

POWER WOMEN!

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE
AND LEARNING DISABILITY
LEADERSHIP COURSE



**Impact
Report**

2023



SCLD

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Introduction and Background

The following provides a report on the outcomes of an evaluation of the Power Women Gender Based Violence and Learning Disability Leadership Course co-produced by the Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities (SCLD) and People First Scotland's (PFS) Equally Safe Group. The course was funded by the Scottish Governments Delivering Equally Safe Fund as part of a two-year grant received by SCLD that also included the Unequal, Unheard, Unjust: But not hidden any more research project (SCLD, 2023) The course builds on SCLD's existing leadership work.

The course was co-designed with the Equally Safe Group. Initial discussions with the group suggested that they wanted the programme to focus on safe and healthy relationships, keeping safe and identifying red flags in relationships and members viewed the course as a personal development opportunity. It was also hoped that the Unequal, Unheard, Unjust (SCLD, 2023) research findings would inform the content of the course. However, discussions on course content evolved into considering leadership and campaigning mechanisms for achieving change in the lives of women and girls with learning disabilities who had experienced gender-based violence. During the course, however, there were also many opportunities for peer discussions around lived experience of gender-based violence and enhancing individual, knowledge of the topic.

The Equally Safe group drew on their previous life experience and of previous courses to provide input on a range of issues including accessibility and the kind of topics that would be useful. The group also commented on course material such as the accompanying course workbooks and presented and led on several workshops. There were seven women in the Equally Safe group, although not everyone participated in all aspects of the work. It is anticipated that three of the women who participated in the Power Women course will join the Equally Safe group now that the course is completed. A key concern of the Equally Safe group was to ensure that the course had the same feel as their own meetings where women felt safe and confident about speaking.

The Equally Safe group were also mindful that the course participants would find it challenging post course without having ongoing contact with others so ensured that all course participants were offered the opportunity to join their group. There were also concerns from SCLD and PFS around re-traumatisation of the women and therefore consideration was given to how women would be supported before, during and after workshops. The organisers were clear that the course was not a support group, therefore, striking the correct balance between opportunities for sharing lived experience and learning opportunities for campaigning for change was a significant task for the facilitators. The organisers considered that each workshop should enable the women to reflect on their lived experience and to draw this into the discussion.



The main aim of the course was to support women with learning disabilities who had experienced GBV to develop the skills and expertise needed to achieve positive change in their own lives and more generally for women and girls with learning disabilities living in Scotland. The course had several objectives including:

- To support women to develop leadership skills.
- To develop women's confidence to speak up to a range of professionals about their experiences as a women with learning disabilities who has experienced GBV.
- To ensure women's sense of self-worth is enhanced.
- To empower women to take action to improve their lives and the lives of others.
- To develop connections and networks that women can turn to for support.
- To increase women's awareness of their rights, particularly their right to be involved in leadership and advocacy roles.

Course Aims

1

leadership

2

confidence

3

self-worth

4

empowerment

5

connection

human rights

6



To achieve these objectives the course contained workshops on developing skills for leadership and using storytelling to create change. Further detail on course content will be outlined below. The course also offered the opportunity for the women to meet with others with a similar experience and to share their expertise.

Following completion of the course it was hoped that the women would be able to:

- Raise awareness among peers, service providers and health care staff of women with learning disabilities with experiences of GBV.
- Participate in leadership and campaigning roles by joining relevant groups and starting and signing petitions.
- Have confidence to speak to others and challenge poor practice.
- Know where to go for support and advocacy.

“

The course contained workshops on developing skills for leadership and using storytelling to create change. ”



Pre-course requirements and Application Processes

A requirement of applying for the programme was that the women had access to a tablet or laptop, had a quiet space to participate in the course and that they committed to all eight sessions (except in the case of emergency). Each woman was required to secure a mentor for the duration of the course. This could be an advocate but could not be a carer or existing support worker. The role of the mentor was to help women prepare for the sessions, support them through the sessions and to help them use and build on newly learned skills between sessions. If applicants were unsure or unable to secure a mentor, support was provided via SCLD. Mentors were not paid outside of their usual posts. The participants were asked to undertake specific tasks/work before and after sessions, examples are provided below.

- Identifying their campaign ideas and thinking about why it is important.
- Exploring how they might raise awareness of their campaign.
- Thinking about what makes them a Power Woman.

The activities set were accessible and the women were able to seek support from their mentor or others to complete them and to use different forms of communication including words and drawings.

The course was available to women self-identifying as having a learning disability and who had experience of gender-based violence. Applications were encouraged from people across Scotland. PFS shared information about the course at national and local women's groups as well as sharing it in their national newsletter, organisation website and Facebook page. SCLD also shared the course recruitment pack, including an accessible information sheet and consent form, with their networks, in their monthly newsletters and on their social media channels. to try to secure participants for the course. Overall, recruitment was challenging, and it was noted that attracting participants already known to SCLD or PFS was more successful. This leaves a substantial number of potential participants hidden and excluded from the opportunity to participate. This is particularly the case for those women with learning disabilities who may not be receiving support from any services.

Women who were interested in participating had to complete an application form that asked them why they were interested in taking part in the course and how they might use the skills they learned in the future. It also asked if they felt comfortable talking about gender-based violence and if they had any concerns about gender based violence to help avoid the potential for secondary traumatisation. The application form also considered any support applicants would need. As ten places were available and only eight applications were received all those who applied were offered a place.



All material
provided about the
course was
provided in an
accessible format.

Participants ranged in age from early 20's to
late 40's



Course delivery and structure

The course was delivered on-line, over 8 weeks. The decision to deliver the course online meant it was accessible to women from across the country. It also recognised that not everyone was able to travel easily because of health, mobility or weather. Online participation also had the advantage of enabling people to take breaks unobtrusively in an environment where they likely felt comfortable. Information on each workshop was provided to the women one week in advance to give participants time to prepare for the specific topic and to provide the opportunity for clarification. The importance of creating a safe space for everyone to participate and of showing respect was emphasised throughout the Course and course material. Clear information about support from within and external to the course, such as Rape Crisis, was also provided to the women. All material provided about the course was provided in an accessible format.

Table 1 below provides information on how many of the participants attended each session, participants ranged in age from early 20's to late 40's. Most participants came from Central Scotland, but the course was also successful in engaging participants from other parts of Scotland including the North-West and the South, a benefit of the online format. Different gender identities were represented in the group of participants, although no formal record of gender identity was sought as part of the application process



Each of the women secured or were provided with a mentor by SCLD, PFS or Central Advocacy Partners (CAP). One woman was supported by her support worker, and one was supported by her parent. This was contrary to the recruitment/ inclusion criteria; however support worker input was permitted because this was the only person the woman had built a trusting relationship with. The final woman's mentor was identified as a member of staff from a local additional needs group, however they had to withdraw prior to the course commencing. Mentorship from a member of SCLD staff was offered but the offer was never formally accepted. No communication was received by the parent, and they didn't attend any of the course workshops. The support worker's communication, and support to participate and create a campaign for change, was excellent.

Some of the participants were parents, some lived with partners, some lived alone or with parents. One of the participants were not involved with any support organisations, the others were receiving support from either Central Advocacy Partners or People First's Equally Safe Group. Three women were supported and mentored by CAP (one of whom couldn't complete the course). Two women were mentored by SCLD - one had support from another organisation out with the course, and one woman had no support from other organisations - this woman was unable to complete the course. During the course, this woman was referred to other services for support, due to safeguarding concerns, and is being offered regular support from SCLD. One woman was mentored and supported by People First.

10

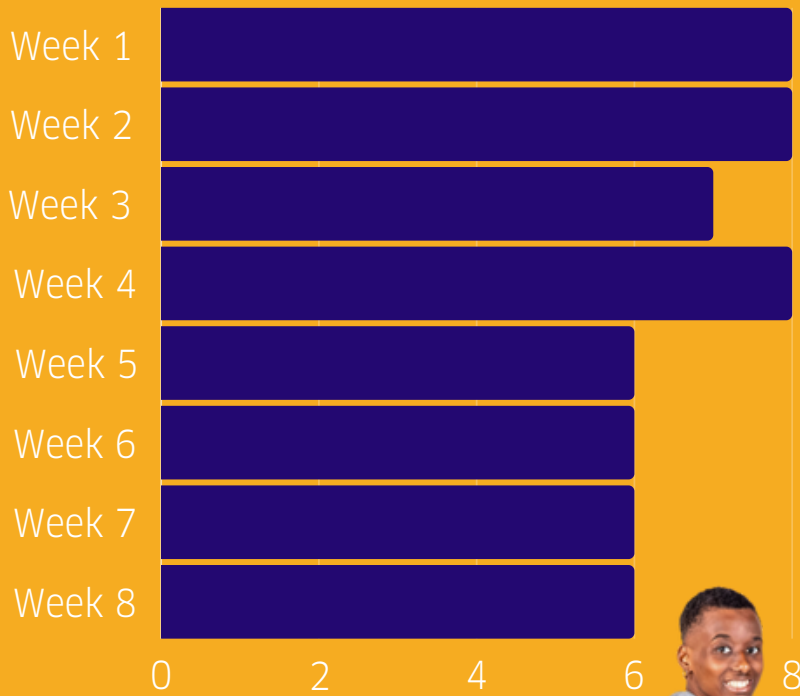
women
speakers

8

women
mentors

ATTENDANCE RATES

Power Women who attended the course by week



8

power
women



8

online
sessions

As mentioned above, 1 woman was supported by her support worker and 1 woman was supported by a parent. Eight women began the course and six completed it. It was noted that those participants with support from agencies such as CAP were more likely to complete the course.

Table 1 – Attendance Rates

WEEK	TOPIC	PARTICIPANTS
1	Introduction to the course and campaigning for change	8
2	Leaders for Change	8
3	Communicating for Change	7
4	Human Rights Leadership	8
5	Trauma Informed Leadership	6
6	Changing the law and policy	6
7	Skills for Leadership	6
8	Graduation and celebrations	6

Different gender identities were represented in the group of participants, although no formal record of gender identity was sought as part of the application process



Weekly Topics

1

Introduction to the course and campaigning for change

2

Leaders for Change

3

Communicating for Change

4

Human Rights Leadership

5

Trauma Informed Leadership

Changing the law and policy

6

7

Skills for Leadership

8

Graduation and celebrations

The Evaluation

Dr Gillian MacIntyre and Dr Ailsa Stewart were asked to provide a framework to evaluate the Power Women course and to work in collaboration with SCLD and People First to gather and analyse the relevant data. It was agreed the following data would be collected for analysis to provide an overview of the experiences of the course from a range of perspectives. The obvious limitation to this work is that there was no external data collection from the women themselves or the mentors.

1

Demographics and key features of applicants collected from application forms (September 2023)

2

Short pre and post course, on-line and/or in person survey focused on expectations and outcomes for participants. (September/October/November 2023)

3

Reflection on outcomes in each session by the women – recorded by People First/SCLD/group facilitator. Focused on the following questions. (September/October 2023)

- What did you enjoy most about today's session?
- What would you have liked more of today?
- Was there anything you did not enjoy/or anything that could have been done differently?
- What were the key messages that you will take forward from today?
- How will you use what you have learned today?

4

Relevant staff interviews x 2 (November 2023)

Pre-course expectations

(based on Qualtrics online survey and application forms)

An online Qualtrics survey was designed to elicit pre-course expectations from participants. The survey was made available to participants in week 2 of the course (there were some delays in finalising the content of the survey) and participants were encouraged to seek support where required to complete the survey. Whilst every attempt was made to ensure the accessibility of the survey, it is acknowledged the nature of the software could have made this difficult for some participants. Half of the participants completed the survey, although not all participants completed all questions. The following reports the findings from the pre and post course survey alongside some key themes from the application forms for the course.

A range of reasons were given for embarking on the course, these included the following.

- To become more independent and assertive.
- To learn more about leadership skills and gender-based violence.
- To stop bullying.
- To spend time with people who had similar experiences and to share expertise with others.



- To explore strategies for keeping safe and preventing gender-based violence.
- Because someone they knew was doing the course.
- Because a worker thought it would be good for the woman.
- To keep busy and fill in some time.
- To learn about ways to defend myself.

Helping and spending time with others with similar experiences was a key theme in the pre course data. Some participants felt nervous before starting the course but also excited with one respondent feeling relaxed about the course. The nervousness of participants appeared to be either related to not knowing what to expect or not knowing many other people on the course.



“

I was nervous to start with, but I have experience of doing other things like this which help.

”

Most participants were keen to learn a range of skills such as self-advocacy and leadership and to increase their knowledge of issues affecting women and gender-based violence.

Participants were also keen to increase their own confidence, to make friends and to potentially increase their social networks as well as spending more time with staff. Participants indicated low and very low levels of knowledge of several topics prior to commencing the course. This included the following.

- Issues affecting women.
- Gender-based violence.
- How to keep themselves safe.
- How to help other women with similar experiences to them.

None of the participants felt that they had good support networks and friendships.



Programme Overview

Course Content

The course content was dynamic and varied. Each week focused on a different aspect of leadership. Prior to attending the course participants were asked to consider an area for campaigning, not everyone came with a fully formed idea and the learning in the workshops helped them to develop their ideas. Each week the topic under discussion was related directly to the various proposed campaigns to bring the topic to life for the participants. Throughout the course the women were able to draw on their own life experience of GBV and other challenges, enabling them to support each other informally and well as validating their own experiences. Some people did struggle to come up with a topic for a campaign but as they moved through the course and their confidence increased, they were more able to focus on their own campaign topic.

Other topics on the course included the following.

- An introduction to leadership.
- Using storytelling to create change.
- Communication skills/ how to communicate your message.
- Storytelling and the media.
- Human rights and human rights advocacy.
- Linking your campaign to human rights.



- Trauma informed practice and leadership
- How to change Policy and the Law in Scotland.
- Equality, diversity, and inclusion.
- Financial inclusion.

The programme was delivered by different speakers and facilitators who came from a range of backgrounds including the Equally Safe lived experience group. Each speaker had a range of skills and expertise in their chosen area. The workshop(s) included talks and interactive activities for participants to take part in. These included developing a communication plan, linking campaign ideas to human rights, and thinking about how to change laws and policies in Scotland.

After each session time was built in to talk about the topic, related activities and learning and there was always the opportunity to ask questions. There was a focus on self-care with spaces to reflect included in the programme.

As noted above, participants were asked to reflect on each session by considering the following questions:

- What did you enjoy most about today's session?
- What would you have liked more of today?
- Was there anything you did not enjoy or anything that could be done differently?
- What were the key messages that you will take forward from today?
- How will you use what you have learned today?

Based on these reflections it was possible to identify several themes. These have been grouped below under the question headings described above.

What did you enjoy most about the session?

Participants expressed satisfaction with several different aspects of the course. They appeared to particularly value having the opportunity to meet new people and to come together as a group. They appreciated that meeting online gave them the opportunity to meet people from different parts of the country although some people found this difficult and would have preferred to meet in person. Indeed, given the strength of feeling on this, the group are planning to meet in person in early 2024 to catch up.

Working as part of a group brought lots of benefits including learning from others in the group, hearing others' stories and feeling less alone. Participants highlighted the importance of creating a safe space where they felt able to talk about their own experiences. Participants also valued having the opportunity to get to know the staff who were carrying out a mentoring function from People First, SCLD and CAP.

“ It [the course] makes me want to inspire and share my story with others ”



By the end of the course the women were able to identify several key outcomes for themselves. These included:

**the value of
feeling
listened to**

1

2

**having
learned new
information**

3

**noting how
they and
others in the
group grew in
confidence**

4

**meeting new
people and
developing
new
connections**

The staff involved in the process noted that the group had developed into a supportive network that embraced and celebrated each other. Their instinct was always to support one another.

What would you have liked more of today?

Participants were very happy with the course content overall so did not have many suggestions for things they wanted more of. A number did however feel that they would benefit from more input on the law and how to access their rights. One participant also felt that the course could have been longer.

Was there anything you did not enjoy or that could have been done differently?

Generally, the things that people commented on related to structure and modes of delivery. Some people found meeting online challenging particularly in the early phases when they reported feeling “nervous”. However, it was also acknowledged that meeting online also brought benefits as it offered people more privacy if they became upset or needed a break. It also made it possible to offer the course to women from across the country, as discussed above.

Participants also reported feeling that the course was very intense, with lots of information being provided in the workshops. They referred to feeling that their “head was very full” which sometimes made it “hard to take it all in”, particularly where there were two sessions per workshop.

This meant that the programme felt very tiring at times. There was a suggestion that having some of the information provided in advance of the workshops might have reduced this intensity. However, it should be noted that accessible information about what would be covered in each workshop, and a list of meanings of any difficult words that would be used, were sent to participants and mentors one week ahead of each workshop. The tiredness might also be attributed in part to the course running on a Friday afternoon which meant that:

“it feels as if I am crashing now as it’s the end of the week”.

Some participants reported that, at times, the course content could be upsetting and could potentially be quite “upsetting and triggering” for people. There was a sense overall that these issues were dealt with in a very sensitive way.

Related to this, it was noted that the course raised awareness of issues that participants might not have been so aware of before. This resulted in a sense of frustration at not being properly heard by “leaders and politicians”.

What were the key messages that you will take away with you?

Participants reported a lot of learning that they took from the course around specific topics such as the five key principles of Trauma Informed Practice and the Law - which they felt they needed to know more about.

There was also learning around feeling valued and valuing others and the importance of valuing yourself. This would suggest that those who participated in the programme were developing greater self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-worth:

“Thank you for helping to find my wings and grow”

They spoke of the importance of being accepted:

“everyone wants to be accepted for who they are and it’s ok to be who you are”

“be true to yourself”.

“

**Thank you for
helping to find my
wings and grow**

”



They also spoke of the value of peer support and of being with others who shared similar experiences to them who they could learn from:

“I am not alone”

“hearing messages from others like me”.

They also discussed the importance of being able to make choices and to be able to have a greater say over decisions affecting their own life.

“People should have a choice and feel safe in their homes and communities without fear of people not wanting you there as well as having control over the decisions in their lives”

“Keep having hope and faith when making choices”

Participants also valued the practical skills that they learned around sharing their stories and having their voices heard and conflict resolution:

“we can agree but in different ways”.



They spoke of the importance of having their voices heard and the campaigning theme of the programme seemed to be particularly important to the participants who recognised the need for change, with a growing awareness of injustice and inequality and the need to campaign to change this. The following quotes illustrate the theme of change and the role of the women in achieving this:

“
Campaigning
about GBV is
very
important
for us to be
involved in.
”

“
There needs to
be a change to
give more
support to
those who are
excluded.
”

“
The Scottish
Government
need to do
more to fund
this kind of
campaign.
”

“
Things need to
change to better
support women with
learning disabilities
who experience
gender-based
violence. ”

“
We all want to
make a
difference and
to make the
world a better
place. ”

How will you use what you have learned?

It can be difficult to identify how learning will be used in future, but participants noted several important areas where they feel they have changed and developed. Participants discussed having increased their knowledge and understanding around campaigning which meant they felt better equipped to participate in campaigns and to take their own campaign ideas forward. They discussed wanting to use what they have learned to “make a difference”. They acknowledged that:

“this is hard but it’s important to get the message about these [our] experiences out there”.

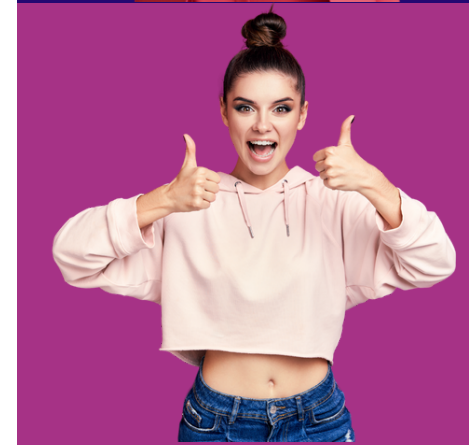
Overall, the participants were realistic and acknowledged that there was “still a lot of work to do” but they felt better equipped to take on this work because of their increased knowledge, self-confidence, and awareness of important issues around equality and justice.

“I feel more confident to speak up now”

Participants discussed several core themes and principles that they will put into practice as they take the work forward including choice, safety, and power. For example, two participants acknowledged that safety would be an important part of their campaigns which were on the rights of transwomen with learning disabilities and raising awareness of the red flags associated with domestic abuse, while another committed to ensuring people had choice as part of their campaign.

All participants felt that they wanted to share their campaign ideas and information with as many people as possible and a small number were able to give examples of actions already taken. For example, one participant had sent her MSP an email about her campaign despite feeling “nervous” and “powerless”. Not all participants felt ready to immediately become involved in campaigning but felt they had benefited from the course in having this information for the future.

The participants also felt strongly that they wanted to consider contributing as presenters or mentors in any future course to share their learning and put it to good use. However, it should be noted that there is no ongoing support to this group of women to progress their campaigning ideas and this is a significant challenge, particularly for those not currently being supported by organisations such as CAP or PFS.



Learning from programme delivery

Reflections from course organisers (SCLD, PFS and the Equally Safe Group members)

Overall, the course format and delivery methods appeared to work well but a clearer focus on campaigning for change from the outset might have been useful to allow participants to build on their campaign ideas each week, so they were ready to implement this by the end of the course. However, this might have been difficult without first skilling up the women to consolidate their leadership skills. There was also reflection on whether some topics, such as law and policy were overwhelming for participants in terms of the volume or complexity of information provided. It was also acknowledged that there was less focus on GBV than some participants might have expected and that this was something that could be developed in the future.

The collaboration between the Equally Safe Group, PFS and SCLD was felt to have worked well and the discussions on the detail of the course and individual workshops benefitted the Equally Safe group membership as well as course participants. The consistent structure of the workshops and relaxed informal atmosphere were valued by participants. The balance of informal peer discussion and formal input by a variety of speakers was thought to be useful, particularly in diffusing the more challenging topics.

The benefits and challenges of offering the course online are noted throughout the report. Overall, the organisers felt that the women would have liked the opportunity to undertake the course in person but acknowledged the difficulties of including women from across Scotland alongside the increased costs for travel. A hybrid approach was also considered but again there were concerns that those in geographically distant locations may be excluded. When working online, the provision of accessible information was considered particularly important. Contributors were, however, provided with lots of information and guidance on delivering accessible workshops. This included an accessible presenters guide, templates for PowerPoint presentations and pre-workshop information booklets as well as one to one support to develop course content and activities. It was noted that workshops delivered by contributors who accepted the offer of additional support meetings, were most well received, accessible and engaging.

As noted, not everyone was able to come up with a campaign topic early in the course. Those who initially struggled to come up with a campaign idea expressed the least anxiety about taking their idea forward. Those participants who had support from organisations going forward appeared more likely to be able to action their campaign ideas. However, some participants simply felt that they were not at the right place in their lives to lead on a campaign but noted that they had developed the skills to take a campaign forward in the future. For example, a group of the women working together supported by CAP, were intending to develop a board game based around identifying red flags for

domestic abuse following completion of the course.

Due to the limited funding available, long-term outcomes from the course for participants will not be monitored so it will not be possible to identify the impact of any campaigns enacted.

Short term outcomes

In terms of short-term outcomes, the course organisers mirror what the women themselves expressed around a growth in their confidence, which they felt was “easy to see” and was evidenced by their increasing contributions to the course as it progressed and their growing ability to challenge misconceptions. It should be noted however that some of those who responded to the survey still felt that they lacked confidence and would like to do more work around confidence building, motivation, and self-esteem. One participant felt that the course should be longer to allow the women to work on these skills.

Based on the number of completed post-course surveys it is possible to identify a number of short-term outcomes as follows:

- Most of those who completed the survey rated their leadership skills as being “good or “very good”.
- Most felt that they knew more about the issues that affected women than they did at the start of the course.
- Most of the women felt they knew more about gender- based violence than they had at the start of the course.

- Most felt they knew more about how to help women who have shared the same experiences as them than they did at the start of the course.

Other areas of learning include the role that the media plays in reporting the issues experienced by women:

“We learned a lot more than what we get told on the news, which can only be small clips...I learned a lot about the media and how they work”.

Satisfaction levels

Upon completion of the course survey respondents were asked how they felt. One participant summed this up well by saying:

“I felt great because if the course was to come around again, we could lead it in some way...I think it was brave of us all to come together and collaborate our stories”

This illustrates not only a growth in confidence (evidenced by a willingness to take on a leadership role in future) but also the benefit of peer support and learning and taking strength from one another's stories.

All of those who completed the post course survey expressed high levels of satisfaction with the support they had received from course staff. They also felt very happy with the support that they had received from their mentor.

“

I felt great because if the course was to come around again, we could lead it in some way...I think it was brave of us all to come together and collaborate our stories.

”



Participants valued learning from the expertise of the different contributors to the programme. They felt that they had received very good advice and input from contributors. They also found the discussions they had within the group to be beneficial to their learning. Participants valued different approaches to delivering workshop content including the use of videos and slides that had lots of information to take away. They discussed having lots of good messages to take away from the course and found this very inspiring and empowering. Participants also identified learning where to get further information and support as helpful. There was also an awareness raising component that was identified by participants for other agencies to highlight issues faced by women with learning disabilities who experience gender-based violence.

There was a clear advocacy component within course content and workshop delivery that participants found useful. They particularly valued having information about taking their campaign ideas further and “not sitting on the fence”.

Overall, participants appeared to find this very inspiring:

“we got what we needed during and after the course. We could reach out if we needed to”.

Survey respondents also noted high levels of satisfaction around the new friendships and relationships that they had developed with other course participants. Socialising and making new friends were identified as a very important part of the course.

Areas for development

Some of those who completed the post-course survey reported a strong desire to meet other participants in person. This is reflected in future plans to meet together as a group and in the invitation extended by the Equally Safe Group to join their meetings in future.

Some of the concerns about the need to provide accessible information for participants in advance of sessions discussed above were also reflected by those who completed the post-course survey. For example, one participant found the course workbook a bit overwhelming and would have liked this to be broken down further. This participant also reflected that they had a lot going on in their life at the time which made their participation more difficult. This is something worth considering in future. For those who may be experiencing difficulties or crisis in their own life, careful planning and consideration must be given to timing their participation.

Different participants expressed different views about the topics that made them feel comfortable. For example, one person felt very uncomfortable talking about money because this was a particularly pertinent issue in her life at the time of the course. Other participants found talking about other aspects of the course more challenging, such as learning about the law. This illustrates that all topics need to be handled with great sensitivity and at a place that suits the women who are participating. Facilitators therefore need to be highly skilled at adapting their style, tone and pace as required.

There was also a recognition that it might be useful to develop a similar course for men so they could access resources:

“so that they have a safe place to go to as well...a place where they feel safe so they can open up”.

Planning for future developments.

When reflecting on their learning from the course, the organisers were able to identify a number of areas for future development. It was felt that the role of the mentor needed to be more clearly set out with more guidance and support available on how to undertake this role. The role was thought to be complex and required specific skills and qualities as mentors had to deal with the women's anxieties and fluctuating confidence levels as well as supporting them to effectively and meaningfully participate in the course. It is perhaps testament to the success of the course that members of the Equally Safe group wanted to be mentors and to consider running the course themselves in the future.

It is fitting to finish with some final reflections from the Equally Safe group who highlighted what they hoped that participants would get out of the course are below.

“We want to make sure something comes out of it. The women on the course have worked really hard and we’re so proud.”

“We want this work to go on so people keep learning and speaking up for themselves. The whole idea of the course is to help women finish with more confidence and be proud of themselves.”

“It’s been a safe place for women to open up and we feel relieved getting to talk about it. We want to make sure other women get this opportunity.”



Conclusion

Bringing together evidence from the pre and post course surveys, the weekly reflections, and interviews with course organisers, it is clear that the majority of women who took part in the course found it enjoyable and relevant for their needs in considering how to raise the profile and awareness of the issues facing women and girls with learning disabilities who have experienced gender-based violence. There was evidence that women's confidence and self-esteem grew because of participating in the programme although some participants suggested that these were areas they needed to continue to work on.

The complex interaction of factors that influence the lived experience of this group of women meant that their personal situation could impact on their ability to attend and fully participate in the course. Delivering the course online offered flexibility to enable maximum participation and this is demonstrated by the fact that only two of the eight women did not complete the course due to personal issues. Whilst there are no plans to repeat the course or to follow up with participants, the opportunity to become part of the Equally Safe group has been offered to all participants which would provide some consistency and follow on for the participants, although their funding is also time limited. Those participants supported by CAP also have ongoing support to realise their campaign ideas.

Post-course evaluations suggest that most women (who completed these) reported increased confidence and a greater awareness of the issues facing women with learning disabilities and greater knowledge of gender-based violence. They also reported increased awareness of how to help women in similar situations for them. The course was delivered with care and sensitivity, and this was particularly important given the nature of the material which had the potential to be triggering or re-traumatising for the women. Support from course staff and mentors was vital to ensuring the women had a positive experience and this was an area that was identified that required further work and development for any future programmes that may be delivered.

The Equally Safe group were very proud of being partners in the design and delivery of the course and of the achievements of the women who participated. The collaboration with SCLD was also noted as being successful and fully inclusive with the Equally Safe Group being involved in all aspects of the design and delivery of the course. While it has not been possible to look at the longer-term outcomes that may emerge from the project due to a lack of longer term funding, it is clear that for those who participated the motivation and commitment to carry on with the work remains high.



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