Meaningful Survivor Participation
An engagement toolkit for organisations
About Welsh Women’s Aid

Welsh Women’s Aid is a national federation of 19 independent third sector violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) specialist services in Wales and is the national umbrella body in Wales working with all specialist services and wider stakeholders to prevent VAWDASV.

Established in 1978, we support and provide national representation for the federation of independent third sector VAWDASV specialist services in Wales. These services deliver life-saving and life-changing support for survivors of violence and abuse (women, men, children, families) and deliver preventative work as part of a network of UK provision.

Our primary purpose is to prevent domestic abuse, sexual violence and all forms of violence against women and ensure high quality services for survivors that are needs-led, gender responsive and holistic. We collaborate nationally to integrate and improve community responses and practice in Wales; we provide advice, consultancy, support and training to deliver policy and service improvements across government, public, private and third sector services and in communities, for the benefit of survivors. This includes advising and supporting commissioners and strategic leads in their development of VAWDASV needs assessments and strategic plans, promoting evidence for innovative new service models, and supporting research into the prevention of abuse.

Some of the services we deliver include providing a national voice to inform relevant policy, legislative and strategy developments; providing advice and information on the development and delivery of promising practice in the sector; providing support with policy and practice

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1 Our federation of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence specialist services in Wales, with whom we have national partnership agreements to ensure our work is coordinated and integrated includes: Aberconwy DAS, Atal y Fro, Clwyd Alyn Housing Association (CAHA) Women's Aid, Carmarthen Domestic Abuse Service, Calan DVS, Cardiff Women's Aid, Cyfannol Women's Aid, Domestic Abuse Safety Unit (DASU) North Wales, Gorwel (Grwp Cynefin), Montgomeryshire Family Crisis Centre, Thrive Women's Aid, RCT Women's Aid, Safer Merthyr Tydfil, Safer Wales (including Dyn Project), Stepping Stones, Swansea Women's Aid, Threshold, West Wales Domestic Abuse Service, and Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre (RASASC) North Wales.
The Wales Live Fear Free Helpline for survivors and families impacted by sexual violence, domestic abuse and all forms of violence against women.

The National Training Service partnership: a unique national partnership of specialist services delivering Wales-based training, learning and development around all aspects of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. We provide accredited and general training courses delivered by expert and specialist trainers.

A programme of work to ensure ‘Children Matter’, which supports local services to help children and young people affected by abuse and to deliver preventative Safety, Trust and Respect (STAR) programmes across Wales.

The Welsh Women’s Aid National Quality Service Standards (NQSS) which provide a national accreditation framework for our membership of domestic abuse specialist services in Wales; as part of a UK suite of integrated accreditation systems and frameworks delivered by partner infrastructure organisations, with which we collaborate.

Survivor Engagement programme – working to engage meaningfully with survivors to appropriately resource and reimburse experts by experience and enabling them to sharing their experience and speak truth to power. We do this through our Survivors’ Network and a series of events and resources.

As a national federation, our policy work, campaigning, consultancy, training and advocacy is all grounded in the lived experience of local specialist services and service users. Our success is founded on making sure the experiences and needs of survivors are central to all we do.
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Introduction to this toolkit

Within Welsh Women's Aid (WWA) we have been working tirelessly to steer a more meaningful approach for survivor engagement, ensuring inclusivity and diversity across Wales. This toolkit is our latest resource to help organisations achieve this. However, at the outset we would always recommend that when working with survivors of domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women, non-specialist organisations should do this in partnership with a specialist service such as Welsh Women's Aid or one of our members. This will ensure ongoing guidance and support for both your organisation and the survivors participating.

This toolkit focuses on women because violence against women and girls (VAWG) is gendered violence that happens to women and girls because they are women. Because of this, some crime types are disproportionately suffered by women and girls, such as: domestic abuse, rape and sexual violence, stalking and harassment, female genital mutilation, so called ‘honour’ based violence, sexual exploitation and forced marriage. It is a problem of pandemic proportions: 1 in 3 women experience some form of violence and abuse in their lifetime, particularly intimate partner violence and sexual violence. More women suffer rape or attempted rape than have a stroke each year. Intersecting issues of discrimination linked to race, age, disability, poverty and others can also compound the abuse women suffer. It occurs in Wales and worldwide, cutting across all generations, nationalities, communities and spheres of our societies. This means survivors of abuse are everywhere: your friends, colleagues, your classmates, your family members or you yourself may be a survivor. Men can also be survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence and should have specialist responses to meet their needs.

Children and young people who witness or experience these types of abuse are also survivors in their own right. Whilst this toolkit may offer some insight and tools into how to engage with children and young people, it has been developed in consultation with and for adults affected by domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG. Resources designed to engage children and young people are also available through specialist services working to end violence against women in Wales. A list of local organisations across Wales can be found on our WWA member search.
How the toolkit was developed

This resource for organisations attempting meaningful survivor participation and engagement was developed by Welsh Women's Aid in collaboration with survivors. Information was initially gathered through a workshop with a group of survivors that reflected on what meaningful engagement meant to them. It does not intend to prescribe a strict method of engagement, but rather to:

- Suggest a set of values and principles for engagement.
- Pose questions for practitioners to consider when developing their own survivor engagement plans.
- Share survivors' suggestions and recommendations of good practice.

The foundations of our approach in co-producing this toolkit with staff and survivors followed the position, also adopted by the Wales' National Service User Involvement Framework's, and the Research Integrity Framework on Domestic Violence and Abuse of acknowledging the expertise of individuals with lived experience, both as experts in their own lives, and in how services can be improved. The WWA SEEEdS Survivor Engagement Good Practice Toolkit, ‘Beneficial but triggering’: Experiences and support of survivor speakers in the UK by Dr Jessica Taylor and Bramley Clarence and the publications were also consulted to form the basis for this work.

We would like to express a special thank you to all of the survivors who have contributed to the creation of this toolkit, our Survivor Engagement Officer, Vicky Lang, whose approach to working with survivors has been highlighted as an example of best practice, WWA's membership of specialist services who have shared their expertise and experience, and Eva Roussou, Clinical Psychologist and Consultant in Trauma-Informed Practice who facilitated the workshop and whose report formed the basis for this framework.

Background and purpose of this toolkit

Survivor engagement is important. Decision makers can often be the furthest removed from survivors' experiences. Without meaningful engagement, we run the risk of making assumptions about what survivors need and want from organisations and interventions, or not considering them at all.

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2 Wales National Service User Involvement Frameworks
4 National Principles for Public Engagement of Wales-Doc
As decision makers, organisations and workers, it is our duty to amplify survivor voices, lift them high and ensure that they make it to the ears of the people with power so that we can make positive change and ensure the best support for all who need it.

We also need to ensure we do this in a way that supports and empowers survivors so that the process is also beneficial to them. Done badly, survivor engagement can lead to burnout, risk to safety, financial burden, secondary trauma and more. It needs to be done right the first time!

Created through co-production with survivors, the purpose of this toolkit is to identify good practice and support Welsh Women’s Aid’s member services and others to develop a framework of survivor and service user engagement that is:

**Empowering**  
**Trauma-Informed**  
**Strength-Based**  
**Needs-Led**  
**Dynamic**

We have termed this a ‘back to basics’ framework as for some practitioners it will be an already established way of working. However, for some organisations commissioning pressures that prioritise outcomes over values may have led to a distancing from these principles. Our aim is to put them back at the heart of all of our work. It is our intention for the framework to be dynamic and to refresh it regularly with updates and direct feedback from survivors and practitioners in order to ensure that survivors’ voices are centred.

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This toolkit is for:

- Specialist services / Welsh Women’s Aid specialist members
- Organisations planning engagement with survivors of domestic abuse and other forms of VAWG (in partnership with specialist services)
- Governments undertaking survivor engagement activities and consultation
- Police, health and other statutory agencies consulting with victims/survivors.
The approach to meaningful survivor participation

Words used to describe how engagement programmes should be implemented often include the following: respectful, transparent, re-assuring, safe, ethical, accountable, innovative, inclusive, empowering.

**Taylor and Clarence** recommend considering:

- The invitation to a survivor to take part – what is the power dynamic?
- Payment and expenses acknowledging the worth of survivor contributions to an organisation.
- Supporting a survivor through what can be a traumatic experience retelling their experiences. This includes specialist support before, during and after any engagement.
- Acknowledging and respecting the full role of survivors as professionals contributing their expertise.
- Ensuring engagement is meaningful and needed. It should never be a ‘tick box exercise’ or feel tokenistic or voyeuristic.

It can be difficult to describe what elements such as making a process safe, making it effective, and actively empowering survivors actually look like in practice. This is especially true when individuals delivering programmes or services do so naturally, organically. For the purposes of this framework, it is useful to name what has been identified in the workshop by survivors in terms of creating safe, effective, and empowering processes in survivor work. They told us they want:
These outcomes are the result of creating emotional safety and value in interactions with survivors. Specific personal and professional-personal qualities are required to achieve this, including:

- Empathy and compassion
- Understanding of people's experiences and difficulties including multiple disadvantage and intersectional discriminations
- Understanding of how wider systems are involved in these processes
- Assertiveness, persistence, clarity, and non-violent communication skills
- Boundaries
- Trustworthiness
- A willingness and appreciation of working in partnership
- A willingness to be challenged and learn from individuals who may have different experiences from one's own.
A dynamic framework
We have adapted Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation as the basis of our framework.  

Survivor leadership
Groups made up of survivors who lead on all decisions, projects and campaigns.

Delegated power
Survivors take the lead on some decisions and responsibilities. They may initiate some projects with support from staff.

Partnership
Survivors and staff contribute to decisions as mutual partners. Projects are co-produced.

Placation
Survivors are invited to share their suggestions through structures such as steering/advisory groups but have limited influence.

Consultation
Survivors are consulted on their views and opinions. However, agendas are already set and there is no guarantee that their views will influence final decisions.

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6 Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation
Arnstein’s ladder is a guide to seeing who has power when important decisions are being made. It has survived for so long because people continue to confront processes that refuse to consider anything beyond the bottom rungs) to demonstrate the different levels of survivor engagement, so that survivors can be involved in what is meaningful to them at the right time. Whilst it may take time and relationship building for survivors to lead their own projects, an empowering survivor framework should aim to provide opportunities for survivors at all levels. If you only provide opportunities at the bottom of the scale, engagement can feel tokenistic. Survivors told us that they feel that their voices are not being heard and that engagement does not lead to genuine change and as a result, they may disengage all together. At the same time, you should emphasize that there is no value or hierarchy in the type of initiatives that are meaningful for them. The framework and engagement opportunities should be flexible enough so that they don’t limit survivors’ wishes to participate and at the same they do not place expectations for engagement. For example, if some survivors only have time or only want to respond to consultations or surveys, they should not be made to feel guilty for not participating in other activities. Make sure that everybody’s contributions are valued and as people’s circumstances change, check regularly how much or how little they would like to be involved.

A trauma-informed, strength-based, needs-led framework

Seeing survivors in their wholeness as individuals is key. Beyond their survivor identity, there are many other identities: parent, professional, artist, teacher, community member etc. Each of them comes with its own set of skills and experiences and tapping into this wealth can be a healing and empowering experience in itself. It also amplifies the scope of survivors.

Many survivors have experienced trauma not only in their relationships. They have also been retraumatised by the very institutions that were meant to protect the survivor. Anger and frustration are natural responses. Instead of asking what is wrong with someone, consider what happened to someone.

**Trauma-informed**

A trauma-informed practice is a strength-based framework that is responsive to the impact of trauma, emphasising physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both providers and survivors; creating an opportunity to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment. A trauma-informed approach needs to take an intersectional approach to understanding the multiple disadvantages that individuals might face accessing services or participating in consultations.
Talking about past experiences can lead to re-traumatisation. Make sure that:

- You have checked about individual survivors’ triggers and safety measures.
- Survivors have access to known sources of support. This includes both in terms of preparation and aftercare.
- Access to support is threaded throughout the engagement with the project rather being an afterthought for when the person has already been exposed to trauma.

We are unable to control the reactions of the individuals and the bodies that survivors engage with, such as government officials and the media. Work with survivors to minimise the possibility of survivors not being heard, being judged, or disbelieved. At the same time, prepare survivors for ‘worst case scenarios.

Celebrate survivors’ strengths, achievements, and successes no matter how small these may feel for them.

Check with survivors about their goals and what they are looking to get out of.

Provide different options for engagement that suit survivors’ needs – e.g. flexible hours suited to those who work or have children.

Recognize that survivors have not been passive victims in their lives. Focus on their resilience and the survival strategies that they’ve relied.
As some survivors may not want to engage through groups, always check with survivors their preferred engagement method and allocate additional time and resources to meet their needs.

It is important to highlight that all these principles are inter-connected and will only be effective if they are all implemented consistently and across the organisation/institution. These principles are based on three key pillars that work on VAWDASV should be trauma-informed, needs-led and strengths-based.

Ensuring that these values and principles guide your work is not only morally right and ethical but lead to better outcomes for the survivor and service. Modelling behaviours that are as far removed from the abuse that women have experienced will provide them with a safe space to share their experiences, achieve sustained recovery and flourish. Below we provide some examples of the types of behaviours that should be used in your engagement. By exhibiting these behaviours, you are clarifying in practice what survivors can expect from their interactions with you and you are also role modelling expected behaviours within the group.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abuse that survivors have experienced</th>
<th>Behaviours that practitioners should use have experienced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control and coercion</td>
<td>Give survivors choices, different and flexible options to participate. Value their contributions and provide opportunities for them to lead. Share power - give back control. Encourage women to voice their priorities for activities and initiatives and allow for democratic process to identify the number of priorities that can realistically be worked on. Regularly review these to identify the right time for another goal to be initiated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td>Create opportunities for survivors to connect with their experiences and with others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence and abuse</td>
<td>Treat survivors with empathy, care and kindness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats and fear</td>
<td>Create a safe space for individuals. Check with them what feels emotionally safe. Maintain safe boundaries including confidentiality. If your organisation works with women and men, ensure that you safeguard women only spaces by providing separate engagement activities for women and men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpredictability</td>
<td>Make sure that you are consistent and dependable in your approach. For example, don’t cancel at the last minute; deliver on your promises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humiliation/putting down</td>
<td>Treat survivors with respect. Lift them up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blame/ gaslighting</td>
<td>Provide reassurance and affirmation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploitation</td>
<td>Work in a transparent and honest way. For example, don’t promise on outcomes that you can’t deliver.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silencing</td>
<td>Make sure that women feel heard and seen. Reassure survivors that no matter how different their experiences are, they are all valued and important. Create a space of ‘shared experience’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domination</td>
<td>Work in collaboration in genuine partnership with survivors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pain/ hurt</td>
<td>Create a positive space that celebrates survivors and their achievements.</td>
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</table>
We must recognise the power imbalance between paid staff and survivors and think again about who we are asking to engage. For example, current service users may feel pressured into taking part or that their support may be affected by how they respond. It is important therefore to acknowledge this and provide structure and information for participants, regardless of targets or outputs that you need to achieve. It is our duty as VAWDASV workers to amplify and uplift the voices of the women who use our services to ensure that these services continue to develop and improve.

An empowering framework

“... the women who recover most successfully are those who discover some meaning in their experience that transcends the limits of personal tragedy. Most commonly, women find this meaning by joining with others in social action.”

– Judith Herman, Trauma and Recovery

Survivors live in a society that denies the extent of violence against women and girls and its harm. The silence surrounding this gender-based violence gives the message that abuse only happens to some women and leads to othering, feelings of isolation and self-blame. Survivor spaces can help break the silence and create new connections.

Survivor empowerment often stems from their ability to come together with others to take collective action to demand change and response to shared experiences. It comes from being able to have a voice again and regaining a sense of control. As specialist organisations, survivors' experiences including systemic failures to prevent or provide an effective response to these experiences should be the vehicle to inform everything from our services to our campaigning work and the lasting change that we want to see.

As mentioned previously, often the people making decisions can be removed from the realities of front-line experiences and survivor voices. Therefore, it is important that as organisations we provide a platform to ensure these voices are amplified.

A special note on group sessions

• Preparation

If you are running group sessions, having a co-facilitator is important for many reasons. It ensures that you have someone to share the planning with, an extra pair of eyes in the sessions and also someone to debrief after the session with. Any “back up” facilitators who would cover in the event of staff sickness/ absence should be introduced to the group in the first session to limit the number of different people coming into the space.
It is important to remember that some survivors may be more vocal whilst others may prefer to listen. It is important to provide an opportunity for everybody to engage whilst also ensuring that people don't feel in any way either pressurised or silenced.

It is important that facilitators have time to prepare adequately before running sessions and afterwards to debrief and follow up concerns.

It's always important to check-in in with your group – is there anything that can be done differently next time for example. Often this can be as simple as rearranging the room. Sometimes in a circle of chairs people feel pressure to share but having a desk in front of them can be a barrier, in a good way and help them to feel a little protected. Ask your group which they would prefer and have some options.

It's crucial to acknowledge that by opening up about their experiences, survivors may feel vulnerable, or they may also feel triggered by other people's stories. Think about incorporating a grounding exercise into the session in order to close these feelings and “leave them in the room” so that participants can leave the session and go about their day. These can be as simple as asking each person, what their plans are for the evening, or to share one nice thing they will do for themselves before the group meets again. This can be a great way of incorporating an icebreaker into the next session, by checking if participants managed to complete their self-care action.

People bring into the ‘room’ not only their past traumatic experiences but also the feelings and pressures of the day. Check in with survivors at the beginning of the session about how they are feeling. Knowing that somebody is feeling tired or had a difficult day, will help you relate to them better.

It’s important to acknowledge the difficult subjects that may be discussed, for staff and participants. Checking in around self-care can be a good way to ground the session and ensure things are closed on a lighter note.

Make sure that you are available after the session should anybody need to have a chat or debrief. Ensure that you provide a space for a debrief for yourself and draw a boundary between personal and professional.

- **Inclusion**
  Practitioners should be aware and sensitive to the additional layers of trauma and discrimination that women from different backgrounds may have experienced. For example, asylum seeking and refugee women, women from a minoritized background or women in conflict with the criminal justice system will often have experienced abuse at the hands of the state leading to additional trauma, e.g., racial trauma. As a practitioner you should make sure that:

  - You create an inclusive space that feels welcoming to survivors with different experiences and backgrounds.
  - You challenge discriminatory language and behaviour.
○ You understand the trauma that discrimination and marginalisation can cause and use a trauma-informed response.

○ You consider the membership of the survivor group that you are working with in order to identify groups that are underrepresented, and you reach out to these groups to understand what is stopping them from joining and how to remove those barriers.

○ You build solidarity that connects the experiences of survivors who are part of your group to the experiences of survivors who are marginalised by legislation and policy (e.g., women with no recourse to public funds or women who are harmed by the sex industry).

○ That we are not tick boxing ‘survivor engagement’, that you have a clear aim and objective for survivors to be included.

○ Also, if you’re an allies share best practice to overcome issues others are experiencing to prevent triggering, or discrimination in any form with marginalised groups!

A safe and trauma-informed survivor engagement framework needs to consider issues of confidentiality and protecting the anonymity of survivors who do not wish to make their details public, particularly women who are marginalised. Survivors should not be excluded from sharing their experiences and you should consider whether and how to do this safely, e.g., through a case study that is audio recorded or narrated by a third party.
Consider planning meaningful survivor participation

The following section supplies some questions for services to consider as well as feedback that survivors provided to Welsh Women's Aid about the best approach to survivor engagement.

Survivors valued the creativity in these sessions, in developing new and creative approaches to their engagement with services. This was achieved through understanding of their experiences, consistency, flexibility, and acknowledgement of what they bring to the group. Realising the different skills and abilities each individual brings to the group opens up the confidence to share, develop and identify means and ways to improve engagement at all levels.

That’s why as the group grows, what you need will grow too with the needs of the group.

Motivation

Why would survivors want to be involved? How is meaning created in participation? Why would they give their time and skill in this programme?

Survivors in the workshop spoke about wanting to do something that would make a difference. This could be as broad as supporting other survivors who find themselves alone in the aftermath of abuse or as specific as addressing particular areas of poor practice from police/services. In every case, there was clear intention to put their own skills and experience into use practically.
Recruitment

How will survivors come to know about the programme and under what circumstances they will choose to sign up to it?

Survivors spoke about the need for improved visibility of such resources for survivors. Once they made first contact with Welsh Women's Aid’s Survivor Engagement Officer, the elements that supported their decision to join included:

- Receiving adequate information beforehand via email.
- Having a 1:1 with questions asked very openly about their safety, triggers, availability, intentions, and potential goals from participating in the programme.
- An approach during the first meeting that created good rapport.
- Knowing that the Survivor Engagement Officer was also a survivor and had the understanding that comes with lived experience.
- The flexibility around the time and energy they would like to put in the group, without consequences for stepping back.

Opportunities

Consider whether the currently offered types of opportunities allow for different levels of commitment.

Do opportunities address different levels of participation including service delivery, shared decision-making, and governance? Is there a clearly communicated intention that these areas of activity are within what the programme supports? Are such opportunities actively pursued or created? Are opportunities co-developed in the group?

The following table may be a helpful guide in exploring the scope of can be developed:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Example of activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Pre- Planning on strategic plans, policies, toolkits. Discuss what works and hasn’t in the past to prevent re-evaluations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation</td>
<td>Forum membership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Representation</td>
<td>Speaking to commissioning bodies or service review panels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research / evaluation</td>
<td>Design questionnaires, peer reviewing, facilitating focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training delivery</td>
<td>Leading workshops, train the trainer events, training staff, sharing experiences e.g., media skills, writing questionnaires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff selection / recruitment</td>
<td>Writing job descriptions, person specifications, job ads, shortlisting, interview panel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service delivery</td>
<td>Peer mentoring, developing good practice guides, delivering groups, as employed staff members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service design</td>
<td>Consultation activities, working as a team on a project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media and publicity</td>
<td>Press, addressing events/conferences, feature pieces in newsletter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>Committee or board member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consider payment and reimbursement for survivors giving their time and skills in these activities when appropriate. They can be forms of acknowledging their role as experts and their investment. This should be considered on top of covering travel, childcare and refreshment costs and any resources needed as standard.

**Training and support**

What needs be in place? What do survivors need in terms of preparation and support for different activities?

Survivors will have their own ideas about projects and campaigns that they want to take forward. For example, in the workshop with Welsh Women's Aid survivors suggested working on developing a guide for navigating the complexities of post-separation abuse and systems failure; campaigning for a non-police domestic abuse advisor to work directly with the police; developing a Scrutiny Panel; working on what the UK Domestic Abuse Act (2021) is changing
and actively looking at this implementation to see what they can offer from a place of expertise.

Acknowledging existing skills and identifying what training and support needs arise for each suggested activity may be a good place to start. Consider accessibility issues when deciding on which activities to work on. Programmes should make opportunities easy for any survivor who wants to be involved to do so: language, disability, logistics, conflicting time commitments are some of the areas to address. These should be incorporated into budgets and plans when setting up survivor engagement projects so that they are considered from the beginning and not a last-minute adaption. Equally, it is important to consider what the expected experience and / or impact of engaging in the activity may be. Any limitations in terms of scope and content should be discussed at the outset and communicated to the group so that expectations are not raised beyond what is possible.

With issues of physical and emotional safety and capacity in mind, what support will there need be in place? Depending on the nature of the activity, is a staff member available to offer on-site support? How are debriefs structured?

It is also acknowledged in the literature that it can be important for survivors to know that there are future opportunities coming up. For those who want a longer-term involvement, gradual goals for the group will create meaning through continuity.

Communication
Every aspect of the programme relies on clear, consistent communication where information is offered and received as timely as possible and there is safety in disagreeing. During the workshop, survivors spoke about discussions in the group being well held, without anyone dominating. Good communication is reliable and has boundaries. It is acknowledged that elements of communication may activate previous trauma and facilitation of the group should this into account.

Reflection and evaluation
Is there space to reflect on the process itself? On what is going well? On the readiness of the group to take on new activities? How are opportunities evaluated? Does this evaluation feed into decisions for next steps (is there a learning process from experience?)

It is important to ensure that survivors revisit existing activities, celebrate successes and review goals on a regular basis. You should also consider how you could gain difficult feedback – there are examples of services developing systems using volunteers to gain feedback from survivors that they may not be comfortable giving to their support worker.

This could also be used when getting feedback from survivors who have left a service or programme. Evaluation tools such as SurveyMonkey and baseline surveys can help to record this reflection.
Plan to evaluate each meeting or event as you go. One approach is for the facilitator to write up the feedback, including quotes and other key points raised. Make sure you get permission to share this for evaluation and other uses. It is also useful to reflect on how things could have been safer, more effective and the things that went well in terms of engagement. Don't minimise the things that didn't go well or as planned, as this is important learning for the future. You should plan to revisit your evaluations when planning future engagement and create quarterly and annual overviews of what you have achieved and what the issues have been.

Platforms
It is critical to create a variety of platforms and spaces for participation such as online, written, face to face meetings etc. It is the responsibility of the organisation to make the process easy and accessible so that participation is not a burden for survivors. Materials should always be translated, and interpreters should be available for discussions as required.

Platform
Are spaces/ venues accessible? Have you provided flexible and multiple times to participate, including weekdays and weekends? Are you able to provide free childcare at the venue? Are you able to engage with survivors using formats including one-to-one meetings, group meetings, surveys, virtual meetings etc.?

Exit strategy
Is there a process in place for survivors to be able to exit the programme? At the moment how do survivors make decisions to leave or move on? What factors contribute to that? What feelings are associated with this decision?

An exit strategy recognises that survivors can choose to contribute for a set amount of time and then choose not to continue, without guilt for moving on. This strategy should include an acknowledgement and celebration in the group of their contribution and space for reflection for them, in terms of what they have taken from the experience.

Boundaries
Some of the most commonly encountered difficulties in engagement programmes relate to personality clashes in the group, individuals dominating discussions, cliques, and exclusion of members through group behaviour. It is important to have ground rules and a policy in place that addresses these forms of disruption in the group. This is to protect individual members as well as the group. Boundaries need to be clearly set and upheld. From a trauma-informed perspective, it is important to acknowledge in a one-to-one safe space that an individual's behaviour may be coming from a place of difficulty within themselves. However, acknowledgement does not equal tolerance of behaviours that can be harmful to others and/or discourage healthy group processes. A group programme may not always be
the best choice for an individual survivor and there should be exit processes in place for them if needed.

Survivors provided the following examples of good practice that are reflective of and aligned with trauma-informed practice principles and could be replicated in other organisations running survivor engagement initiatives:

- Groups are running consistently and start on time.
- Different participation options are offered (such as face-to-face, online Zoom, email only).
- There are no fixed expectations, but flexibility. Survivors can engage as much or as little as they want. There are no consequences or apologies expected.
- The groups are open and welcoming. There is no enabling of cliques. There are different group opportunities for everyone to be involved.
- Emotional safety is paramount: information is sent beforehand for those interested. There is then a 1:1 to explore how potential new members experience emotional safety, physical safety parameters, what they are bringing in the group, what they would like to get out of their involvement. They are asked what type of activities they want to be involved in.
- Emotional care is offered after activities in the form of debriefs.
- Peer support is focused on building confidence and survivors are offered other opportunities such as receiving training.
- There is clarity about what the groups are and aren’t about. Discussions are held and the groups well facilitated. Space is offered for 1:1 discussion, which are best held outside the group. There is an agenda and goals are set and reviewed.
- The groups celebrate successes.
- Boundaries are valued and upheld, put in the context of safety for the group and for individual members.
- Communication is kept between sessions via a WhatsApp group or similar, with specific parameters for the content of messages.
- Commissioners have been invited to attend the groups and this is being actively pursued.
- There is a clear message that the programme is about actively doing things and making a difference.
Consider the following questions when setting up a survivor engagement project:

What is the purpose of engagement
- Seeking feedback from survivors on your services/ a specific issue?
- Co-producing and developing services?
- Involving survivors in activism?
- Involving survivors in strategic work in your area?

Who are you seeking to involve
- Current service users?
- Current and ex-service users?
- Is there a space to involve survivors who have not used the services?
- Have you considered survivors working within your service?

Who is going to deliver the project
- Is this a new role or is this going to be added to somebody’s responsibilities?
- How are you going to ensure that the staff member/volunteer has the skills to work with survivors in an empowering way? Consider your recruitment processes.
- Have you allocated sufficient resources for the role, including a budget to run activities, pay for expenses, pay for participation, childcare, interpreters etc.

What engagement mechanisms are you planning to use
- Think about the engagement ladder and participation you planning to use activities

How are you going to make sure that you work with survivors in an empowering way and shift the power relationships between survivors and organisations?
- How will you apply the principles of:
  ○ Trauma-informed
  ○ Strength-based
  ○ Needs-led working?
- Consider the venue and settings, preparation, managing dynamics, debriefs, access to clinical supervision etc.
How do you ensure that survivors from all backgrounds get a voice? How will you address intersectional disadvantage?

- What is your understanding of discrimination and disadvantage?
- How do you include these issues in your conversations with survivors?
- Do you have a budget to ensure accessibility including access to interpreters?
- How have you advertised or recruited your group, and could you widen access?

This framework only provides you with some questions and recommendations. Always speak to survivors first about what matters to them, how they would like to be treated and what they would like to achieve.

Case studies
Using the below case studies, reflect on how you might make changes in this session/the next session:

Case study 1
Jill has come to a survivor engagement forum that is asking women for their experiences and thoughts about engaging with services. There will be four sessions in total and for the first session no one else has been able to get a word in edgeways. Jill’s son was removed from her care, and she is using the forum as a place to share her feelings about other statutory services. By session two other participants are rolling their eyes and are become less engaged themselves. How would you respond to this?

Reflections:
- Jill clearly needs to talk about the trauma she has been through.
- It is an emotive subject and needs to be handled sensitively.
- Can we find out what other support if any Jill is accessing?
- Are we able to signpost her to this support in-between sessions?
- If so, we should then be able to gently guide Jill back to the ground-rules.
- Restating the ground rules to the group as a whole so they can see that you have taken action.
- Can we amend the session – i.e., smaller groups so there is more space for individuals?
Managing a group on Zoom is very hard, we aren't able to rely on as many non-verbal cues as we would in person.

We have to remove ourselves and our feelings from the situation.

It doesn't matter if Emma was in our accommodation or not – her feelings are valid.

However – we need to be sure that the sessions stick to time set and the aims are achieved.

Is Emma still receiving domestic abuse specialist support – are we able to liaise with her case worker?

Are we able to offer Emma a separate catch up either after the session or on a different day to have a separate forum so that her experiences are heard? If so, we can offer this in the group session and then assertively move the group on to ensure all voices are heard.

Is there a way Emma can link in with our services so that we can advocate for her around her accommodation?

How can we close the session for the group safely and ensure people leave feeling ok?

Reflections:

○ Managing a group on Zoom is very hard, we aren't able to rely on as many non-verbal cues as we would in person.

○ We have to remove ourselves and our feelings from the situation.

○ It doesn't matter if Emma was in our accommodation or not – her feelings are valid.

○ However – we need to be sure that the sessions stick to time set and the aims are achieved.

○ Is Emma still receiving domestic abuse specialist support – are we able to liaise with her case worker?

○ Are we able to offer Emma a separate catch up either after the session or on a different day to have a separate forum so that her experiences are heard? If so, we can offer this in the group session and then assertively move the group on to ensure all voices are heard.

○ Is there a way Emma can link in with our services so that we can advocate for her around her accommodation?

○ How can we close the session for the group safely and ensure people leave feeling ok?

As you can see, the questions above may well throw up many more questions and practicalities about your sessions, but these basic questions can be a useful place to start. If you are clear yourself about what your session is for, how often they will be taking place and what you want the outcome to be, you will be much more likely to be able to explain this to service users and also to ensure they want to attend. You should also be clear ahead of time the support that you are able to offer to participants: before, during and after any engagement.

**Who**

Who are we hoping will attend the group, what kind of participants are we looking to work with?

For example, if we are hoping to get a group of women who have lived in refuge in order to share their experiences for recommissioning, we need to identify participants who are in a place where they are able to share – so perhaps they have moved on from refuge, also we
might seek to gain views from women who were offered refuge and then declined or even who chose not to access refuge. These women may have useful information to share that could also help shape the refuge pathway moving forward.

Their experience is also valuable as it could hold some learning – therefore marketing the session appropriately – not just “Have you ever lived in a refuge” could change to “Did you ever discuss accessing refuge” in order to ensure all of these views are captured.

Reaching out to specific agencies that support migrant women for example could ensure that some no recourse to public funds (NRPF) survivors were able to feedback as well as they may have struggled to gain access to refuge spaces even though they met the rest of the criteria.

It’s really important to make clear in any promotional material as well, who the session is for so that people can choose to engage if they feel safe. For example, your service might provide refuge spaces for men, but the organisation should run separate groups to offer women only and men only spaces to do this in a safe and empowering way.

At the very base level, we need to think about how we are referring to the participants, and how they would choose to be referred to. Often as professionals we use ‘service user’ or ‘client’. ‘Survivor’ is a word that many have reclaimed, and ‘victim’ has its own connotations – Hickman states “Ask yourself if the label is for the benefit of the organisation or the person and ask the person you are working with what they would prefer to be called.” (Hickman, 2014) This immediately sets the tone, that you want to be led by them and also that you hear and validate their thoughts.

You may already have had survivor feedback that relates to this, or your member organisation may well have their own policy or preferred terms. It’s important to remember when we are looking for participants that every word, we use counts.

Have you thought about access in other ways i.e. Translation in order to ensure the sessions are as accessible as possible. Do you have a Welsh language speaker who understands the intricacies of DSV – perhaps someone you have used before. Are there other languages that need to be accommodated for? Ensuring that safe Interpreters are used, again your member organisation may have a preferred provider but if not things to think about are is this someone how may know the survivor outside of this space, is the interpretation accurate, is this specific interpreter available for all of the sessions if more than one, to ensure continuity.

Is there good representation from marginalised groups, disabled survivors, black or minoritized survivors and LGBTQ+ service users. How can we ensure this, is there a local provider of specific services for these groups that you could link up with in order to ensure these voices are heard as part of your engagement project.

- **Where**
Where your session is held is so important and this will impact the number of attendees you have. Whilst it is important to acknowledge that unfortunately you will never be able to
please every potential group attendee, and sometimes you will just need to make a decision and stick with it. It is our duty as facilitators to ensure the space is as accessible as possible.

There are benefits to a face-to-face session, and if this is a method you choose, you need to think about accessibility. Not only for yourself and any other workers but also for the attendees. How accessible is the venue itself for example, is it in a town centre/village hall and how are you expecting attendees to get there?

Running a session at your offices may be easy for you to get to in terms of time management but women attending may feel unable to speak their truth in the building where you work. Sometimes having a neutral venue might work better for all. Then the session is less linked to your previous support. It’s also important to think about safety in terms of people leaving the venue, is there reliable public transport/parking will they be safe to get home?

Will you also be covering attendees travel expenses? All of these questions need to be explored at the outset to ensure fairness and inclusivity. Often charities are able to offer vouchers for participating, this often feels better than dividing up petty cash, for example covering bus tickets, but you will need to ensure vouchers are for somewhere that the service user will use, for example, Amazon may not be accessible to everyone, and that specific supermarket may not be local to them. Love2Shop vouchers can be helpful here as there is a wide range of options for the participant to choose.

Zoom sessions are more popular now and many sector groups such as Freedom and the Recovery Toolkit are taking place virtually. This offers options to participants who are unable to attend support sessions or who live more remotely and rely on public transport. Is this a possibility? More so – is this safe – think about the women you are supporting and where they are in their journey. Is it appropriate to be asking these questions if they are dialling in at home and what about your safety as a worker? Could a perpetrator gain information about you or other vulnerable women by listening in to a group.

Being able to offer Zoom sessions though may minimise time spent by facilitators and participants in getting to a venue, meaning there may be a lower drop off rate and attendance may be higher throughout the sessions as its easier to log on when not quite feeling 100% than get up and get out of the house. This flexibility could work in your favour, you could also hold more sessions at various times to ensure people who work/have other commitments can attend sessions.

You could combine methods, have a face-to-face session followed by a Questionnaire re Survey Monkey – This method whilst more scatter-gun in approach could reach people who used to /are not currently engaging in your service. These types of questionnaires can be shared more widely on social media etc. You may then get a wider response especially from people who are less able to reach the service or people that never quite came in to service.

• What
You need to plan and structure your session so that you can clearly and confidently explain how it will work to your participants. You will need to ensure there is enough time for the activities you have planned but also adequate time for group forming, as without this, people
may feel uncomfortable being open in front of others. Please see the two session plans in the appendices for some suggestions on how you might run different session lengths.

You will need to think about how you are marketing your sessions, is it a one-off One Hour Focus group, a 6-session closed steering group or even a monthly Have Your Say meeting where different participants are able to join each time. It’s up to you, you will need to spend some time thinking about which is most appropriate in order to garner a wide range of views and it may be necessary to use different methods for different groups of survivors.

Being clear on your flyers/leaflets/emails about what is expected in the session and also what service users will get out of the session for example “a chance to have your say” or “be a part of shaping services”. Where possible use different methods of communication e.g., Phone calls, face to face, emails, info on website. Ensure that others who are helping spread awareness are clear too, ensure the correct info is cascaded to teams and team leaders and other groups that are running.

Also, in the first session it’s important to make it clear to participants that they can withdraw at any time, with no consequences. That they can use an alias if they prefer and that they can ask to have a copy of the final report. This will help service users to feel like part of the whole process. If there is a launch or event to go alongside the piece of work, inviting them to attend as a thank-you whilst also ensuring they are appropriately reimbursed for their time/travel.

Remember that you can also signpost anyone who has enjoyed being part of the survivor engagement work at your organisation to the WWA’s Survivors Network.

- **Why**
  
  What is the purpose of the engagement?
  - Are you looking for feedback on a specific service?
  - Are you looking to co-produce or develop services?
  - Do you want to Involve survivors in activism?
  - Do you want to Involve survivors in strategic work in your area?

  What has prompted this group? Is it a one-off need for information to help with a funding bid or is it part of your services effort to engage more with service users. The sessions that you plan will need to reflect the differing need.

  For example: Involving survivors in activism could be a monthly workshop that is longer i.e., 2.5 hours, with the Service bringing one topic i.e., Street Harassment to discuss and a space held for the Service Users to discuss and raise a topic too. This would be a longer commitment for survivors but could also be a chance for them to be involved with a project form beginning to end and feel part of changemaking.

  Thinking about “why” is so important and also making sure that your why aligns with the why of the management so that your results can help them tender for new bids or add new services into the recommissioning process.
“Why” also considers current events, what has led to the group being instigated, is it a response to current affairs for example Vigils that were held this year for missing/murdered women? The group will still need to have an overarching purpose, for example highlighting all missing women, with a view to setting up a women’s safety group or encouraging BME and LGBTQ+ service users to engage in to influence change moving forward.

- **How**
When it comes to how, this is not only methods such as the type of group as previously discussed, but also how are you going to record and store your data so that it can be collected, analysed and used, not only by yourself but perhaps by others within your organisation.

Think about your support, is someone (your cofacilitator) able to take notes so you can focus on running the group and the unexpected challenges that this may bring – or are you able to record the session? Recording the session means the conversations will flow better, and you aren’t having to take notes during the session, but it can take a long time to then transcribe, so you must ensure you have allowed yourself enough time to complete this before the next session or deadline. If recording, you can explain how you would anonymise the participants when writing up, and even bring an example of something similar so they can see. They may want to know their alias so they can look out for it in the finished report.

How will you present your information, does it need to be collated in a report, and if so, what will this look like, is there a template? Are you also able to use individual case studies to bring the data to life? Think about how it will have the most impact.

You will also need to think about consent, what does this mean, what if someone changes their mind, during the process? We need to accept wholeheartedly that participation can be revoked at any time. It’s important to lay the groundwork around this at the beginning so that participants know they have this choice. Sometimes people may want to be part of the group but change their mind when it comes to using their words, again this is ok, but letting them see how they may be anonymised may allay any fears.
Safety and wellbeing, what you need to consider

Ground rules

“Ground rules are very important. You model how important they are by how you negotiate them.”
- Lindsay, T and Orton S 2008 p 105

Even in a one hour session, spending 5 minutes at the beginning of the time establishing ground rules is crucial. Ground rules are your bread and butter – they will allow you to steer the session.

Sessions can often be dominated by loud voices or complaints, even if planned and structured well, sometimes Service Users have particular things they feel like they need to say. It can be really hard to break back in and gain control, especially as VAWDSAV workers, who are trained around and passionate about not interrupting women’s stories.

It’s important to remember though that being assertive in this instance works to support the many and not the few as with a large group it’s important that everyone has a turn to speak and also to inspire confidence in you as a leader as someone that can be trusted with this often sensitive and precious information.

Being able to refer back to ground rules – such as “everyone gets a chance to speak” or “ensuring everyone is heard” gives a way of as facilitators ensuring this can happen.

This has been especially effective in working with young people – for longer sessions or
groups over many weeks, asking the group to physically sign the ground-rules ensures buy-in, and they get brought/revisited each week, this keeps them fresh and allows both parties to add additional ones in based on the previous week if needed. Young People are often quite good at then “calling-out” others who aren’t abiding by the rules.

Surprisingly short sessions can fly by – especially when there is lots of admin to complete, sometimes it feels hard then if conversations are in full flow to interrupt and bring the session to a close, but it’s important to stick to that boundary. In this toolkit I have given session plan examples for both one hour and two-hour sessions so you can see which one works best for your needs.

Examples:
- Timekeeping – Service Users and also Facilitators to ensure finishing on time.
- Phones – If turning your phone off is dangerous (if someone is still in their abusive relationship) is there a compromise – phone on but silent and all calls to be taken outside? We want to gain a range of experiences and having to turn off a phone could be a huge barrier for a woman’s safety.
- What’s said in the room stays in the room (caveat safeguarding)
- Everyone gets a chance to speak – and the right not to speak if they so choose
- Everyone deserves to be heard – we need to listen to each other
- There will be a time for Questions at the end
- Anyone can change their mind about participating at any time – they would need to let you know
- Respect – everyone to be respected – people will be challenged if they are disrespectful.

Common Issues
Groups are unpredictable, that is the beauty of them, however it’s important to think some of these common issues through prior to the session so that you have contemplated your response. Remember to challenge the behaviour rather than the person, but also remember that your role as facilitator – with the support of your second is to keep the space safe for everyone, and this often involves challenging actions/remarks that are made in the group.

- Triggering a memory/experience flashback
It’s recommended to have 2 members of staff as with most groups, this means if something is triggered, there is a member of staff who can assist the service user, taking them to a safe place away from the group for a check-in.

Explaining that this might happen at the beginning of the session is important too, for those who may be affected and also for the rest of the group to normalise this and ensure the group carries on and doesn’t become distracted. If your session is longer, you may want to schedule breaks around difficult questions to ensure there is time to recharge and regroup.
It is also worth bearing in mind at this point that you as a facilitator may also have lived experience. Many who work in the sector do – again this is why there is a second facilitator, to ensure that you as a worker are looked after, able to debrief and discuss, but it is important to acknowledge that this could happen – and plan for if it might. Also, to understand that this may not be in the always we expect or about the things that we think. If there are particular topics to be wary of, discuss with your co-facilitator who leads each section and ensure you also get regular breaks – something that often happens with training/groupwork is that facilitators are pounced upon in the break. Is there somewhere you can go in order to have a true break and practise self-care?

• **Running out of time**
Although it might not feel like something to worry about, often when the flow of conversation picks up it can feel hard to bring back to specific topics or draw the session to a close. However, it is important to do this as people may have other appointments/meetings and may not feel comfortable in letting you know. Just as we would expect participants to be on time, we need to extend them the courtesy of ensuring we finish on time, this is about respect.

Sticking to this boundary models our commitment to the ground rules and ensures that the participants feel held, secure and that we have their best interests as a focus.

• **Someone dominating the group**
This is so common. Often people who attend these sessions have a story to tell or could benefit from some different perhaps more intensive support. It's important to acknowledge that they have a lot to say, perhaps offer to stay with them in the break/after the session to provide some signposting etc but you can remind them that the session is short, you need to stick to the prearranged questions and also give everyone a chance to speak. Holding these boundaries is important for the whole group. See Case Study one for an example and some reflections.

• **Responding to a disclosure**
Either as part of the group discussions or as is often the case as the group is packing up someone might approach you and ask to share something that has happened to them, or to a family member.

If in the group- it is best to acknowledge and thank the person for sharing but then also to check in with them after the session, find out if they have any other support at the moment, or if they would like some and signpost them to relevant local agencies if needed. It’s important to remind them of the purpose of the session, and the limitation in terms of support you can provide.

If this is at the end of the session, you are able to interject and remind them of the ground rules around safeguarding for example, then if they choose to continue, they have done so in the knowledge that you would need to report any concerns.

• **Rude/offensive comments**
Whether intentional or not often inappropriate offensive comments are made as part of a larger group. These can be quite overt, or mumbled, also with group dynamics sometimes
two or three attendees can gang up together and work to undermine the facilitators. Firstly – this is normal, it isn't personal, and it is usually borne out of a place of anxiety. Secondly, it is our Duty to challenge remarks and comments that are inappropriate. This can be a “learn with me” way i.e. “Can you repeat the remark to the group” or “do you really think that that is the case?” Again, these can be followed up after the session in the guise of a check-in “I just wanted to make sure you are ok because some of the comments you were making were concerning.”

Some participants will want to use shock value as a way of trying to impress other group members but also as a way of getting everything out in the open so no one can “expose them” especially if they know other people in the group. Sometimes the best tactic here is to skim over the remark but validate another part of their story.

**Group dynamics/Issues**

Often, we hope for friendships to form amongst survivors to enable peer support, but this can also have an unexpected effect on the group in some cases.

The break area is often a common place for these relationships to start to form. We need to keep an eye on the power dynamics in the group to ensure everyone gets a chance to speak and is not talked over. Whilst friendships are formed, not everyone will always get on. Again, this is normal, just because people have one thing in common doesn't mean they are the same and will have more.

As a group comes to an end, survivors often want to stay in touch and talk about setting up a WhatsApp group for example, but there are also examples of women approaching the facilitator separately from the group and say they really don't want to be part of that. It's about ensuring everyone knows that this is an option, that they can engage with or not and that it is in no way affiliated with your organisation.

**Safeguarding**

You will need to refresh yourself with your own organisational policies prior to any engagement taking place – this will mean you are operating safely and have a robust framework to back you up.

Essentially though, at the beginning of the session you will need to share some information about safeguarding, and when you would break confidentiality. For example, if something is said that makes you worried about the safety of a child or a vulnerable adult, you are duty bound to pass that information on. This not only protects you but protect the attendees.

It is worth thinking again at this point about who your attendees are. Are they still in their relationships? Have they left/are they planning to? Do they need to be re-referred back in for additional support based on what they have said? All of these things are possible and need to be acted on quickly.

You should reassure the group that if you were concerned and needed to pass something on, you would speak with them about it first, and whilst the group is confidential, this means confidential within the organisation.
Think about who your second is, are they used to assessing these situations daily perhaps they are a domestic abuse support worker with a caseload themselves, so they know the signs and symptoms to look out for and how to respond to a disclosure. As mentioned in the facilitation session with survivors – this is why there needs to be two facilitators in charge of a session. To enable sessions to still run smoothly if you need to deal with an urgent issue.

Does your organisation have a policy around incidents such as explicit threats to kill? Do they need to be reported to the police? – if so, we need to be really clear about this from the offset in order to manage those disclosures safely and help service users to access the most appropriate support when they need to.

The most important advice around safeguarding is not to panic. Yes, sometimes quick decisions need to be made, but you are never alone in them you will always have your co-facilitator and your organisation and other organisations such as Welsh Women’s Aid supporting you.
Appendix 1: Session plans

Session plan one hour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>How long?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introductions/ground rules overview</td>
<td>Whole group</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm up exercise</td>
<td>Whole group</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break</td>
<td>Whole group</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>2 x smaller groups</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing exercise</td>
<td>Whole group</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong> 1 hour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you can see – An hour can be filled very quickly – also this 1-hour session plans allows no time for overrunning, there isn't a lot you can move or switch up depending on how the group is going. Whilst sometimes this can be good, as you can get through sections quickly, if your group has started to get into a good discussion it can be hard to move them on.

In an hour, the session may feel rushed, but a suggestion would be to ditch the break, and speed up the closing exercise if needed.

This one-hour session plan might be a good intro session if you are running more than one group – as this allows the group to spend some time getting to know each other with less pressure to get into the big conversations early on.

The more comfortable you become with facilitating groups the easier you will find it to move
your session plan around based on how the group is reacting to the activities. A session plan is a great place to start as it can help you be guided by time, but you will also need to think on your feet, especially to ensure you finish on time.

Finishing on time is incredibly important, it is about respect. As we would hope everyone is able to arrive on time, we need to ensure people can leave on time. People attending these sessions will have all kinds of commitments and things they need to rush off for, however with the balance of power tipped in our favour as already discussed, they may feel uncomfortable/unable to communicate this. We need to ensure we model good behaviour around boundaries and finish the session on time – this means planning sufficient time, realistically, it’s always better to finish a little earlier than trying to squeeze in more information in front of a room who are no longer listening- trust me I’ve been there!

**Session plan two hour**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>How long?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introductions/ground rules overview</td>
<td>Whole group</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm up exercise</td>
<td>Whole group</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group discussion</td>
<td>Whole group</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break</td>
<td></td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>2 - 4 smaller groups</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing exercise</td>
<td>Whole group</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>Whole group</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total: 2 hour**

As you can see with the two-hour session above, things are similarly structured however parts of the session have more time afforded, which again means they can be amended.

There is clearly defined time for two different types of discussion – this will ensure that different styles can be used which will suit different learners. A whole group discussion is great but not everyone is comfortable speaking, having smaller break out groups for the second discussion gives them this chance. This combination would work equally well on a Zoom session as you can manually move participants to rooms of your choosing. You get a bit more power here and could for example break up members of the group that know each other or have got close if they perhaps been disruptive. The lengths of the discussions are good here too, there will be a whole hour of feedback to write-up/ensure is captured.
In this longer session there is also protected time to gather feedback (this often gets rushed/missed or thought of as not a priority in the moment, however this could have serious consequences for your overall project as your work may not have quantifiable outcomes).
Appendix 2: Ice breakers

Whilst often they may be approached with trepidation, sometimes something is needed at the beginning of the group to bind them together and enable people to feel comfortable.

We have to remember that for many of our Service users this group could be a source of anxiety – not only with perhaps having to share traumatic experiences, but also meeting people, interacting with other survivors, and the pressures of this.

Sometimes these can be less structured rather than gathering everyone to the centre of the room for an icebreaker we can simply ask for a name and a sentence from each person, for example, but always remember this in itself can be stressful for attendees. Ice breakers should be short and sweet with minimum pressure for attendees.

Essentially as the facilitator you need to read the room – is there already a low-level murmur of chat or is the room silent – have people started to help themselves to refreshments or do they need some help?

**Jenga:**
Jenga but with Questions (in other groups we have brought a blank Jenga and written the questions ourselves – but you can buy it ready done) The questions aren’t too deep but things like “favourite food, favourite TV show, etc and allegiances are then formed.

To speed it up you can keep the pieces in a bag and simply get people to pass the bag and take a question rather than play the full game (you would read the question of the piece you take out and add to the top) Young People have particularly liked playing the game and the questions are an annoying addition! Each group will be different so tailor the ice breaker to them.

**Sweets:**
An easy one, taking a sweet from a bag each colour corresponds to a category

- Red – Music
- Green - TV
- Purple - Food

You have to name your favourite one. If someone pulls the same colour one twice, they can share their worst in the category

Allegiances can be formed quite quickly here! You could also use a dice. Some people may not want to be around food – if they want to sit out that’s fine, but there’s also no pressure to eat the sweet if they do take part.
Appendix 3: Checklists

Prior to the session:

☐ Venue – joining instructions
☐ Participants – confirmed on the day (if safe)
☐ Paperwork – printouts of consent forms/handouts
☐ Pens – for whiteboard and participants
☐ Petty cash – for reimbursements (or vouchers)
☐ Biscuits! – refreshments tea/coffee etc

After the session:

☐ Reminders about next week’s group if having more than one
☐ Contact details for attendees – to send the finished outcome
☐ Signed consent forms
☐ Recording of session for transcribing
☐ Actions from the group – signposting etc
References

Lindsay, T and Orton, S (2008), Groupwork Practice in Social Work, United Kingdom: Learning Matters LTD.


Taylor, J and Clarence, B (2021), ‘Beneficial but triggering’: Experiences and support of survivor speakers in the UK, VictimFocus Resources.
