

## **Focus Group Report: Night-Time Safety for people with learning disabilities and/or autistic people.**

### **April–May 2025 | Sussex**

During April and May 2025, a series of online and in-person focus groups were held for people with learning disabilities and / or autistic people living in Brighton & Hove, East Sussex, and West Sussex. These groups included participation from local police and community safety representatives, fostering open discussions around feelings of safety, perceptions of the night-time environment, and overall confidence within the local community, particularly at night-time.

The aim of these conversations was twofold:

1. To better understand the specific challenges people with learning disabilities face when engaging in night-time activities.
2. To explore practical solutions and interventions that promote greater inclusion, accessibility, and safety at night.

Through open dialogue, attendees were encouraged to share personal experiences, raise concerns, and identify what contributes to a greater sense of security after dark. The key themes and outcomes from these sessions are detailed below.

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### **Key Findings**

#### **Feeling Unsafe**

One of the main concerns raised was uncertainty around how to respond in potentially unsafe situations, particularly in crowded places such as gigs, town centres on weekends, or during football events when anti-social behaviour may increase. These scenarios were seen as barriers to community participation, both during the day and at night.

Participants also expressed discomfort around door staff, describing them as intimidating, which often prevented people from reporting safety concerns. In response, a local police licensing officer provided valuable insight into the role of door staff, emphasising that they are trained to support and protect vulnerable individuals. Participants were encouraged to approach door staff if they felt unsafe, as their primary responsibility is to ensure everyone's safety. As well as people, places also want to feel safe and inclusive, with their customers feeling comfortable in sharing their views, hopefully leading to a harmonious balance between night-time venues and customers.

The discussion also covered the roles of welfare officers and safety marshals. These individuals, who work closely with shops and venues, were introduced so that the attendees would know who to look out for and feel more confident asking for support.

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#### **Promoting a Sense of Security**

When asked what promotes a sense of security, participants highlighted several key factors:

- **Familiarity with venues** and knowing what to expect.
- **Friendly and approachable staff.**

- **Accessibility**, both in terms of physical access and inclusive customer service.
- **Availability of calm spaces**, either within venues or as dedicated safe spaces in town, to reduce anxiety and uncertainty.

A local night safety manager shared a range of helpful resources after the session, including information on safe spaces where individuals can:

- Charge their phones
- Arrange transport
- Request assistance
- Take time out in a quiet, supportive environment

These resources will be shared widely with the community to ensure people know where and how to access them.

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### **Safety Tips from Participants**

In addition to learning from police and safety professionals, participants shared their own safety tips, which will also be circulated. These included:

- Always ensuring your phone is fully charged
- Having a backup plan for your journey
- Knowing your route home and ensuring access to transport

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### **Conclusion and Next Steps**

These sessions were immensely valuable, not only for the people with learning disabilities who attended, but also for the local authorities and safety representatives who listened to their voices. It has created better links between Stay Up Late and local law enforcement, with one person involved stating they are always happy to be contacted should anyone involved in the charity experience issues inside a licenced premises or if they can offer any further advice. Another said:

*I learnt a lot from this workshop too and it's definitely helped focus some of my work and ensuring that I add in the group's perspectives when I'm talking to the night-time venues. It's a very valuable experience to speak to different groups directly so thank you again for putting this on.*

With improved understanding of the barriers people face and how safety can be better supported, there is real potential for positive change.

Moving forward, Brighton, East Sussex, and West Sussex can build on these insights to foster a more inclusive and secure night-time environment, ensuring everyone, regardless of ability, feels confident, safe, and welcome when out at night.

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