

GM Moving Podcast: Right To The Street Series

Series 3 Episode 4 - Public Health Transcript

Introduction

Eve: Welcome to the Right to the Streets edition of the GM Moving Podcast. Join the conversation about what makes our streets, parks, and public spaces joyful, welcoming places for people to be and to be active. Join me Eve Holt, Strategic Leader at Greater Sport on the journey around the streets as we explore people's freedom to move about without fear.

In each episode, we hear about the roles we can all play to make where we live, work, and play places where all women and girls feel they belong and are invited to be active. We gather stories, experiences, and ideas as we speak to strategic leaders, decision makers, and lots of local people who are creating the conditions in place for everyday moving and active lives for all.

In this episode, we explore the links between our right to the streets and public health. The World Health Organisation defines public health as the art and science of preventing disease, prolonging life, and promoting health through the organised efforts of society. Some people refer to public health as social or community medicine.

Public health explores the ways we can change the environment for the benefit of the public, like ensuring clean water supply, clean air, healthy homes and streets, and shifting population behaviour through public health campaigns. I am keen to hear what this means and what we can learn from people working in public health to create better conditions on our streets, in our public spaces and parks, and to make them feel like safer, more joyful, and welcoming places for all.

We saw through the Covid vaccination programme how important it is for people working in public health to listen to, understand, and work with people and communities in their diversity. If we are to really develop solutions that work for them and address the health inequities so starkly revealed over the last few years.

So coming up, you'll come with me to the St. John Centre in Old Trafford to meet a wonderful group of women from the community hub who tell us all about their local area. Including the places where they find joy.

Safina: I'm really thankful. I'm really blessed that my first step coming into Old Trafford was my park.

Eve: How they get about.

Sushila: I just walk everywhere. I walk into town, I walk into Sale.

Eve: And the things that can often get in the way of them leading more active lives.

Cath: I became disabled about four or five years ago. I've changed from. Being a ridiculously fast limitless walker to someone who really can't walk very far at all.

Interview 1

Eve: Joining that conversation too, is Eleanor.

Eleanor: I'm Eleanor Roaf, and I'm the Director of Public Health for Trafford Council.

Eve: I grab some time with Eleanor on her own to chat about what exactly we mean when we talk about a public health approach and her ideas to help us lead healthy and happy lives. Eleanor has over thirty years experience in public health.

By law, every local authority must appoint a Director of Public Health. These directors are responsible for ensuring that public health is at the heart of their local authorities' agenda, using the best, most appropriate evidence. They determine the overall vision and aims for public health in their locality, and then they manage the delivery of those objectives reporting annually.

Eleanor is a huge advocate for active travel and personally cycles to work in Trafford every day.

I start by asking Eleanor why safer streets matter to her and her work.

Eleanor: Safer streets really matter because it's about us all having space around our homes where we feel safe and it's part of our lives. We all understand how important it is to feel safe in your home, but actually feeling safe in your local area is absolutely critical too.

And I think what we find, especially for women and girls, is that our use of streets isn't as free to us as for men. And that there are constraints that are put on us and fears that we have about using our streets, and many of those fears are unjustified. Sadly, some are justified. But what we need to be doing is, I mean go back to that old jargon. It's the reclaim the streets. Because if you don't feel safe in your local area, how can you live effectively and be your best self in that area? So for me, it's just so important that we're able to, to think about people's physical and mental health, because being out and about mixing with people, knowing that you belong is really important to all of us. And you have to feel you belong in the streets around your home as much as you do within your home.

Eve: So as a Director of Public Health and obviously leading a team in Trafford, what sort of things do you and can your colleagues do that contribute to this agenda?

Eleanor: A lot of the work we do is about thinking about things like physical activity and mental health and how intrinsically linked both physical and mental health are.

They're not different things. They're all part of the same thing. And the work that we've been doing is really thinking about how we help people to become more physically active. Because we know in our population, a lot of us aren't active enough day to day, and one of the easiest ways to become more physically active is to be walking or cycling around in your local area.

We don't all need to be going to the gyms iff we can build physical activity into our daily lives, then that is a really effective way of keeping ourselves healthy. By going outside we also expose ourselves to vitamin D, to social interactions and to enjoying the change of seasons and the weather and being more part of nature.

So for us as a public health team, what we are really interested in is how do we make our physical environment as pleasant as it possibly can be. And some of the things that we can do aren't really public health actions, they are for environmental services and others. So things like street lighting and the quality of pavements are far more important to people being active than anyone really thinks about. But we know that in the winter, lots of people don't go out in the dark because they don't feel safe. But we also know that the more of us that are walking or cycling around, the safer we all become. So there is something about how do we make sure that we feel safe, but also the fact that actually we have a bit of a duty to be going out and about too, so that other people feel safe.

Eve: So are there any particular lessons, I guess from your work in Trafford or across Greater Manchester that you would point to some of the ways maybe working with other partners, things that you focused on to make a difference?

Eleanor: So we've been doing a lot of work with Transport for Greater Manchester about walking and cycling and the Bee Network work. For many people, particularly people from more deprived backgrounds, you're much less likely to own a car.

People with disabilities are less likely to own a car. Women are less likely to own a car and less likely to drive. Children don't own cars and don't drive. So there is something about making sure that our streets aren't just completely dominated by cars. And that's particularly important in more built up areas where you've got high levels of housing density.

You quite often also have a high number of parked cars. And ironically, people often think, oh, I don't want to cycle because I'm worried about the drivers. But sometimes it's the parked cars that make it really dangerous or difficult for us to cycle. Because the streets become so narrow or cars park

on the pavement, and there's a lot of evidence showing that that can really limit people's ability to get around their local area.

We know that it's a big factor in whether parents will allow their children to walk to school because the child may have to go into the road or their vision may be impaired when they're trying to cross the road. So thinking about how we make our streets into places for people and for people to move around rather than for people to drive around, I think is the first step that cities offer people to live in, for people to enjoy, for people to design, and we can't continue to design around cars.

So in Greater Manchester, when you measure productivity levels, we are less productive in work terms than many other parts of the country. Part of that is because we have higher levels of ill health than many other areas. Part of that ill health is going to be down to low levels of physical activity, but we also know that congestion plays a big part, and so traffic traveling slower actually means that journeys take longer, and that means the number of jobs anyone can do in a day is decreased. The time that people take to get to work is increased. All of those things have a negative impact on our productivity as a region. So if we can start thinking more about how we walk and how we cycle and how we use public transport, that will help us take cars off the road, that will reduce that congestion, improve our quality, increase the likelihood that we can be physically active and increase our sense of cohesion and community because we are much more likely to stop and smile or speak to somebody if you're walking or even on a bike than if you're in a car.

But also, although lots of people think, oh, having parking outside a shop, means that you'll get more footfall in the shop. Actually, that's not the case that's been born out repeatedly, that people who walk and cycle are much more likely to use the shops in their local area and spend more in them. So shopkeepers and local businesses are much better off if we can try and make sure that as many people as possible, are walking around the area.

The other thing is that more people walking makes it feel safer and actually is safer for all of us. So trying to make sure, particularly after dark that we've got well lit streets and that people are able to walk and feel

safe in doing so, is a really important part of being able to live in, own and belong to your local area.

Eve: So you briefly talked about air pollution. Let's go there.

Eleanor: The first thing to remember is that outdoor air pollution doesn't stay outdoors. It goes indoors as well. There are some things as well that make indoor pollution worse. Wood burning stoves are a particular issue, but most of the air pollution in our cities is caused by road transport.

So if we reduce the number of people driving and make sure that they're driving at a steady speed, then we'll see an improvement in our air quality. I think a lot of people think that electric cars are going to be the solution to this, but actually unfortunately they're not. And that's because electric cars, although they don't produce the nitrogen dioxide, they do produce particulates.

And these particulates are tiny little elements of matter. The real risk with them is that they're so tiny that they can get through your lungs and into your bloodstream. That's why we're so concerned about air pollution. Although they definitely are better for the climate. They're not necessarily always going to be better for air pollution, so that the message has got to be in urban areas you should think before you drive, and you should particularly think before you do a short journey. And you should think as well about if you live in an area in one of the leafy suburbs, for example, but then your drive to work takes you through a more heavily built up area, you're going to be creating more problems in that area.

And in our more heavily built up areas such as Old Trafford, typically the households are, have more people living in them. They may have lower incomes and they may be less able to protect themselves. And it's really difficult for any of us to protect ourselves against air pollution. We all have to breathe. We can't go around holding our breath. So it's really important that we do everything we can to improve air quality.

Eve: As well as talking about the role of public health. We talk in Greater Manchester about taking a public health approach to gender-based

violence, to active lives for all, to healthy streets. What does that actually mean to anybody?

Eleanor: I don't think it means anything to anyone outside public health. But what it means is that by taking a public health approach, what we're doing is we're trying to think of the causes as well as the results of any situation. So whether it's domestic abuse or air quality or safer streets, we're trying to think about why is the situation as it is and what's caused that?

How far back do you need to go and how can you influence all the little stages on the way? And lots of this will be about not only what can policy makers do, but also what can communities do, and how do we hear from communities about what's driving their behaviours and why is it that they're living in the way they are.

Most of us are creatures of habit. Most of us, most of the time just do the same things that we always do. If we had to stop and think about every single action we took we probably would struggle to get out of bed. We are really pre-programmed by our habits, but now, a number of the things that I would say are our modern lifestyle and our urban lifestyle.

Some of the benefits, some of the lovely things about that urban lifestyle are also some of the things that are making it more difficult for us to continue to be healthy. Fast food may be delicious, but eating it regularly is really not good for you, and we all know that, but it's very hard to break some habits.

Similarly jumping into the car may feel really convenient, but actually quite often that journey in the car will have taken you longer than it would've done if you'd walked or cycled the same distance. But we don't really have that in our mindset, especially in a place like Greater Manchester. If you compare Greater Manchester to London, about 85% of commutes to work in Greater Manchester are done by car, but it's less than 30% in London.

So people in London are more used to thinking about using other modes of transport than we are. So we need to start thinking about why is it that we

are not thinking about these different modes of transport. And if we did think about traveling differently, just think of all the benefits we'd have of meeting people, the fresh air, the exercise.

I think this is something that everybody in public health really does see as a crucial part of changing our population health and changing the outcomes in our country that we don't have as good health outcomes as we should. I think it comes back to the more control you have over your life, the better your health is.

So doing anything that gives local communities more feeling of control and more autonomy is going to be really helpful. So, The reason I'm so passionate about active travel and sustainable travel, so travel by public transport is that I just feel it's such a good solution to so many things. It helps us with congestion, it helps with productivity, it helps with air quality, it helps with physical activity, it helps with mental health, it helps with community cohesion, it helps with local businesses, and it's really cheap.

So why wouldn't you choose that as one of your targets of something that you can absolutely do something about. There is no downside to active travel. The only downside is that we need to do a little bit of re-engineering of our streets and quite a big bit of changing the habits and the mindsets of all of us about where the car fits.

And really, I would say cars should be our servants, not our masters.

Eve: I like that.

Eleanor: And also, the big thing I didn't talk about was the impact on climate change. That actually one of the things that we're seeing with the climate changing is more extreme weather. That more extreme weather, ironically makes it more difficult to walk and cycle, but it actually makes it even more important than we do in order to mitigate the impact.

So road transport and using cars is one of the big drivers of our gap in delivery of climate change action and getting to net zero. I don't think we are honest enough about how important walking, cycling, and using public

transport is for our ability to withstand and address climate change. I think our current lifestyle, unfortunately, is unsustainable and we are going to have to change it.

We are going to have to reduce the amount we rely on private motor cars. People who own a car have been shown to walk a lot less than people who don't own a car. We know that so many people in our population are not physically active enough. So by not using a car and by becoming a bit more physically active, you've actually then sorted out another problem as well.

But I don't think we've done the work we need to do to persuade people that actually our current reliance on private cars it's not sustainable. I think a lot of people would really take issue with me on that, and I think that's a debate we should be having nationally about what is the role and what is the place of the car.

Eve: So there's also how money and finance is prioritised with a gendered lens to recognise that women are less likely to have a car, they're more likely to rely on doing those trip chain journeys, including public transport and active travel modes. So I guess that influence that colleagues have as well on thinking much broader around where money flows. What's prioritised across the council, across our partners is gonna continue to be, be critical, isn't it?

Eleanor: I completely agree with you, and I think things like pavement maintenance are absolutely critical. We have to make sure that our pavements are smooth and flat and safe to walk on because otherwise people won't be using them because older people in particular will be afraid of falling, but also cars parking on pavements damage the pavements.

So we've got, we've ended up with loads of money being spent on road maintenance that we wouldn't need to spend if we have fewer cars on the road. And bikes and people walking cause very little damage to any of the streets. If we can get the number of cars and lorries that are going through our cities, if we can reduce those, then we will actually save money on a road maintenance budget.

And I do think when you look at the return on investment for any cycling infrastructure, it's huge compared to the return on investment you get from roads. So we really should be looking much more at making sure that that money is used in the best possible way. And that has got to be on walking and cycling infrastructure and on public transport.

Eve: I mean, we often talk about the importance of locally led GM enabled and nationally supported. And I guess that reflects as well the whole process and thinking behind the Rights of Streets project in making sure that it is and at a very local level within neighborhoods in North Trafford, that it's people that are informing and deciding and how money can be spent and what are the interventions that need to be taken and what their role is to make those places feel safer, more welcoming, , but then very much supported by the work and the learning and the knowledge and the partnerships across Greater Manchester. And it does feel that it has helped, that it does feel like gender-based violence and also taking a gendered perspective on the design of our streets has become more of a national issue now.

So there's an appetite and there's an awareness that helps galvanise people at the moment. I guess it's partly a belief that even we can make change happen, which feels very difficult, doesn't it?

Eleanor: It's probably summarised best by that old adage. Think global, act local. And what I've found really strongly in the pandemic was the national messaging was really important, but that nationally, you can't drive change.

So the national messaging has to be right, but you have to put the resources into a local area in order to deliver the change. So while you've got the national messaging and you've got local resources, you can achieve anything. But if the national messaging goes. It's actually really difficult, even with resources to enact the local action because you get a conflict in people's minds between what the national picture is saying and, most of us do get a lot of our information from, from national messaging.

So if the national messaging doesn't support the local action. It's really hard to make that local action change. And a really obvious example is in

Covid when, for example, the advice to wear masks changed, or the advice for contact tracing changed as soon as that advice went nationally. It was very difficult for us to do anything about contact tracing locally because people had heard the national messaging.

But even with the strong national messaging, The national government showed that you can't do contact tracing on a national level. You have to do it locally. It has to be owned locally. So it is national for the message, national for the resources, but local for the action and listen to your local people.

I think women and girls are much more subject to messaging about it not being safe to go out, but actually across Greater Manchester, we don't have no go areas. The streets are safe. We are limited quite often by our own fears and by fears, gendered fears that are really pushed at women.

Obviously there are terrible things that happen, but they, thankfully, are not as common perhaps as people think. And, I do feel sometimes we can end up in quite a victim blaming situation where it's made out that everywhere's dangerous. And then if something bad happens to a woman, well what was she doing walking alone, or what was she doing there at that time of night? And I think we have to come back and say, no, we've all got rights to be there. But also I do think for young men in particular, actually the streets are probably more dangerous in many ways for young men. But we don't give young men the same messages about what is dangerous as we do to young women.

And I think that that threat, particularly around sexual violence against women, is really damaging because it limits us and we internalise it and we start limiting what we do because we've internalised those fears. And I think that's something that we should really be starting to think about. How do we stop ourselves becoming prey to internalised fears that are ultimately about controlling women? And that sounds a bit dramatic, but I think we should be thinking we have a right to these streets. We should be on the streets. We should be able to go where we want, when we want, and the more of us who do it, the safer it becomes and it becomes safer for everyone as well. It's not just safer for women and girls, it's safer for men and boys as well.

Eve: And we've heard that over and over again. So is there anything that, as we try and align our messaging and shift that narrative, all of us at a local national and at GM level, what do you think as colleagues working across a council can do?

Eleanor: I think one of the things that we can do is really think about how we improve cycle safety and the perception of safety on the roads for people cycling. I do feel that being able to cycle your way from somebody is a massive plus, but lots of women in Greater Manchester and girls are just not given the opportunity to have the sheer joy that is being able to cycle around and have the freedom of your town on a bike. Because where you see high rates of cycling, you start seeing that gender gap disappear and women will cycle as well as men. And a bike is such a great way to get around, especially for short journeys that aren't the standard in and out of town or on a standard bus route. They're really good for local orbital little journeys.

Eve: There's a few things you pointed to, so what for you is the ultimate vision and aim?

Eleanor: What I'd like us to see within the next five years is people within that area and women and girls, particularly in that area, saying that they feel safer walking around, that they walk around and I'd like it to be measured by how much they are walking around.

I'd like people to be able to think about not using the car for short journeys in particular, and that we are able to see more children playing on streets and more children walking to school, more of us being able just to enjoy that wonder in our local environment and feeling at home in it and knowing that we belong. And that's what I'd like to see change.

Eve: Sounds good to me. Thank you. Thank you very much for your time.

Eleanor: Thank you.

Interview 2

Eve: Now in the last bit of this episode, come with me to Old Trafford. We've off to speak to a group of fabulous women to chat about what makes their community here in Old Trafford, a place where they feel welcome, feel they belong, and importantly feel safe and invited to lead active lives. We'll also, of course, hear the things that get in the way.

We are upstairs right at the top of the St. John's centre in their activity room, which is used for so many different things for meetings, courses, English and second language lessons, confidence building sessions, sewing, craft, card making groups, and tuition. There's also a Saturday school here for young people every week.

Sushila: Hi, I'm Sushila Patel.

Eleanor: Hi, I'm Eleanor Roaf.

Cath: Hi, I'm Cath.

Safina: My name is Safina.

Christine: I'm Christine Aspinal,

Eve: As well as being the manager here at the centre Christine is one of the ordained ministers at the adjoining St. John's Church. I start our conversation, it gets a little animated at times by asking Safina to describe what it was like when she first moved to this community.

Safina: My first experience was when I moved here to Old Trafford Manchester, and I didn't know a person here, so the first thing I went was I went into the park, had a little walk, and I started meeting people there, talking to people, introducing myself, that I've come from Ashton Under-Lyne to Trafford.

And they said, oh, do you have family here, so you moved here? I said, no, I don't have any family here. And I don't know anybody. I didn't know anybody. I was quite sad. So I just went to the park with the children, walked around, and that's how slowly I started meeting people and I used

to go every evening and made sure I go every evening on the weekend, take the children, and just started meeting the community.

And that's it, that's when my life started moving up and up and I met a lovely lady called Elaine, and she introduced me that why didn't come to St. John's centre volunteer there and they were just all in the park enjoying the sun, enjoying their time sitting in the park.

And I just walking past and saying hello. And that's how we started making friends and believe it or not at this time. I don't know how many friends I've got, but must be over two, three hundred people. One day my son was like looking at my WhatsApp and he went, Mum, is that how many people you've got on your contacts?

I said, yeah so I'm really thankful. I'm really blessed that my first step coming into Old Trafford was my park and my friends, twelve years now, the memories they still talk about it is where we first met was in Seymour Park. After dropping the children off at Seymour Park School, we used to go all around, have a little walk around, have a little chit chat, and one of my friends used to say, I think you do more chit-chatting than having a walk in the park.

You doing the mouth chit-chatting, than rather doing your legs exercise. I said, well, mouth exercise is very important. If we don't do mouth exercise, then we'd rather take it you out than rather keep it in. So I think mouth exercise is very important.

Eve: That's so wonderful.

Safina: That's my lovely memories from starting off was from Seymour Park. So my brother gifted me a bike at the age of fifty and I said, how am I gonna ride that bike? And he went, just get on it. And just ride it and, and just feel that, you are back to your childhood, whatever, right, okay. So I started riding on my road and all my neighbours coming out and saying, whoa, yeah, well done.

So then going in to Seymour Park and all the ladies stopped and went, wow, you're doing so well. And I said, yeah, it was a gift from my brother.

And then I sent my brother a video. And slowly as I noticed my own Asian community women, they don't hardly ride bikes. We went to that stage that St. John's centre got funding to get ladies a bike. We got all our Asian ladies to get a bike and they slowly started coming into the parks. So we got all the ladies to ride a bike. And it was so funny cause they were sending me videos. They say look what we are doing, we are riding a bike too. And, I'm really happy that with me doing it and other people just watching and say, yeah.

Somebody used to say, oh, you can I have a go? I said, yeah, just sit down and I just have a little chit chat while you go and have a ride around the park on my bike. And it just makes them, I feel that it just motivated them too by seeing somebody doing it that they can actually do it.

And I love my park. I really love my park, the community. There'd be events there, there'd be so many gatherings and even if you go around and just have a little community feeling, when you go in there you see all the community, especially when the sun's out. It's just lovely.

Eve: Wow. I think we've all just exercised our mouths and smiling all the way through those stories.

Thank you. I think we can all sit here and listen. And think what a brilliant example of just what an asset parks can be is a space there you've described of connection and friendship and then giving you, signposting you to other places in the community like the St. John centre. And that story we talk about how for people to live an active life often we miss out on all the different influences, all the different people that enable that to happen. And your story there from your brother buying you a bike. That enable that to happen. Then you become this amazing inspiration I'm sure.

Sushila: Do you still meet up?

Safina: Yeah. Then Covid came. But slowly, It's coming out of there again. We're getting out of there again.

Eleanor: I was going to ask just about you. You talk about that joy and the freedom that you get when you are on a bike and it is so lovely when it's

sunny and you are cycling and in a park, and I was just thinking about some of the streets here.

I mean, I cycle around here a lot and they're quite narrow streets. Some of the driving can be, there's a lot of park cars and so on, and it's just thinking about how can we make it so that people can use their bikes, not just going round parks, but feel safe on the roads as well. Do you and the other ladies you cycle with, is it mainly in a park?

Safina: I think we've just done it in the Longford Park and Seymour Park at the moment. And there is a group I know of, they are getting ladies or ladies and men who are a bit not confident to go on the road and slowly taking them.

Alexandra Park, I think they meet and they get everybody to go and build that confidence up. But there's a lot of bike lanes that they're doing around here I've noticed, which is good because, I've been driving since the age of eighteen, nineteen, but when I'm on a bike, I feel different. I feel very different.

So that Alexandra Park or whatever they're doing, they're taking people up, it's very good. It's just building that confidence up inside you to get on that road.

Eve: Yeah. So that's the Bike Hive in Alexandra Park and TFGM come and work with them there.

Safina: Yeah.

Eve: I set that up years ago. It's a joy. For that purpose. So it'd be great to hear. And is there anything else, and we'll go around, I guess, is there anything else in that point of, what you'd like to see next? What else, what would help for you and for some of the other women you've talked about there, whether it's walking or cycling, anything else that you'd like to see happen that would make that even easier and more joyful.

Safina: Once when I was here I experienced an event. I think it was from Trafford Council. I don't know. It was a beautiful event. We had the stage

and we had the Bhangra guys coming and dolls and you had a whole Old Trafford community there. And it was brilliant cause we actually stayed all day there and events like that they're amazing.

Eve: And where was that?

Safina: This was Seymour Park.

Eve: Okay.

Christine: Okay. That was Party in the Park. One of our development workers at the time was part of the quite a few people from the community that pulled that together. It was a lot of work and it cost a lot of money and we had to have lots of security.

Yeah. But it was an amazing event for the area. It just makes people feel that there is a sense of community as well, and when something like that event happens within the community, rather than you having to go out of your own area to experience something like that and something of your own culture as well, that it's all in the mix there, but it hasn't happened for a few years and if it was to happen again, I think we'd have to pull in the community movers and shakers to make it happen. But I think, as you say, a lot of people were delighted to be at that event. There was just so much there so it would be nice to be able to do something like that again, but it does give you a sense of belonging.

Eve: Often people want to do all the fun stuff, don't they? The creative art side of organising event. But yeah, as you described there, there's so many other things that often come with it that can provide a real challenge.

Christine: Well, last year we did the Ayres Road Festival. So between us at St. John's and Linda Sterling, she runs an art shop at the top of Ayres Road. Just remind me what it's called.

Eve: OT Creative.

Christine: Yes. OT Creative. Yeah. We got together because I've always wanted to have an Ayres Road Festival. So all along the area of shops. so last year we pulled it together, but we didn't get the funding.

All we got was five hundred pounds, a small pot from Trafford. And what we were able to do with that was totally amazing because, musicians, artists, everybody pulled together and we had a fantastic event. And because it was the fact that Covid was still hanging around but out of the way and people were allowed out, it seemed to be that everybody was there. There was food, different types of cultural foods. There was just art workshops and you could actually see the joy in people's faces. They were out there, the sun was shining. That helps. Yeah. It might have been rained off, but it wasn't. And now we thought, let's do it every other year. And you have a real good run in and a plan because I think it was a Jubilee grant that we applied for and yeah, we didn't get it. We asked for ten thousand pounds. Could you imagine what we could have done with that?

Safina: Yeah.

Christine: But on five hundred we didn't do too badly because in this community there are so many talented people that can make things happen and can contribute.

Safina: Yeah. Old Trafford has got talent.

Christine: Indeed it certainly has.

Eve: Definitely has. But the shows, yeah. Five hundred pound what an amazing thing communities can do. And it's interesting cause you said it costs a lot to do the Party in the Park.

Christine: I think it was probably ten to twelve thousand pounds and a lot of that went out on security. Yeah. Some went on they brought a mobile stage. So that costs money.

Eve: Yeah. It's just interesting, isn't it, when you think where money goes and what's seen as being of value. So if that was an event that created that sense of welcome and belonging, and that impact all these years on, in the

end, it's a pretty small amount of money, isn't it, for what could be possibly the impact that has around people using a local asset that's there, but they might not otherwise know about or feel that they've got any sense of ownership around. So, okay. Fantastic examples. I'm gonna come over to here.

So Cath, I guess for you, first of all, anywhere in particular for you that you'd say is somewhere that you do feel you belong, you feel welcome, safe, invited to be active?

Cath: So I think that because there's been a big change in my life, so I've barely had any period of time in my life when I've used a car. So I've always walked, cycled, used public transport, so on and so forth. But I became disabled about four or five years ago, so therefore I've changed from being a ridiculously fast limitless walker to someone who really can't walk very far at all. And all I do is I walk from my house to here, or I walk around the corner to the bus stop. Or sometimes I walk the whole length of St. John's Road to go to a different bus stop if I have to go to a medical appointment.

I exist in a very small world. And I think what's interesting to me, if I'm honest and I'm listening to Safina, is that what it's left me with is I have the change in me physically means that there are things that I don't do that I've been trying to find a way to like to do.

So. I don't like to sit somewhere on my own or just to walk around the park on my own. And it's crazy because anybody who knows me will know that I'm given to staring at like teeny tiny, I can get ridiculous amounts of joy from looking at a bit of moss. But I don't feel comfortable doing that in public and I'm not sure what it is about me that makes me feel, I think it's something to do with, I don't feel entitled. I could walk if I've got a job to do or if I'm there helping with something, or if it's part of what I'm meant to be doing, but the idea that I just hang around somewhere, having a nice time by myself.

And I wouldn't go to a cafe by myself or sit outside by myself. The only time I sit by myself is when I'm forced to so if I'm walking, sometimes I have to stop and sit on a wall or sit on a bench, and I'll do it when I'm

exhausted, but I have to be absolutely exhausted to overcome the embarrassment that I feel which is very different from what I would say was like my public persona, but that is actually how I feel inside.

Eleanor: But I think that's not unusual, is it? Especially for women. I think we are not very good at claiming our space and we feel watched perhaps much more than I'm sure than we are. But, I think people can feel that you're being watched or judged if you're sitting doing nothing, or walking on your own.

Cath: Yeah. And I know that I shouldn't feel like that. It's like it makes me angry, but eighteen year old me would be completely disgusted with that. But that's what I've absorbed overtime.

Eleanor: And I think what you said there as well, I mean I'm sure lots of people have that experience and we all need to be braver so we can model that sitting on our own and make it easier for other people to do that too. But also what you were saying about the benches and the importance of benches when you're tired, I know my mother was talking the other day about how she likes to walk in one particular direction, but not in the other, because in one, there's lots of benches. So she can just sit down and she's saying, and everybody, they should have benches everywhere. And you need two benches. You need a bench, and then a planter, and then another bench. So people can sit on each bench and talk over the planter.

So they're not in each other's way. She's in her eighties, but it was really interesting hearing her talk about what she wanted the streets to look like so that she would feel more able to go out. And once she's out, she's a bit like you, she'll chat away. She wants to be able to sit there and have that chat with somebody and make a day of it.

Christine: I'm sure Safina you probably wouldn't want a planter in between you and anybody else. But I can see the sense of that personally, because I like you, Cath. I'm just feel awkward when I go out on my own walking and I've always felt like that and I've not had anything that's changed my life so much, but yeah, it's like going to a cafe on your own.

I don't feel comfortable. I will do it. But yeah, I don't feel as comfortable and I've definitely never, ever go in a pub on my own. And, I'm quite surprised you feel like that. Do you think there's a vulnerability?

Cath: Yeah, it's funny, but because I walked so fast, I had no experience of people coming up behind me.

And then I'm like walking along really slowly and initially I would really jump because people kept overtaking me. I wasn't used to that proximity. So some of it is the physical side of it and knowing that I'm gonna get tired and as you are saying about your Mum, I need to know where I'm going, where I can sit down.

And occasionally I've come in here because if I've been somewhere and got the bus and it's a bit too far for me to walk, so I know that I can sit here and although it's a slightly technically longer walk, I know that I can sit here and I feel fine here because it's familiar to me.

And I think the other aspect of it is I've definitely got an internalised thing that as a female, you're basically not meant to sit around by yourself looking content, doing nothing and no amount of intellectual fight against that has got rid of it. But the other part for me is that part of my condition is that I have clinical fatigue.

So my brain can become very confused when I'm physically tired. So I'm anxious about staying still because if someone's talking to me, I can't engage. So that's socially very awkward. I've got to get myself back to a place because my instinct is to think that the majority of the people that I come across when I'm wondering about are great people.

That is what the majority of the people in the world are. I'm not naturally afraid of other people and like Safina, when I'm fine, I'll talk to anybody quite happily and I like going on the bus and I like sitting at the bus stop. And I like that random conversation with somebody, and I don't like it when it's only the people you know.

Eve: I'm conscious, I'm hearing you, you're very harsh on yourself because what I've heard you say is, I should do this, I need to do this. And these are

things that while everything you've talked to. There are things that have been internalised and socialised, particularly for us as women and girls.

They are things that we've adopted because that's what we've been told and gets repeated. So I guess to your points, there's a whole load of people and things that then have created the space for you to feel socially confident in spaces. And again, I just wonder Cath what are the roles that others can play?

So it's not just you taking on a sense of I've now got to somehow sort this out for myself actually what are the things other people can do that help for that world to grow again, and for you to move from sometimes feeling socially awkward in spaces to that social confidence that clearly you've experienced and brings you joy in life.

Cath: I mean, very simply, being able to sit is important. So the whole thing about benches and so on and so forth, and I know where all the bus stops are that have seats and don't have seats and where to get on and off. And I actually feel more confident in the busyness of Central Manchester than somewhere else.

And also there's less traffic because I'm very intimidated by traffic because I don't necessarily look as if it's going to take me a long time to cross the road, for example. And that's quite a thing. And you've gotta be feeling confident to carry on walking slowly. And sometimes I limp in a more exaggerated way or I do things that indicate that you cannot have the expectation that I'm going to rush across the road. And that's something that's changed since I was young in the sense that most places now are dominated by the idea that you absolutely have to have a car. And that's a huge thing to pull back on, but everything, our working lives, absolutely everything there is a preposition that you will have a car and that preposition didn't exist when I was growing up.

Eve: So Sushila, yeah, it'd be lovely to hear a bit about you in terms of, again, what are the spaces and places and I guess use the language you've heard there, where do you feel socially awkward or uncomfortable, or where do you feel socially confident, uncomfortable?

Sushila: I just walk everywhere I think Kath knows. I walk into town, I walk into Sale and I just love to walk, but I don't sit down anywhere. I think I'm like you. I feel a bit vulnerable. I just don't sit unless, it's with a group. If you go hiking or something like that's okay, but not on my own.

Eve: And how do you pick your routes? How did you decide where to go?

Sushila: Oh, I just, like on Sunday, I was bored again. I thought, right, Whalley Range head for Whalley. That side, because I just love to see the old houses, and their gardens. I was feeling a bit, oh. I thought, oh, I don't know how people will think or what am I looking at.

Do they think I am weighing up their houses to burgle you didn't know these days, oh, what's gonna happen?

This is how I was feeling at the time when I was walking. I was looking, I was walking so slowly and I was looking, admiring the houses, but I thought, oh gosh, they might be thinking I'm gonna burgle the house.

Not me, but this information sent to somebody else. Cause these days burglaries is on the rise. So, but , yeah, I took a lovely walk in Whalley Range because the houses are so lovely and big and the gardens are nice. Yeah. Just anywhere I walk.

Eve: Fascinating that sense that you have to be, that's there's a clear purpose and it has to be visible what your purpose is and thinking that people are gonna make up all these stories about what we are doing and why we're doing it and about us.

Safina: , I just wanted to share my daughter, she wanted to do work experience, so one day she said to me on a Sunday morning, she said, Mum, can you drop me off at Longford Park? I've got work experience. And I looked at her and I went, work experience in Longford Park? Yeah. She said, every Sunday morning I'm gonna go to Longford Park, and I'm doing work experience there for two to three hours.

I said, which side of Longford Park am I dropping you off and what are you doing in Longford Park? She went, right, I'll give you the directions and

you just follow my directions. Went down Kings Road, right to the end of Kings Road and I went, Hullard Park is down there where you take me. She went, just carry on I'll tell you, I've got the map where I need to go. Said, okay. So end of Kings Road, middle near to the end, we turned left and then we did another turn left. And it was a bumpy ride. And I said, are you taking me right to the right place? Yeah, keep going. Just keep going. Don't worry about it. I'm telling you where the direction is.

I still remember the first day when I first took and I went, what are you actually doing in Longford Park for work experience? My daughter wanted to be a veterinary doctor. So she loved working with animals and she went, I'm just gonna go and help him. And I went to the destination where she took me, and I was just amazed that I never knew Longford Park have got a beautiful place where there's animals. And she used to go there and just clean the kennels up and I don't remember, but there was like big animals, I don't know what they were called, but when I went to come pick her up, she was in there and went, oh my god. But it was beautiful.

So when I found out this place, I used to take my small children there to go and have a look. But it's an amazing, beautiful area. And I went, oh wow.

Eve: And the pet's corner, I think it's called, isn't it? Yeah. Longford Park. Yeah.

Safina: Little cafe there, little walking space. People were walking around pet's corner. It was beautiful.

Eve: And that provided the work experience for her as well.

Safina: Yes.

Eve: And the opportunities for her future work and So go on then what stopped her from making her own way there? From walking there or getting there another way?

Safina: Waking up late and just quickly waking Mum up and saying Mum, can you quickly drop me off I'm running late. Okay.

Eleanor: I was just going to say that I'm probably, before I started working in Trafford, Old Trafford was the area of Trafford that I knew the best, and I still feel it's got such a great sense of community. It feels really interesting. I love it when I've got meetings around here. I really like walking or cycling around these streets. The houses are lovely. It feels really safe. The community feels very welcoming and really diverse and especially during Covid, we worked such a lot with people in this area, with the Mosques, with Christine and the St. John's centre, with the community hub that was set up. It really felt like a community that is very caring.

Lots of very different people, lots of very different backgrounds, but it felt like an accepting community and one that was really proud and rightly so of what you have here and how it is. And it's a place weirdly, even though it's raining today, I always think of it as sunny here. I don't think it's always sunny, certainly so many times, including today.

Christine: It's a feeling of sunshine, different sort of sunny, I would say and I think some of the diversity of cultures and religions make that as well, because for me it's we build strong relationships when we meet in the park, when we meet in centres and places where we can come together, we make relationships with one another and we take them out onto the streets, and that's why it feels safe.

I mean I've always felt safe walking, although sometimes self-conscious sitting in a park on my own. I don't think I've ever felt unsafe in Old Trafford. In fact, after a do here one night I was walking home about one o'clock after doing all the dishes and this car pulled up and I thought, oh, here we go. And actually it was somebody that I knew from church and he recognised me and he said, where are you going? I said, well, I'm walking home.

He said jump in I'll give you a lift. And it's because I knew him and that those relationships were quite strong. And I think that's what we do. We build the relationships within the community. Yeah. And therefore we know each other on the street.

Eve: I can see everyone's nodding. There is something magic about Old Trafford that does feel like that those relationships, that sense of community feels very strong.

Christine: It is yeah.

Cath: I think there is an expectation that it's okay to speak to people, and that is what they would expect to happen. I think of it as sunny as well, actually that's interesting. Like if I think about the images that I have of the bits of Old Trafford that I know well, they're always sunny, which is interesting. And it probably is to do with the people and, although I'm physically limited, I will walk home, say from here.

I mean it is a familiar route, but I don't feel concerned on the very rare occasions that I'm out after teatime, like I'd feel very safe walking up and down Henrietta Street. And it's a mixture of actually knowing who's behind some of the doors. And also just because my experience of walking up and down that street is if I walk past someone, my expectation is that you would acknowledge each other rather than ignore each other.

Safina: My daughter sometimes she walks from, she teaches on Stamford Street, and I'm on the other side near Seymour Park, a street where I live, and my daughter sometimes walks from work, and it's about half, seven, eight o'clock, and it's quite dark at that time. And I always say to her, I said, walk down Ayres Road, because there's a good community, there's shops there, there's people there.

And feel when she's walking down Ayres Road. I feel I know that at the back of my mind that she's safe. It is a lovely community, walking down and out, and I feel that she can just walk down if she doesn't get a lift from me or her dad. She could just walk down a road and straight down to home.

Christine: Well, I don't feel that safe. It's like maybe it's age, I'm not sure. When I used to work, I used to go for a walk right up to Stretford Arndale centre. I'd come home, cook, and then take a walk to Stretford Arndale centre and come back. And that was about half, six to seven, quarter past seven. That's fine.

Now I can't walk at that time. I get scared even going to, I want to go to Lowry to see a show and my husband's not here so he would normally pick me up on his bike at Trafford Bar and we'd walk back together. He's not here, so I can't go to the show. But I can't walk on my own. That's the first thing I thought, how am I gonna get back?

Eleanor: And there's no houses actually for quite a bit of it. I walked one time and it was late and I was thinking, this is really stupid.. When I was walking from Chester Road to Trafford Bar and I was just doing that walk and just thinking. Really, I'm too old to be being quite so stupid.

And you start victim blaming. You start thinking about, am I putting myself, and you shouldn't be thinking that because we are entitled to walk. You should be able to walk wherever you want, whenever you want. But you do start thinking, oh, this doesn't feel comfortable. And I think it was too much traffic, too few houses, no other people.

Christine: It is very empty.

Eleanor: You feel funny then.

Christine: Yeah. And that ties in with what subpoena said about her daughter walking down Ayres Road and the shops open, et cetera.

Outro

Eve: What a great conversation. I could sit and listen to these women all day. A big thanks to the ladies and the St. John Centre for making us feel so welcome. Thanks for listening to this Public Health episode of the Right to the Street's edition of the GM Moving Podcast. As ever, I've loved hearing people's personal stories.

And hearing about their relationship with their streets, parks, and their physical environment, and the ways this relationship can change over time. We've heard the difference it makes for people's lives, their sense of control and freedom, and their physical and mental wellbeing when they feel safe in their local area, when they feel a sense of community and when they get to enjoy local nature.

As this episode is just the start of the conversation, we'd love to hear more from you. When you think about where you live, what things create that sense of community, what makes you feel welcome and that you belong, and what invites you to be active and what takes away from that feeling. Whatever it is, let us know and we'll share your thoughts on future episodes of this podcast.

We've got a few ways you can get in touch. You can tell us on social media from Facebook and Twitter. Simply search GM Moving or Greater Sport, or you can leave a voicemail. You can find the link in the episode, show notes, and on our GM Moving website. Search Right to the Streets Podcast.

A big thanks to everyone who has contributed to this episode. We'll be releasing more episodes throughout the next few months, so keep an eye on our social media pages for when the next one will be released, or simply hit follow or subscribe on whatever podcast player you're listening to right now. This means the latest episode will go straight into your library as soon as it's released. This Right to the Streets series. The GM Moving Podcast is one element of the Right to the Streets project led by GreaterSport, Trafford Council, Open Data Manchester and other GM Moving partners. Thanks to funding from the Home Office for Safer Streets.

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