

# face equality

## EMPLOYMENT AND CUSTOMER SERVICE



### Disfigurement in the workplace

Every day, employers and providers of customer services in companies and organisations across the UK are likely to come across people with disfigurements.

One in 111 people has a significant disfigurement to their face from birth, accidental scarring, cancer surgery, skin conditions and facial paralysis. Many others have disfigurements to their hands and bodies. Despite surgical advances, a disfigurement can rarely be removed.

The present Disability Discrimination Act (1995) makes it illegal to discriminate against someone with a severe disfigurement. However, despite this law, many people with disfigurements have told *Changing Faces* that too often they are made to feel undervalued, abnormal and 'different' in the workplace. As customers, they often receive a less than welcoming reception.

A public attitude survey of 1,000 people conducted in January 2008 showed that 90% of the general public find it hard to apply positive qualities to people with disfigurements. Particularly pertinent to employers, is that people with disfigurements are judged as being less socially skilled and less likely to succeed than the general population. The survey also showed that such attitudes were unwitting: people were generally unaware that they held such beliefs.

Such general attitudes about disfigurement, if transferred into the workplace can result in discrimination in the recruitment, retention, management and career prospects of people with disfigurements. Furthermore, they can influence the way that people who have disfigurements are treated as customers and clients.

### The reasons for change

There are several unconscious prejudices which can disadvantage people with disfigurements at work. For example, because line managers or recruitment staff may consider that 'good looks' to be essential to the success of their organisation, they may believe that it would not be a

good idea to have them on the front desk. Similarly, if people associate disfigurement with low expectations, employees can be treated unfairly.

Worst of all are workplaces that allow harassment, name-calling, ridicule and ostracism.

In January 2008 *Changing Faces* conducted a small-scale survey of people's experiences in the workplace. Comments included:

***'I was disappointed not to get the post but there was no way of proving that the scarring was the reason. I was well qualified and had the right experience for the job.'***

***'I heard comments made at interviews and questions were inappropriately asked that other candidates would not be asked. I knew I had not got the post as soon as they asked the questions they did.'***

***'Discrimination seemed to be subtle, but got worse after I was 40. In today's***

***world, perfect facial features seem to count more than intelligence, hard work, qualifications and interpersonal skills.'***

## Getting it right

Employers that get it right, do so because their directors, managers and staff display and model positive behaviour towards people with disfigurements. The organisation creates a culture of inclusion for all. And it is well-equipped with information, skills and resources to be able to handle the challenges of disfigurement in a confident and positive way.

*Changing Faces* has been at the forefront in developing effective resources and interventions to enable this to happen. Please see our Employers' Guides available for download on our website, [www.changingfaces.org.uk](http://www.changingfaces.org.uk)

***'You have to work twice as hard to prove you are better than a person without a disfigurement. I do feel I have to prove myself sometimes at these conferences, meeting etc. But then, somebody has to break certain mindsets and it happens to be me in this situation.'***

In order to make the reasonable adjustments required by the law, it is important that employers are aware of their own attitudes and knowledge in relation to disfigurement and introduce practical measures to eliminate facial prejudice and discrimination within their organisations.

For further information go to [www.changingfaces.org.uk](http://www.changingfaces.org.uk)

## What you can do

### Stand out. Show your support for face equality

*Changing Faces* calls on employers in the private, public and voluntary sectors to create a culture and practice of face equality for people with disfigurements as employees and customers, stamping out facial prejudice and discrimination.

We call on all the Department for Work and Pensions and for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, and those departments at devolved and local levels, to ensure that facial discrimination is outlawed in employment.

Employers should adopt three goals in employing and serving people with disfigurements:

#### **1. Become familiar with the causes and effects of disfiguring conditions**

Staff should be trained and informed to develop policies and procedures which avoid facial prejudice and discrimination in recruitment, retention, career advancement, management and customer service.

#### **2. Adopt the positive in your thinking about people with disfigurements**

The culture and ethos throughout all organisations should promote the inclusion of people with disfigurements.

#### **3. Adopt new ways of behaving when you meet someone with a disfigurement**

Organisations should ensure that their recruitment, interviewers and customer-facing staff receive face equality training so that people with disfigurements are recruited, retained and served, equally and fairly.

**Changing** faces  
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disfigurement

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