



Personal Outcomes Stories during COVID: Phase 2 understanding from experience

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What has continued to help keep a focus on what matters for people during the pandemic?

The Scotland Reducing Gambling Harm programme aims to put the voice of people affected by gambling harms at the heart of action to reduce those harms. To do this it is engaging people with lived experience of gambling harm throughout Scotland and working with them to set up a lived experience forum on gambling harms to accelerate the delivery of the National Strategy to Reduce Gambling Harms, a strategy launched last April by the Gambling Commission.

Engagement activity so far has included:

- Series of [virtual engagement events](#) with people with experience of gambling harm
- One-to-one interviews with people with lived experience
- Virtual [ALLIANCE membership engagement sessions](#)
- Capturing [Humans of Scotland](#) stories showing impact of gambling on people's lives

Engaging people with lived experience of gambling harm is crucial to the success of this programme and it has been challenging to do meaningful engagement during this time. Gambling harm is a new area of engagement and it took some time to get the process started. However, what we've learnt is that bringing together an initial small cohort of people who care deeply about the issue has helped to widen our engagement to other groups. What often happened was that a person would come in touch with us having seen a news item or an event report on our website and we'd have a phone call to understand their interests. It often helped having an invite to a next event for the person to attend or the option of sharing their story through Humans of Scotland series as a means of engaging in the future. This helped an ongoing dialogue which in turn built a relationship even when working remotely.

The main takeaway has been that different approaches work for different people. Being in a large zoom meeting won't suit everyone, some prefer to have their views heard over email, on social media, or in one-to-one calls. Taking the time to do this and to allow people different ways of getting in touch has helped widen our engagement.

Are there changes that seem to be lasting longer term and are there things that have slid back to old ways of doing things?

Because the programme started in late February 2020, the vast majority of events so far have been held virtually. In some ways it has helped to involve people who we may not otherwise have engaged with, this includes people in rural communities, carers and people with disabilities. It has been striking what benefits many people we work with see in meetings taking place virtually, whether that be that they don't need to travel or that they feel more comfortable discussing the issue when at home. A couple have said they like being able to smoke during the meetings. Most of the cohort we're working with say they prefer meetings online and hope that this will continue even after restrictions are lifted, with maybe occasional face to face meetings, but predominantly online for ease of travel and time.

What difference has this made to people?

People with experience of gambling harm have said that they feel their contribution is highly valued. Previously there hasn't been a Scotland-wide means of influencing policy relating to gambling harm and many people find it exciting to have a chance to contribute to identifying where change needs to happen.

What has been striking to me is that on calls over Zoom people seem more willing to give one another time for reflection and to develop their points than they might in a face to face meeting. There seems to be an acceptance that the meeting would descend into chaos if everyone attempts to speak at once, and allowing people more airtime means they have the chance to really listen to what is being said.

I mentioned in my last piece about how online video calls flattens the power dynamic in the room. It strikes me that everyone is in the same boat to a certain extent. Everyone is at home, everyone is wearing a t-shirt, and there's less formality. One of our attendees remarked to me that in 'physical meetings you can tell some people think they're powerful by the way they move around the room and the way they dress'. But online people don't take up physical space in the same way and don't dress as formally. While it's limiting not to meet face to face, there are certain ways in which this flattened power dynamic leads to more fruitful discussions.

How did this make you feel?

I'm pleased that we've been able to engage with a large number of people using virtual technology. I'm pleased that we are able to reach groups of people who may not otherwise be engaged, but I worry about the groups that we're not engaging with, especially those who are digitally excluded.

Reflecting on your experiences what have you learned?

My main takeaway is that it's important to provide people with a number of ways to engage. We have rich conversations in our events, but equally deeper themes emerge

from our one-to-one conversations and allowing people the opportunity to feed in over email. The same applies to engaging people face to face, but bearing it in mind is doubly important when regular means of engagement are off the table.

What difference has it made to you to tell your story as part of this project?

It is really valuable to take some time to reflect and think back on what's been happening in the last six months or so. In a weird way home working and digital meetings have become a fact of life and it's valuable to have some time to reflect on how different it really is. There are obvious downsides, but this process of reflection allows sight of some potential benefits to this way of working.