

Together for Women & Girls

Community consultation



Norfolk
Community
Foundation

Together for Women and Girls

Community consultation in brief

We asked women all over Norfolk what life is like for them.
This is what they said.

66%

said there are
activities they
enjoy
participating
in within their
local area

*'The only place people can get
together in evenings is the
pub. If you don't want to
drink, there is nothing to do'.*

*'Education in computer skills would be
useful for applying for good, well-paid
part-time jobs so childcare is sorted
and a career can be achieved'.*

*'One of my
favourite
things about
my local
area is the
community
and how
strong it is'.*

*'It would be amazing if community hubs could teach
financial planning for life, including setting up
pensions, working out benefits and claiming what you
need for your children'.*

49%

of women did
not feel safe in
their local area
after dark

57%

of women said
they struggled
with their work-
life balance

*'As a mum in a rural area where
most schools have no before and
after school provision, the juggle
of work, childcare and earning
enough money to live is tough.'*

55%

of women can't
access
affordable
childcare



The 7 Key Findings:

Identity

Women tend to identify themselves by their roles and professions rather than solely as "women".

Childcare

Childcare is a major barrier to women in the workplace.

Employment

Prejudice around gender and disability impacts women's employment.

Community

Women want activities at times that suit them and to be more aware of what activities are available near them.

Health

Healthcare gender inequalities related to age and ethnicity were identified.

Services

Statutory services are difficult to navigate and men delivering services often don't understand women's issues.

Safety

Safety is a key concern for women: particularly night time safety, police relations and reporting of crimes

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Introduction

At Norfolk Community Foundation, we are committed to rooting our work in a deep understanding of local communities. Whilst our grant making has broadened our knowledge of the needs and assets that exist across our county, we've wanted to deepen our insight so we really understand what matters to local people and what will make the greatest difference to their lives.

This summer, we've focused on building a clearer picture of what life is like for women and girls in Norfolk. We last ran a programme specifically for women and girls before the pandemic and this primarily focused on projects around employment. We knew that things were likely to have changed since then, so we offered different ways for women and girls to share their views with us. Alongside an online survey, we worked with community organisations who held focus groups to drill down into the experiences of Norfolk women. We were delighted by the positive response to our survey and focus group funding and by the richness of the insight that's emerged from this research.

This report shares what we've heard about the hopes and challenges for women and girls living in Norfolk and it will directly shape the next steps for our Together for Women and Girls programme. We hope that people will be inspired to join us to help make sure every woman and girl in our

county has the chance to live a fulfilled and happy life. Together, we shine brighter.

Summary

As a grant funder, this report will primarily focus on analysing findings that are within our gift to act upon. Nevertheless, issues were raised that, whilst beyond our scope as a local community grassroots funder, are important and this report will discuss them.

Because of the open-ended nature of the methodology, a wide range of discussions took place across the 15 focus groups that were carried out. Though varied, discussions revealed several underlying themes.

7 common areas of discussion emerged:

Identity

Regarding identity, women tended to identify themselves by roles such as mother, caregiver, or by their profession rather than solely as 'women'. This can lead to tension between what they want for themselves and what is expected of them. Some women felt pressure to prioritise raising a family over their career. The disparity between their competing identities left some women feeling the need to adopt different personas in different environments, leaving them feeling unlike themselves in certain settings.

Groups also discussed how sexism impacted them in their daily lives.

Childcare

Childcare was discussed almost exclusively in relation to employment, and how both women and men are affected by childcare roles perceived by others.

Employment

Women identified multiple barriers to both entering and excelling in the workplace. Childcare was identified as the largest barrier, but employer prejudice around employing and promoting women, and around women with disabilities, also had an impact. Women's experiences of transport and self-employment were discussed, as was education.

Spaces, activities, and community

Women-only spaces were discussed by multiple groups, but almost all women wanted family-friendly activities in their area. Community groups were identified as a good way of connecting with people for health and wellbeing. It was universally agreed that finding activities locally was challenging, with many women commenting that they were not aware of what was available to them locally. Other barriers were mentioned, such as the cost of activities and not feeling able to bring children to activities.

Health

Discussions around both physical and mental health were some of the most emotive among groups. Groups working with migrant women found that they were less confident in their knowledge of women's health. Some groups identified access to wellbeing activities and mental health support to be important. Groups also identified healthcare inequalities related to age.

Services

Many women found that local statutory services were difficult to navigate, and they felt that there was a lack of understanding from men about the issues they face – especially in local authority settings. Women also expressed fears about social services taking their children away.

Crime and safety

Women across groups brought up a variety of issues related to crime and safety. Safety at night was a key concern, as were relations with the police and attitudes towards reporting crime. Attitudes towards the victims of crime were also discussed, as was low-level crime in local areas.

Methodology

We used two methods to collect the views of women and girls in Norfolk. The first was an online survey that was open from 8th March (International Women's Day) until 15th June. The second was focus groups carried out by community organisations in Norfolk. We were able to fund these focus groups thanks to regular donors to our Together for Women and Girls fund, which seeks to help local women and girls take positive steps towards empowerment and opportunity, challenging inequality, abuse, exploitation and disadvantage in the home, the workplace, and the wider community.

Survey

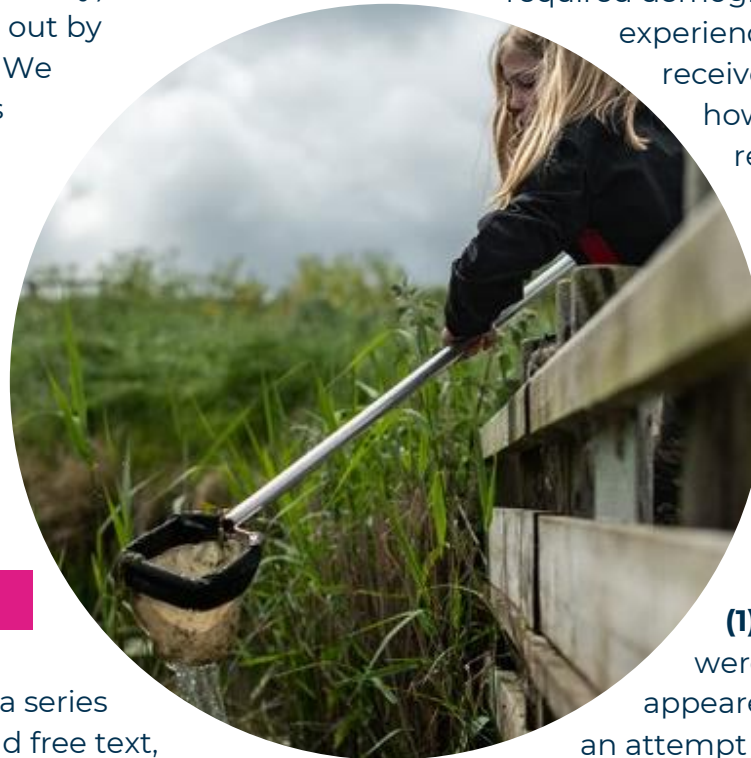
Women aged 16 and over, living in Norfolk, were encouraged to answer a series of questions, both multiple choice and free text, around their thoughts and feelings towards their local area. The survey was shared through email newsletters, social media, and Norfolk Community Foundation employees sharing with their own networks. The survey was initially

open for 3 weeks and reopened in April for an additional 9 weeks due to popular demand.

The limitation of using an open survey is that it is susceptible to both 'bots', and people not meeting the required demographics filling it out. This was experienced in both rounds of the survey. We received a total of 1,495 survey completions; however, after manually sifting the results to remove those that **(1)** appeared to be fake and **(2)** were not from the required demographic, the total number of survey completions deemed to be reliable is 285.

The following steps were carried out to manually sift through the data received, and remove responses relating to the two categories set out above:

(1) Responses using fake postcodes were removed. For example, NR7265, appeared several times and appeared to be an attempt to look like a local postcode. There were also several repeated answers in free text boxes, which bore no resemblance to the question being answered, so these were also removed.



(2) Responses from postcodes outside of Norfolk were removed, as the study area was limited to Norfolk. This included removing responses from elsewhere in the UK and abroad.

There is a risk of human error in this manual sift, however, this has been reduced by having multiple people review the sifting process set out above to ensure it is the best method for reaching reliable data.

After gathering the sifted results, thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring topics and concepts. This centred around coding and the generation and review of themes. Upon review, the list of themes was shortened to better encompass the key findings which are used in this report to elevate the findings from the focus groups.

Focus Group Fund

An open grant round allowed Norfolk-based voluntary, charity, social enterprise, and community groups to apply for £500 to run a focus group with women whom their group had connected with. After the applications had been assessed and grants awarded, successful applicants were invited to attend an online training session and provided with template resources to use to record their focus groups. The groups were given 6 weeks to conduct and provide feedback from their focus groups. Although the fund only required groups to run a single session, some groups elected to run multiple focus groups with different

members, often at the different sites where they operate. Overall, the 10 participating community groups conducted 15 focus groups.

Groups sent a summary write-up of their focus groups to the Foundation to be compiled, and we trust that these summaries are an accurate reflection of what the participants in their focus groups discussed. This methodology does, however, come with some limitations. Groups were self-selecting, and while groups that came in for funding represented several ethnicities, faiths, and abilities, not all were represented. No information on equality or diversity was required to be provided under the terms of the grant, although some groups chose to provide this information. There is little to suggest that older women (65+) or many women under 18 participated in the focus groups. Groups did not report that any transgender women participated in their focus groups, and only one group (NR5 Hub) indicated that lesbian or bisexual women participated in their focus group. There was not county-wide coverage through the focus groups, with many conducted with women from Norwich or Great Yarmouth, though more rural towns like Thetford and smaller rural villages were represented.

Discussion

Identity

Several groups referred to the various identities that women adopt. Women tended not to identify as 'women' first, but rather as a 'mother', or 'autistic' or 'carer'. The Feed made specific reference to the challenges that women face when moving from one identity to another. They said that when they had a baby, the baby would come first and they would feel ignored, and similarly when children leave home and primary care of a child is no longer a requirement, they can suffer an 'identity crisis'. The Feed highlighted a tension between what women wanted for themselves and what they were expected to do, stating that some women:

'felt that it was primarily to raise a family whilst others talked about life after children get older and work being their primary purpose. People sometimes contradicted themselves which perhaps reflected the tension between perceived purpose for women and what they would like to do.'

They found that this was especially true when it came to the dynamic between working and raising a family, stating that one woman considered her purpose to be her work as a social worker and that she had to 'give [it] up to take care of her children'. The Garage referenced this when they

asked women about their hopes for the future, where one comment was freedom from 'social pressures around relationships, marriage, and babies'.

Multiple groups specifically mentioned 'masking' or having a need to 'mask'. For their members, Aspergers East Anglia defined masking as the 'need to present or perform social behaviours that are considered neurotypical.' They describe masking as something that they do 'just to please other people', and that having to do so is 'exhausting'. They also suggest that because they are expected to mask all the time and do so effectively, people assume that they 'are okay' even when they are not. St Giles Trust participants similarly discussed having to hide aspects of themselves, especially whilst at work.

People for Purpose also referenced having to 'mask' in a work setting. Workers within the charity sector, which they describe as 'flexible and chaotic' (e.g., short-term contracts, part-time working, etc.), mean that issues facing women can be masked through the nature of women's employment - though this is not always helpful, nor does it lead to actual solutions to the broader issues (such as lack of affordable, flexible childcare) that women face.

Comments around sexism were prevalent across groups. Women reported feeling responsible for everything to do with their family, from managing money to caring for children. Not being listened to or taken seriously was a theme that also emerged among women. Women

attending the focus group at The Garage suggested that sexual harassment at work was rarely taken as seriously as it should be and that sometimes it was enabled – ‘oh, you know what he’s like’. At The Wild Hub, women felt that their views were dismissed at parish council meetings because of their gender.

No group specifically identified whether any of the women participating in their focus groups were transgender women. Only St Giles’ focus groups mentioned transgender women in their discussions. One group discussed feeling uneasy around transgender women in a women-only setting, whereas the other group were concerned about the potential violence faced by transgender women in public spaces.

Childcare

From the survey, we found that 118 women who answered the survey said childcare applies to them. **55%** of these women said they cannot access affordable childcare. Only **22%** said they can access affordable childcare.

When mapping the postcodes of women who said they cannot access affordable childcare to see if there are any

hot spots for this issue, it became apparent that this is a universal issue. However, it was noted in the survey responses that rurality puts additional pressure on accessing affordable childcare-

‘As a mum in a rural area where most schools have no before and after school provision, the juggle of work, childcare and earning enough money to live is tough.’

It was also made evident in the survey responses that there is insufficient support available for childcare in relation to employment-

‘If I had money to spend on something that would make the lives of women and girls in Norfolk better, I would spend it on subsidising childcare for working parents during the half terms so that women can confidently return back to work after having a family’.

‘Childcare and help for working families needs to be reviewed urgently. We currently pay over £1,000 to put my 2-year-old into



nursery and cannot afford to put my 10-month-old in too. Therefore, I am having to work full time from home whilst looking after a baby. Not ideal! There's more support for mothers who stay at home than there is for mothers who go back to work.'

'The lack of affordable childcare is a real issue for working parents, not just for early years, but for parents with school-age children.'

In the focus groups, childcare was discussed almost exclusively in relation to employment. When it was not, women referenced the differences in expectations between men and women when it comes to childcare.

Most of this feedback related to men not being expected or permitted by employers to take on caring responsibilities. Discussions at The Wild Hub highlighted that men were rarely expected to do things like the school run or help with after-school activities, which ate into mothers' free time. Hanseatic Union also highlighted this in relation to taking children to doctor's appointments. People for Purpose note that even when men do want to engage, they face barriers when trying to take more time for childcare, citing one example where a father was asked 'can't the mum do this?' when he asked for flexibility to support his child with additional needs. The Garage Trust similarly drew attention to limited paternity leave, and how men are not

'normalised' as caregivers. This demonstrated how sexism towards women can also impact the ability of men to participate in family life, as well as limiting women's abilities to care for their families and themselves.

Most women agreed that a lack of affordable/flexible childcare was a barrier to participating in work. This will be discussed in the next section.

Employment

Across all focus groups, most women were enthusiastic about working. The Hanseatic Union focus groups were particularly vocal about the importance of work, with many women discussing their pride in rising up the ranks at work and becoming managers. Those who were out of work and/or on benefits were keen to move into employment as they recognised the mental health and social benefits that work brings. Some women in the St Giles Trust focus group, however, mentioned that sometimes you'd be 'better off' to stay on benefits, as 'benefits stop if you work more than a certain number of hours, but free childcare is not available until you work more than that, so they [women] are stuck.'

Childcare was identified as a barrier to work by almost every group and was often seen as the biggest barrier to employment. Groups were not usually specific about what childcare they used, or what childcare they could not access. Groups that worked with migrants, such as Hanseatic Union, referenced not being able to rely on family

for childcare – which implies that this is a common route for women to secure childcare and is sorely missed when it is not available. One woman at Hanseatic Union commented that although she could split childcare with her husband as they worked opposite factory shifts, this meant that she rarely saw her husband. The expense of childcare was also referenced by multiple groups as being a barrier to accessing it.

Prejudice from employers against women with children was also discussed. Whilst some women in the focus groups made complimentary comments about their employer's attitudes towards women and children, most were negative. Positive experiences (raised by Hanseatic Union and People for Purpose) focused on employers being flexible and understanding when it came to childcare and health. Negative experiences mentioned across multiple groups tended to focus on when employers were not flexible or understanding of external situations (e.g., hospital visits, needs of children/family). Women also highlighted discrimination faced due to perceptions of women. St Giles Trust drew attention to a perception that employers were reluctant to employ women whom they

suspected had children, whether they had children or not. They also commented that employers were not understanding of women-specific issues, such as menstruation or menopause.

Employer prejudices were also highlighted by Hanseatic Union and Aspergers East Anglia about how perceptions around disability can impact employability, whether this was a physical disability such as being a wheelchair user or having autism or ADHD. Many believed that they were not offered jobs due to their disability or found that their disability made their job too difficult to persevere with.

Several groups touched on education during their discussions, including issues faced by women who had previously worked in highly qualified jobs abroad. Hanseatic Union and Zainab Project both work with such women, but women in each group had different viewpoints about the kind of skilled work they would like to do.

Some women at Hanseatic Union were educated to postgraduate level in their countries of origin (generally European countries) but work in unskilled jobs in the UK –



though they did not reference why that is. Women at the Zainab Project, which works with asylum seekers generally from Arabic-speaking countries, were more keen to work using their qualifications but found that getting their qualifications converted was a costly process - with a particular barrier being the fact that Norwich City College no longer offer this service for free.

Education was also discussed by survey participants. **48%** of participants said they were happy with education provision in their local area, compared to **32%** who said they were not. Several participants expressed an interest in expanding adult education provision. This includes financial education, with **36%** of participants saying they did not feel confident handling their finances-

'It would be amazing if community hubs could teach financial planning for life, including setting up pensions, working out benefits and claiming what you need for your children'.

'Education in computer skills would be useful for applying for good, well-paid part-time jobs so childcare is sorted and a career can be achieved'.

Volunteering was also identified by these two groups as being helpful when looking for employment, though Zainab Project highlighted that whilst asylum seekers could volunteer (employment is prohibited for asylum seekers)

they face financial barriers to doing so. They also commented that the concept of volunteering was not understood by all women they worked with, though the broader idea of 'helping out' was. People for Purpose commented that they thought young people were pressured into choosing a career too early and that career advice given at school was not helpful.

Women also identified other barriers to employment. Transport was identified as a challenge for many. Women at St Giles Trust said that this was due not only to limited timetables, which made accessing a place of work impossible but also to safety fears when travelling after dark. The Wild Hub and Involve Razem also identified transport as a barrier to accessing employment, but also other services more broadly.

Women in several groups mentioned that being self-employed resolved issues they had faced when being conventionally employed. Women at the People for Purpose commented that the third sector (charity sector) tended to be more flexible and accommodating to women's childcare needs. One woman from The Wild Hub commented that she hadn't 'had children to get someone else to care for them while they work', so self-employment was the way to go for her. One woman at Aspergers East Anglia referenced that self-employment was easier as she 'just couldn't get on working with other people who didn't understand' her.

The subject of employment was not heavily discussed in the survey; however, it was recorded that **57%** of participants reported struggling with their work-life balance. Some individuals mentioned employment in their free text responses, primarily surrounding access to higher-paid jobs with more flexibility-

'There should be more support for females to engage in work at a managerial level and have childcare that is affordable for them to do this. This should start early in females' (and males' lives)'.

Spaces, activities, and community

Spaces for women and girls were mentioned by many of the focus groups. Some groups expressed approval and desire for activities just for women and girls. St Giles Trust spoke about women-only spaces, a suggestion which was met with much enthusiasm within the group. Activities discussed seemed to gravitate around exercise (e.g., swimming, yoga, gyms) or meeting in relaxed settings, such as women-only coffee mornings. Similarly, women at People for Purpose wanted a 'safe, non-judgemental space to share issues and celebrate successes' that were for women only.

Positive responses to spaces for women tended to revolve around local open spaces such as parks, the beach, or the countryside. Women at NR5 Hub, St Giles and Hanseatic

Union were all complimentary about green spaces, and women at Involve Razem commented that improvement of local cycle paths would further enhance their enjoyment of outdoor spaces. Other positive comments involved spending time at local groups. Typically, this was either as volunteers or as service users, such as Aspergers East Anglia who run a social group for people with autism. Similarly, groups consisting of migrants and refugees wanted activities for their communities. In the case of Zainab Project, women wanted language sessions that incorporated community activities, such as cooking, and Involve Razem wanted activities for the Thetford Polish community.

Barriers to accessing activities were also discussed. Women from The Feed discussed a desire to have activities that were unstructured and didn't require much advanced preparation or an expectation to participate. They wanted to be able to participate with their children and not feel judged, stating that they felt like a 'burden' on others if they brought their children along to things. They also mentioned feeling 'pigeonholed' by activities aimed at mothers and children and thought that children should be welcome at every event. Other groups similarly expressed a desire for activities to do with their children. Women at The Wild Hub criticised a lack of year-round events, commenting that a single village fete once a year was nice but ongoing activities aimed at families were desired.

The cost of activities was also mentioned by more than one group. Women at Involve Razem discussed the need for more 'cheap and cheerful' activities for families to participate in. The Wild Hub focus group similarly commented that competing costs for fuel and food mean that activities are often out of reach due to comparatively high costs.

Another common barrier discussed among groups was an inability to find out what was going on near them easily. Some, such as The Wild Hub, pointed out that local groups sometimes shut down quickly because they could not attract members. The Feed focus group mentioned that a weekly calendar of local events, groups and activities would be beneficial. Other barriers included comments about the timing of activities and venue opening hours. Women at NR5 Hub raised the point that many classes and activities took place during working hours, meaning women could not participate in activities they felt they could benefit from because of work. Women at The Garage similarly noted that shops and cafés tended to close early, meaning there were fewer places to shop and meet.

The survey highlighted similar thoughts about activities and events for women and girls. Suggestions included opening a female-only community café, a community gym for women and girls, and groups for women and girls to learn new skills.



Whilst most references to the community in the survey were positive, approximately **20%** of participants said no positive activities are going on in their local area. Whilst there may be some activity cold spots, a few people commented that they would like a greater awareness of what events and activities are taking place near them. This may explain, in part, why several people believe there are no positive activities taking place near them.

One theme that emerged is a desire to have more community activities outside of working hours-

'The only place people can get together in evenings is the pub. If you don't want to drink, there is nothing to do'.

'Most community groups are during the day, when I am working'.

The focus groups also discussed the sense of community in their area. They were, however, divided on how strong they felt this was. Generally, focus groups that were in Norwich tended to report less of a sense of community, whereas other areas reported a stronger sense of community.

Community was also identified as a key theme during the analysis of the survey responses. It was one of the most prominent topics to emerge as a 'favourite thing' in participants' local areas. **67%** of participants said there are spaces where the community can come together in their local area. Similarly, **66%** of participants said there are activities they enjoy participating in within their local area. Specifically, many people referenced a sense of community spirit-

'One of my favourite things about my local area is the community and how strong it is'.

'My local area has an awesome community'.



Health

Discussions about health included both physical and mental health. Discussions on physical health varied from group to group. Positive experiences were discussed, such as cancer screening services being 'easy' as health services reach out to women for these.

Organisations that support migrants and refugees expressed a desire for better adult women's health education. One woman at Hanseatic Union said, 'The young girls today seem really clued up, they know where to get healthcare', whilst women at the Zainab Project discussed the lack of education in their countries of origin around women's bodies at school and when growing up, resulting in a lack of knowledge around women's health now. Both groups identified that younger women seem to be more aware of women's health but commented that there is little information targeted at women past school age.

A lack of awareness around women's health in a broader sense was identified by several groups, including the Garage Trust and People for Purpose. One woman at People for Purpose identified Pre-Menstrual Syndrome as a

factor that led her to struggle in the workplace, and the group identified the third sector as being more accommodating and understanding of women-specific health issues whilst at work.

Whilst not women-specific, access to dentistry was a common feature between groups when discussing healthcare. Women at Involve Razem commented that they take themselves and their children back to Poland for dental care, as it is easier to access it there. When discussing services, however, Hanseatic Union linked dentistry to women's concerns with childcare and social services. Due to the dental care shortage in Norfolk, women feared their children being 'taken away' by social services because they were powerless to get their children dental care. They also had trouble getting time off work to take their children to the dentist/doctor.

Similar comments were made in the survey. It was noted that some participants felt there is an insufficient understanding of, and access to, women's healthcare, specifically. Reference was made to long waiting lists for accessing GPs and dentists. Less than half (**43%**) of participants said they can access healthcare services when they need them. Access to healthcare was spoken about specifically in relation to employment. Getting advice or help with health requires some individuals to take time out of work, and not all employers offer the flexibility to do so.

Discussions around mental health proved to be one of the most emotive topics discussed by the focus groups. Women at St Giles Trust and Aspergers East Anglia had negative experiences when engaging with mental health services. Aspergers East Anglia's focus group felt that negative experiences with mental health services put them off accessing services again, linking this specifically with a lack of awareness around autism. Women at St Giles commented that they felt the threshold for accessing support was quite high and that they didn't feel they were being taken seriously when they accessed services because they were women. Similar comments were made by The Garage Trust, whose focus group remarked that 'the perception of teenage girls being moody or sad [meant] mental health concerns are often missed. There is a lack of awareness of health conditions that predominantly affect women'. Other aspects of mental health discussed included the impact of social pressure in person and online that teenage girls are exposed to and the negative impact that this can have on their self-esteem and confidence.

Mental health services also came up frequently in the survey, mostly in relation to areas of improvement. In comparison to physical health, only **23%** of participants said they can access mental health services when they need them-

'So many women in Norfolk are abandoned by the mental health services in this region.'

This has to stop! A two-year waiting list to get mental health support or psychological support is just abysmal.'

In addition to access, many participants were concerned with the prevention of wellbeing issues developing into more chronic mental health conditions-

'We need better mental wellbeing support, not just for those who are suffering, but a sort of 'well woman' service to educate, inform and prevent women and girls' mental health from deteriorating.'

'My local area would be improved by having something to boost self-confidence and esteem. This would give girls resilience to face challenges'.

'Skills development for women and girls would help to improve mental health and prospects'.

Many of the comments made about healthcare were very similar to similar focus groups that the Norfolk Community Foundation conducted via local VCSEs as part of the Seldom Heard Voices report, commissioned by the Norfolk

and Waveney ICS, which can be found on the Norfolk Community Foundation [website](#).

Women in the focus groups also noted practical barriers, such as having to telephone for appointments or to access services. Women at Hanseatic Union found phoning at specific times challenging due to work and childcare patterns, whilst women at Aspergers East Anglia found that their disability made communicating on the phone a barrier.



Services

Survey participants discussed services mostly in relation to access to public transport. **52%** of participants who answered questions surrounding public transport said they were unhappy with the current provision. Some participants specified that public transport is unreliable, especially given the rurality of Norfolk, and others commented on public transport being expensive. No positive comments were made about public transport.

Most focus groups discussed their thoughts about services that were available to them. Women at NR5 hub (Norwich) were generally pleased with the local services that were

available to them, with one commenting that everything they needed was within walking distance. Women in this group also praised the recent extension of the £2 bus service locally, describing it as a 'godsend'. Other comments towards local services tended to be more critical. Several focus groups mentioned that a lack of public toilets, or public toilets with restrictive opening hours, was a problem for them.

Local authorities and housing associations were discussed by several groups. This was typically discussed in relation to perceived apathy from councils when complaints were made and decisions around housing that women considered to be inappropriate. Women at St Giles Trust criticised their local authorities around housing, commenting that they had been placed in housing that they felt was unsuitable for families due to a lack of transport and support networks. Women at Hanseatic Union also felt ignored by their housing association, commenting that they felt their complaints about antisocial behaviour from neighbours were not listened to or acted upon, leaving them feeling vulnerable.

Social services were also mentioned by these two groups. Women at Hanseatic Union felt scared of social services taking their children away for issues they felt powerless to resolve – namely access to health and dental care. Women at St Giles Trust said they felt that local authorities were difficult to navigate and that they were met with a lack of understanding from men within social services. Aspergers

East Anglia also reflected this view, commenting not only that you had to be 'lucky' to come across the right service for you, but also that services for women with autism were lacking when it came to wellbeing.

Several groups, such as The Feed and St. Giles Trust, specifically mentioned that closing Sure Start Children's Centres was particularly devastating, especially for new parents and single parents. These centres were described by a woman at The Feed as a 'lifeline', especially when local nursery places are limited. Women at The Garage Trust similarly noted the 'decimation of services for young people' which they claim has led to antisocial behaviour and a rise in 'county lines and gang crime'.

Crime and safety

Safety and crime were mentioned in most groups. There was almost unanimous agreement across groups that women did not feel safe when out at night. This was due to a fear of crime and antisocial behaviour and was linked by NR5 Hub's focus group with a lack of streetlights in areas like parks and fewer visible police officers or community support officers.

Some women simply did not go out at night under any circumstances, whilst women who did listed a variety of tactics they used when walking out at night to feel safe, such as staying on the phone with someone or taking their dog out with them. Most women reported that they felt

most comfortable at home, though some women at St Giles said that as single women, they even felt vulnerable at home as 'everyone in your area knows you live alone' and they have a general fear of opening the door, even to delivery drivers. Women at Zainab Project also said that while in the UK they were not as restricted with their dress, they felt vulnerable because of what they wore and worried about wearing hijab, especially when around drunk people.

Similar comments were made by survey participants. Safety was discussed heavily in relation to being outside, both during the day and at night. **71%** of participants stated they feel safe walking around their local area during the day, but this dropped to **49%** at night. Some participants suggested community transport or a taxi share scheme should be available for women at night to help them feel safe. Others suggested more streetlights would help them feel safer at night, especially if these were kept on throughout the night. A few people commented that free self-defence classes for women would be beneficial. Several people referenced educating boys and men to respect women and girls so they can feel safer.

'I would feel safer out at night if men were better educated to respect female autonomy and choice'.

'The education of boys (and men) to respect girls/women and treat them as equals would reduce misogyny and sexual harassment'.

'Let's work together to stamp out misogyny and build a society where women are safe and loved by their society. This means educating boys from an early age to value girls and women as human beings'.

Most survey participants reported feeling safe at home, with only **3%** of people disagreeing with this. However, comments were made regarding domestic abuse, including a belief that Norfolk Police do not take domestic violence and coercive control seriously.

This was echoed by the focus groups. Women at St Giles Trust offered insight into relations with the police and reporting crime. Many of the women agreed that they felt that the police did not always take women seriously. Examples of this were given, including being told that they were 'overreacting' or being made to feel as if what had happened was their fault. These comments were reflected across both of St Giles' focus groups. Women at St Giles' Norwich focus group additionally commented on the stigma they felt came with being a victim of a crime. Several women reported that they would rather not report a crime against them for fear of that stigma. It was felt that it is often assumed that they will have chronic mental health problems if they had experienced a trauma such as rape or domestic abuse. They felt that the resulting stigma is always with them and can present a significant barrier to future prospects.

Women at The Garage said that they were also cautious of the police. Involve Razem and NR5 Hub both desired more police presence, especially at night, though NR5 Hub also commented that they'd like to have better relations between the police and women living in their area. Survey participants anxious about domestic abuse also made suggestions for how we can better protect women and girls from such issues-

'We should be educating women about healthy relationships, including what is healthy and what is not, and to be strong and confident and self-reliant.'

Several women in the focus groups indicated fears for their own daughters and young women around street harassment but also discussed their concerns about more serious crimes, particularly around online grooming. They linked this to worries about advances in technology.

Focus groups also made comments about low-level crime, such as littering. Whilst on the surface this seems like a minor issue and not related to women, The Feed's focus group linked this to feeling as if the local area wasn't 'looked after', connecting activities like litter picks to making the area feel safer. Low-level antisocial behaviour was also linked to safety in this way.

Conclusion and recommendations

'I would start a campaign to speak more openly about women's issues and end stigma around things like periods, abortions, breastfeeding, whether a woman has children or not, abuse.'

Norfolk Community Foundation is committed to listening and responding to local needs and making change happen together. Thanks to our community partners, we have been able to actively consult to build a picture of what it is like for women in Norfolk today. We have discovered what they love and value, listened to their aspirations, and explored the challenges they face. As part of our responsibility not only to our communities but also to our patrons and funders, we have conducted this research to ensure that support for women and girls can be targeted where it is needed most. This will ensure the expansion and creation of activities relevant to women and girls across our county, as well as give confidence to local and national donors that their investment in Norfolk communities is benefitting the individuals who need it most.

Women face various challenges in different aspects of their lives. We hope that we can support women and girls to access what they need to lead a positive and meaningful life within their community, helping them to break down barriers and realise their potential. Through our grant-

making, we hope to collaborate with communities to create an inspiring programme that engages with the aspirations of women and girls in Norfolk that will also get to the root of their concerns and address some of the challenges they face today.

Women tend to identify themselves by roles such as mother or caregiver, leading to tension between what they want for themselves and what is expected of them. Programmes run by the Foundation should therefore seek to enable women to connect in environments where women and girls can be themselves, free from outside pressure to conform with particular standards or behaviours associated with their roles whilst still being able to take pride in them.

Women-only spaces were discussed by multiple groups, but almost all women wanted family-friendly activities in their area. Women clearly valued being able to come together in a supportive and safe environment and enjoyed accessing the support and friendship that community groups offered. Any programme focusing on women and girls must consider not only the needs of women as individuals but women as members of families, too. Public spaces were also a concern for women.

Many women appreciate open, natural space around them, and associate a clean, non-threatening environment with safety and contentment. Programmes could seek to improve local areas and spaces, so women feel at ease in public – especially at nighttime.



Discussions around both physical and mental health were emotive among groups.

Through our work with the Sir Norman Lamb Coalition for Young People, we know that early intervention and low-level mental health support through local community organisations can make a big difference to people's mental wellbeing. Programmes aimed at women and girls should aim to build on or introduce this type of support into existing community activities, or to create spaces or activities where this type of support is available. There is also space for activities that engage women and girls in conversations around their health as women – especially in refugee or migrant communities where this knowledge may be limited or absent.

Nevertheless, there are some concerns that women raised through the focus groups and survey that are not within our gift to solve. Larger structural issues around the cost of

childcare, benefits, access to and quality of health services, and crime and policing are outside of the Foundation's area of influence. It is therefore important that we share these findings with our statutory partners and work with them to find solutions that work for women in Norfolk. One of the most dominant issues and significant findings of our survey and focus groups was that childcare is a significant barrier to both entering and excelling in the workplace. The scale of this barrier is insurmountable with the resources currently at the disposal of the Foundation, and it will take meaningful cross-sector partnerships to address this.

Women also found that local services were difficult to navigate, and they felt a lack of understanding from men about the issues they face - especially in local authority settings. Whilst we can (and indeed do) design programmes that support women to access these services with the support of community organisations, it is important to recognise that services can be improved so women and girls are less reliant on needing navigational assistance to access them in the first instance. Training could be provided about the challenges women face, and more empathy is needed from these services. Furthermore, clear signposting to the correct support at the right time would be beneficial.

Additionally, the significant reduction in funding over the past few years for youth services and services for parents must also be addressed. The loss of Sure Start Children's Centres, and services like it, has dealt a significant blow to

women and girls in Norfolk. Whilst the community and voluntary sector have been able in some cases to step up and offer support, there is a great need for renewed investment in this work.

Safety at night was a key concern, as were relations with the police and attitudes towards reporting crime, with groups also discussing how sexism impacted them. For some women, personal experience with the law has broken their trust in the system and this will be challenging to repair. Wider perceptions around women who are the victims of crime could also be addressed, as could perceptions of women in the workplace. Despite legislation that seeks equitable treatment of women in the workplace, women still feel discriminated against, especially where their status as mothers and carers is concerned.

Some discussions were notable for their absence in the survey and focus groups. We were surprised that care of elderly relatives was not mentioned by groups, despite older women (who tend to take on caring responsibilities) taking part in almost every group. The specific experiences of transgender and/or nonbinary women, as far as we can surmise, were also not reflected in the focus groups. It is therefore difficult for us to make specific recommendations about provisions for transgender women / nonbinary people.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the voluntary, charity, and social enterprise organisations who contributed their time and resources to running focus groups and the women who participated. We'd also like to express our appreciation to each woman who filled in our online survey and had their say. Finally, our immense gratitude to all those who have donated to our Together for Women and Girls fund, whether through Payroll Giving, a monthly donation, or those who gave a one-off sum.

Thank you to Corrie Colson and Adam Baker for processing the information presented in this report and for preparing the final document. Thank you also to Laura Wigby, Lizzi Barker, and Katy Rutherford for their support in creating and running this programme.

Participating groups

10 groups were given funding to run focus groups. Not all groups provided demographic information regarding their focus groups. Below is a summary of the groups and what information about demographics they provided.

Aspergers East Anglia

Aspergers East Anglia is a registered charity that was set up in 1996 by families affected by Asperger syndrome (AS). They offer personal, friendly support and assistance for

everyone with, or suspected of having, AS living in Norfolk and Suffolk. They aim to be a resource and provide a range of support services for children, young people, and adults with AS, and their families/carers, whilst also increasing awareness and understanding of Asperger syndrome.

Aspergers East Anglia has a pre-existing Women's Group which meets weekly as a social meeting. They conducted three focus groups. The first consisted of 7 women aged between 19-42, the second (conducted via Zoom) had 6 women aged between 21 and 40, and the third had 5 women aged 28-38, with 18 women participating overall. All women had Aspergers or autism, and some also have other disabilities such as dyspraxia or ADHD.

Hanseatic Union

Hanseatic Union are a King's Lynn-based organisation working with migrant communities and refugees to promote community cohesion and support those who are disadvantaged. They deliver English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes to help those whose language barriers prevent their full participation in society. They also offer wrap-around support for migrants and refugees to understand and access essential services and opportunities in the UK.

Hanseatic Union ran three focus groups with women from their ESOL classes: 1 group with their Beginner class and 2 groups with their Advanced classes, speaking with over 20

women overall. Women were all migrants from a variety of countries, including Lithuania, Latvia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Italy and more. The women were aged between 30 and 60.

Involve Razem CIC

Involve Razem is based at the Charles Burrell Centre, a busy community centre at the heart of the Burrell estate, Thetford. They offer Polish-focused language courses and 1:1 sessions for local children and young people with a focus on learning about their own language, traditions, history, and literature.

Involve Razem ran one focus group with 5 women, all from Thetford apart from one woman from Wymondham. They were aged between 30 and 51.

NR5 Hub

NR5 Hub is based at the Cadge Road Community Centre and engages around 200 local people every week, with opportunities for training, learning, and volunteering. The youth drop-in operates as part of the community hub and has an active group of young people who are involved in the local Youth Forum.

NR5 Hub had 7 women in their focus group, including girls aged under 18 – the only group to do so. They were also the

only group to note that women who identified as lesbian or bisexual were present.

People for Purpose CIC

People for Purpose are a social enterprise that specifically supports people working in not-for-profit organisations and/or for social purpose. They drew their focus group from a development programme specifically for women who are in (or aspiring to be in) leadership roles within Norfolk's VCSE (voluntary, charity and social enterprise) sector.

They spoke with 6 women, aged between 25 and 45, all of whom had professional roles within the local VCSE sector.

St Giles Trust

St Giles Trust drew their focus groups from a range of women's services they deliver across Norfolk. The nature of the services meant that the women already viewed St Giles as a safe environment to express themselves and the staff who support these women have worked hard to establish the atmosphere of trust which is central to the St Giles ethos. Many of the women they work with have multiple complex needs and have experienced trauma.

They hosted groups in two locations: Norwich and Great Yarmouth. A King's Lynn session was planned but did not go ahead. 14 women participated overall (14 in each group), all but 3 of whom were white British.

The Feed

The Feed is a Community Interest Company, with a mission to empower communities in Norwich, ensuring each and every person has the support to eat well, live well, and feel connected. By providing safe spaces at the heart of the community and a holistic programme of projects and 1:1 support, they aim to reduce inequalities, raise aspirations, and create a shared culture of strength and kindness.

Their Community Café and Kitchen is a space where Social Supermarket members can connect over food. Their focus group was made up of 5 women who were members of their social supermarket. All were mothers and two brought their children with them.

The Garage Trust

The Garage Trust is a centre for performing arts located in Norwich. They work with local and national partners to provide high-quality performing arts programming, participation, education, and training. The charity has a strong focus on those who face challenging circumstances and uses art to change people's lives, particularly children and young people.

The Garage ran a focus group with 4 women aged between 21 and 39, with one additional woman who was unable to attend sending in feedback after the focus group. Women were professionals working locally, with all living in Norwich

apart from one who was from Wymondham. All were self-described as middle-class.

The Wild Hub

Based on a community farm, The Wild Hub runs various groups and activities that benefit the local community and their mental wellbeing. Their services are affordable to all and inclusive. They aim to tackle isolation and loneliness and have set up a Women's Circle, a Pregnancy Group, and a Wellbeing Hour Session. They are based in West Norfolk.

The Wild Hub ran the focus group as part of their Women's Circle group. The 9 women who participated, aged from 30 to 60, came from nearby villages.

The Zainab Project

The Zainab Project focuses on the needs of refugees, asylum seekers and other migrant people. It aims to improve people's lives through the provision of information, work experience, volunteering, training courses and other activities that support understanding, enhance their wellbeing, and improve their social contacts as well as their transferable skills.

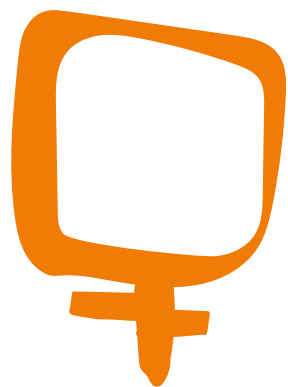
8 women took part in the focus group. They were aged between 24 and 62, and all were migrants (Iranian, Kurdish, Moroccan, Syrian, Iranian, and Nigerian). A translator was available so women who only spoke Arabic could

participate. 6 had university-level education whilst two had no education beyond primary level.

About Norfolk Community Foundation

Norfolk Community Foundation invests in communities to improve the lives of local individuals.

We believe that effective change-making must begin by listening to local communities and understanding their desires, challenges, and needs. Our grant making has allowed us to gain a great deal of knowledge about what matters to people in the area and the impact they want to make. However, we are committed to taking our community conversations to the next level through active consultations to increase our understanding and broaden our reach even further.



Together for Women & Girls



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