Courtesy: Kafayat Okanlawon, LB Waltham Forest

Safer Places: Working to Reduce Violence Against Women & Girls

26/05/2022

- **Management is key in preventing catcalling and other forms of intimidating behaviour towards women and girls, and objectives should be set in order to achieve this.** We need to improve the way we plan for safety starting by engaging the girls themselves in the conversation in order to get an accurate picture of their experiences, as well as the boys in order to form a complete picture. If an understanding is developed of their experiences of sexual harassment, we can start to develop a coordinated approach to addressing safety concerns.

- **Reporting mechanisms need to be put in place and data needs to be collected utilising technology to identify areas where there are safety issues**. From social media accounts that call out intimidating behaviours, such as Catcalls of London, to apps like the Waltham Forest Safe Streets App where street based harassment can be reported to the police on behalf of the women and the location of the incident can be logged, technology can be utilised to encourage and speed up incident reports. A sense of community is also very important for women to feel safe to report incidents, which is why the support of local businesses is vital, with an example being QR codes that are placed on shop windows in public spaces or supermarkets that can be scanned to report incidents.

- **According to the LLDC public consultation on the safety of women and girls, poor lighting, isolated routes, and large construction sites were among the main factors influencing women's perception of safety**. In contrast, common themes of places perceived as safe that emerged during our UDL event include greenery, well located and designed lighting and signage, comfortable seating, a mix of uses, and natural surveillance. It is important to be mindful however of recommendations against features in the built environment that on the one hand pose an issue of safety but on the other support people's health, such as shrubs and benches.

- **Fear of intimidation or violence puts women off engaging in social and leisure activities, as well as employment, education, civic, and community life, which poses a significant public health problem and widens inequalities.** As a reaction to this, the built environment can influence public health positively by encouraging physical activity, lots of green spaces, and connections with people in place, since, in the end, what keeps us healthy is the homes, neighbourhoods, and communities in which we live. Well-designed, and well-maintained public spaces that feel safe can play an important role in supporting women's mental and physical health overall.

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- **A bigger shift is needed in society to address the root causes of violence against women.** It's not public spaces that are killing women or that are catcalling, it's men and there is a limit to what place design can do to prevent this. What is important is to not accept catcalling and other forms of what some people might say as just banter or fun, and there is a need for this conversation to keep going, and to have people, local businesses and organisations interested in pushing forward and being part of this conversation. Increasing awareness of the issue through campaigns and education is also vital in shifting mindsets and attitudes towards women.

Speakers:

Farah Benis, Director, FFA Security Group & Founder, Catcalls of LDN

Julia Thrift, Director – Healthier Placemaking, TCPA

Dinah Bornat, Director, ZCD Architects

Marina Milosev, Principal Planning Policy Officer, LLDC

Kafayat Okanlawon, VAWG Project Manager, LB Waltham Forest

Olaide Oboh, Director, Socius Development Limited

Sophie Thompson, Director, LDA Design

Lauryn Brown, Safer Spaces Project, Commonplace

Attendees: 272

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