

# **FOSTER FORWARD AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PLAN**

## **FOSTER FORWARD ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE**

Foster Forward was started in 1995 to meet the needs of the foster care community caring for children, youth, and young adults who were removed from their biological families. Over the years Foster Forward has shifted its activities to meet the changes in child welfare but has not wavered from its original mission.

Foster Forward's mission is to empower lives impacted by foster care. We have an unwavering commitment to support children and youth, families, and the child welfare system as a whole, to grow, connect, improve, and move forward.

Foster Forward is a nationally and locally recognized leader committed to ensuring that all children and youth impacted by foster care have safe, healthy, and nurturing families. We continuously innovate to provide proven programs that engage natural supports and promote healthy development. Today, Foster Forward has a staff of 21 and provides a programming array for children and youth in foster care, young adults who have aged out of foster care and the families who care for them.

## **PLAN ADMINISTRATION**

Foster Forward is committed to being an anti-discrimination organization and our policies and procedures reflect that commitment. The purpose of this policy is to state and affirm the basic employment policy of Foster Forward that all employment decisions will promote the principles of Equal Opportunity and comply fully with applicable Executive Orders issued by the President of the United States and federal, state, and local civil right laws, and to delineate areas of responsibility.

Foster Forward provides equal employment opportunity (EEO) to all people and shall not discriminate on the basis of age, sex, race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability with respect to employment, volunteer participation, or the provision of services. Foster Forward is committed to equal opportunity and equal consideration to all applicants and employees in personnel matters including recruitment, hiring, lay-offs, training, benefits, promotions and appointments, demotions and discipline, work assignments and salary/wages and leaves. Foster Forward will post all vacancies, recruit, hire, train and promote persons in all job classifications without regard to race, color, sex, age, national origin, religion, handicap/disability status, veteran's status, sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

Foster Forward is committed to identifying and eliminating the present effects of past discrimination in employment. To achieve equal opportunity, Foster Forward recognizes the need to take affirmative action to identify classifications with under-representation of minorities and females; to set goals and timetables for increasing the employment of underrepresented groups; and to develop an affirmative action plan for implementing those reasonable goals through outreach, recruitment, training, and other activities and commitments.

**SEXUAL HARRASSMENT:** It is the policy of Foster Forward that it will not tolerate verbal or physical conduct by any employee that harasses, disrupts, or interferes with another's work performance, or which creates an intimidating, offensive, or hostile environment. The purpose of this policy is to state and affirm that all forms of harassment, including sexual harassment, are prohibited by Foster Forward, and to acknowledge and express the intent of Foster Forward to comply fully with applicable Executive Orders issued by the President of the United States and federal, state, and local civil right laws, and to delineate areas of responsibility.

While all forms of harassment are prohibited, it is the policy of Foster Forward to emphasize that sexual harassment is specifically prohibited. Each supervisor has the responsibility to maintain the work place free of any form of sexual harassment. No supervisor is to threaten or insinuate, either explicitly or implicitly, that an employee's refusal to submit to sexual advances will adversely affect the employee's employment, evaluation, wages, advancement, assigned duties, or any other condition of employment or career development. In addition, no supervisor is to favor in any way any applicant or employee because that person has performed or shown a willingness to perform sexual favors for the supervisor.

Foster Forward prohibits the introduction, duplication, and/or distribution of racially, ethnically, or religiously offensive materials on Foster Forward's premises or during Foster Forward related activities. Any employee who believes that the actions or work of a supervisor or fellow employee constitute unwelcome harassment or ethnic, racial or religious offensiveness, has a responsibility to report or complain as soon as possible to the appropriate supervisor, or if the alleged offender is a supervisor, to the Executive Director.

It is the policy of Foster Forward that the work of all employees shall be assigned, directed, and reviewed by supervisory personnel. Each employee will have only one supervisor to whom he or she is directly responsible. It is the responsibility of each supervisor to ensure that the goals regarding conduct and performance established by management are achieved and that the Personnel Policies in the manual are implemented. Supervisors are expected to be involved in the following activities and to perform those activities without regard to race, color, sex, age, national origin, religion, handicap/disability status, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity or expression:

1. Hiring and work assignments
1. Training employees supervised
2. Keeping employees informed on factors relating to their work assignments, work progress, and opportunities for advancement
3. Evaluating, as deemed necessary by Foster Forward's Policies and Procedures, the performance of probationary employees, regular employees, and employees who are being terminated
4. Recommending salary adjustments, promotions, and termination of Employees
5. Scheduling employee weekly work hours, lunch and rest breaks

Foster Forward's Executive Director Lisa Guillette is designated as the Coordinator of Foster Forward's Equal Employment Opportunity Program and is also designated as the Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinator/504 Coordinator.

## **APPOINTMENT OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Foster Forward maintains an Equal Opportunity Advisory Committee chaired by Lisa Guillette, Executive Director that will include the following members:

- Victoria Ferrara, Director of Programs, white, female
- Bernadette Tavares, Works Wonders Program Coordinator, African American, female
- Caitlin Divver, Program Evaluation Coordinator, white, female
- Cherai Dimeo, Assessment and Data Support Specialist, black, female

The Equal Opportunity Advisory Committee shall meet quarterly and develops and reviews the annual plan for determining underrepresentation and goal setting, track Foster Forward's performance in applicant data, applicant refusal and training participation summary. The Committee also makes recommendations to the Executive Director for changes to policies and practices to promote equal opportunity within the organization. Minutes of the meetings will be kept and submitted to the Executive Director and Foster Forward's Board of Directors.

## **DIVISION HEADS, SUPERVISORS, PERSONNEL/EMPLOYEE RELATIONS OFFICERS**

It is the policy of Foster Forward that the Board of Directors, through the Executive Director and senior team administrators, shall assume responsibility for implementation of Foster Forward Non-Discrimination Policy. The statement "Equal Opportunity Employer" shall be included in all employment advertisement and a Non-Discrimination statement shall be sent to all sources from which Foster Forward is seeking funding. All employment decisions will promote the principles of Equal Opportunity.

## **PROGRAM COORDINATOR/ AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT/504 COORDINATOR**

Foster Forward's Executive Director Lisa Guillette is designated as the Coordinator of Foster Forward's Equal Employment Opportunity Program and is also designated as the Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinator/504 Coordinator. Ms. Guillette will chair the Equal Opportunity Advisory Committee and be responsible for ensuring that the following areas are administered without regard to race, color, sex, age, national origin, religion, handicap/disability status, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity or expression: Hiring Work Assignments, Salary/Wages Leave, Lay-Offs, Training, Promotions and Appointments and Demotions and Discipline.

Employees who wish to make a complaint outside of the complaint processes outlined by Foster Forward may contact:

Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights  
180 Westminster Street, 3rd Floor  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903  
Phone: 401-222-2662

TTY: 401-222-2661  
Fax: 401-222-2616

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)  
Boston Area Office  
John F. Kennedy Federal Building  
475 Government Center  
Boston, Massachusetts 02203  
Phone: 1-800-669-4000 or 617-565-3200  
TTY: 1-800-669-6820  
Fax: 617-565-3196

## **DISSEMINATION OF PLAN AND POLICY:**

### **Internal Dissemination**

Foster Forward's Personnel Policy Manual affirms Foster Forward's policy and grievance procedures. Copies of the Personnel Manual are provided to each employee at the date of hire and must be read and signed by the employee. Foster Forward also posts information related to Equal Opportunity including Policy Statements on procedures that are available to handle complaints of alleged discrimination, Policy on Contracts including Minority Outreach, and Policy on Service Delivery including contact person in the mail room for all staff members to review. A full copy of the Affirmative Action Plan is also available to staff.

### **External Dissemination**

Foster Forward's Affirmative Action Plan will be posted on our website by January 1, 2017.

## **POLICY STATEMENTS**

Three separate statements, signed by the agency head, are posted in Foster Forward's mail room including:

- Policy that states procedures are available to handle complaints of alleged discrimination.
- Policy on Contracts (including minority outreach)
- Policy on Service Delivery (including contact person)

## **COMPLIANCE WITH SEX DISCRIMINATION**

Foster Forward provides equal employment opportunity (EEO) to all people and shall not discriminate on the basis of age, sex, race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability with respect to employment, volunteer participation, or the provision of services. Foster Forward is committed to equal opportunity and equal consideration to all applicants and employees in personnel matters including recruitment, hiring, lay-offs, training, benefits, promotions and appointments,

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#### **COMPLIANCE WITH GUIDELINES ON DISCRIMINATION BECAUSE OF RELIGION OR NATIONAL ORIGIN**

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Any complaints of sexual, ethnic, racial, or religious harassment will be investigated promptly and in an impartial, and as confidential a manner as possible by the supervisor, or if the alleged offender is a supervisor by the Executive Director. In all cases the employee is to be advised of the investigator's findings and conclusions.

If an employee is not satisfied with the handling of a complaint or the action taken by the supervisor, then the employee may bring the complaint to the attention of the Executive Director in accordance

with Foster Forward's Grievance Procedure. If the complaint is against the Executive Director, then it may be submitted in writing to the Personnel Committee in accordance with Foster Forward's Grievance Procedure.

Any employee, supervisor, or manager who is found after appropriate investigation to have engaged in harassment of another employee, shall be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Accommodations to religious observance and practice- The Equal Opportunity Advisory Committee will develop a draft policy for accommodations to religious observance and practice to be reviewed and approved by the Board of Directors in February 2017.

## **PROGRAM EVALUATION**

Foster Forward is committed to achieving racial and ethnic equity and inclusion for all clients we serve and routinely examines disproportionalities in the population we serve and disparities in outcomes. Issues identified are included as part of program planning and goalsetting for continuous improvement and are reported to funders.

## **SELF-EVALUATION**

In 2015, Foster Forward identified an underrepresentation of minorities among their Director/Coordinator level staff and targeted to increase that by at least one staff member. Foster Forward also identified in 2015 that although we exceed statewide representation for both minorities and women among our Professional staff category, our staff composition does not adequately represent the population we serve. Accordingly, we targeted to increase minority representation among our professional staff by 2. All hiring goals for 2015 were met. In January 2017, the Equal Opportunity Advisory Committee set hiring goals for 2017 for review and approval by the Foster Forward board. Priority was set on hiring staff who were bi-lingual English/Spanish. Hiring goals were met.

## **IDENTIFICATION AND ANALYSIS OF PROBLEM AREAS**

Foster Forward is in the process of examining all personnel practices. At the present time, no workforce composition deficiencies exist. All position openings are first posted internally to give current employees opportunities for promotion. It is Foster Forward's policy and practice to support the ongoing professional growth and development of all staff and to create opportunities to retain and grow our staff and provide equal opportunity for advancement. When positions are not filled internally, they are posted externally noting EOE with the Providence Journal. Positions are also posted on the Foster Forward website, on LinkedIn, on our Foster Forward Facebook and Twitter feeds and shared with a network of local organizations and colleges and universities to draw a broad and diverse applicant pool. Resumes and cover letters are reviewed by the supervisor for the position being hired with the Executive Director to ensure that all candidates who meet the qualification of the position are selected for interviews. Interviews are conducted by the supervisor and may include Executive Director. Those

participating in interviews score candidates based on their responses to questions and performance in any role play or exercise they are asked to complete and a top candidate and alternate is selected. Qualified applicants who are not selected for the position opening are made aware of any other openings that may come up.

All staff are afforded training opportunities through monthly presentations at staff meetings and are encouraged to identify professional development and training opportunities that are relevant to their current position and areas identified for growth and development. Foster Forward's attitude is that professional development is essential for everyone and each staff member has a professional development and training component to their annual work plan, developed with their supervisor. Furthermore, Foster Forward works with staff to fund, partially fund or support (with flexible scheduling) opportunities for staff to participate in professional development and educational opportunities.

Foster Forward conducts exit interviews with all staff members, affording them an opportunity to provide feedback on ways to better enhance the organization and support its employees. Foster Forward also purchases an Employee Assistance Program through Coastline EAP to assist employees with personal issues. Beginning in January 2017, the Equal Opportunity Advisory Committee will annually review and update Foster Forward's analysis and compliance and review and enhance procedures and policies for Outreach Recruitment, Physical and Mental Qualifications, Work Environment, Reasonable Accommodations including modifying job-site, support services, special equipment and restructuring the job. The Equal Opportunity Advisory Committee will also report on last year's activities and this year's plans.

#### **AFFIRMATIVE ACTION FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES, DISABLED VETERANS AND VIETNAM ERA VETERANS**

Foster Forward meets the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Rhode Island General Law 28-5.1, Executive Order 92-2 and Vietnam Era Veterans Readjustment Act of 1974, and takes affirmative action to employ and advance individuals with disabilities and veterans. This policy statement is signed by the Executive Director, posted and notes that she is responsible for implementing this program. Beginning in January 2017, the Equal Opportunity Advisory Committee will annually review and update Foster Forward's analysis and compliance and review and enhance procedures and policies for Outreach Recruitment, Physical and Mental Qualifications, Work Environment, Reasonable Accommodations including modifying job-site, support services, special equipment and restructuring the job. The Equal Opportunity Advisory Committee will also report on last year's activities and this year's plans.