



Community Safety Research 2021

Project 4: Community Safety for
groups with protected characteristics

Interim report

MainStreet Consulting

April 2021

Project 4: experiences of community safety for groups with protected characteristics

Introduction

This project builds on recent work by the Scottish Community Safety Network (SCSN), notably a report from July 2020 on [Perceptions and Experiences of Community Safety](#), which documented high-level data about (and illustrated personal experiences of) community safety in Scotland with a view to informing what might be done to create safer communities. This was also the subject of an [Experiences of Community Safety webinar](#) in December 2020, which summarised reflections from keynote listeners about what resonated for them and what their asks would be of CSPs considering this research.

That exercise identified data gaps especially around young children; trans and gender non-conforming people; lesbian, gay and bisexual people; specific minority ethnic groups in Scotland; and people with specific disabilities – as well as the intersections of these identities.

As a result, SCSN is keen to develop its understanding of what people with protected characteristics (or under-represented groups more generally) think about community safety in Scotland; that is, begin capturing qualitative data – the views, stories and personal experiences from groups and individuals on how they perceive liveable communities “where people can go about their daily activities in an environment without fear, risk, harm or injury”.

This was a short piece of work and – even at the outset – was not designed to be comprehensive or exhaustive. Instead, it is merely illustrative, used to capture reflections on the root causes of feelings of safety and unsafety and within the context of asset-based communities - exploring what's strong as well as what's wrong, active citizens rather than passive consumers, what could be done to make them feel safe, what could services be doing in response to their experiences and so on.

NB: *this project should still be considered 'live', SCSN should undertake further engagement with organisations and groups that expressed an interest in participating but for whom capacity or timing did not allow active involvement at this time. That should include older people, people from minority ethnic backgrounds, people identifying with religious communities and with groups representing Gypsy/Traveller and Roma communities. Initial contacts have been made and SCSN can make use of the approaches set out below.*

Approach

By definition, the nature of these consultees and groups meant different approaches to engagement –respecting specific sensitivities, ensuring more anonymity, being aware of triggering, recognising language barriers or digital access and exclusion issues. There was also an explicit challenge around engaging with children and young people.

The approach was designed to accommodate these challenges:

1. Much of the engagement was done via relevant voluntary sector groups and charities, with some of whom SCSN had already started building relationships. These initial contacts included:
 - the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland
 - Several children & young peoples' voluntary sector organisations
 - Victim Support Scotland and other support bodies for victims of or witnesses to crime and abuse
 - Organisations supporting trans & gender non-conforming people, and lesbian, gay and bisexual people
 - Bodies helping specific minority ethnic groups in Scotland; and
 - Charities assisting people with specific disabilities.

2. Development and issue of a light-touch questionnaire survey, incorporating the specific accessibility requirements from the consultees or representative bodies
3. Organising follow up workshop sessions or 1-2-1 conversations with people from these groups (self-selecting or as encouraged by the representative bodies). This included suggestions that:
 - a member of the community chaired the session
 - the session could be done anonymously or pseudonymously
 - cameras can be turned off
 - no recording need be made
 - the group could run autonomously (that is, with no member of the external project team involved were that in any way sensitive or triggering)
4. A light-touch consent form was issued for the focus groups and 1-2-1 sessions, setting out the purpose of the research, the approach taken and what would happen to quotes captured
5. That focus group sessions or 1-2-1 conversations were not prescriptive – merely that participants were prompted on “what’s strong as well as what’s wrong”, their ability to be active citizens rather than passive consumers, what could have supported them to feel safe, and what communities and services could do in response to their experiences.

Emerging survey results

The light-touch questionnaire went through several iterations. The initial focus was on developing a small set of questions that captured easily which communities and/or protected characteristics were relevant to the respondents (mainly via drop-down lists or check boxes) *and* facilitated their providing personal stories or quotes on experiences of community safety (via free text boxes).

Subsequent iterations were developed with community or representative organisations to accommodate accessibility concerns and appropriate language or terminology. The final version was distributed mostly by those organisations.

As of 23rd April, the survey has been filled in around 60 times (there is some variation across the 8 questions), with representation from 18 local authority areas (again, across remote rural, islands, major urban and mixed rural/small towns/large towns areas of Scotland).

A breakdown by characteristic or community is set out in the table below:

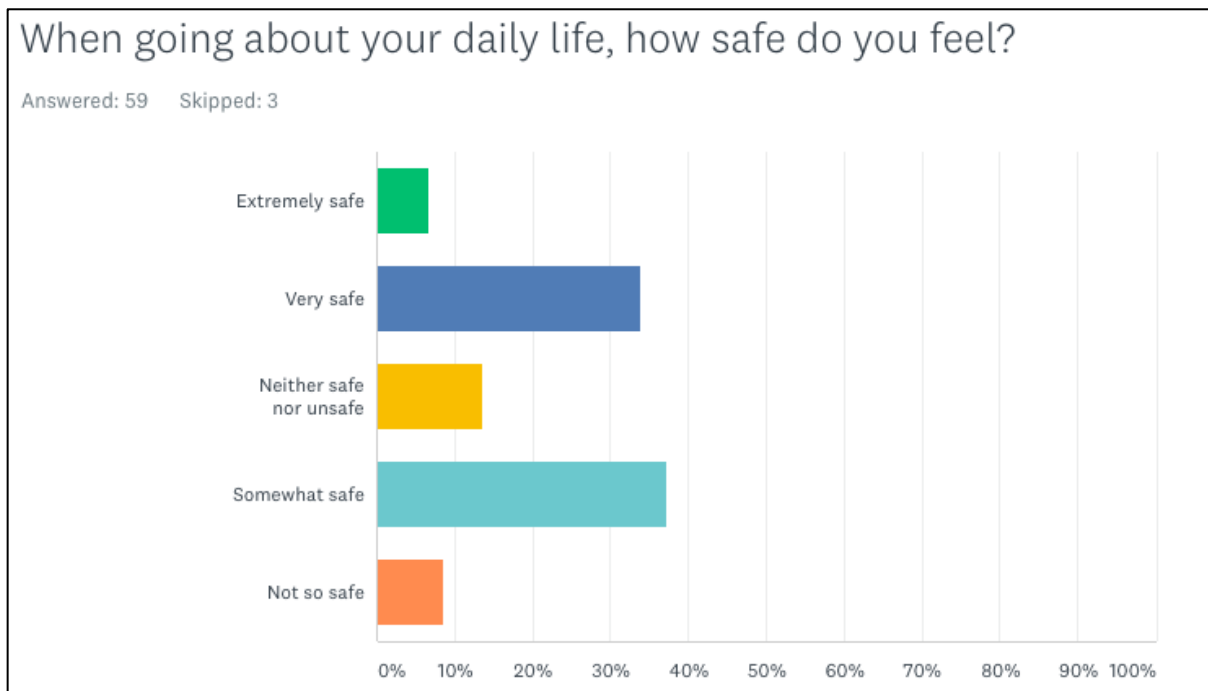
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ I am a young person (25 and under)	8.47%	5
▼ I am an older person (65 and over)	18.64%	11
▼ I am a disabled person	22.03%	13
▼ I am from an ethnic minority background (Asian, Black, Mixed, White, Gypsy/Traveller, Roma, and Other)	6.78%	4
▼ I am female	72.88%	43
▼ My gender identity is not the same as the sex I was assigned at birth	1.69%	1
▼ I am Gay or Lesbian or Bisexual	15.25%	9
▼ I am homeless or have experienced homelessness	5.08%	3
▼ I am a victim of crime	11.86%	7
▼ I have been a witness to crime	15.25%	9
▼ I identify with a specific religious denomination or body	11.86%	7
Total Respondents: 59		

SCSN Community Safety for groups with protected characteristics survey, March 2021

While more than 90% of respondents say they feel extremely, very, or somewhat safe, 8% of our respondents at this stage felt 'unsafe'. Although the detailed analysis has yet to be done on individual responses, most in that latter category appear to be victims or witnesses to crime e.g.

- *"I experienced domestic abuse as a male. Police Scotland failed to take my reports seriously, did not act, and I am still unsafe in my community"*
- *"I have never liked walking late on my own. I had a bad experience when I was younger, a handbag snatch"*.

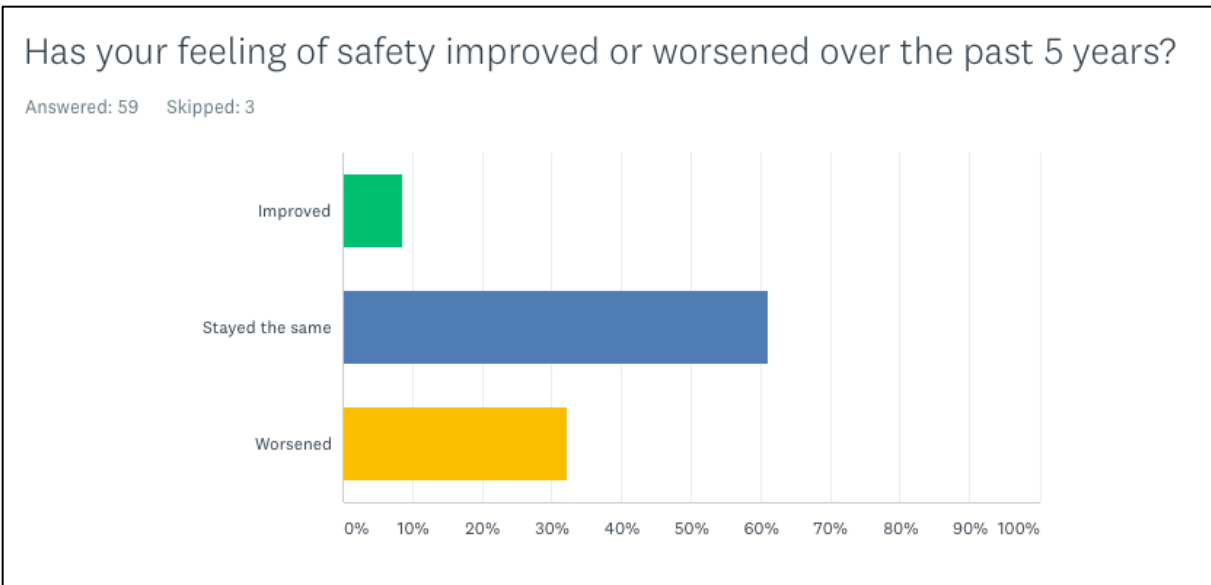
However, other comments suggest other characteristics are relevant: “*Being an ethnic woman, I’m always on guard*”.



SCSN Community Safety for groups with protected characteristics survey, March 2021

When asked ‘Where do you feel safest?’, most respondents referenced being ‘at home’ (93%) and/or ‘with family or friends’ (mentioned in 14% of comments) as the space or time they feel safest. 5 respondents as of mid-April 2021 mentioned their own work environment as a safe space too.

While most respondents felt that their safety had improved or stayed the same over the past few years, there were still a third who believe it has worsened. Again, some of that appears to be related to being victims or witnesses to crime (“I was followed by a male whilst out running at 8pm at night in winter whilst it was dark”), but there were several comments around women’s safety (“I’ve always felt worried being alone as a woman”; “hearing of assaults on women”; “seeing and reading about attacks on women”). Women’s safety was especially prominent, perhaps due to media attention on the murder in London on 3rd March 2021 of Sarah Everard.



SCSN Community Safety for groups with protected characteristics survey, March 2021

When prompted on ‘what local or national changes would help you feel safer’, a significant number of respondents referenced a range of services or infrastructure improvements. The *word cloud* below shows the main themes with frequent mentions made of “improved and more street lighting”, “CCTV in park areas”, “more initiatives to draw young people from the streets”, “Safer roads for cyclists”, “increased police presence” and “Zero tolerance for antisocial behaviour”.



SCSN Community Safety for groups with protected characteristics survey, March 2021

More specific protected characteristics comments included:

- “Raising awareness of disabilities”,
- “Better awareness of visual impairment - more 20 mph zones, less street and pavement clutter, clearer signage”
- “Better reporting for homophobia”, “more involvement from LGBT community”
- “Work to challenge toxic masculinity and misogyny”
- “As a young female I often felt unsafe on the late trains...better cameras / deterrent measures”
- “Much more awareness raising and tackling society's opinions of ethnic minorities esp. Gypsy Travellers is essential. Schools should include far more about these cultures into the curriculum”
- “Greater respect for difference in sections of the population”.

The survey remains open for additional consultation with other relevant groups by SCSN. It is recommended that further analysis of the results – and especially the comments - is undertaken later in 2021.

Focus groups sessions

In April 2021, more detailed discussion sessions have been organised and run with groups with protected characteristics or who have been previously under-represented in SCSN (and wider community safety) research.

Each of these sessions was designed to be as informal as possible but would cover the same broad themes, derived from the survey:

- What does being safe actually mean to participants?
- What experiences have participants had where they have been unsafe (or felt unsafe) because of their specific protected characteristic?
- What public and community services could do more (or less) of to make participants feel safer?
- If staying safe online is a consideration?

Participants were clear that there was no expectation that the conversations would be exhaustive or comprehensive, or representative of the communities involved. They were clear too that anything used in subsequent reports from the session or accompanying survey would be anonymised.

As of 27th April, four sessions have been captured. Full notes from those are set out in Appendix B, but the key elements are summarised below:

Blind or visually impaired people	People from various LGBTQI+ communities
<p>Convened by SightScotland, and facilitated by someone with retinitis pigmentosa</p>	<p>Organised by SCSN colleagues, facilitated by a someone from the LGBTQI+ community</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Just walking around, it's comforting that people offer to help. Feeling part of a community who are looking out for you makes me feel safe” • “Home is safe because no gangs no teenagers hanging around, free space, no obstacles or tripping hazards” • “Being able to navigate the environment with a cane or guide dog and safe getting to bus stops or doctors etc” • Guide dogs have been attacked by other dogs in the street – leaving blind or visually-impaired people more frightened and potentially unsafe • “Being disabled itself makes me feel unsafe; blindness leaves me a little exposed” • Recognise that public realm needs attention for blind & visually impaired people e.g., potholes are dangerous not frustrating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Being safe is when I don't need to hide my identity or be invisible...” • “Lots more judgemental comments about my sexuality in my late 50s” • “I feel safe at work too: mainly because of legal protections” • “Have in the past been scared of groups of teens drinking” • Safety and comfort are not necessarily a given in LGBTQI+ friendly settings • “Visibility is not enough: it's acceptance” • “Need to raise awareness of LBGTQI issues...provide opportunities to listen and act on issues” • “Transphobia online is constant; reinforces feeling that 'outside' is not safe” • “We need to make more use of remote reporting”

Children and young people	Victims & witnesses of crime
Organised by 6VT (charity providing services to Edinburgh's young people incl highest risk and most marginalised individuals)	Organised by Victim Support Scotland, in a closed session. Notes transcribed by the Service User Engagement Officer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I feel safe when I don't need to be alert all the time" • "Avoid spaces with gangs of teenagers hanging around" • "Police do not necessarily make me feel safer – maybe they're there because there's been trouble" • "Street lighting is an issue...certainly avoid dark areas" • "I'm on edge when I'm on a bus or when I'm by myself...aware of lots of bampots and weirdos on the buses" • "Unpredictability of people drinking in groups makes me feel unsafe" • All had some 'strangers' as 'friends' online - "maybe we see things different from in real life" • "I feel safer online because I have more control over what happens there" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Being safe means staying alive without fear of impending violence that could end our lives or the lives of our family." • "...how unsafe we feel when parole hearings come up" • [Re parole:] "it's the not knowing that is very, very scary" • "It's very worrisome, especially now with lockdown as to how they are managing criminals in the community. I don't feel that's at all safe" • "Been times that justice system or community police have let the system down, let the community down" • "Can't count on the authorities when we need them" • "Community Police Officer did make me feel safe for quite a while...and other security measures do make you feel better...but it does make you feel confined to the house" • "We don't have the Community Police Officer any more, and I don't know if we have anyone else" • "We've asked for better monitoring in the community...we do not feel safe while they are walking the streets" • "I've made it difficult to find me online...social media all locked down to private...we turn location services off"

By definition, there is a wide range of stories and observations from these groups and the supporting survey – some of which will be specific to individual groups (e.g., street furniture obstacles for blind and disabled people, LGBTQI+ awareness raising across public sector practitioners) and some of which is common across many consultees (street lighting, intimidating anti-social behaviour or group alcohol use, safe public transport). SCSN and its partners will reflect on both elements.

Project 4 next steps

This piece of work was not necessarily designed to identify conclusions, but instead to capture stories and experiences for follow-up activity with SCSN partners and other stakeholders. Some of that has emerged from the survey and initial focus groups but further activity is recommended.

This project should be seen as 'live' with further engagement to be carried out. Indeed, SCSN intends to follow up with other organisations that expressed an interest in participating in this exercise but for whom capacity or timing did not allow active involvement at this time – notably with older people, people from minority ethnic backgrounds, people identifying with religious communities and with groups representing Gypsy/Traveller and Roma communities. Initial contacts have been made and SCSN will make use of the process identified above.

SCSN should also speak further on findings with those organisations and groups that have participated so far, organising sessions to follow-up on policy, CPP and CSP, and continued engagement implications.

APPENDIX A – comments from survey

To continue, May 2021

APPENDIX B – comments from focus group sessions

Session with LGBTQI+ communities, 31st March 2021 via Zoom

Introduction

David Welsh introduced the session including a recap on purpose of the overall suite of research and specifically the aims of Project 4. This and other sessions are being used as an opportunity to hear stories and useful quotes on safety from groups otherwise under-represented in this type of research.

Agreed that sessions would be as informal as possible. There is no expectation that the conversations are exhaustive or comprehensive, or that it is representative of the communities involved.

Noted that anything used in subsequent reports from the session or accompanying survey will be anonymised.

This particular session was not recorded in Zoom; instead, notes were taken by David Welsh.

Theme topics and comments

1. What does being safe actually mean to participants?

- *“Just like everyone, I want to be safe to come into, and go out of my flat, to shop, to socialise”*
- *“Age is increasingly a factor as well as my sexuality. Lots more judgemental comments about my sexuality in my late 50s, but aware too of increased susceptibility of muggings, threats etc”*
- *“Being safe is when I don't need to hide my identity or be invisible...when I'm not seen as an irritant or nuisance. So I often have to withdraw”*
- *“Where and when I'm not judged for being me...being disapproved of”*

2. Where do I feel safe?

- *“At home, within my four walls. Not necessarily even within common buildings or spaces or in the local community”*
- *“Family home, maybe friends' homes...because I don't have to hide my identity”*
- *“Within my community [LGB in this instance]”*
- *“Mutual aid organisations and spaces e.g. GAS”*

- *"At work too: mainly because of legal protections" [although note another participant's comment: "I am viewed as less professional because of my gender identity"]*

3. What experiences have participants had where they have been unsafe (or felt unsafe) – perhaps as a result of their sexuality?

- *"Can't ignore fact/research that LGBTQI+ people of colour are more exposed/unsafe"*
- *"Often in public spaces. Aware of threats or perception of threats"*
- *"Have in the past been scared of groups of teens, especially when they are drinking"*
- *"Aware of micro-aggressions that together push me out of common spaces, certainly by making me feel less welcome"*
- *"Medical and in the professional settings make me feel uncomfortable and therefore unsafe. Not a threat per se but my concerns don't feel like they're taken seriously"*
- *[But safety and comfort is not necessarily a given in LGBTQI+ friendly settings]*
- *"LGBTQI+ pubs and clubs still have threats. Often alcohol and drugs are a factor there which makes people unpredictable"*
- *"A pervasive 'tactility' still...may no longer be appropriate and makes people increasingly uncomfortable/unsafe post MeToo" [one participant referenced a 'hyper-sexualisation']*
- *"Yes, there is more physical contact in these spaces generally and can feel predatory". One participant noted an instance of being kissed forcefully and unsolicited by a stranger in a pub*
- *"Took a straight friend to a gay bar and a gay man forcefully tried to kiss him...could have easily ended up in a fight"*
- *"Danger is that this behaviour is just accepted...almost inculcated in the community?"*
- *"Note that LGBTQI+ is still heavily dominated by gay men – that is often a problem for wider groups of LGBTQI, including lesbians"*

4. What can public and community services could do more (or less) of to make participants feel more safe?

- *"Visibility is not enough: it's acceptance"*

- *"Have to recognise that LGBTQI+ people have higher instances of mental illness and addictions – which in turn means more unpredictability, unsafety etc. We need to challenge that compassionately"*
- *"Medical care is poor for LGBTQI communities"*
- *"The point is that representation makes people feel comfortable and safe. Need to try harder to make these spaces look like wider community somehow. And at least better at listening"*
- *"Diversity awareness"*
- *"Challenging homophobia and transphobia in society, esp in schools"*
- *"Trans/LGBTQI+ training in the public sector – raise awareness of LGBTQI issues. Provide opportunities to listen and act on issues"*
- *"Definitely more on trauma-informed practice across the sectors: ensuring that the wider population understands that. Kids at school should be able to understand and deal with emotions better to prevent anger/trauma"*

5. If staying safe online is a consideration?

- *Yes. Cited examples of the dangers of Grindr – noted the Stephen Port example in London and a need to get the tech companies to do more on the dangers there*

(Note that, in this case, the Police were not seen to be dealing with the case appropriately - because they thought gay men overdosing on certain party drugs was just what happens and didn't investigate foul play quickly enough)

- *"Also note the possibilities/anecdotes of blackmailing via social media – threatening employers with knowledge or under-age activity"*
- *"The block button is your friend!"*
- *"Transphobia online is constant now – reinforces feeling that 'outside' is not safe"*
- *"Recognise that online is just part of life now – not really a separate domain"*
- *"But we need to self-educate on this stuff. Awareness of mapping/location technology"*
- *"We need definitely to make more use of remote reporting"*
- *"Challenge inadequate support from Police etc"*

Session convened by SightScotland, 6th April 2021 via Zoom

Introduction

Session facilitated by Ken Reid, who himself has retinitis pigmentosa (RP).

Ken introduced the session including a recap on purpose of the overall suite of research and specifically the aims of Project 4. This and other sessions are being used as an opportunity to hear stories and useful quotes on safety from groups otherwise under-represented in this type of research.

Agreed that sessions would be as informal as possible. There is no expectation that the conversations are exhaustive or comprehensive, or that it is representative of blind people or those with visual impairments.

Noted that anything used in subsequent reports from the session or accompanying survey will be anonymised.

This particular session was recorded in Zoom by SightScotland; these additional notes were taken by David Welsh.

What does being safe actually mean to participants?

- "When I can walk around the neighbourhood, with others knowing and recognising my invisible disability... when I can't recognise someone, people think I'm rude and I get embarrassed"
- "Just walking around, it's comforting that people offer to help. Feeling part of a community who are looking out for you makes me feel safe"
- "Home is safe because no gangs no teenagers hanging around, free space, no obstacles or tripping hazards"
- "Feeling safe in my house....being able to leave the house with no fear or worry...having people around who can help. Good neighbours are important"
- "Being able to navigate the environment with a cane or guide dog and safe getting to bus stops or doctors etc"
- "Burglar/intruder alarm makes me feel safe"
- "My rented accommodation [a student] is safe. It's a one-bedroom flat, well-lit [white aluminium lights fixed] and on the ground floor. The wider team knows my disability"
- "Street lighting is a big issue, as is car parking on pavements. I am often forced out on to the roads and that is dangerous"
- "My cane is my best friend; gives me confidence"
- "Having a Guide Dog helps me feel safe"

No one has really used or tried adaptations for door entry systems although there is awareness/appreciation of new technologies that can potentially help people to feel safe. For example, the Safe Zone app used at Glasgow Uni

What experiences have participants had where they have been unsafe (or felt unsafe) – perhaps as a result of their visual impairment?

- COVID19 social distancing has exacerbated some issues of safety for blind or visually-impaired people – “we can't always do that, and that's not always appreciated by others”
- “I've only been out of my street 3 times in the past 12 months because of COVID19 restrictions”
- Guide dogs have been attacked by other dogs in the street – leaving blind or visually-impaired people more frightened and potentially unsafe
- ‘I've had people walk in front of the dog just to see what the dog does.’
- ‘I'm meant to use a cane but I stopped because people walk in front of you, ‘we'll see how blind this guy is.’
- “Being disabled itself makes me feel unsafe; blindness leaves me a little exposed”
- “Halloween is a particularly stressful event because of people/often strangers knocking on the door”
- “Had a couple of instances when people shout loudly at me. Or say ‘you can still see me’ threateningly”

What public and community services could do more (or less) of to make participants feel more safe?

Much of the conversation focused on good support from charities and support groups, and limited support from wider public sector services e.g. Good references to SightScotland, RNIB, Scottish War Blind, Retina UK etc

- “Zoomtechs, Dolphin, synaptic phones etc have helped me feel confident for social interaction”
- “the University has helped with talk to text technology and training”
- But “I'd like councils and other public services to do more: certainly better signposting after registration – more regular or even occasional check-ins etc”
- “A need for wider public services to recognise increased mental illness because of sight loss”
- “Much more use of Neatebox [smart technology]
- More recognition that the public realm needs attention for blind/visually impaired people e.g. potholes are a danger not a frustration

If staying safe online is a consideration?

“I am aware of scams etc but not any more or less than fully-sighted people”
 “I reveal my disability online and fine with that”

Session with 4 people convened by 6VT, 14th April 2021 via Zoom

Introduction

Session facilitated by David Welsh, and supported by Dot Thorne, Exec Director at 6VT (a charity providing holistic quality services to Edinburgh's young people including the highest risk and most marginalised individuals)

3 young people (13yr, 14yr and 19yr) via Zoom

David introduced the session including a recap on purpose of the overall suite of research and specifically the aims of Project 4. This and other sessions are being used as an opportunity to hear stories and useful quotes on safety from groups otherwise under-represented in this type of research.

Agreed that sessions would be as informal as possible. There is no expectation that the conversations are exhaustive or comprehensive, or that it is representative of young people. Noted that anything used in subsequent reports from the session or accompanying survey will be anonymised.

The notes below were taken by David Welsh and approved by Dot Thorne.

What does being safe actually mean to participants?

- "When I can walk around the neighbourhood, without having to look around"
- "When I don't need to be alert all the time"
- "Feel safe at the 6VT café - people there are supportive and looking out for me"
- "Safe mostly in my house but not always. If there is drama nearby, I'd check the windows and doors"
- "Yes, I'm safe inside but I'm always aware of stuff outside, so definitely checking doors are locked"
- "always looking around my area- there's always something happening"
- "I feel safe with my friends especially if there's lots of us together. I'm safe because I trust them"
- "Home is safe because no gangs of teenagers hanging around, free space"
- "I only really go to places I know anyway,"
- "Cycling is mostly ok for transport..but I wouldn't leave my bike outside anywhere"
- "My friends give me confidence, esp"
- "Police do not necessarily make me feel safer - depends on the situation. Maybe they're there because there's been trouble and I want to avoid that"
- "When I saw police at the centre, I thought we'd done something wrong!!"
- "COVID/social distancing has made some issues of anxiety worse" [worry about catching the virus itself]

What experiences have participants had where they have been unsafe (or felt unsafe)

- "Street lighting is an issue, .certainly dark areas"

- "The Meadows situation recently (some localised violence and assaults in the park) made me feel unsafe"
- "I'm an overthinker but I'm uncomfortable with tuff and people I don't know incl strangers"
- [Buses were a big theme]
- "I'm on edge when I'm on a bus or when I'm by myself. When it's dark"
- "Aware of lots of bampots and weirdos on the buses"
- "I know the bus driver is aware of stuff but doesn't make me feel safe"
- "I have to be alert when I'm on my own"
- "Wary of when people are drinking around me on the bus,.or there's evidence of smoking. It' an uncomfortable feeling"
- "It's the unpredictability of people drinking in groups that makes me feel unsafe"
- "Being wary of other groups of kids, rivalries - I know that it's maybe the worry/anxiety that really sets people off"
- "There are bullies at school - but I do think that teachers help with that"

If staying safe online is a consideration?

- They all had some 'strangers' as 'friends' online - "maybe we see things different from in real life"
- But all participants don't generally follow strangers
- "Actually, I feel more safe online because I have more control over what happens there"
- "I have private accounts, and Snapchat status is ghosted"
- "I would only follow people if they're mutuals"

Discussion with two participants as part of the SCSN views on community safety project 16/04/2021

Interviewees were both victims of serious violent crime.

TRANSCRIPT NOTES FROM AUDIO RECORDING, ANONYMISED

First question - what does feeling safe actually mean to participants?

Int A) To me being safe means staying alive without fear of impending violence that could end our lives or the lives of our family. In a nutshell.

Int B) Absolutely, I would agree with that. Is there anything we could add to that?

Int A) I was going to say about how unsafe we feel with every time the parole hearings come up.... So that's kind of the impact it's had on the community, as well.

Would you mind expanding on what part of the parole hearings makes you feel unsafe, if you don't mind doing so?

Int A) It's upon their release, ... The only way I can describe it is it's like having a terminal illness, and it's every time the parole hearing comes up it's like, the cancer's back, you're going to die.

Int B) It's an expiration date, that's what it feels like. It shouldn't be, but it does feel like that to us, we've got an expiration date as to whenever the perpetrator comes out, we don't feel safe, if they come out of jail. We know what they are capable of doing, we know what they've threatened us with, and we know why, and everything that we've been through from then until now, it still makes us feel very unsafe knowing that they are able to sort of go out and about unmonitored and unchecked.

It's very worrisome, especially now with all the lockdown and things going on as to how they are managing criminals in the community. I don't feel that's at all safe. We have no knowledge of how they are working it, and community safety in general. It's the not knowing that is very, very scary. And it's very unnerving to have the parole hearing come up and the nerves are unbelievable. And then it's the date, you're waiting on the phonecall. So maybe two or three weeks beforehand, before this parole date, you can't eat, you can't sleep, you can't do anything. Because, you're just anticipating, waiting what's going to happen to you.

It's not so much to the perpetrator, it's to us. I know that sounds quite self-absorbed, but it's the way we feel. And it's unfortunately a feeling that doesn't go away every time, so, apologies for that.

Int A) It kind of in a roundabout way answers the second question of what experiences have participants have been or felt unsafe. Well, that for a start, every time the parole hearing. The second one – a family member can no longer remain in their job due to the fear of who is waiting for them.... They feel unsafe... so their job has basically had to change, for that. [Discussion here around lockdown and ensuing difficulty moving home during this period]

You mentioned there that lockdown has had an impact?

Int A) It's absolutely terrifying that a family member is an easy target... I've made it difficult for them to find me [online.] I think it's a bit unfair that I've to do that, but the minute I [don't do that] I can be found. For that online question, our social media are all locked down to private. It's only family and friends and immediate people we know that are on it. We turn the location services off when taking photos and so on. It's so imperative that you don't do that [leave photo location on].

It sounds like you're changing your behaviour as a result then?

[Discussion of wider safety measures for family including children and young people, especially if they don't understand safety aspects due to their age and if there have been previous threats to safety.]

.....

Question about what public and community services could do more or less of to make people feel more safe?

Int A) I'll be blunt on that one, keep the perpetrator behind bars. So we can live our lives without fear and panic and being absolutely terrified, of everything.

.....

Int B) It's scary, and I feel we've got very good reason to feel worried for us and for other people's safety. Previous convictions of the perpetrator have been times that justice system or community police have let the system down, let the community down, let all of us down. There were so many opportunities for the perpetrator to be helped, to be monitored better or to be in prison before that. I feel there's very big cause for us to think that they are not going to change and that rehabilitation does not work for everybody. I do believe in rehabilitation, I believe that a lot of people that do bad things can be rehabilitated and they go on to do things. Some people, it depends on the circumstances... I do feel there are levels of criminals, petty crimes and petty things. This perpetrator is a dangerous person and I don't have faith in the police, I don't have faith in the community, because I don't know what they are doing to minimise the perpetrator's risk in the community again.

...

I have no faith in [the system] and I don't think we can count on the authorities when we need them. They can only do something after the event. I reported things [involving threats] and Police could do nothing except move them on. So eventually I stopped saying to the police this is what happened because it's wasting my time, it's wasting their time, they won't do anything about it. Because the Police only have powers of arrest after the event. So, to me, that's no good to me, that's no good that I can't get the police involved until after the event [of something serious happening].

I don't think the system is very good that way. I think there should be some changes, I just don't know what.

Int A) We've asked for better monitoring in the community, [but some of these measures only last for so long]. It's just not safe for the perpetrator to be out. We do not feel safe while they are walking the streets, it is that simple.

Is there anything, other than the perpetrator remaining behind bars, that the authorities could be doing to make you feel more safe, when it comes to communication, or that sort of thing?

Int B) I did have a Community Police Officer who did make me feel safe for quite a while. They came up to the house, they did a sort of safety check, things I hadn't thought of, which was great, and I took on board what they were saying. And other security measures do make you feel a lot safer. But it does make you feel confined to the house, because then you still don't feel safe when you are out and about.

Int A) We don't even bother phoning the Police about it [threats when out and about], because they can't do anything about it.

Int B) No matter what you do, it still doesn't make you feel any better. The Community Police Officer is no longer part of that police department. So we were given another person, we were transferred again, and we haven't really heard from them. Just an email checking every so often up on us, how are we doing. I've even tried emailing them when a parole hearing is coming up, just to keep them in the loop. We have got a marker on our address, but that doesn't actually fill my confidence a great deal... [Example given of prior incident where there was a delay in response to a 999 call]... I could still be left many hours without any assistance. Very scary.

There is a question about if participants are aware of community planning [safety] partnerships in their areas, and what they do?

Int A) No. We know about third sector support organisations, and we know about the Police and that sort of thing, but apart from that...

[Explained that answer is fine and that I'll highlight that you are not aware of that and not aware of other services and so on.]

Is there anything as we've gone through that we've not been able to cover yet?

Int A) I think about the regular meetings, family support especially at times when the parole hearings are coming up. Because of lockdown, family have not been able to see each other. And we really need to be face-to-face. We are really really, close, and I think that's quite key to our mental wellbeing, with the lockdown thing we've not been able to see each other. Online methods and that are okay, but it's not good enough, because we need support for each other.

Int B) Family really needed each other's support, at the parole hearing, coming up. Especially as we couldn't attend it. ...It's just the knowing, I [would find it really helpful] just to understand where they were at. It made you feel just that little but more, 'yeah okay, this is fine'.

They didn't get released, thankfully, and it made us feel relieved, I'm not going to lie there. But it's that anticipation of that phonecall, we didn't get to gauge how it went, it's the little things. The not knowing, is actually worse, than anything. Because, you don't have a sense of closure there. It's just a phonecall there saying yes, they were paroled, or no they weren't. That's all that really you're getting, you're not getting a summary of the case or anything, you're just getting an email letter with the very, very basic, letter, that's punted out probably to everybody, it's not really personalised much. It's just a case of, this was the decision, and then they coming up for Parole again in [so many months]. But I want more information as to what happened and why, and what caused you to make that decision. And, what else do we need to do, what stage are they at, where are they going now, what's happening, there. And then, I would be able to settle a wee bit more, in anticipation of the next one that's coming up. That's kind of my, side of things.

I really want to be able to attend these Parole Hearings, because I want to hear for myself, how it's going with them. Because it would make me feel a little bit safer if I had the knowledge and understanding. Because to me, that's key, to feeling safer, or feeling more okay about what's happened to me. It's hard to say I would feel okay about a decision or something, but I would, I would feel okay if I understood why, and what was involved in the decision. I think that's just me, because I am that type of person. I do understand a lot of victims would probably not want to do that, they would not want to know. And that's fine too. It is just the way I feel, and that's the way I would feel safer, absolutely, I need to know.

Int A) Aye, definitely. I still think if the perpetrator is released... We go into panic mode anyway, beforehand. But I actually don't know what would happen if it ever came that they would be released. I would be, beside myself. I would be, an absolute wreck.

Int B) I absolutely dread the day that they turn around and say 'yes.' We know it's going to happen as well, that's the most, terrifying thing to think of. But we know it's going to happen, they can't keep the perpetrator for ever, they can't, really keep them forever. But it is going to happen, and I don't know how we would react to it, I think we would melt down, just into a bundle of goo on the floor. I can't even comprehend it right now, it's that much of a, a stressful environment. I think at that point is when everybody that's in our position needs support from everywhere possible.

The community, the justice system, third sector support services, every place that could possibly give support needs to be there at that decision. Because that is, that's a massive, humungous life changing decision for a victim. Because, that decision there, if the perpetrator is released, would change our lives, forever. It was life changing when [the crime] happened to start with, but it's like, one, it happened, it changed our lives. And then again, this, is the end of everything. There is nothing else we can do, after that, there is nothing else we can find out. So, to me it's like there's no support after. 'The perpetrator is out, get on with your life. They'll get on with their life, you get on with your life, that's it'. I can't see anything after that. It's like, my life ends there, I can't see past that. As soon as they say yes, I can't see me growing old, I can't see me cuddling grandkids, I can't see my life after this point. I can see my life now, I can see my life right up to there, if the perpetrator is still

in [prison] but once the hammer comes down and they say they are out, it's a whole different ball game for us.

Int A) It's another life changer, because that is, that's going to be constant high alert, that's going to be our life. We're on high alert anyway, but the level of high alert we would have to go to....

Int B) It's emotionally draining, physically draining. We'd probably never sleep, you'd be sleeping with one eye open, worrying about your family... Life I don't think would ever be the same again, and I think it's actually terrifying, absolutely terrifying. I don't even want to think about that day, I don't know what we would do. But I know we would need some serious, serious support of some sort from as many outside sources as possible. Because at point you probably wouldn't be able to function properly, back to the PTSD sort of thing. You probably wouldn't even be able to work for a while, take some time off with stress. And then you've got the health implications on top of that, you could get ill, as the stress becomes visible. It's like going back to when it first happened, it's like doing it all over again. And we were sort of game over, for a couple of years, literally functioning on a very sort of zombified level.

Int A) The slightest little thing would send me off [discussion of a flashback experienced].

Int B) Years of counselling, years and years of trauma counselling. Awful.

Int A) It's when that hammer comes down, and the perpetrator is released, that's the end of our lives, as we perceive them.

Int B) It's not necessarily saying that the perpetrator will actually come out and kill us, but it's a possibility, and that's how we feel about it.

Int A) That's our feelings.

[Expressed that understand from this discussion feelings of safety now can't be separated from future plans, discussed about support side of things]

Anything else you want to add?

Int A) With the Community Safety Partnerships and what are we aware of, is there anything there that we don't know about, that maybe we should know about. Are there any kind of Community Safety Partnerships out there that we are not aware of?

[Expressed here that to be honest I don't know, but I can certainly find out. That there will be regional multiagency working for each area, representation from different organisations. Said that I will find out if/how individuals can tap into anything like this. Key point about what people should be aware of etc. But helpful to know that people are not aware of what is there and who attends etc.]

Int B) We don't have the Community Police Officer any more, and I don't know if we have anyone else. Because they haven't been in touch yet. See, this is the communication problem we have. It just goes for a little while and then you are kind

of left alone, without anything to kind of prop you up. I just feel the community kind of support there... Because I felt quite safe when the Community Officer was around. Because he used to drop me an email now and then, and he even used to drop in if he happened to be in the area at the time, he stopped in once or twice just to check up on us. As I said he had a look round the house, just to make sure everything looked good. And that did make me feel really safe. But obviously that was because he was a Community Police Officer and that was his job. But he also understood our case, and how we were feeling, and he just wanted to make me feel more safer. And I really appreciate that, because he did.

But now, he's not there, and it's all tailed off again, and I'm okay just now. But when it comes to the parole hearing again, that's when that type of support. Even just seeing the police drive by, just makes you feel more comfortable that they are out and about, they are there, if you need them. Because sometimes, out of sight is out of mind. And I wouldn't like to be the one that is out of sight and out of mind and just kind of left, to our own devices, and then the Police don't really have a clue about what's going on. And then to have to do an emergency call, to have them out. And then to have to explain everything to them, again. It does feel most reasonable to have someone there that if something happens they already know the case, they know the background to it, just to phone them up and say 'this has happened, or this is going on, the parole hearing is coming up, and give them a heads up'. And then let them know the perpetrator is not out so it's okay the now. And then maybe they can check back with us in a couple of months, see how things are going. I'm not expecting someone to be checking up on us every five minutes. But when things are about to happen, is when we feel the most kind of support there is need.

Int A) And also when you get the unexpected things..

Int B) [examples given of damage to property].

I think we've pretty much covered everything.

Thanks for participation and check in about how are feeling/support options

Other comment added after discussion about the trial process:

'It's living in absolute terror of what's going to happen next? You feel the crushing anxiety of awaiting the uncertainties of a trial.... with NO reassurance or protection from the appropriate authorities.'