



# Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy

## Contents

Vision	2
Definition and terminology	3
Why are equality, diversity and inclusion important to Tilehouse Counselling?	6
Strategy development and implementation	8

# Vision

As a counselling organisation and registered charity, we are committed to improving equality, diversity, and inclusion (ED&I). We believe that creating a truly diverse and inclusive service means addressing many systemic issues. This requires fundamental change in our culture, values, belief systems, behaviour, organisational and structural systems, practice, services and financial commitment, over a sustained period.

This strategy is about a continuous focus on embedding change.

Focusing on ED&I will bring significant benefit for our service users, staff, volunteers and wider community, not just now but into the future. The Tilehouse Counselling strategy sets out our commitment to evolve and improve practice across all areas of our work. Making the necessary changes is complex and we're at the beginning of the journey – this is our first ED&I strategy.

## **Our vision for the future is:**

- embed change that ensures the relevance of our service to all corners of our diverse community
- remove and address barriers to access to paid employment and volunteering so we're reflective of the communities we serve
- remove barriers that prevent the growth and evolution of our staff and volunteers, supporting a skilled, competent and diverse workforce to deliver counsellors to people from all sections of society
- ensure clients experience a welcoming and inclusive organisation.

The intent of our strategy is that our counselling service changes the lives of more people and those most in need of support regardless of who they are, their values, beliefs and culture. Social justice is at the heart of our strategy, and we're fully committed to promoting and progressing social justice in our communities. Social justice means many things to many people, but for us, it's about ensuring that anyone who needs counselling will be able to access equitable, ethical and effective practice.

We recognise that this work needs to be from the mind of more than one individual, and so the first actions of this strategy to be delivered during this first year include convening an ED&I focus group comprising staff, volunteers and clients.

# Definitions and terminology

Equality, diversity and inclusion (ED&I) cover all aspects of individual identities where difference can lead to barriers to access or disadvantages. Working to achieve ED&I in any organisation is a continuous process, similar to how our own identities go through a process of change, growth and development. It's an ongoing area of learning and improvement.

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects individuals and society against discrimination with respect to nine protected characteristics. It provides a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all, with the aim of creating a fairer and more equal society. It's important that we remain mindful of the ways in which one aspect of a person's identity intersects with other aspects of their identity (intersectionality), often creating multiple levels of discrimination and inequality. This may vary throughout a person's life (Crenshaw 1989). By being attentive to their changing presence, we'll be able to support, empower and work in ways which make inclusivity possible.

The three main aims of the Equality Act 2010 are to eliminate discrimination, to advance equality of opportunity, and to foster good relations.

The strategy is grounded within this framework and guidance.

## Terminology

We recognise that language in relation to ED&I is evolving regularly and that preferred terms can vary from person to person. In writing this document, we've aimed to use terms that are sensitive and generally considered to be acceptable by individuals within the demographic groups to which we're referring. For example, we've chosen to use the identity-first language 'Disabled people' rather than people-first language 'people with disabilities'. Using the word 'Disabled' before 'people' signifies identification with a collective cultural identity and capitalising the 'D' emphasises the term's political significance. Using the term 'Disabled people' or 'Disabled person' is therefore a political description of the shared, disabling experience that people with impairments face in society [Disability Rights UK in their Social Model of Disability].

We've avoided using the term 'BAME' but have instead opted for 'people from an ethnic minority (UK) group', we hope recognising that actually the global majority of people are not white, but that in the UK they are in a minority with a majority white population.

We have used the term GSRD (gender, sexuality and relationship diverse) within this document.

We recognise the limitations and problems of using catch-all umbrella terms like these and understand that some members of these communities may feel these terms don't accurately reflect their distinct and unique identities, individual experiences, and challenges. We hope we have used the most inclusive terms possible, but we are open to being challenged, learning from people within the described communities doing better when it comes to understanding and addressing matters of discrimination and privilege.

## **Equality**

Equality is about creating a fairer society where everyone can participate and has the same opportunity to fulfil their potential. Equality is backed by legislation (Equality Act 2010) designed to address unfair discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic, or more than one, and those who do not.

There are nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

## **Diversity**

Diversity acknowledges and values the full range of differences between people in the workplace and in wider society. It recognises that entering employment, and reaching potential once there, can be influenced by factors beyond the characteristics included within equality legislation. These include social, economic and educational background, professional background, hierarchical level, working style and nationality.

## **Inclusion**

Inclusion refers to an individual's experience within the workplace and in wider society, and the extent to which they feel valued and included.

## **Discrimination**

Discrimination is defined as less favourable treatment of a person (or persons) that is not capable of being justified. It's unlawful to discriminate against any person on the grounds of their protected characteristic(s). We're committed to promoting equality and avoiding discrimination. This doesn't mean that we must treat everyone in the same way. People may, for example, have different needs and requirements from us. It does, however, mean that we should provide equality of opportunity.

Discrimination can occur in many ways.

**This includes:**

### **Direct discrimination**

For example, deliberately inviting only younger job applicants to a job interview.

### **Indirect discrimination**

Where our policies or activities indirectly affect people who have different 'protected characteristics'. For example, asking members of the public to put a complaint in writing may indirectly discriminate against people with certain disabilities as they may find this request harder to comply with than non-disabled people.

## **Harassment**

This can be unwanted conduct, which affects the dignity of an individual by creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

### **By association**

For example, where a white employee is harassed by other employees because they're in a relationship with a black person.

### **By perception**

For example, where an individual is perceived to be trans and experiences harassment – irrespective of the individual's actual gender identity.

## **Victimisation**

Victimisation happens when someone is treated unfairly because they've made a complaint about discrimination or harassment on their own behalf, or on behalf of someone else.

## **Hate crime**

The term hate crime refers to a criminal offence, which is perceived to be motivated by hostility or prejudice, based on an individual's disability or perceived disability; race or perceived race; religion or perceived religion; sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation; or transgender identity or perceived transgender identity.

## **Positive action**

Positive action refers to any steps taken to reduce barriers and encourage participation for disadvantaged or underrepresented groups. Positive action shouldn't include positive discrimination (such as treating a person more favourably because they have a protected characteristic), which is banned under the Equality Act 2010 unless there is an occupational requirement.

## **Oppression**

The term oppression refers to the unjust use of power to marginalise, disadvantage or silence an individual or a social group.

## **Anti-oppression**

Anti-oppression refers to the use of strategies, theories, actions and practices that recognise the existence of oppression, and aim to challenge and mitigate the impact of oppression with a view to equalising power imbalances.

# Why are equality, diversity and inclusion so important to Tilehouse Counselling?

Equality, diversity and inclusion (ED&I) are central to Tilehouse Counselling's (and BACP's) ethos. We need to ensure that our colleagues, staff and clients are in an environment with us where they can thrive and fully be themselves.

This aim is supported by ethical, legal and business cases, which are outlined below.

## The ethical case

The ethical case for equality, diversity and inclusion is central to the approach to ED&I which Tilehouse has undertaken. As an organisation, we believe that a focus on actively including people from all parts of society is central to our work as therapeutic practitioners. At its simplest and most straightforward, it is 'the right thing to do'.

Focusing on ED&I can often feel challenging and confusing. At its core is the sense that all members of society, irrespective of their age, familial circumstances, gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status, physical ability, race or ethnicity, religious belief, sex, or sexual orientation are treated with equality, dignity and respect. We take this further, recognising that exclusion can happen for many other reasons. These may include nationality, personal philosophies, accent, class, education, and many others. Again, we advocate that discrimination on these, and other grounds should not happen, and that everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

We may all have had experiences in our lives of when we have felt excluded, or not seen, or not heard, and we know the damage that can result from this. These experiences may not have arisen from a typical ED&I characteristic, but we can identify with the impact.

Proactively addressing ED&I and working from within a personal framework, which recognises and values difference, is essential in providing services which are truly accessible to all, which treat our clients with the dignity and respect they deserve, and which are fit for the diverse communities within which we work as practitioners.

We reinforce this approach through the *Ethical Framework*, which sets out the expected ethical principles, values and good practice for BACP members: practitioners providing therapeutically informed services, particularly coaching, counselling and pastoral care, psychotherapy, and those using counselling skills. This reiterates our commitment to valuing diversity, actively working against discriminatory behaviours, and recognising that we all bring values and assumptions, which are not universally shared, but which may impact how we work with others. The *Ethical Framework* requires us to actively seek out learning and knowledge about those subjects which may impact or inform our clients. It also requires us to show humility in recognising that there are areas where we might need to educate ourselves, or to refer our clients or patients to other practitioners.

The BACP *Ethical Framework*, which we are committed to both as a service and as a result of our counsellors being individually accredited, also states that 'We will take the law concerning ED&I into careful consideration and strive for a higher standard than the legal minimum'.

## The legal case

We must comply with all UK legislation. The Equality Act (2010) covers England and Wales, and Scotland. It consolidated previous anti-discrimination laws into one single Act, identifying how discrimination may be experienced across society. The Act cites the nine protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race (including colour, ethnicity and nationality), religion and belief, sex, and sexual orientation. These provisions apply to everyone who falls under the jurisdiction of UK law, in both the workplace and wider society.

For Northern Ireland equality and discrimination are covered under separate pieces of legislation. The areas covered are as follows: age, disability, gender/sex including trans, race, religious belief and political opinion, and sexual orientation.

Compliance with the Equality Act (2010), and the equivalent laws in Northern Ireland, are the minimum standard upon which our equality, diversity and Inclusion (ED&I) work is based, and care will continue to be taken to ensure that the requirements of this foundation are understood and explicitly reflected in our operations. As laws change over time, this document will be updated to reflect current legislation.

## The business case

The business case for ED&I can be considered from two perspectives: the staff and volunteers; and clients at Tilehouse.

### Internal business case

As an organisation, we'll strive to embed ED&I throughout our full range of operations, strengthening our workforce talent, market competitiveness, brand, and reputation.

- **Workforce** – Staff make their best contribution to Tilehouse when they feel respected, supported and valued. We'll nurture a positive and inclusive culture and continue to build processes, which allow individuals to fulfil their potential and want to give their best.
- **Market** – Diverse and ethically grounded counselling professionals will strive to remove barriers that prevent people from accessing therapy. A diverse counselling team will contribute to positioning counselling at Tilehouse as a positive, responsive and sensitive service that respects and strengthens individual identity and improves emotional wellbeing.
- **Brand and reputation** – Embedding an ED&I focus in all communications with clients, partners and the general public will strengthen our brand. We'll strive to further our brand and reputation, so they are universally synonymous with respect, equality and social justice.

### Business case for clients

The business case for clients is premised on access and support.

- **Access** – We're committed to ensuring equal access to our service for people from all demographics, so that our client group even more closely reflects the makeup of the local populations we serve.
- **Support** – We're committed to equality of support from our service for people from all demographics, so that everyone feels understood and comfortable here.

# Strategy development and implementation

Our senior management team has drafted a plan to identify specific strategic goals designed to ensure that Tilehouse fully embeds equality, diversity and inclusion (ED&I) throughout the organisation.

This document aims to ensure the thread of ED&I runs through all our work and is embedded into our organisational goals, but that not all of the strategy steps to do this may yet have been identified. This is simply a place to start.

## **Strategic area one**

We will listen to, learn from and work with our clients (and their families where appropriate) to inform the work of Tilehouse. We will recognise and work to remove barriers that prevent individuals from accessing our service with particular regard to those communities who appear to be under-represented in our current client group.

### **First step(s)**

Interrogate our datasets and compare the Office of National Statistics datasets to understand which communities we may not be reaching / fully reaching currently. This will cut across gender, sexuality, race, religion, disability and unpaid carer status. We will specifically recruit volunteers from these groups to feed into our ED&I focus group(s) to ensure any barriers are identified and appropriately reduced or removed.

## **Strategic area two**

We will equip our staff to be able to work in a fast-changing world, to be able to influence and contribute to the wellbeing of local society

### **First step(s)**

Full audit of training offering (and under-pinning budget). Promotion of learning and development opportunities on equality, diversity and inclusion (ED&I) to support staff to work with the communities we serve (for example BACP 'Race is Complicated Toolkit' training and BAME online conference 2023)

## **Strategic area three –**

We will further develop confidence in and credibility of the service by upholding the BACP professional and ethical standards which are informed by an evidence base and maintaining our BACP organisational accreditation.

### **First step(s)**

Conduct a complete review of all policies to ensure all are up to date, robust and as far as possible written in neutral language and are easy to understand.



## **Strategic area four –**

We will not pursue nor accept funding from any philanthropist, trust or other funding body without first ensuring their ED&I aims align with ours and any historic issues rectified (for example with appropriately consulted on and agreed reparations)

### **First step(s)**

Conduct a full review of our current and immediately prospective funders, completing ED&I due diligence with a view to indentifying any issues.

## **Implementation**

An internal equality, diversity and inclusion (ED&I) Steering group will be developed to further grow and implement this strategy. This internal group will include volunteers recruited specifically from backgrounds other than our current staff team, to ensure we include views we may otherwise be missing.

## **Practice**

We'll work actively to continue to build an inclusive and diverse organisation, which is open to everyone, and where everyone can progress. This is inherent in creating a culture which is truly diverse, fair, and inclusive.

We believe it's essential that we work with our staff to ensure that all voices are heard, that opportunities are open to and for everyone, that our staff equality, diversity and inclusion (ED&I) group is fully supported and has opportunities to raise issues, and that people can really be their best selves at work.

It's also imperative that our recruitment processes are fair and transparent, and that, when recruiting, we can understand the different experiences and routes that people have taken. This is critical in ensuring that the best candidate is appointed rather than recruiting in our own image, helping ensure Tilehouse Counselling is an inclusive employer.

We recognise the importance of leading by example, and senior management will be tasked with providing clear leadership on this in line with best practice.

By focusing on our people, and building policy to support our people, we'll be able to put ED&I at our centre, helping us to create and foster a vibrant culture, which is equitable, celebrates and values diversity, and which is inclusive and welcoming to all.

## **Our commitments**

- We'll lead by example. Leadership within Tilehouse Counselling, from the Board and senior management, will ensure that consistent messages are set from our top level, helping us to lead our internal work by example.
- We'll work towards more inclusive recruitment by connecting with, interviewing and hiring a diverse set of individuals, engaging with, understanding and valuing different backgrounds and opinions. This will in turn support our aim to ensure that all the structures of our organisation – our staff, Board and volunteers – are diverse and representative of the communities we serve.
- We'll embed issues of ED&I in all aspects of our policies and procedures.
- We'll continue to develop and review our people and organisational development policies and procedures, which promote and safeguard rights and wellbeing throughout our organisation.
- We'll continue to encourage the highest standards of behaviour and conduct from all staff and volunteers, supported by training and education which facilitate an inclusive workplace.

## **Impact – what we want to achieve**

- We'll ensure consistent messaging about ED&I across our Board and Senior Leadership Team.
- We'll create a vibrant, inclusive, diverse, ethical and equitable culture with staff who feel respected, supported and valued.
- We'll ensure that ED&I is at the forefront of the work we do.
- We'll consider staff policies, procedures, guidelines and best practice through an ED&I lens so that inclusion becomes embedded into the organisation.
- We'll develop our internal ED&I group to drive cultural change from within Tilehouse Counselling, and ensure that all voices can be heard.
- We'll develop a methodology to measure and report on this impact – this will form part of our annual impact report from 2024

# Glossary of ED&I terms (not all used in this strategy)

**Ableism:** prejudice or discrimination against individuals with disabilities.

**Accessibility:** the ability to access services, systems and resources.

**Ageism:** prejudice or discrimination on the grounds of an individual's age.

**Antisemitism:** prejudice or discrimination against Jewish individuals, communities or Judaism as a religion or ethnic identity.

**Barriers to access:** conditions that prevent individuals with disabilities from using resources as effectively as individuals without disabilities.

**Black Lives Matter (BLM):** a political and social movement, which protests against police brutality and racially motivated violence against black people.

**Communities experiencing racial inequality:** communities typically but not exclusively referred to as People From An Ethnic Minority (Uk) Group. These are communities who may be facing discrimination, disadvantage or be marginalised.

**Disability:** is a barrier preventing full societal participation and is experienced in addition to, not because of, impairment. We recognise that many disabled people state it is society, not their impairment, that disables them (Oliver, 1995) and that we need to look at access to the profession and therapy services from a perspective that considers an expanded social model view.

**Disabled people:** individuals who have an impairment or identify as disabled, whether due to a physical or mental impairment. Some neurodivergent people (with or without an impairment) may also consider themselves disabled. Impairments may be visible, invisible, congenital (born with) or acquired; someone may be simultaneously visibly and invisibly disabled. Many people who are classed by others as disabled may not consider themselves so. The words impairment and disability are used interchangeably in everyday language with people preferring one word over the other, or neither.

**Eurocentric:** a focus on European history, perceptions and/or culture to the exclusion of other cultures or perceptions.

**Explicit bias:** biases that you are consciously aware of, and that you admit to yourself and potentially others. **Homophobia:** prejudice or discrimination against individuals who are attracted to people of the same sex.

**Implicit bias (unconscious bias):** refers to attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious way, making them difficult to control. As they are often subtly expressed, we don't initially detect or intend implicit biases, but they can become more apparent with tools and careful self-introspection.

**Inclusion:** authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities, and decision/policy making in a way that shares power.

**Inequality:** a situation in which money, health or opportunities are not shared equally or are unevenly distributed between different groups in society.

**Inequity:** refers to unfair or unjust differences, which are avoidable. Often these arise from poor governance, corruption, unconscious bias, prejudice or cultural exclusion.

**Institutional racism:** a form of racism that's created and maintained through rules, regulations and/or laws within a society or an organisation.

**Intersectionality:** an analytical framework for considering the interconnected nature of social categorisations (such as race and gender), and how these categorisations can combine to

influence an individual's experiences of discrimination and privilege. The term 'intersectionality' was coined by the civil rights activist, philosopher and critical race theorist, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw

**Islamophobia:** prejudice or discrimination against the religion of Islam or Muslim individuals.

**GSRD:** Gender, sexuality and relation diverse. We recognise the limitations and problems of using catch-all umbrella terms like 'GSRD'. We understand that some members of these communities may feel these terms don't accurately reflect their distinct and unique identities, individual experiences, and challenges. We hope that we have used the most inclusive term possible.

**Marginalised groups:** groups who experience social, political and economic discrimination and disadvantage due to inequalities within society.

**People from an ethnic minority (UK) group:** people from an ethnicity which is not White British or White English. We recognise the limitations and problems of using any catch all umbrella term like 'People From An Ethnic Minority (UK) Group'. We understand that some members of these communities may feel these terms don't accurately reflect their distinct and unique identities, individual experiences, and challenges. We also acknowledge that 'People From An Ethnic Minority (UK) Group' does not sufficiently cover mixed heritage people.)

**People of colour:** or 'people of colour and other marginalised groups', if we are also talking about minority white groups such as Irish, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities or Jewish communities.

**Positive action:** refers to any steps taken to reduce barriers and encourage participation for disadvantaged or underrepresented groups. Positive action should not include positive discrimination (i.e. treating a person more favourably because they have a protected characteristic), which is prohibited under the Equality Act 2010 unless there is an occupational requirement.

**Prejudice:** a preconceived opinion or bias that is not based on actual experience.

**Protected characteristics:** outlined in the Equality Act 2010, it is against the law to discriminate against anyone based on the following protected characteristics: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation.

**Racialised communities:** (may be especially relevant when we are speaking about inequality and injustice). This is because ethnic, racial and cultural communities who are in the minority have been racialised – that is, white-majority systems have categorised groups according to the colour of their skin or other cultural or religious features, and in doing so have 'othered' and marginalised them.

The term 'racialisation' was coined by Fanon (1967). Fernando (2019) suggests the importance of having a racialised other, be it as individual or communities as serves a function, where negative unwanted aspects can be projected into the other.

**Racism:** prejudice or discrimination against individuals on the basis of their race or ethnic group.

**Reasonable adjustment:** any change to remove or reduce the effect of any barriers for individuals with disabilities so that they can access services and resources.

**Reparations:** compensation given for an abuse or injury. In this context, reparations are meant to acknowledge and repair the causes and consequences of human rights violations and inequality in societies dealing with racial injustice and legacies of colonisation.

**Sexism:** prejudice or discrimination against individuals on the basis of their sex.

**Social justice:** justice within a society, which is considered in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges.

**Social model of disability:** this model focuses on the disadvantages or barriers experienced in the

physical and social environment. How society is structured, services organised and delivered; institutions, language, culture and attitudes all have influence (Oliver, 1990).

**Socioeconomic status:** the social status of an individual, which is often measured as a combination of occupation, income and level of education.

**Structural discrimination/societal discrimination:** a form of institutional discrimination, either intentional or unintentional, which restricts the opportunities of a group of people.

**Therapy:** We use the word therapy to cover talking therapies such as counselling, psychotherapy and coaching.

**Transphobia:** prejudice or discrimination against transgender individuals.