

What Does Safety Mean To You?

ABOUT CARDIFF WOMEN'S AID

Cardiff Women's Aid is the leading specialist service for women affected by violence and abuse in Cardiff.

We have been delivering services for women for over 48 years, and have been at the forefront of developing new and innovative services for survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV).

We provide early intervention, advice and information, crisis interventions, emergency safety and protection, step down support, aftercare and recovery support to women, girls, and families who have experienced or are at risk of abuse.

We receive over a hundred referrals per week, each representing a woman, girl, or family in desperate need of our life-saving services.

INTRODUCTION TO BRIEFING

Cardiff Women's Aid, as part of the Safer Streets funding, is building evidence on what women's perceptions of safety are within the city to inform the prevention of VAWG in public spaces. Cardiff Women's Aid is providing our expertise on VAWG, survivor engagement and an effective referral routes to specialist support for any women and girls affected by VAWG in the city to the range of support we provide.

As part of this, Cardiff Women's Aid partnered with the Violence Prevention Unit to deliver a craftivism workshop aimed at creatively engaging women to discuss and share their perceptions of safety with the aim of informing the development of the Safe to Say campaign. There were 7 participants who attended the Craft Cafe - Special Focus on Safety Session on Thursday 1st December 2022 during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence 2022. The session took place in Cardiff Women's Aid's offices.

During the session, all participants were very keen to share ideas and opinions, often relating back to their own lived experiences of domestic abuse.

All participants consented to their comments being used as quotes and feedback being used to write this report which will have further influence and impact within Cardiff Women's Aid.

OBJECTIVES OF FOCUS GROUP

- Empowerment, peer support, creativity, activism, informing our collaborative work, influencing views on safety
- Evidence gathering and developing a positive discussion on what a safe space / safety looks like for a diversity of women across the city
- Engaging a wide range of women including: women we already work with, women in the community, survivors of VAWDASV, volunteers, CWA / RISE staff
- Increasing community awareness of what safety in the public means for women and girls
- Gaining insight from service users on their view of what safety means to them to be able to provide needs-led services
- Bringing together multiple safety campaigns working to end Violence Against Women and Girls, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence
- Linking in with the Violence Prevention Unit and the Safe to Say Campaign
- Linking in with the Safe Spaces Scheme
- Creating art and craft with our pledges to end VAWG and Sexual Harassment
- Giving participants the choice to keep their artwork as a souvenir or display on the walls in the Cardiff Women's Aid office to inform other women
- Using social media to display the artwork after the event using hashtags to promote the Safe to Say campaign / Safe Spaces / Safe Space Cafe / Cardiff Women's Aid services
- Getting together and supporting each other as women - strong women empower other strong women! Collective power through craft!

What does safety mean to you?

The question above was displayed on an interactive whiteboard and the participants were able to add their voices via a QR code.

Independence stands out as a word echoed by multiple participants.

Also important for the women participating was equality, freedom, justice and opportunity.

Women wanted their voices to be heard and listened to.

POSITIVITY CONFIDENCE COMMUNITY
ESSENTIAL OPPORTUNITY
JUSTICE EQUALITY
FREEDOM SECURITY
INDEPENDENCE
BEING HEARD HAPPINESS
A SPACE FOR MY VOICE SPACE
AUTONOMY KEEPING YOUR OWN POWER
BEING BELIEVED RECOGNITION CHOICE
GOOD FRIENDS VALIDATION EMPOWERMENT
BEING ABLE TO SAY NO **CWA** **SUPPORT NETWORKS**
CARDIFF WOMEN'S AID
CYMORTH / FENYWOOD
CAERDYDD

THEMES IN WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY

Independence - Safety Within Ourselves

Being recognised, having independence and the freedom to live our lives in the ways we want to was a sentiment much spoken about during the session. Women agreed that to feel safe in their community, they needed to feel safe that their actions, beliefs and voices would be believed and heard in the spaces they occupy.

One participant said that safety meant simultaneously having freedom and security. She talked about how she felt safe when she could express herself and wear clothes that could be seen as 'sexy' but knew that nothing bad would happen to her because she had chosen to dress like that.

'I feel safe knowing that I can express myself in the way I dress and in the clothes I wear. I feel safe knowing that the worst thing that could happen is I could get cold if I'm not wearing many clothes, but nothing dangerous or harmful.'

Another woman commented 'I decided not to wear red lipstick on a night out because I know I'd be coming home late and it would make me vulnerable or attract attention towards me.'

One woman spoke about how, being single, she felt less safe, as being in a relationship offered a protective barrier against other men. When you are single, men make assumptions especially if you are dressed up. So, it is safer to wear baggy jumpers, jeans etc. The woman spoke about how, the older you get the firmer the assumptions are – it's "okay" for young women to dress up nicely but if an older woman does, then men will make assumptions about what she is looking for.

Two women discussed how clothes should be a chance to show your personality, be creative and represent who you are but are too worried to dress how they would like to, in case they expose themselves. Women spoke about having to change their appearances and behaviours to keep themselves safe, because of a fear of what might happen if they did not.

'Safety means to be free without fear.'

Sexual Harassment in the Night Time Economy

One participant said 'Men say they know best, but when they sexually harass us, they say that they didn't know better and blame us for the way we were dressed... So which is it?'

Another said: 'The result (being sexually harassed, abused or attacked) does not equal the action [of what we wear, how we act, if we're drunk...].' They agreed that there was an unfair balance between our actions and the so-called consequences of such.

One participant spoke of the fear of being sexually harassed, especially in the dark. 'I hadn't even left my garden path when men drove past, beeped their horn and cat-called me.' This participant spoke of her confidence being knocked when so called 'minor' incidents like these happen, and how they affect her day to day life deeply. She said 'My boyfriend can walk to the gym down that alley at 6am in winter, I had to explain to him that I can't do that.' She also said that 'In winter, life shouldn't stop for women at 4pm,' but that for her, it did.

One woman spoke about how she believes COVID-19 and the restrictions associated with it have made people more self-centred, aggressive and entitled. People go out and only think about what they want.

The women discussed confidence and how this could be so easily shattered by men's actions.

The women felt the onus was often on them to explain the restrictions that the harassment and abuse they experience had on their ability to do everyday activities. There was a lack of understanding by men of what women's everyday life was like due to the harassment we experience. 'Men just don't get it. Even the 'good' ones.' They noted the energy women are spending having to take to explain this over and over again.

**'I am tired of having to explain to men why they can do things I just can't.
Especially at night, the dark, or winter.'**

"Safety' as a Tool of Coercion and Control

Some participants had experience of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence and this informed their perceptions of safety.

One participant spoke about using 'safety' as a means of control. She said that the word safety for her reminded her of her ex partner who was abusive. She said that he had told her he was 'keeping her safe' but this was a means of control and a guise for further manipulation.

"He'd say 'Stay with me and I'll keep you safe.' 'You don't need to wear makeup, you're so pretty without it.' But this was making me more unsafe."

For this participant safety meant having access to support to leave her abusive partner and live free from the control he had labelled as 'safety.'

Where there was and was not Safety in Services

For another participant, safety meant being around other women who get it, other survivors of VAWDASV. She said that the support she had received from Cardiff Women's Aid via the Own My Life course and Safe Spaces Cafe had opened up her eyes to see that her current partner was abusive, not just her ex. She said that coming to events and groups where she feels safe to open up is a big part of feeling safe in the world.

The same participant said that services should make you feel safe, but not all do. She has a lack of trust in some services and said she feels unsafe disclosing the abuse she has suffered to social services for fear of repercussions against her and her kids.

These thoughts are echoed significantly in the interactive word display with women contributing their desires 'to have my voice heard' 'to be believed' 'justice' & 'validation.'

Another woman spoke about the need for better education at a younger age. She feels that the police don't/can't do anything when it comes to harassment, so it is better for younger generations to be educated on being respectful, kind etc.

KEY FINDINGS

- To feel safe in our communities, we (women) need to feel safe that our actions, beliefs and voices will be believed and heard in the spaces we occupy
- Being able to express ourselves and not be judged in the clothes we wear is important to feel safe
- Men respect other men more than they respect us (i.e. a man might leave us alone if they know we are in a relationship with a man)
- There is an unfair balance between our 'actions' (i.e. getting drunk, what we wear, how we act) and the so-called 'consequences' of such
- Women's lives are majorly affected and impacted by the winter and the dark
- The notion of 'safety' can also be used as a means of control by perpetrators of abuse (i.e. 'I'll keep you safe', 'You're safe with me etc.')
- Safety means interacting with other women 'who just get it' and having peer support
- Safety means accessing support services that are informed by women's experiences.
- Not all services make us feel safe and there is a widespread lack of trust in statutory services

THANK YOU

Thank you to the women who attended our Craftivism Cafe and fed in their views and experiences. Thank you to the Violence Prevention Unit who partnered with us to deliver the group and are using the feedback to inform the Safe to Say campaign.

We hope to do more of these groups to gather the perceptions and experiences of women in Cardiff. We hope these findings will inform collaborative work across services and businesses to ensuring that the city of Cardiff is an empowering and equal space for women to work, live and have fun.

CWA

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