

RECEIVED  
09 NOV 2004  
Equality Unit



Single Equality Bill Team  
Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister  
Room E3.18  
FREEPOST NAT 17679  
BELFAST  
BT4 3BR

239 Newtownards Road  
Belfast BT4 1AF  
Tel: 028 9045 8560  
Fax: 028 9045 2561  
Email: info@ebm.org.uk  
Web: www.ebm.org.uk

November 2004

Dear Sir or Madam,

The SEB and its wording has particularly come to our notice as an organisation who depends a great deal on volunteers to keep our various programmes running smoothly. We feel that the inclusion of voluntary work and equating volunteers with paid employees in the overall wording of the Bill is not acceptable for a variety of reasons.

As an organisation we seek to engage in 'best practice' when managing and involving volunteers but do not think that volunteers should be aligned with employees in this Bill. Volunteers in the main do not wish to have an arrangement which is surrounded by 'red tape' and often people who volunteer are on JSA or Incapacity Benefit and to define such people as 'employees' would not be at all correct. Entering into established contracts of employment with volunteers would completely change the nature of the relationship between volunteer and organisation. Another area in which voluntary organisations are already being hit is in the cost of insurance premiums. Should volunteers be included in the SEB this would lead to new risks that would not be easily definable and may result in fewer opportunities for volunteer involvement.

HOSFORD HOUSE

STEPPING STONE

DAY CENTRE

CHARITY SHOPS

We think that there could be viable alternatives to the inclusion of volunteers within the SEB. The bill could mention volunteering - distinct from employment, goods or services - that volunteers should be treated fairly and not suffer from discrimination and a definition of volunteering understood by the sector should be included. A Code of Practice drawn up by an organisation such as the Volunteer Development Agency could be the recommended model. A body of people trained in mediation could act on behalf of volunteers rather than having the need for a tribunal which would first have to decide whether or not a volunteer was an 'employee' as in past cases.

MEALS ON WHEELS

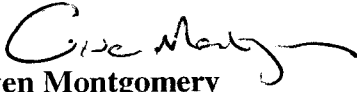
YOUTH WORK

COMMUNITY PROJECTS

COMMUNITY  
PASTORAL CARE

The voluntary sector needs to be heard and consulted on this issue as it is not a case of 'one size fits all'. We trust that our concerns will be heard and appropriate structures, wording and practice be implemented in a manner which reflects the peculiar nature of the relationship between a volunteer and the organisation they give their time to help.

Yours faithfully,

  
**Gwen Montgomery**  
Finance and Administration Manager

Superintendent  
Rev. Dr. Gary Mason

Director of Care and Training Services  
Mr Glenn Jordan

Part of THE METHODIST CHURCH IN IRELAND

Charity Reg No XN68566