



DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Annual Report 2021/22

**VERSUS
ARTHRITIS**

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Foreword

During my first few months at Versus Arthritis, it has been a pleasure to reflect on the excellent progress we have made in terms of diversity and inclusion over the past year and to look forward to what more we can achieve. Through our activity in 2021, we have taken steps to create an organisational culture that is diverse and inclusive and that nurtures and empowers every individual to flourish and reach their full potential.

Whilst progress has been made, we are conscious that this work must not be rushed if our diverse and inclusive culture is going to be sustainable. Whilst we are off the starting blocks, we recognise that we have a long journey ahead that we are committed to and will achieve.

We started our diversity and inclusion strategy development work in February 2021, with a desire to co-develop the goals and action plan with our people. Listening to our people's experiences, ideas and suggestions were a key part of the strategy development and we created the space for people to contribute. We are proud of our first diversity and inclusion strategy and

we recognise that implementation of the strategy is key to its success. Year one of our strategy was about building the foundations for diversity and inclusion, getting to understand our people better and developing our shared understanding of broad diversity and inclusion topics in partnership with our people.

Year two focuses on getting our systems in place so we can further understand the diversity demographic of our people and plan activity to improve the experience of our people and remove barriers that prevent full engagement. We want to have better representation at all levels of our charity, so a major overhaul of our approach to recruitment is essential in this year.

Year three will allow us to talk with credibility about health inequities for people with arthritis and be part of the solution not re-enforcing the problem.

At Versus Arthritis, diversity and inclusion must be at the heart of everything we do. Our research, services and influencing work must reflect the diverse needs of all

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those living with arthritis and our employees, volunteers and Trustees will represent the broad diversity of the communities of which we are a part. Everyone will feel they can belong to the Versus Arthritis community and feel comfortable and valued in bringing their whole self to our charity.

Our vision is clear and I am committed to leading Versus Arthritis to become a more diverse, inclusive and accessible charity and to reach the broadest possible range of people living with arthritis.

We are working towards three clear goals, each supported by a range of cross-charity actions and whilst we recognise achieving this is going to take time, we are committed to reporting on our progress in a rigorous and transparent way.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to our diversity and inclusion work over the past year, particularly members of our Diversity and Inclusion Action Group, our Staff Networks and Employee Forum.

Deborah Alsina MBE, CEO

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Highlights

We have been busy refining our approach to diversity and inclusion and whilst there is still some way to go, we are proud to share our highlights.

2

We launched our diversity an inclusion strategy engagement and hosted over 30 engagement events with staff and volunteers.

3

Conducted 'Understanding our People' anonymous diversity demographic data survey with staff.

4

Hosted strategy engagement sessions with our Board, Organisational Leadership team, Employee Forum and staff networks.

1

We collated the diversity demographic for our Board for the first time and set targets to increase diversity.

5

Established Diversity and Inclusion Action Group, chaired by our CEO to scrutinise progress of our first diversity and inclusion strategy.

6

Mandatory diversity and inclusion workshop for all staff



10

Fully reviewed and refreshed our approach to Access to Work.



9

Mandatory anti-racism training for all staff.



8

Set up menopause support group.



7

Established and launched a network of 'inclusion champions'



11

Reviewed and refreshed our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

12

Celebrated a range of diversity and inclusion events in partnership with our staff networks.

Education and Engagement

In 2021, we spent considerable time engaging with our people, developing an understanding of their experiences within Versus Arthritis and working out how we can make our culture, processes and behaviours more inclusive. We hosted over 30 strategy engagement sessions, some focused on specific diversity and inclusion topics such as ethnicity, disability, caring responsibilities.

We also shared an anonymous survey to gauge our people's experiences and for the first time, we collated diversity demographic data on our Trustees and staff and set targets for increasing diversity. 2021 was very focused on understanding our people in terms of both quantitative and qualitative data, getting the foundations in place for a more data driven charity.

Throughout May, June and July we delivered a diversity and inclusion workshop to all our staff that focused on reflection, understanding the impact of an inclusive, accessible and anti-racist culture and the barriers that prevent full inclusion.

We wanted our people to have time away from their day-to-day work to really think about diversity and inclusion within the workplace from a person-centered perspective rather than focusing on compliance.

'One of the most valuable things is that having the workshop allows you to stop and think about your work, what and how you do it'.

'There was lots of information included, but also a real opportunity to interact and share experiences'.

'Time to think about areas of our organisation's culture and what needs to change'.

Anti-racism

Towards the end of 2021, all staff attended 3 hour anti racism training delivered by Aduke Onafowokan of Inclusiviti. We know that racism cannot be dealt with simply by telling people it's wrong to be racist.

To stop racism, we need to become anti-racist as a collective. This means evolving the way we think and act and being prepared to educate others to do the same. The learning outcomes for our people included:

- An evolved learning mindset and understating of your role in promoting anti-racism and inclusion.
- The ability to identify anti-blackness and intersectionality within the racism spectrum and how to create counter structures.
- A detailed understanding of how to be an ally and anti-racist.
- A practical anti-racist toolkit that can be adapted for personal, team, and organisational use.
- Understanding how to address and respond to workplace racism including influencing and crisis management skills.

Each training session was followed up with a reflection session and new staff starters are also required to complete the training as part of their probationary period.

The challenge for us a charity is to ensure anti racism principles and practice are embedded in our work and that we provide spaces for continual reflection.

'Exploring the notions of power, privilege and superiority - really struck home that these are the cornerstones of all types of prejudice'.

'How it broke down something that can feel overwhelming into something that's easy to understand and speak out against'.

'Challenged my understanding of the definition of racism; enjoyed talking about the toolkit and practical ways to be an ally and learnt about new resources/reading'.

We have developed a draft anti-racism action plan that includes our statement on anti-racism and sets out what it means to be anti-racist in Versus Arthritis:

Starting with ourselves

Understanding our own racial biases, identifying how they affect our internal thoughts and feelings and bringing them into consciousness can form a foundation so racially-just decisions can be made. To begin this journey, we must practice selfcare, compassion and acceptance of our present selves, being open to the opportunity to reframe our biases and empower ourselves as allies. Get comfortable with being uncomfortable, which means embracing feelings of discomfort or the 'unknown'. Use such feelings as an opportunity to learn and grow in terms of anti-racism practice.

Promote Psychological Safety

Psychological safety is the shared belief that members of a team feel comfortable taking interpersonal risks. When it exists, staff and volunteers feel safe to share their perspectives without retaliation. Fostering psychological safety promotes teamwork, encourages authenticity, fosters learning and innovation, and drives charity outcomes.

How to Talk about racism

Talking about racism can be difficult because it can be deeply emotional, and there is fear that we might say the wrong thing. But saying nothing is even worse. We will create opportunities for colleagues to share their experiences and feelings about racism and ensure our people are heard, can express emotions, and generate solutions for combating systemic racism. We will also make sure our people take action to confront and reject racism.

It is not enough to say that we are not racist or that we are against racism. To actively fight social inequality, we must behave as anti-racist and stand up and reject racist behaviours and policies. The recent anti-racism training delivered to staff has supported us to better understand anti-racism and the steps we can take as an individual and collectively to confront and reject racism.



Practise allyship

Allyship is the active and lifelong practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person in a position of privilege and power acts in solidarity with a marginalised group. Allies actively work to end oppression, seeking to create more equitable environments for all people and dismantle systemic racism.

We will ensure that our staff and volunteers understand the role of an ally and how we can each play this role, showing up and using our privilege to break down oppression. Practising allyship is about taking action to effect real, tangible change.

Our Allies will use their voices and relatively advantaged positions to educate fellow advantaged group members who may not be aware that they are unfairly benefitting from inequitable systems. We will speak up for others, challenging and changing institutional policies that perpetuate inequality.

Keeping focused on the change

Anti-racism is a lifelong pursuit, and we must keep focused on driving progress and change in anti-racism practice. We need to acknowledge the histories and life experiences of our people, continuously.

Diversity and Inclusion Action Group

We launched Versus Arthritis' Diversity and Inclusion Action Group in April 2021, with the purpose of developing the diversity and inclusion strategy and importantly, scrutinising progress of the strategy.

The group is chaired by the CEO and the core membership includes Director of People and Organisational Development, Head of Diversity and Inclusion, a representative from Employee Forum, each of the Staff Networks

and one representative from each directorate. The group meets on a quarterly basis and the members are the link between the staff members they represent on the group and the leadership.

The Diversity and Inclusion Action Group has been integral in progressing our diversity and inclusion work in 2021/22 and we thank them for their dedication and commitment.

Our Staff Networks

We have 3 Staff Networks at Versus Arthritis:

- Race Equity Network
- Disability and Inclusion Network
- LGBTQ+ Equality Network

A Women's Network is in the process of being established. Our networks have been critical to our diversity and inclusion and strategy development and scrutiny, hosting events and in terms of keeping the challenging

conversations going across the charity. The networks have represented their members in the Diversity and Inclusion Action Group and provided feedback for all our diversity and inclusion work and attended two training sessions with Cherron Inko-Tariah MBE of The Power of Staff Networks.

Thank you to all our Staff Network members and we look forward to building on your successes in 2022/23.

Annual Surveys

We want everyone working for, volunteering with and supporting Versus Arthritis to be able to give their best to the organisation, feel engaged and supported in achieving more for and with people with arthritis. In September 2021 we launched Versus Arthritis' People Surveys which are an annual opportunity for all our People to tell us what they think is good about working at Versus Arthritis and what we could do better.

Having feedback that we can benchmark against year on year means that we can build a really comprehensive picture of what our People like about Versus Arthritis and what we can be doing better so we can make informed improvements and

changes where we need to. Results of the surveys were reviewed by the Board of Trustees, Organisational Leadership Team and senior leaders, and used to inform action plans for improvements. Conducting the surveys annually means we track progress over time.

The response rate for our staff survey was 77% which was excellent. There was a section within the survey focussed on diversity and inclusion questions so that we can better understand the experiences of our people and action plan to improve their experiences and increase our scores year on year. We have further analysis to do on our survey results and further planning, but to have the baseline data is a good start.

Grant Thornton Diversity and Inclusion Audit

The objective of this audit was to review the design of the framework of policies, processes, procedures and controls in relation our Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. The scope of the audit included an assessment of the following areas:

Roles & responsibilities

- Assignment of roles, responsibilities and accountabilities in relation to the delivery of the diversity and inclusion framework.
- Incorporation of diversity and inclusion into strategic and leadership objectives.

Governance

- Review, input and approval of the diversity and inclusion framework and supporting documentation by the Board of Trustees and the OLT
- Ongoing oversight and monitoring of the implementation of the diversity and inclusion framework by relevant governance forums.

The audit found here have been a number of areas where we have demonstrated our commitment and focus on diversity and inclusion across the organisation with the introduction

of a number of interventions. This includes the development of the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy which was co-created with staff, mandatory workshops on diversity and inclusion and anti-racism, and the launch of a network of inclusion champions.

Engagement with staff has been enabled through the employee forum, the formation of Staff Networks and support groups, and staff surveys which have collected data on how included staff feel. Separate engagement sessions have been held for specific activities, such as a focus group for feeding into the Anti-racism action plan. Regular updates directly from the CEO also regularly reference diversity and inclusion, such as promoting events, which helps to reinforce this strong tone from the top. The audit raised five medium rated findings, which relate to:

- **Diversity data collection is not adequate:** We are currently not able to collect data across all the diversity strands protected under the Equality Act 2010 due to limitations in the current employee management system.

- **Roles and responsibilities within the OLT in relation to delivering the ED&I Strategy are not formalised:**

Only the Director of People and Organisational Development has objectives related to delivering the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, when good practice dictates it should be a responsibility which is shared across the OLT, given that diversity and inclusion should be embedded across all of the Charity's products and services.

- **Lack of formalisation and consistency when engaging with staff on the ED&I Strategy:** The design and purpose of the Staff Networks and how they will be engaged to feed into the diversity and inclusion agenda, has not been formally defined. There is no process in place to explicitly communicate to staff how the feedback they had provided on the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy had been considered, and if feedback had not been incorporated, the reason for this.

- **The employee and volunteer lifecycle has not been assessed against ED&I principles:** An end-to-end assessment of the employee and volunteer lifecycle has not yet been performed to identify and assess key touchpoints (such as recruitment, performance management, and

offboarding) for whether updates to address bias are required.

- **Commitment to addressing Board diversity:** The current process to assess potential new Board members is prioritised towards candidates with technical and professional experience, rather than a balanced process which gives appropriate weight to personal and lived experiences.

We accept the findings of the audit, which we have found incredibly helpful in terms of reflection and forward planning. Many of the recommendations were already in our Diversity and Inclusion action plan and we will ensure that we address the findings and share progress with our people.



Looking ahead and getting better

Our first full year with a dedicated resource for Diversity and Inclusion was challenging, successful with a clarity about where we are in our diversity and inclusion journey and what we need to do make us a more inclusive, accessible and anti-racist charity. The year has not been perfect and we are clear that any progress made in this year has been about getting the foundations in place, rather than progressive diversity and inclusion activity. That said, we have made decent strides forward and we hope that our people can see and feel the steps taken.

We know from our annual survey, that we have work to do on:

- Building diversity and inclusion credibility in our Trustee Board and Organisational Leadership Team. We are not sure our people believe that our leadership walk the walk in terms of diversity and inclusion and that was apparent when we failed to appoint a broad range of new Trustees in our 2021 Trustee recruitment campaign. To address this, all Trustees have attended 'inclusive recruitment' training

with an external expert and when the 2022 recruitment campaign is complete and new Trustees appointed, the Board and committee members will attend anti-racism training as a collective.

- Black and Asian Minority Ethnic staff are less likely to be able to articulate our shared understanding of diversity and inclusion and anti-racism. We need to engage with our people to find out why this is and what we need to do to instil more faith in our shared understandings. We will analyse annual survey to understand experiences by ethnicity and plan accordingly.
- Our people seem to understand how to raise a complaint of bullying and where to find the appropriate policy, but they do not seem to have faith in the investigative system. We will train line managers in understanding racist bullying behaviour and ensure all staff know how to report bullying behaviour.

It would be remiss not to mention the Strategic Review that has been taking place during the majority of 2021/22.

We recognise that it has been an unsettling time for our people, but we have continued progressing our diversity and inclusion activity and we are clear that in 2022/23 we need to get systems in place to better understand the diversity demographic of our people against arthritis and ensure that we are reaching a much broader range of people with arthritis through our research, influencing and service support.

We are proud of our work over the past 12 months and relish making greater strides in the year ahead.

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For more information please visit our website
versusarthritis.org

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