SafeSport26

Conference Attendee Insights Report

SafeSport26 – Advancing athlete safety through collaboration, research and global leadership

Safe Sport International, August 2026

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University of Cape Town, South Africa

Advancing athlete safety through collaboration, research and global leadership.

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Introduction

Following SafeSport26, attendees were invited to reflect on the conference through a short feedback form. The purpose of this report is to capture the collective knowledge and experiences shared by participants, highlight recurring themes across responses, and identify how the conference is informing future safeguarding work across different settings and organisations.

Attendees were asked to share:
- 3 key points – the most important ideas, messages or takeaways from the conference
- 2 key insights – new learning, reflections or perspectives that will influence their work moving forward
- 1 memorable quote – a quote, statement or message from the conference that stayed with them
- Additional reflections, resources, actions or ideas inspired by their participation

This report does not attempt to summarise every session individually. Instead, it brings attendee feedback together into a set of cross-conference themes that reflect the ideas, priorities and practical actions most consistently identified across the responses.

Seven Key Themes Emerging from Attendee Feedback

1. Safe sport is everyone's responsibility
2. From policy to practice: safeguarding must be lived, not just written
3. Athlete voice, participation and lived experience matter
4. Prevention, reporting pathways and trust are central to safer sport
5. Recovery, trauma-informed practice and support for safeguarding leads matter
6. Leadership, collaboration and culture change are essential
7. Learning for action: what attendees will take back to their organisations

1. Safe Sport Is Everyone's Responsibility

A strong message running through attendee feedback was that safeguarding cannot be left to one person, one department or one policy. Respondents repeatedly described safe sport as a shared responsibility that must be embedded across the full sporting ecosystem, from leadership and safeguarding officers through to coaches, administrators, parents, volunteers and participants themselves.

Key messages emerging from attendee feedback
- Safeguarding is a shared responsibility that should be integrated into all aspects of sport.

• Safe sporting environments depend on collective ownership, not only specialist roles.
• Participants want systems that function in practice rather than safeguarding remaining a paper exercise.

Selected attendee voices

"Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility." — Palesa Pitso, Rugby Lesotho

"Safe guarding involves everyone… we should make the systems function rather than make safeguarding just a policy." — Tawanda Mutero, National Athletics Association of Zimbabwe

"The conference reinforced that creating safe sporting environments cannot be left solely to safeguarding officers or leadership." — Libo Batyi, Oasis 'Reach for your dreams'

2. From Policy to Practice: Safeguarding Must Be Lived, Not Just Written

Attendees consistently emphasised that safeguarding cannot stop at policy development. Across the feedback there was a clear focus on implementation: reporting structures, governance, accountability, training, risk assessment and the practical day-to-day work needed to turn written commitments into meaningful protection.

Key messages emerging from attendee feedback
• Policies and procedures are important, but they are not enough on their own.
• Clear, independent and trusted reporting structures are essential to better safeguarding.
• Regular training, awareness and operational systems are needed if safeguarding is to work in practice.

Selected attendee voices

"Safeguarding cannot exist only on paper." — Palesa Pitso, Rugby Lesotho

"Establishing clear and independent reporting structures is key to better safeguarding." — attendee feedback

"That safeguarding is not a compliance matter, but a duty of care matter." — Motlatsi Nkhahle, Kick4Life

3. Athlete Voice, Participation and 'Nothing About Us Without Us'

Another prominent theme was the importance of listening to athletes and young people directly, and of involving them in the design of safeguarding systems, policies and responses. Feedback highlighted the value of lived experience, participation and athlete voice in shaping safer, more relevant and more trusted approaches to safeguarding.

Key messages emerging from attendee feedback
• Athletes should be active partners in shaping safe sport systems and responses.
• Listening to lived experience improves safeguarding policy, culture and practice.

• Young people and participants need meaningful opportunities to be heard, not simply consulted after decisions are made.

Selected attendee voices

"There should be nothing about us without us." — quoted by an attendee from Anne Tiivas

"Athletes voice should be listened to." — attendee feedback

"Listening to athletes' voices and not assuming you know is key." — Florence Gitau, Kenyatta University

4. Prevention, Early Action and Clear Reporting Pathways

Attendee feedback also pointed strongly to prevention: building cultures and systems that identify concerns early, support disclosure and create trusted routes for raising issues. Participants reflected on the importance of awareness, education, early intervention and making sure that people know where to go, who to speak to and what support is available when harm occurs.

Key messages emerging from attendee feedback

• Safer sport depends on prevention, not only response after incidents occur.
• Reporting pathways need to be visible, accessible and trusted by participants.
• Education and awareness are central to helping people recognise harm and act early.

Selected attendee voices

"The message from the conference stayed with me is that safeguarding starts with me." — Bongani Mathiso, Oasis

"The knowledge that safeguarding is everybody's responsibility." — attendee feedback

"Many sessions emphasized the importance of proactive education, clear policies, early intervention, and ongoing culture-building rather than responding only after incidents occur." — Libo Batyi

5. Supporting Survivors, Recovery and Trauma-Informed Practice

Several attendees highlighted sessions that focused on difficult conversations, survivor support, recovery and trauma-informed practice. These reflections emphasised that safeguarding is not only about responding to risk, but about how people are supported through disclosure, case management, healing and recovery. Attendees also reflected on the emotional demands placed on safeguarding leads and the need to care for those carrying this work.

Key messages emerging from attendee feedback

- Recovery is not linear and support must be trauma-informed, person-centred and ethically grounded.
- Safeguarding work often requires difficult conversations held with empathy, care and emotional safety.
- Safeguarding leads and practitioners also need support, training and networks of care.

Selected attendee voices

"People can recover when they choose, in the way they choose and to the extent they choose." — quoted by attendee from Neal Anderson

"It is not a failure to defer to someone else. Good safeguarding requires collaborative support." — quoted by attendee from Emma Thomas

"There were sessions dedicated to ensuring the health and welfare of Safeguarding Leads." — Motlatsi Nkhahle, Kick4Life

6. Leadership, Culture and Accountability

Leadership commitment and organisational culture emerged as another core theme. Attendees reflected that safer sport requires more than technical compliance; it depends on visible leadership, sustained commitment, accountability and the willingness to address cultural norms that allow harm, silence or inaction to persist.

Key messages emerging from attendee feedback

- Leadership commitment is essential to sustaining safe sport culture.
- Safeguarding is undermined when culture, behaviour and accountability do not align with policy commitments.
- Long-term change depends on leadership follow-through, operational capacity and shared standards.

Selected attendee voices

"The sport that only matters is safe sport." — attendee feedback

"That safeguarding is not a compliance matter, but a duty of care matter." — Motlatsi Nkhahle, Kick4Life

"Ensuring leadership commitment and accountability." — attendee feedback

7. Learning for Action: What Attendees Will Take Back to Their Organisations

The feedback did not only identify ideas and messages from the conference; it also showed how attendees intend to use the learning in their own contexts. Across the responses, participants described concrete next steps ranging from reviewing reporting pathways and training approaches to strengthening athlete engagement, building research partnerships and sharing knowledge with colleagues.

Key messages emerging from attendee feedback

- Review safeguarding frameworks and reporting pathways through a prevention-focused lens.
- Strengthen safeguarding awareness, training and participant education.
- Create stronger opportunities for athlete feedback, collaboration and ongoing learning.
- Share conference learning across organisations, teams and communities to extend the impact of SafeSport26.

Selected attendee voices

"Continue promoting open conversations about safety, wellbeing, and inclusion." — Libo Batyi

"I am committed to continuing the efforts within the Mali Rugby Federation to establish effective safeguarding policies..." — Ousmane Mayentao, Mali Rugby Federation

"I was inspired to think of collaborations in research." — Florence Gitau, Kenyatta University

What Attendees Are Taking Forward

The attendee feedback reveals that SafeSport26 was experienced not only as a space for learning, but as a catalyst for reflection, collaboration and action. Taken together, the attendee responses suggest that SafeSport26 has reinforced both strategic and practical priorities for future work.

Common actions identified in attendee feedback

- Review safeguarding policies, reporting pathways and implementation systems
- Run safeguarding awareness and training sessions for staff, coaches and participants
- Strengthen athlete voice, feedback loops and participant-centred practice
- Improve support for safeguarding leads and embed trauma-informed approaches
- Build stronger collaboration, knowledge sharing and research partnerships
- Share conference learning with colleagues and stakeholders to extend the impact of SafeSport26

Tawanda Mutero

Safeguarding Officer
National Athletics Association of Zimbabwe

What were the three most important ideas, messages or takeaways from the conference?

- Safe guarding involves everyone.
- Athletes' voice should be listened to.
- We should make the systems function rather than make safeguarding just a policy.

What new insights, perspectives or learning will influence your work moving forward?

Establishing clear and independent reporting structures is key to better safeguarding.

What quote, statement or message from the conference stayed with you?

"The sport that only matters is safe sport."

You are also welcome to share any additional reflections, resources, actions or ideas inspired by your participation.

Safeguarding is not just about compliance and having written paperwork, it's about athletes protection and collective engagement for athletes wellbeing.

If you are happy for us to quote or share your response in Safe Sport communications, reports, publications, or promotional materials, please provide the details you would like us to use for attribution

Tawanda Mutero
Safeguarding Officer
National Athletics Association of Zimbabwe

Libo Batyi

Sports Coordinator
Oasis "Reach for your dreams"

What were the three most important ideas, messages or takeaways from the conference?

The conference reinforced that creating safe sporting environments cannot be left solely to safeguarding officers or leadership. Athletes, coaches, administrators, officials, parents, and volunteers all have a role to play in fostering cultures of respect, accountability, and wellbeing.

What new insights, perspectives or learning will influence your work moving forward?

Many sessions emphasized the importance of proactive education, clear policies, early intervention, and ongoing culture-building rather than responding only after incidents occur. Prevention requires continuous commitment and investment.

What quote, statement or message from the conference stayed with you?

A recurring message throughout the conference was that athletes should be active partners in shaping safe sport systems. Listening to lived experiences and including athletes in decision-making processes strengthens both policy and practice.

You are also welcome to share any additional reflections, resources, actions or ideas inspired by your participation.

The conference demonstrated the value of collaboration across sectors, sports, and countries. Hearing diverse perspectives highlighted that many organizations face similar challenges and can benefit from sharing resources, research, and best practices.

As a result of the conference, I am inspired to:

- Continue promoting open conversations about safety, wellbeing, and inclusion.
- Review current practices through a prevention-focused lens.
- Explore opportunities for athlete engagement and feedback.
- Strengthen awareness of trauma-informed and participant-centred approaches.
- Share key learnings with colleagues and stakeholders to extend the impact of the conference beyond the event itself.

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Libo Batyi
Sports Coordinator
Oasis “Reach for your dreams”

Ousmane Mayentao

Deputy Chair of the Medical Commission and Safeguarding Officer
Mali Rugby Federation

What were the three most important ideas, messages or takeaways from the conference?

1. Safeguarding is a shared responsibility that involves all stakeholders in sport and should be integrated into every aspect of sporting activities.
2. Victims and survivors must be placed at the center of prevention and response mechanisms, with approaches based on respect, listening, and support.
3. Establishing effective safeguarding policies, procedures, and reporting mechanisms is essential to creating a safe and inclusive sporting environment.

What new insights, perspectives or learning will influence your work moving forward?

This conference strengthened my understanding of the importance of embedding safeguarding into all sporting activities. It also exposed me to practical tools and approaches used across different sports and countries. In the future, I intend to contribute to strengthening the safeguarding framework of the Mali Rugby Federation, raise awareness among rugby stakeholders, and promote a safe environment for children, women, persons with disabilities, and all vulnerable individuals.

What quote, statement or message from the conference stayed with you?

"Safer Sport is Possible."
This message particularly resonated with me because it highlights that creating safe sporting environments is achievable when organizations and individuals work together and make safeguarding a priority.

You are also welcome to share any additional reflections, resources, actions or ideas inspired by your participation.

Participating in Safe Sport 2026 reinforced my belief that safeguarding should be a strategic priority for all sports organizations. I am committed to continuing the efforts within the Mali Rugby Federation to establish effective safeguarding policies, strengthen the capacity of coaches and leaders, and promote a culture of prevention, respect, and inclusion. I also established valuable connections with international experts who can support the development of safeguarding systems in Mali.

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Name: Ousmane Mayentao
Position: Deputy Chair of the Medical Commission and Safeguarding Officer
Organization: Mali Rugby Federation

Motlatsi Nkhahle

Country Director
Kick4Life

What were the three most important ideas, messages or takeaways from the conference?

- That safeguarding is not a compliance matter, but a duty of care matter.

- That safe sport is the only sport that matters.
- That enforcement of safeguarding policies goes a long way towards creating safe spaces for all involved in sport / sport for development work.

What new insights, perspectives or learning will influence your work moving forward?

There were sessions that were dedicated to ensuring the health and welfare of Safeguarding Leads. We have already started workshops focused on training our Safeguarding Leads on how to take better care of themselves as they carry out these emotional matters.

What quote, statement or message from the conference stayed with you?

"That safeguarding is not a compliance matter, but a duty of care matter."

You are also welcome to share any additional reflections, resources, actions or ideas inspired by your participation.

I very much enjoyed learning how teaching participants to recognise the signs of abuse can assist safeguarding leads with attending to concerns faster.

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Motlatsi Nkhahle
Country Director
Kick4Life

Anne Wambugu

Safeguarding Lead
Moving The Goalposts, Kenya

What were the three most important ideas, messages or takeaways from the conference?

1. A recurring message was the importance of athlete voice, youth participation and lived experience. The phrase "nothing about us without us" captured this well. Safe sport must not only be done for participants, but with them.
2. Safety is not only about preventing physical harm or having rules in place. Participants must also feel heard, respected, believed and supported. Emotional safety is central to whether people disclose, seek help or remain in sport.
3. No single person or organisation can build safe sport alone. Safe sport requires coaches, safeguarding leads, athletes, families, communities, researchers, funders, governments and sport bodies to work together with shared responsibility.

What new insights, perspectives or learning will influence your work moving forward?

An important learning was around difficult conversations and recovery. Safeguarding work often requires conversations where emotions, risk, power and responsibility intersect. The conference reminded me that these conversations must be held with emotional safety, choice, pacing, empathy and cultural humility. Recovery after harm is also not linear; people recover when they are ready, in the way they choose and to the extent they choose.

Another key learning I'm taking forward is that trust is part of safeguarding infrastructure. A reporting pathway may exist, but if athletes or young people do not trust the people or systems around them, they may not use it. In my work, this reinforces the need to keep strengthening reporting pathways.

What quote, statement or message from the conference stayed with you?

- "People recover when they choose, in the way they choose and to the extent they choose." — Neal Anderson
- "It is not a failure to defer to someone else. Good safeguarding requires collaborative support." — Emma Thomas
- "There should be nothing about us without us." — Anne Tiivas
- "Nobody is just one thing. An abuser can be an excellent coach, well loved by parents, brilliant, smart ...but they can also be a pedophile." — Glenn Joselowitz
- "Recognising harm is nuanced. Not everybody presents in a manner that's simple to recognise." — Marcella
- "If I had to choose a superpower for all people in safe sport, it would be to listen." — Anne Tiivas
- "Do your best to be on time for the beginnings and the endings." — Neal Anderson

You are also welcome to share any additional reflections, resources, actions or ideas inspired by your participation.

For my work at Moving The Goalposts Kenya, the conference reinforced the importance of strengthening safe sport as part of everyday programme practice. Key actions inspired by the conference include reviewing and simplifying field-level reporting pathways, strengthening support for Girl Safeguarders, integrating learning on difficult conversations and recovery into staff training, and creating stronger networks of care for safeguarding staff.

If you are happy for us to quote or share your response in Safe Sport communications, reports, publications, or promotional materials, please provide the details you would like us to use for attribution

Name: Anne Wambugu
Job Title: Safeguarding Lead
Organisation: Moving The Goalposts, Kenya

Palesa Pitso

Rugby Coach Development
Rugby Lesotho

What were the three most important ideas, messages or takeaways from the conference?

- Ensuring leadership commitment and accountability
- Strengthening risk assessment processes for events and activities
- Safeguarding cannot exist only on paper

What new insights, perspectives or learning will influence your work moving forward?

Conduct regular safeguarding awareness and training session.

What quote, statement or message from the conference stayed with you?

"Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility."

You are also welcome to share any additional reflections, resources, actions or ideas inspired by your participation.

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Palesa Pitso
Rugby Coach Development
Rugby Lesotho

Florence Gitau

PhD, Lecturer
Kenyatta University

What were the three most important ideas, messages or takeaways from the conference?

1. That safe sport is the only sport that matters.
2. Listening to athletes' voices and not assuming you know is key.
3. The importance of supporting survivors of abuse.

What new insights, perspectives or learning will influence your work moving forward?

The knowledge that safeguarding is everybody's responsibility.

What quote, statement or message from the conference stayed with you?

"Until the lion learns to write, every story will glorify the hunter."

You are also welcome to share any additional reflections, resources, actions or ideas inspired by your participation.

I was inspired to think of collaborations in research. The fundamental driver for encouraging research collaborations is the capacity for knowledge and resource transfer. In an interconnected academic ecosystem, institutions with established research capacities can act as catalysts for development. By partnering with developing or resource-constrained institutions, stronger research entities can "lift" their counterparts through mentorship and knowledge transfer, resource optimization and capacity building.

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Florence Gitau, PhD
Lecturer
Kenyatta University

Bongani Mathiso

Sport Coordinator
Oasis

What were the three most important ideas, messages or takeaways from the conference?

- Whistle blowers needs to be protected.
- We need to action safeguarding.

What new insights, perspectives or learning will influence your work moving forward?

It has given me a bigger perspective about safeguarding.

What quote, statement or message from the conference stayed with you?

"Safeguarding starts with me."

You are also welcome to share any additional reflections, resources, actions or ideas inspired by your participation.

It was well informative.

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Bongani Mathiso
Sport Coordinator
Oasis