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President

Royal Patron

Patron

Office of the First & Deputy First Minister
Room E3.18
Freepost NAT 17679
BELFAST
BT4 3BR

RECEIVED
12 NOV 2004
Equality Unit

11 November 2004

Dear Minister

I am writing, on behalf of the Northern Ireland office of The Meningitis Trust, in response to the proposal to create a Single Equality Bill for Northern Ireland.

We would like to register our concerns about the potential inclusion of volunteers within the activity listed as 'employment'. As a registered charity, we encourage many volunteers to commit their time and energy to help our organisation raise vital funds and help us raise awareness of this devastating disease. They may become involved following a personal experience or simply be people with time to spare who wish to give something back to their community. We feel strongly that volunteers are not employees and, more importantly, they do not wish to be treated as such.

We also feel that classifying a volunteer as an employee has major implications for our organisation. As a team of five, here in Northern Ireland, we would be unequipped to begin to deal with the administration and bureaucracy which would surround such an arrangement with a volunteer. We would be concerned also about the rise in our insurance, which would result in order to cover the potential of discrimination claims.

We also think that, by blurring the lines between employer/employee and volunteer status, organisations may find themselves in a situation whereby contracts with volunteers become established. The whole nature of the relationship would change making it impossible for a small team such as ours to manage.



Head Office Fern House Bath Road Stroud Glos GL5 3TJ UK
Telephone +44 (0)1453 768000 Minicom +44 (0)1453 768003 Fax +44 (0)1453 768001
24 hr Helpline UK 0845 6000 800 International +44 870 124 7000 www.meningitis-trust.org
Auckland Belfast Dublin Glasgow Neath Stroud



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

We do, however, fully support the inclusion of volunteers in the legislation. We propose that there would be a separate category for volunteers, which would include a comprehensive definition of volunteering. We feel it would be beneficial for there to be a voluntary code of practice established to guide organisations in providing equality in volunteering, with clear guidelines for mediation.

Our hope is that you will regard our concerns and views surrounding this issue and consider further consultation regarding treating the volunteer relationship as unique and deserving of a category far removed from that of 'employment'.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Shaw'.

Debbie Shaw
Community Development Officer