in practice**

**Cultural humility in practice**

<p><b>Practitioners can:</b></p>	<p>Identify gaps in your knowledge or skills, and areas you want to prioritise developing in. Make sure to communicate these to your manager and why they are important for you and the organisation/service.</p> <p>If you are unable to access training there are lots of free resources available including podcasts, news articles, fiction and non-fiction books.</p>	<p>Commit to learning through collaborating with the person/people you are working with in order to understand their experiences. This is an ongoing process with no final goal. Use the power sharing tips detailed in Worksheet 2.</p> <p>Don't assume to know everything about someone you are working with. Ask questions: be open and show genuine curiosity and interest about someone's life, without forcing them to go over their trauma.</p>
<p><b>Managers can:</b></p>	<p>Identify knowledge and skills gaps and organise resources including training to support staff development.</p> <p>Listen to staff, people using the service and community-based groups to identify these needs.</p> <p>If you are not hearing from certain staff members: actively seek out their opinions. The burden of raising EDI related problems often falls on marginalised groups. As a manager you should be actively listening to your staff members and inviting feedback/open discussion.</p> <p>Consider how internal policies are communicated to staff: are they regularly revisited? How can staff and individuals using your services feedback on and feed into these policies?</p>	<p>Promote a reflective culture: Carve out space for staff to reflect on their work and create space for staff to get things wrong and learn from these instances.</p> <p>Support staff to learn from the people they're working with.</p> <p>Recognise your own power within the team and organisational structure.</p> <p>Listen and learn from staff you line manage. Ask questions: be open and show genuine curiosity and interest about staff members experiences of delivering services, and how it affects them.</p> <p>Don't assume uniformity of experience across staff members.</p>



## Worksheet 3: inclusive service design and delivery

This worksheet has been designed to help workers to consider how a service is reaching and meeting the needs of the people they work for. It can be completed as an individual or as a team. While some aspects of design and delivery may be outside the remit of the team there are still actions that can be taken to increase reach, accessibility and inclusivity of the support delivered.

### Reviewing service delivery

The following questions have been developed as prompts for practitioners, managers and organisational leaders to reflect on how accessible their service is. While going through the questions, consider the protected characteristics.

#### Needs-mapping.

Needs-mapping supports organisations to identify whether they are meeting the needs of the community/communities it is intending to support. Questions to ask:

- Has the organisation recently mapped the needs of people using the service? How was this mapping conducted?
- What community members were spoken to (people using services, other organisations and general public)? What staff members were involved in this mapping, and could there be knowledge gaps?
- Have any voices been left out and how might this have affected the service and decision-making process?

#### Reviewing the accessibility of a service.

Those running services should consider whether they are reaching the groups and individuals that the services are intended for. This should be thought about in the context of the local population. Questions to ask:

- Who is accessing the service? Who isn't? Are the people accessing the service representative of local demographics and demographics of those affected by homelessness?
- Does the way the service is being delivered exclude certain groups of people? Consider barriers groups or individuals may be facing in accessing your service, for example due to opening hours, physical environment/accessibility, language, information and communication, visibility and location of the building.
- What are the referral pathways into the service? Are there groups/individuals who may face challenges accessing/following these pathways? Are there opportunities to open these up to reach wider groups?

**N.B.** Some people are hidden from data and services and will utilise other means to keep themselves safe. In relation to experiences of homelessness this may include people living in hidden homelessness situations or people who are accessing services that aren't 'traditional' homelessness supports, for example women's centres, domestic abuse support services,

mental health support, youth and student services. The next section provides suggestions on how a service may be better able to reach hidden groups.

## **Taking action: quick delivery changes**

### **Working with other services to increase accessibility.**

Speak to community groups that represent individuals you are not reaching.

Identify whether there are specialist services for marginalised groups in your area and ask for advice and guidance. This might include speaking to women's centres, youth centres, disability groups, religious groups or cultural community groups.

As a practitioner, you can forge relationships with other organisations and look for informal opportunities to build partnerships and share knowledge and resources.

Use these conversations to identify challenges in accessing your service, and what could be improved. Make changes and review.

### **Physical space.**

Look at the physical space of your service and consider what messages the environment might be sending.

- Who may find this space welcoming? Who may not? (consider visual cues, location, physical accessibility, neighbourhood, transport)
- Is there anything in the services that undermines connection? (think about physical barriers, doors, staff offices, windows you can't see through)
- Is there anything I can do to promote inclusion in this space: (consider cultural calendars, decorations and displays) and days of importance - posters, signs, something physical.

### **Initial contact and ongoing support.**

When accessing any service people are often asked for a lot of information about themselves. This may relate to offending history, information about a person's family and relationships, financial information and a health history. This can be challenging and intrusive. As discussed above, practices that empower and facilitate control are integral to inclusivity. One way we can do this is through allowing people to tell their story with the words they choose and at a time that suits them. Review your forms and consider what information is really needed to deliver a service to someone.

- Am I making assumptions about this person?
- What information do I have, and where has it come from? Are other people's biases affecting my judgement and if so how/why?

## **Caring for yourself and your colleagues**

## Homeless Link

Frontline workers in the homelessness sector are often exposed to challenging situations. Embedding reflective practice enables individuals to step back from their work and make sense of their experiences and responses in the workplace.

There are many benefits to reflective practice including reduced levels of staff burnout, increased positive outcomes and a more collaborative workplace culture that moves away from individual blame. [Read more about reflective practice](#)

**“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.”** Audre Lorde

## Resources

### Homeless Link Knowledge Hub

Homeless Link has over 100 free resources for homelessness services, including guidance, briefings, toolkits and case studies on meeting the needs of different groups experiencing homelessness.

[www.homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/](http://www.homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/)

[www.homeless.org.uk/areas-of-expertise/meeting-diverse-needs/](http://www.homeless.org.uk/areas-of-expertise/meeting-diverse-needs/)

## What We Do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

## Homeless Link

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# Let's End Homelessness Together

