

Faith and Proselytization Policy

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Suffolk Coastal Poverty Action (SCPA) is a holistic anti-poverty charity working with a variety of churches in East Suffolk.

The Christian faith is the foundation for the charity's work. However, there is a need to clarify how SCPA's faith origins interact with its stakeholders, in particular service users and funding bodies.¹

This policy clarifies how we operate: what we will and will not do when providing services to vulnerable people.

- Motivation for services:** SCPA's mission is to serve those experiencing poverty and is motivated by its Christian faith and values. The charitable activities that we undertake are not in themselves necessarily Christian in nature (there are plenty of non-Christian charities that provide similar support to those in need) and so our motivation is distinct from the services themselves.
- No quid pro quo:** The services that we provide to those experiencing poverty are never dependent on the recipient's participation in religious activities or a willingness to convert. There is no hint of conditionality.
- Freedom of religion and belief:** SCPA welcomes service users of any faith or none and we respect the rights of our beneficiaries to hold their own beliefs. [However, we do maintain a Genuine Occupational Requirement that our staff and our volunteers are practising Christians.] We will never use our position to coerce, manipulate, or place pressure on individuals to change their faith.
- Transparency:** SCPA is transparent about its faith-based ethos. Our parent charity is a Church of England Church with Articles of Association derived from the legal framework underlying the Church of England. Our web-site is clear about the fact that we are a Christian organisation and this policy sets out in detail the practical implications of that for our relationship with service users, partner organisations and supporters.

¹ In the UK, charities must demonstrate "public benefit". Religious advancement is a recognised charitable purpose, but it must be for the public benefit, not just for the benefit of the religion's followers. The law also protects individuals from discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief. Our policy must therefore be consistent with:

- The Charities Act 2011, which requires charities to demonstrate public benefit.
- The Equality Act 2010, which protects people from discrimination based on their protected characteristics, including religion or belief.
- Charity Commission guidance, which has scrutinised the issue of proselytization, particularly in relation to vulnerable beneficiaries.

5. **No public funding for proselytizing:** SCPA recognises that we must not use public money to promote specific religious activities or for proselytising. We remain, regardless of funding source, a Christian organisation, but our attitude to our staff and volunteers engaging in proselytization or evangelism is constrained by the commitments set out in Section B below.

Guidelines for proselytization and evangelism

We regard it as being very important to distinguish between acceptable expressions of faith and problematic forms of proselytisation.

1. Acceptable expressions of faith:

- **Sharing personal stories:** Staff and volunteers can, in appropriate circumstances, share their own life story, but only if the context is relevant and the individual receiving support is comfortable with that sharing.
- **Prayer:** A staff member or volunteer may offer to pray with someone (including service users), but only with their explicit and informed consent, and after explaining that declining the offer will not impact the services they receive.
- **Ethical conversations:** Engaging in respectful conversations about faith is permissible, provided it is voluntary, non-coercive, and does not exploit the vulnerability of the person being served.

2. Unacceptable proselytization:

- **Coercion:** Pressuring a service user, who may be vulnerable, to convert or participate in religious activities is completely unacceptable.
- **Discrimination:** Favouring individuals who share the charity's Christian faith or discriminating against those who do not when providing services is completely contrary to our policy of offering our services unconditionally.
- **Tied aid:** Making charitable services, such as food or shelter, conditional on attending a religious service or listening to a sermon is also completely contrary to our policy of offering our services unconditionally.

Practical applications for staff and volunteers

- **Training:** All staff and volunteers receive comprehensive training on the faith and proselytisation policy. This ensures a clear understanding of the boundaries between expressing faith and inappropriate proselytising.
- **Consent and communication:** Training covers best practice for obtaining informed consent, handling religious discussions respectfully, and ensuring that beneficiaries feel safe and unpressured.
- **Complaint procedure:** The charity has a clear procedure (set out on our website at www.scpa.uk/complaints) for beneficiaries to report any concerns about inappropriate proselytisation without fear of reprisal.