

Project Aim

The aim of this project was to explore and map the lived experience of Perth & Kinross residents with a specific focus on their feelings of safety within Perth city.

Project Objectives

- To provide a welcoming, safe space for discussion around the concept of safety.
- To examine local residents' feelings of safety in the context of Perth city centre.
- To interpret and share our findings in a way that might be helpful or thought-provoking, with potential to inform future GEP projects to address issues of safety in Perth.

Target Audience

- Local women residents, including:
 - Perth Women's Collective members
 - Diversity of age and experience
 - Women with experience of sexual violence or domestic abuse

Project Summary

Thanks to some initial funding from the National Lottery Community Fund as part of a wider programme of events for Perth Women's Collective, the project began to take shape in the summer of 2021.

Local artists Anna Kelso and Helen O'Brien were commissioned to work closely with a diverse selection of community groups within Perth & Kinross to gather insight and understanding of how individuals interact with their city environment and how their sense of safety plays a part in this. The artist was required to produce a creative interpretation of these findings.

The project was officially launched during the 16 Days of Action to End Violence Against Women in December 2021 with the first workshop being held with members of Perth Women's Collective. Successive workshops were held with the Soroptomists International Perth branch, local young people, and women with experience of sexual violence.

The workshops began with an initial conversation about what safety meant to the participants. Ideas were jotted down and discussed. After a few activities to warm up hands and brains, participants were tasked with creating a visual representation of a day or journey. It could have been that day, the previous day, a typical day, or any day they had lived through. A blank piece of paper was provided and lots of different materials to draw, paint, cut, stick, etc. The challenge was to put something on the paper that represented the journeys made during that day and how safe or unsafe that person felt during those journeys.

Collage was the medium for this activity as it is an accessible visual communication tool for all abilities that, in this case, led to deeper insights. The activity also offered an opportunity for the facilitators to hear and take part in sideways conversations between participants.

During this activity there was an opportunity to talk about things surrounding the issue of safety in the place we live. Participants were also invited to mark up a map of Perth with red, green and orange pens to indicate what areas of the city made them feel safe or unsafe, or somewhere in between.

Following the completion of the workshops, Anna Kelso created a short film which combined animation, images of participants' artwork and text to represent the ideas and themes which emerged from the project. This work will be projected on the wall of St Paul's Church in the city centre as part of the programme for the 16 Days of Action to End Violence Against Women 2022.

Findings

Artists' Statement

"We set an intention at the beginning of the project that the participants' artwork would inform the project. We asked the participants to visually depict a journey; most chose a journey they'd made that day.

What emerged out of the depiction of their route was pockets of their personal life, who they were, their previous experiences, their history, their identity. We heard about people's anxieties, their vulnerabilities, their prejudices. Some were beautiful little insights like their children's feet, some were bravely shared accounts of trauma and survival.

These are interior worlds that we carry with us everywhere we go. It led me to consider the parallels between the network of our exterior environment to the inner network of our physiological bodies, one that is informed and shaped by our personal and shared experiences. Our bodies react neurologically and then physiologically to its surrounding environment and references its lived experiences, its memories, as to how to respond. It made me think of worlds within worlds or structures within structures.

I wanted to highlight this idea of the personal but also the collective, what happens if we layer up these different interior worlds? That the more layers that are blended, the image becomes something else, a pulsing organic collective current that is ever changing and fluid.

Whilst in our interior worlds the physiological networks respond flexibly with what it contains, informing and being informed. Externally the stable or rigid structures and systems of city planning inform people's behaviours but doesn't let the people inform it back. Which leads us to ask how can we create systems that flex with that collective transient current.

I recognise that is a massive question but I think worth asking nonetheless. Moving towards that solution even fractionally could transform our sense of safety in city centres and beyond." -Anna Kelso

Conclusions

The main conclusion we have drawn from this project has been the confirmation of the importance of making space for and including diverse voices in the planning of anything.

There is no one simple definition of safety nor straightforward description of what makes a place safe. As Anna points out in her statement above, every person's individual experiences inform how they react to and interact with their surroundings. Surroundings that might feel safe to one person might feel very unsafe to another. There are certainly common themes and overlapping ideas of what makes a space or situation safe, but to plan safe spaces it is essential that many voices be consulted and many viewpoints explored.

How can we be truly inclusive of diverse experiences and viewpoints? Is there a way that the decisions of a few can reflect and respond to the needs of the many? Can we create static spaces that nonetheless, as Anna puts it, flex with that collective transient current? An open-ended but significant conclusion, with the potential for further exploration and development.