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Keep Safe

Practice Exemplar 06/07/2021

Introduction

Keep Safe is a multi-award winning initiative that works in partnership with Police Scotland. The initiative works with local communities to create a national network of Keep Safe places for people to go if they are feeling lost, scared or vulnerable when out in the community. A free Keep Safe Scotland App maps out all of the Keep Safe places and enables users to plan routes in advance and also provides a link to report hate crimes to Police Scotland.

Free Keep Safe cards are available. These detail information about a persons health conditions, communication requirements and emergency contact details. These are particularly useful for people who may have alternative communication or who may need additional support when out in the community.

Situation

The I Am Me Scotland charity was started as a community project in Renfrewshire to raise awareness of disability hate crime. It was set up by community members and a steering group of young people and disabled people. The group managed to secure funding to commission the local theatre company to develop and deliver a live hard hitting drama which

highlighted the impact and consequences of disability hate crime. During focus groups undertaken to find out about disabled peoples experiences of prejudice and hate within the community, some people shared their personal experiences of being targeted because of their disability and highlighted that there were times when they felt unsafe or had stopped travelling independently due to fear or anxiety.

PC Ewan Smith (consultation partner) had identified safe place initiatives operating in England and Wales. After researching these and identifying best practice from each, the Keep Safe initiative was developed. The initiative was designed and developed in partnership with disabled people to help ensure it was practical, accessible, and designed for ease of use.

During the consultations, some people had discussed how they felt apprehensive about reporting incidents to the Police. Some of the reasons identified were fear of not being believed, or taken seriously. It was agreed that Police Scotland co-delivering the initiative would help break down some of these barriers and foster an opportunity to build relationships.

The initiative has continued to grow over the years and this has been due to the desire and commitment from both community partners and Police Scotland to work together to help create safe places for everyone to participate in community life, free from the fear of harassment and abuse.

Action

Focus groups were set up within the disability groups that people already attended (we went to them). Refreshments were provided and surveys were developed in easy read format to ensure accessibility. A short presentation was delivered to the group, followed by a group discussion then one to one consultations. This ensured the group had the opportunity to participate in a way they felt comfortable and included. The information was collated and then a smaller selection of groups were chosen for the design consultation. This ensured that each stage of the development was designed with a broad representation of people with a range of different disabilities.

Everything from the logo to the colours of the branding were chosen by the groups. The name Keep Safe was chosen to support the Police Scotland strapline Keeping People Safe.

The information from the focus groups was used to lead the developments for the group (now a national charity) - (Keep Safe places were developed to encourage people back into the community, training for the Keep Safe places staff, to raise awareness of prejudice, hate and reporting, Working with the

Police to help reduce barriers to reporting, and, educating children and young people – to facilitate early intervention and prevention).

Outcome

Keep Safe was initially developed and piloted in Renfrewshire and is now operating in every local authority area in Scotland. Initially set up for disabled people, Keep Safe is available for anyone who may feel vulnerable when out in the community. There are just under 900 Keep Safe places in Scotland and a Police contact oversees the roll out in each division. I Am Me Scotland manage the national database and the Keep Safe app, linking with a Police national co-ordinator. This approach helps ensure the initiative is robust, structured and continues to include the initial community committee in the growth of the initiative.

In addition, a Keep Safe Ambassador programme was developed with young people and has been delivered to over 1000 young people and disabled people across Scotland. This is a full day training, co-delivered with Police Scotland to educate young people and disabled people about prejudice based bullying and hate crime and the importance of safe reporting.

The charity have continued to work directly with children, young people and disabled people to raise awareness of disability hate crime and have since developed a suite of educational resources that are inclusive, engaging and innovative. This has only been possible due to working directly with new people and empowering participants to be confident in sharing ideas and new ways of working.

Reflection

We would have designed and developed the App to include an accessibility information section for Keep Safe places (e.g. wheelchair accessible), but this is something that we can incorporate into future builds.

Keep Safe is also unfunded, so on reflection, we would have tried to secure Scottish Government backing for the initiative.

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