



UK Excellence Patron's Award Judging Submission

Organisation

Submission By: **Alan Bell**

Nominee: **The Scottish Centre for Personal Safety**

Part 1: Please give us some examples of what they do to deserve to win an award. What sets them apart from the crowd?

We provide empowering Personal Safety training to vulnerable people throughout Scotland but particularly in the local area surrounding our Barony St John Centre in Ardrossan, North Ayrshire.

The area our Centre is located in is not without its problems; According to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 2020, Ardrossan Central is now the 3rd most deprived area in North Ayrshire with nearby Saltcoats Central (part of the Three Towns area which includes Ardrossan, Saltcoats and Stevenston) coming out top of the list and Stevenston Ardeer in 5th place.

North Ayrshire is the 5th most deprived Council area in Scotland with 52 (28%) of North Ayrshires 186 data zones in the 15% most deprived in Scotland and is now also ranked in the Top 10 for the worst homeless death rate in Scotland.

Figures from the National Records of Scotland published in February 2022, show that females in North Ayrshire now have the lowest healthy life expectancy in the whole of Scotland. Females living in our area can expect to live in good health for only 54yrs, in comparison with Orkneys healthy life expectancy of 77.6yrs. Social deprivation with access to alcohol, tobacco and fast food have been noted as factors of this high rate.

Alcohol hospital admissions in North Ayrshire are currently 32% higher than the Scottish average and drug related hospital admissions have increased to more than double the Scottish average.

Aside from drug and alcohol misuse, 2021 figures showed incidents of rape or attempted rape rose by a massive 44%; Sex crimes rose by 12% despite rising by 17% in 2020; Indecent or sexual assaults rose by 12%; and common assaults rose by 15%.

North Ayrshire has the highest incidence of domestic abuse in Scotland per capita (13% above the national average).

Additionally, according to the latest Police Scotland figures, there are 393 registered sex offenders living in Ayrshire communities (an increase of 4.25% from last year) with another 123 sex criminals in





custody or hospital in the area. This means that of the 13 policing areas in Police Scotland, Ayrshire has now the 4th highest number of registered sex offenders in the community, in the entire country.

By locating our Centre in Ardrossan, we have obviously placed ourselves in the eye of the storm and so we are in the perfect place to help those most in need of our services.

Over the last year, we have had female survivors of violence referred to us from North Ayrshire Women's Aid, Police Scotland, Break the Silence and our local GP practices. Through a mix of personal safety advice, informal counselling and practical self defence skills, we raise the women's confidence, decrease their anxieties and encourage them to socialise again and live more richer, fuller lives.

This statement from one of these female survivors highlights our excellent volunteers who do excellent things and make a real difference to society;

“I spent 5 years being abused. Physically, mentally, emotionally and sexually. I was beaten, raped, belittled and bullied. I lost friends, lost touch with family and was completely alone with my 4 kids, who witnessed assault after assault.

We upped and fled and I went to the Police.

I was sent to Alan and the team at The Scottish Centre for Personal Safety and I have never looked back.

It was more than just learning to defend myself; my confidence grew and I was no longer looking over my shoulder constantly. There was coffee and chats that were needed to take the weight off my shoulders, as well as learning how to stop myself becoming the victim ever again.

It's helped me grow in so many ways and I know that I will never again be bullied and used as a punching bag. With the additional Krav Maga classes, my children have also learned how to defend themselves and I have watched their confidence grow too.

I'll never be able to thank Alan and the team enough for all they have done for me and my children.

Our charity is run entirely by volunteers and so far, the nine of us have helped over 7,000 vulnerable people, particularly those targeted by Hate Crime.

In the last year, Racial hate crime increased by 6% in Scotland; Sexual orientation aggravated crime increased by 5%; and Disability aggravated crime rose by 14%.





Our charity strove to combat these figures by running our empowering Personal Safety courses to a variety of groups including;

To female runners throughout Scotland who were being stalked, harassed and attacked by predators in the Central Belt area;

To sensory impaired people afraid from being attacked at Deafblind Scotland's Rehabilitation Centre in Kirkintilloch, Forth Valley Sensory Centre in Falkirk, The Disability Resource Centre in Paisley and our own Barony St John Centre in Ardrossan;

To over 600 children in our local secondary schools to prevent bullying;

ethnic minority women from The Rainbow Muslim Women's Group who had been targeted in Hate Crimes including assaults;

And also this year, we developed a Personal Safety course specifically for People with Learning Disabilities. This confidence building course shas been used by INCLUDED and Neighbourhood Networks for their members.

Our work was recently recognised by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II as she awarded us The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service (the equivalent of an MBE for the charity). This was for empowering vulnerable people and saving lives through bespoke Personal Safety training since 1997. A great honour!

The volume of work our volunteers do, the diverse groups of people they help and the lives they save and change, sets them apart from the crowd. I hope you agree and you award them your Positive Impact Award.

Part 2: Please give us some examples of the impact that they have had with the work they do.

The following are comments from people we have helped:

Sonwabiso Ntonga, EMpowering Women; You really couldn't improve this course. I learned so much and my confidence has increased. I will pass these skills onto my family.

Anon, Deafblind Scotland; "As a deafblind person, my life before this course was like living in a cupboard with the door shut. I was afraid to go out alone - even to hang out my washing in my own back garden. Now, for the first time in 16 years, I have hung my own washing out. Thank you for changing my life."





Laura & Emma McLean, Registered Blind Twins and mum Shona; "When Laura and Emma started personal safety training never in my wildest dreams did I imagine the impact it would have on them. Both girls are very quiet and the thought of any sort of confrontation terrifies them. I wasn't even sure I'd get them to take part in the class. But I'd never met Alan and Michael.

Their encouragement, patience and perseverance struck a chord with both girls who responded positively and grew in confidence.

In the past when I was out with the girls, they spent their time apologising to everyone, if their cane touched someone/something or they bumped into anyone. No amount of reassurance from me convinced them that they weren't at fault.

Now they walk with heads high and instead of the continual sorry it's a confident excuse me.

This new-found confidence is all down to the positive experiences and confidence building they have taken on board from Personal Safety.

Everyone with a visual impairment deserves the opportunity to take part in these classes.

Thank you Alan, Michael, Yvette and Laura."

Anon female survivor; was sexually abused as a child and spent over 40 years suffering from flashbacks, nightmares and feelings of inadequacy. During counselling and training with The Scottish Centre for Personal Safety, I revealed that I was contemplating suicide. Alan and his team got me immediate help with the local Mental Health Team and their Personal training has since increased my confidence. For the first time, I actually beat my attacker in my nightmare and since then I have been free from nightmares and flashbacks. Thank you to everyone at The Scottish Centre for Personal Safety from myself and my children you have, quite literally, saved and changed our lives.

Dr Hazel McFarlane; registered blind Pan-Ayrshire Sensory Impairment Coordinator; On one occasion, there were some teenagers coming towards to me and they were chanting in the eye, in the eye. That didn't mean anything to me but they were eating fish suppers and one of them spat the fish supper into my eyes.

I was obviously upset it just felt really degrading.

Since coming to The Scottish Centre for Personal Safety's training courses, I've learnt different techniques about using the pressure points on somebody's body to fend them off, so it actually





doesn't matter what size you are, or what size they are, by using those pressure points you can take someone down to the ground.

When you have no vision, if you are in a situation that is really busy or if people have been drinking alcohol or if you are out in Glasgow on a Saturday night - although it's not actually directly threatening, you still feel threatened. So to come along to these sessions has been really useful because it just gives you the confidence that you could actually defend yourself if you had to.

The Operations Executive for The Princes Trust, Sally White, commented; Absolutely amazing sessions with The Scottish Centre for Personal Safety. Alan, Yvette and David showed some of our young people how to protect themselves, with amazing outcomes. Everyone's confidence is through the roof and any anxieties have been quashed. A very serious lesson with great impact and humour throughout. Can't recommend them enough!

Participants have also acknowledged the huge social impact we provide, not only for themselves as users of our services, but also the empowering impact our training has had on their friends, families and local communities;

Saving Lives -

Our Personal Safety training promotes personal awareness, making participants more vigilant and less prone to attack. Our training also teaches de-escalation techniques enabling participants to withdraw or escape a potentially violent situation and self defence skills enable participants to take practical steps to escape an attacker. All of these actions can potentially save lives.

Experience has shown us that participants get enthused with self-confidence following our training and often teach the skills they have learned to friends, family and colleagues thereby reducing the fear of crime and potentially giving the skills to save a life to a wider community.

Promoting Inclusion -

Our charity meets the aims of The Equality Act 2010. Our target groups have increased and now include people with learning disabilities, sensory impaired people, people with dwarfism, female survivors of violence, children, ethnic minority groups, LGBTI groups and other vulnerable people whose needs are well documented. Some experience problems with competency issues, self-





confidence and self-esteem but given the right training and support many of these issues can be overcome.

By providing adequate supervision and creating practical personal safety and self defence scenarios in a safe and secure environment to a wide variety of groups, we know our Scotland-wide courses are truly fully inclusive.

Communities are safer, stronger and more able to work together to tackle inequalities -

We have a direct impact on making communities safer by helping people from across all sections of the community able to understand and mitigate against situations that might endanger their personal safety.

The overall fear of crime is often reduced as people become confident in their ability to deal with it and we also provide individuals with the confidence to face life and empower them to engage within their community regardless of their personal circumstances or background.

People have better and more sustainable services and environments -

By enhancing people's awareness of safety threatening situations, this in turn leads to an improvement on how they perceive their local environment and there is anecdotal evidence that safe and secure environments are generally more sustainable.

Encouraging Health Gain -

The nature of our activities, our Personal Safety courses and our evening classes, involve physical activity at a level to suit each individual. By structuring our activities in this way, we not only aim to improve the personal safety, awareness, self-confidence and empowerment of participants, but also to increase their levels of physical activity and so improve their overall health and well-being. This is one of the hidden benefits of our self-defence training and of our Centre as a whole.

The Scottish Government is promoting one hour per day of physical exercise for young people. In schools and often at home young people do not get this amount of exercise but by attending our Personal Safety / Self Defence courses or an evening class, this can be overcome leading to a healthier community that promotes safer lives.





Supporting Individual Development -

By providing opportunities for individuals from across society to learn skills that will allow them to identify and avoid situations likely to endanger their personal safety, we are able to help people from within identified vulnerable groups secure the best chances that life has to offer them.

By transferring skills that result in a greater degree of self-confidence and personal empowerment, participants can improve employability options and life chances in general.

Additionally, Personal Safety and Self Defence training although performed individually, is usually taught in groups, thereby encouraging social development and it promotes both physical and mental health to the individual. By engaging in these skills on a regular basis, participants will become more confident, socially adept individuals with a higher degree of employability skills.

And there's more..

Associated with the direct community and individual social benefits as described above, are the indirect impacts on the economic well-being of communities and individuals as a result of savings on health services, a greater opportunity to engage in economic activity, savings in workplace absence and reduced costs for providing public services. These impacts are carried through into the establishment providing more sustainable environments within our communities.

I hope you will agree that our small charity makes a huge impact - not bad for only 9 volunteers.

