Flare app – to report feeling unsafe

Helping women and girls to feel safer by allowing users to anonymously report incidents.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Prevention
Topic	Violence against women and girls
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Region	South West
Partners	Police Community safety partnership Government department Local authority Voluntary/not for profit organisation
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	November 2021
Scale of initiative	National

Key details

Target group	Adults Children and young people General public Victims

Aim

The Flare app is a method of reporting street harassment and similar incidents. It is not designed to be used in emergencies. The app is primarily aimed at women and girls but anyone can use it to report an incident. Police then collate and analyse the reports, identifying problem areas and any actions to be taken.

Flare aims to:

- capture incidents of street harassment, stalking and sexual violence that often go unreported
- change attitudes and behaviours to violence and intimidation in public places
- reduce crime against women and girls
- improve feelings of safety for women and girls, particularly in public spaces and the night-time economy
- increase the trust and confidence of women and girls in policing and community safety partners

Intended outcome

Most women do not report incidents of street harassment such as catcalling or inappropriate behaviour to the police. Flare's intended outcomes are to:

- increase reassurance and confidence to the community
- increase insight on incidents related to violence against women and girls (VAWG) based on time, location or incident type
- support with the most efficient use of resources to address VAWG within the local area
- provide real-time data to drive future police initiatives, helping to minimise the impact of VAWG

Description

The Flare app can be installed on any mobile device. It enables women and girls to anonymously share their experiences of harassment, public stalking and violence.

The app was developed following a successful bid from Gloucestershire Constabulary and the office of the police and crime commissioner into the Home Office science technology and research (STAR) fund. The data is used by local partners who work under the umbrella of Safer Gloucestershire to make the county's streets safer.

How the app is used

Flare is not intended for reporting crimes in progress. Police check the reports to make sure nothing that needs an urgent response has been submitted. Reportable experiences may include incidents such as staring, catcalling, inappropriate gestures, verbal abuse and invasion of personal space.

The app helps local agencies understand how and where women and girls feel unsafe and to take action. Intelligence gathered through the app directs local policing operations and patrols, and informs the activity of community safety partnerships (including the deployment of 18 mobile cameras to places where women and girls say they feel most vulnerable).

The app provides real-time data on issues impacting women and girls. It is anonymous, quick and connects women and girls to support and advice.

The app can be downloaded on either an iOS or Android device. The user then chooses from a list of categories to help bundle the reports. They can choose where and when the incident happened or they can skip this step. The user can then see a summary and edit each section if needed. The report is then sent to the management dashboard with no personal data attached.

Flare is set up and ready to be rolled out into all UK police areas. It has been used by several police forces, including Northamptonshire Police who received funding through round four of the Safer Streets Fund after a successful bid for £48,000. This was granted for two years to help draw attention to problematic venues or areas and patterns of behaviour in particular places. Northamptonshire Police can then concentrate operational resources and activities to help keep people safe.

Overall impact

The Gloucestershire evaluation showed that:

- the Flare app had 2,700 downloads
- 477 individual reports had been submitted on the app

The top reported categories were:

- other inappropriate public behaviour
- staring
- inappropriate comments
- spiking
- verbal abuse

In the first month, 25 reports of spiking were received. In response, Gloucestershire Police launched Operation Nightingale – an anti-spiking operation in bars and club in Cheltenham and Gloucester. It targeted offenders by swipe testing for drugs as they entered a venue.

Over Cheltenham race week 2022, the app was downloaded 336 times. This resulted in 20 reports, including indecent exposure, inappropriate comments and sexual harassment. Police have since worked closely with the jockey club and partners to address these.

Two reports of verbal abuse and invading personal space were submitted from a popular dog walking location. A meeting was held with partners and with agreement, targeted patrols were deployed. Following these patrols, no further Flare reports were received.

Flare reports relating to online harassment were pinned to a university location. The information was shared directly with the university, who took action by reminding the students of the standards of behaviour and of the support and advice available.

Multiple reports of inappropriate comments, invading personal space and staring at Gloucester Royal hospital and a supported living accommodation resulted in a local authority partner intervening. An alleyway at the rear of the hospital was checked for lighting and overgrown hedging. Housing providers promoted the app to residents in the area. A singular report of indecent exposure close to Gloucester Royal hospital resulted in CCTV being trawled and neighbourhood patrols deployed.

Learning

Lessons learned from Gloucestershire Constabulary

- Early engagement with governance and compliance would have resulted in a more compliant solution, increased efficiency, operational security and reduced reputational risk.
- Earlier engagement with the portfolio and programme team would have been preferable, with discussion around project management expectations and delivery. This would have set out clear terms of reference from the beginning of the pilot.
- Panic guard have the capabilities to switch on push notifications. This could have been switched on at the development stage and run throughout the pilot, potentially increasing active users.
- Ongoing advertisement and active engagement with communication teams is recommended. To increase the downloads of the app, follow-up engagement is required with weekly or monthly summaries to show how the force has acted as a result of submitted reports. Other forces should bear in mind that this can be costly to maintain, as the results require constant promotion.

Lessons learned from Northamptonshire Police

- Liaise with the force early on to work through the crime recording policy.
- Establish the police functions required to monitor the Flare reports. It's vital to ensure the force reviews any reports made and acts on them accordingly. Failure to do so could result in reduced confidence in policing. For example, the control room or dedicated police function around VAWG would likely require login details to the app.

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Tags

Violence against women and girls   Neighbourhood policing   Crime reduction