

# WALES WITHOUT VIOLENCE

*“Investing in allies and ambassadors”*

## Engaging men and boys in violence prevention:

### A Review of Programmes in Wales

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Violence Prevention Unit



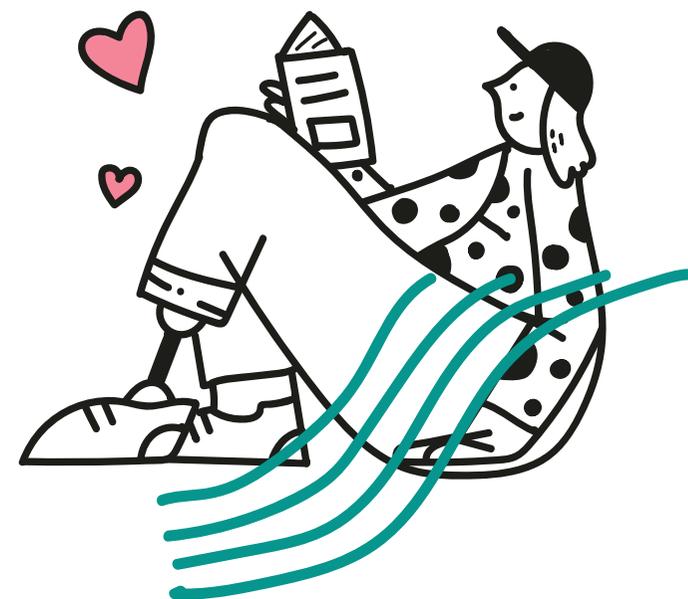
“As allies and ambassadors,  
men and boys can challenge  
harmful social norms that  
uphold inequality.”

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# Executive Summary

**In 2023, the Wales Violence Prevention Unit (VPU) launched ‘Wales Without Violence: A Shared Framework for Preventing Violence among Children and Young People’ (Snowdon et al., 2023).**

This Framework sets out an ambitious vision of a Wales in which children and young people feel safe to be themselves and to live their lives free from violence and the threat of violence. The VPU is committed to developing an evidence-informed approach to violence prevention in which we draw upon the scientific evidence of ‘what works’ to prevent violence, as well as drawing upon the expertise and experience of practitioners and experts in Wales, including children and young people themselves.

This report is part of that vision. It maps projects and programmes in Wales which seek to engage men and boys in violence prevention, and shares learning from the academic evidence base and good practice from practitioners. Men and boys have a vital role in ending violence. As allies and ambassadors, men and boys can challenge harmful social norms that uphold inequality and be part of individual and community-level change to prevent violence.

This report provides a snapshot of Welsh interventions that engage men and boys in violence prevention and offers an evidence-informed discussion on what works for optimum engagement with men and boys. Thirty-nine programmes completed the mapping survey during summer 2023, with representatives from interventions across Wales. The snapshot of Welsh interventions showed that a third of programmes are solely for men and boys, most are delivered for those aged 18 and under, and gender-based violence and physical aggression are the most common types of violence addressed.

This report demonstrates that men and boys can be engaged in violence prevention activities and play an active role in preventing violence. There is a range of emerging practice across Wales, however, there is still very little evidence of what works, and this report seeks to summarise some early learning from a snapshot of programmes in Wales.

**Our rationale to engage men and boys in violence prevention emphasises four elements:**

1. Any work to prevent violence must engage men and boys, because it is frequently (but not exclusively) men who enact violence.
2. Harmful constructions of masculinity and related social norms and attitudes can encourage violent behaviour.
3. Men and boys have a positive and constructive role to play in preventing violence.
4. Through a trauma-informed approach, we can recognise that many boys and men have lived-experience of harmful gender norms, and even violence. Acknowledging this enables a compassionate and constructive conversation about the role of men and boys as change-makers, allies and ambassadors.



## Key Considerations

The report highlights key considerations for practitioners, researchers, policy makers and commissioners when designing and delivering violence prevention programmes with men and boys.



### For practitioners during project setup:



#### 1. Prevention strategies

When developing projects, consider the full range of project strategies from 1:1 working through to family, community, and societal level change projects. Consider whether the project will focus on primary prevention (preventing violence before it occurs), secondary prevention (intervening early once violence has happened), or tertiary prevention (preventing reoffending and supporting longer term needs from experiencing violence) and what evidence-based methods could be used to do this.

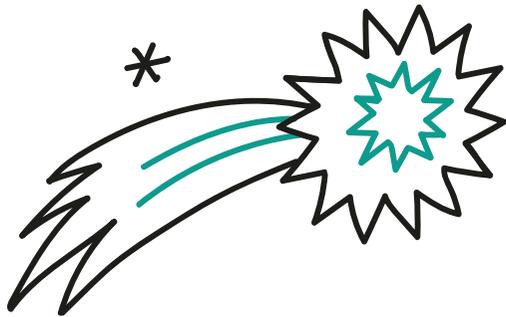
#### 2. Coproduction and cultural relevance

Work with men and boys from the target audience to codesign projects and engage with the communities in which they live, play, learn, and work to ensure the project is culturally relevant.

#### 3. Evaluation

Evaluate the delivery and impact of the intervention to contribute to the evidence base for effective violence prevention programmes.





#### 5. Setting

Hold sessions in accessible, safe, and comfortable settings that are appealing and relevant to the group.



#### 7. Gender transformative approach

Use a gender transformative approach to challenge harmful gender and social norms which create power and privilege and perpetuate inequalities.



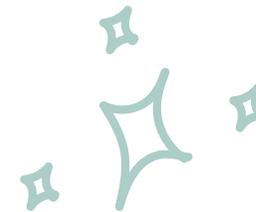
#### 4. Project duration

Run programmes for as long as possible for optimum engagement, relationship building, and impact.



#### 6. Timing

Deliver sessions at the right time in an individual's life when they are most likely to engage positively and proactively, at reachable moments (for example, entering fatherhood or adolescence).



## For practitioners during project delivery:



### 8. Trauma-informed

Use a compassionate, trauma-informed approach in which facilitators centre the needs of project participants and are cognisant of the sensitivities of the subject-matter and the individual's circumstances, experiences, and strengths.



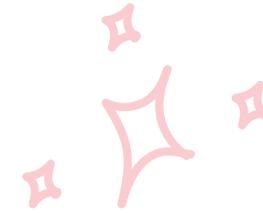
### 9. Teaching style

Use a range of activities and methods to engage the target audience. Allow time for self-reflection, understanding, and accountability in a creative environment.



### 10. Language use

Use positive language like 'ally' and 'role model' instead of blaming language, like 'perpetrator'.



### 11. Empowerment

Focus on the strengths of each person engaged and empower them to use their skills as an ally or ambassador within their wider community.



### 12. Staffing

Employ staff who are empathetic, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable, who can be a positive role model.



### 13. Intersecting needs

Recognise that individuals will have different needs and lived experiences which may impact their motivation and ability to engage critically and reflectively with a gender transformative approach. Seek to establish relationships and understand individual needs to optimise participant's ability to engage in the project.



## For Researchers



### 1. Evaluation

Collaborate with practitioners to evaluate the services and interventions being delivered to understand, for example, optimum programme duration, design, mechanisms for change, and the impact of that programme.



### 2. Intersectionality

Explore and understand the experiences of engaging with specific groups of men and boys, particularly those with risk factors for engaging with and/or experiencing violence



### 3. Behavioural insights

Explore what works to engage different groups of men and boys to effectively segment and target specific groups with violence prevention efforts.



### 4. Collaborate

Work with men and boys to gain their experiences and perspectives on violence prevention programming.

## For policy makers and commissioners



### 1. Language

It is possible to engage men and boys in violence prevention efforts and to acknowledge that violence is often enacted by men and perpetuated by harmful expressions of masculinity. It should be ensured that positive, and empowering language is used, and gender transformative approaches are drawn upon to create positive change.



### 2. Prevention

Most programmes focused on intervening with men and boys who are at risk of engaging with violence. Engaging men and boys as allies in violence prevention and empowering them with the skills to prevent violence through universal, primary prevention programmes is an under-developed opportunity that commissioners and policymakers should seek to develop further.



### 3. Postcode lottery

Only one all-Wales intervention was identified through this mapping exercise. Commissioners should consider encouraging more all-Wales interventions to ensure violence prevention initiatives are consistent and accessible across the country.



### 5. Funding

Funding should be made available for longer periods of time and must stipulate that meaningful evaluation be conducted to allow suitable and impactful violence prevention programmes to be implemented and sustained.



### 4. Sharing learning

Commissioners should encourage collaboration and co-design in this emerging area of practice to share learning to generate consensus around effective practice.



# Acknowledgements

**This report was produced by the Wales Violence Prevention Unit.**

Thank you to all professionals who took part in the survey, who helped us to understand what violence prevention interventions are currently underway in Wales, and what works to engage men and boys in violence prevention in Wales.

Thanks are also due to the professionals who gave advice, shared resources, and reviewed this piece of work, including Anne-Marie Lawrence (PLAN International UK), Naomi Evans (South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner's Office), Dr Nate Eisenstadt (Bristol University, Kindling Interventions), and Mathew Taylor (Welsh Government). Thank you to those who proofread the report, translated, and designed it.





## About the Wales Violence Prevention Unit

Established in 2019 through the Home Office Violence Reduction Unit fund, the Wales Violence Prevention Unit is a partnership between the South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner’s Office, Public Health Wales, and South Wales Police. Each organisation contributes funding, expertise, and resources to achieve the joint ambition of preventing violence through a public health approach. To do this, the core team work closely with over 30 multisectoral organisations, including health, policing, education, local authorities, governments, and the third sector, supporting a whole-system approach to preventing violence in Wales.

Commissioning interventions, delivering research, analysing data, conducting evaluations, leading campaigns, and evolving policing practice are all key areas of the Wales Violence Prevention Unit’s work. So too is its commitment to bringing partners together to ensure a coordinated approach to violence prevention, and advocating for co-designed solutions to violence, both between organisations and with communities.

# Glossary

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## Gender

Gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours, and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl, or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time (*WHO, 2024a*).

## Violence

The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation (*WHO, 2024b*).

## Gender-based violence

Violence directed against a person because of that person's gender or violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately (*European Commission, 2024*).

## Gender transformative approach

A gender transformative approach is concerned with redressing gender inequalities, removing structural barriers, such as unequal roles and rights, and empowering disadvantaged populations (*Marcus et al., 2022*).

## Allyship

Allyship is an active and consistent effort to use your privilege to support and advocate for people with less privilege, by understanding the struggles that they face. Allies recognise the privileges that they have and want to support and take action to help that group (*NCL, 2024*).

## Primary prevention

Primary prevention means stopping violence from happening in the first place. It means transforming the social conditions, such as racial and gender inequity that excuse, justify, or even promote violence (*Snowdon et al., 2023*).

## Secondary prevention

Secondary prevention (early intervention) supports people at the earliest opportunity when they have experienced violence. This can prevent violence from recurring and can limit harm through a safe and compassionate response (*Snowdon et al., 2023*).

## Tertiary prevention

This involves response, treatment, and rehabilitation after violence has occurred, as well as prevention of long-term harm, including repeat victimisation or perpetration (*Snowdon et al., 2023*).

# Introduction

In 2023, the Wales Violence Prevention Unit (VPU) launched 'Wales Without Violence: A Shared Framework for the Preventing Violence among Children and Young People' (Snowdon et al., 2023). This Framework sets out an ambitious vision for Wales, in which children and young people feel safe to be themselves and to live their lives free from violence and the threat of violence. The VPU is committed to developing an evidence-informed approach to violence prevention, drawing upon the scientific evidence of 'what works' to prevent violence, as well as the expertise and experience of practitioners and experts in Wales, including children and young people themselves.

This report is part of that vision. It forms part of a toolkit for practitioners to support engagement with men and boys in violence prevention programmes. The toolkit uses an evidence-informed approach to bring together learning from the academic evidence base, as well as the views and expertise of practitioners working on violence prevention programmes in Wales. Overall, it provides a range of accessible information for understanding, supporting, and critically assessing the role that programmes designed to specifically support men and boys can play in preventing violence.

This mapping report provides a snapshot of the programmes delivered in Wales to engage men and boys in violence prevention, from a mapping survey that was undertaken in June 2023. The survey also provided an opportunity for practitioners to share learning and the barriers and challenges associated with the violence prevention programmes they reported on.



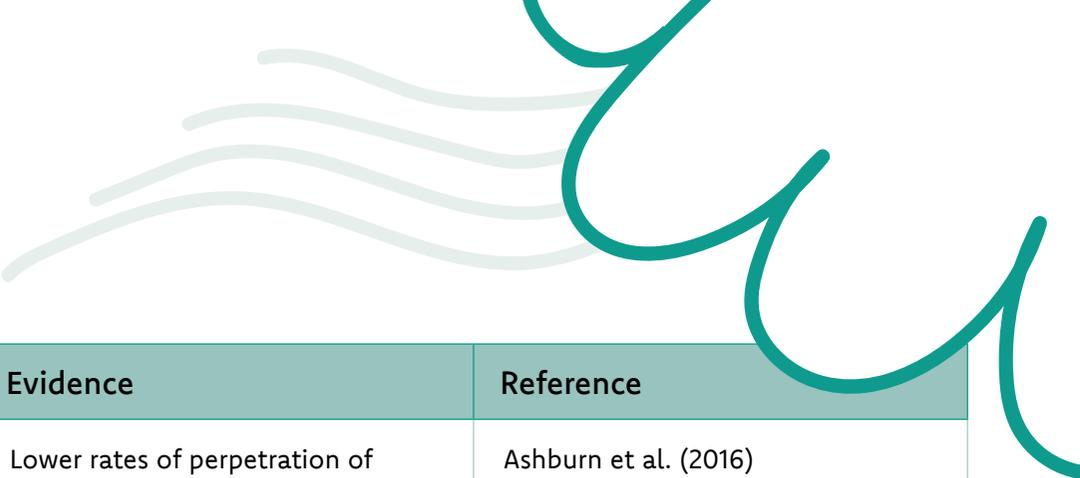
# Background

Violence is a complex public health issue, and its effects are corrosive and widespread, impacting children, young people, families, and the wider community. Whilst violence is prevalent, it does not affect people equally. To prevent violence, it must be understood as a systemic problem, that is rooted in inequality and often perpetuated by harmful gender and social norms (Snowdon et al., 2023).

Men and boys have a vital role in ending violence. In recent years, efforts to engage men and boys in violence prevention have grown rapidly across the globe: from policy and legislation, to campaigns, educational programmes, and advocacy work. However, this is a relatively new trend. Historically, initiatives to prevent violence, particularly gender-based violence, often presented violence as a “women’s issue” and focused on teaching women and girls to “protect” themselves, largely neglecting the role of men and boys as allies and change makers (Flood, 2019).

Whilst work to support and empower victims of violence is of critical importance, efforts to prevent violence before it occurs (primary prevention) must engage with people of all genders, including men and boys. There is a growing evidence base which supports efforts to prevent violence occurring. Interventions may focus on individual behaviour change, supporting skills for healthy relationships, consent, active bystandership, or engaging participants in critically challenging harmful gender norms (Addis and Snowdon, 2021). Table 1 provides some examples of international, evidence-based programmes to prevent violence.





Intervention name	Short description	Evidence	Reference
<b>REAL Fathers Initiative</b> (Uganda)	12 session father mentoring programme designed to reduce childhood exposure to violence at home.	Lower rates of perpetration of intimate partner violence and physical child punishment at 8 and 12 month follow up.	Ashburn et al. (2016)
<b>Stepping Stones</b> (South Africa)	Participatory learning approaches to build knowledge, risk awareness, communication and relationship skills relating to gender violence and HIV, among young men and women aged 15-26.	Two years after the intervention men's self-reported intimate partner violence was significantly lower compared to controls.	Arango et al. (2014)
<b>Safe Dates</b> (United States)	Ten-session school curriculum, a theatre production and a poster contest among adolescents.	Four years after the programme, participants reported less physical and sexual dating violence perpetration and victimisation, compared to controls.	Foshee et al. (2004)
<b>Coaching Boys into Men</b> (United States)	Programme lead by athletics coaches through brief weekly activities to address themes such as personal responsibility, respectful behaviour, and relationship abuse.	Found to significantly decrease overall domestic violence perpetration among male high school athletes.	Miller et al. (2012)





# A note on masculinities...

Programming to engage men and boys through a gender transformative approach encourages participants to critically reflect on the power dynamic between different genders. This approach recognises that masculinities are socially constructed gender norms which can change over time and are not equivalent to men. These gendered social norms can play an important role in upholding male privilege, dominance, and control, sometimes through the use, or threat of, violence (Connell, 2005).

It is therefore important to note that whilst masculinity is discussed within this report, it does not imply that all men and boys aspire to have dominant masculine traits, or that their understanding and relationship with the concept of masculinity is the same. Individuals, groups, and communities will all hold varying relationships with the concept of masculinity which is shaped by their lived-experience, community, culture, and identity. However, for those who uphold dominant masculine norms, violence can often be a way to maintain patriarchal power and gender inequality.

As such, violence prevention efforts may seek to engage men and boys in critically assessing and deconstructing these harmful social norms, and exploring how individuals, peer groups, and communities can play a positive role in challenging and reconstructing harmful social norms. Such programmes may also recognise, through a trauma-informed approach, that men and boys may have lived-experience of violence, which they may be replicating and/or reinforcing. Acknowledging this can enable a compassionate and constructive conversation about the role of men and boys as change-makers and allies.



## Our rationale to engage men and boys in violence prevention emphasises four elements:

1. Any work to prevent violence must engage men and boys, because it is frequently (but not exclusively) men who enact violence.
2. Harmful constructions of masculinity and related social norms and attitudes can encourage violent behaviour.
3. Men and boys have a positive and constructive role to play in preventing violence.
4. Through a trauma-informed approach, we can recognise that many boys and men have lived-experience of harmful gender norms, and even violence. Acknowledging this enables a compassionate and constructive conversation about the role of men and boys as change-makers, allies and ambassadors.

# Methods

This mapping study aimed to explore interventions in Wales that engage men and boys in violence prevention and contextualise these interventions in relation to the evidence base. It also aimed to get a sense of what practitioners delivering these interventions thought worked well, and not so well.

## The report aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What interventions are being undertaken in Wales that engage men and boys in violence prevention?
2. What are the characteristics of these violence prevention programmes?
3. What do these interventions find work well, and not so well, when engaging with men and boys?



This exploratory report was approved by Public Health Wales Research and Evaluation Department, and Public Health Wales Information Governance Department.

To collate the mapping information, the Civica online survey platform was used. The survey was bilingual, available in Welsh and English.

To be eligible to participate, interventions needed to be delivered in Wales, working with men and boys, and aiming to prevent violence. It was requested that a programme lead complete

the survey. In total, 36 individuals from 34 organisations responded to the survey, however, several respondents did not provide their name, contact details, or the name of the organisation/programme. Where the programme was identifiable, they have been listed in Appendix A.

The survey consisted of questions about the intervention (aims, eligibility criteria, and structure), what works well when engaging men and boys, and if the intervention had been evaluated. A copy of the survey questions can be found in Appendix B.

The survey was live for six weeks with responses collected between 22nd June 2023 to 31st July 2023. It was advertised through professional stakeholder mailing lists, awareness raising at professional meetings, snowballing through professionals, and on social media accounts.

A literature review was conducted alongside the mapping survey to understand what the academic evidence base suggests works to engage men and boys in violence prevention (Walker et al., 2024). This was used to inform the discussion on the mapping survey findings.

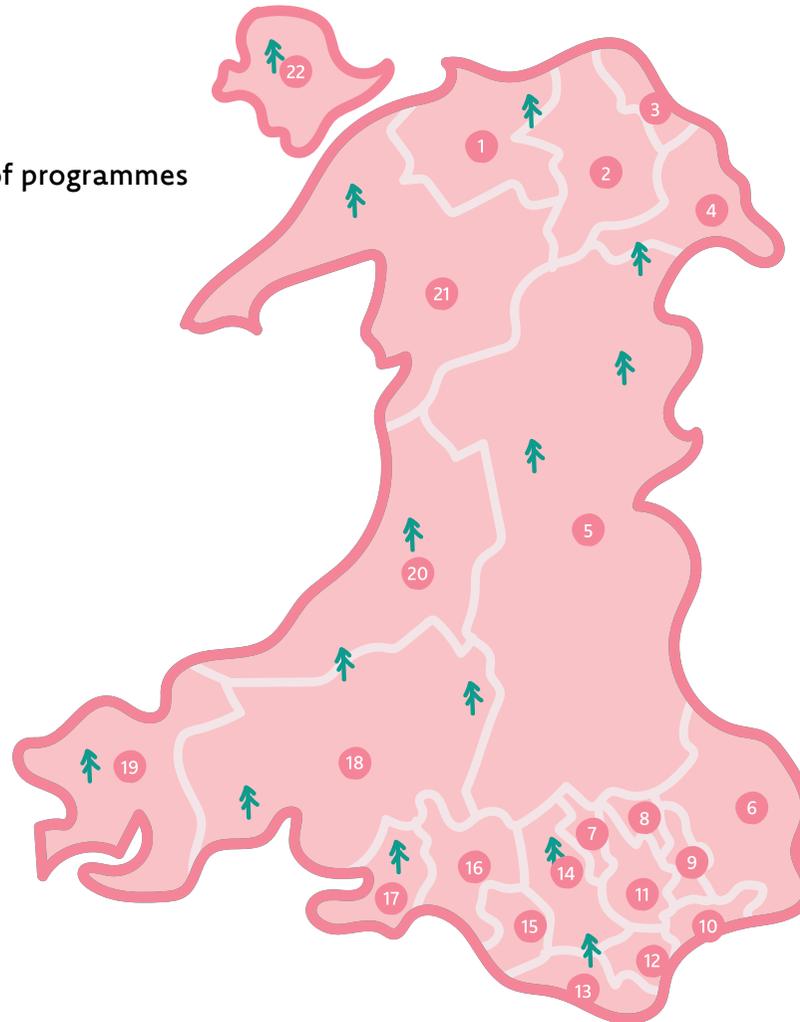
Details of 39 violence prevention programmes from across Wales were identified by the survey. A list of these programmes can be found in Appendix A. Web links to the programmes are provided where possible. Quotes from survey respondents have been used throughout this section.

The distribution of the areas covered by these programmes can be found in the map below (figure 1). Please note that other programmes may exist in Wales, but they did not take part in the survey.

## Results

Figure 1: Geographic distribution of programmes

- 1 Conwy - 2
- 2 Denbighshire - 2
- 3 Flintshire - 2
- 4 Wrexham - 2
- 5 Powys - 5
- 6 Monmouthshire - 1
- 7 Merthyr Tydfil - 4
- 8 Blaenau Gwent - 2
- 9 Torfaen - 1
- 10 Newport - 2



- 11 Caerphilly - 1
- 12 Cardiff- 16
- 13 Vale of Glamorgan - 4
- 14 Rhondda Cynon Taf - 3
- 15 Bridgend-6
- 16 Neath Port Talbot - 13
- 17 Swansea- 13
- 18 Carmarthenshire - 6
- 19 Pembrokeshire - 7
- 20 Ceredigion- 5
- 21 Gwynedd- 2
- 22 Isle of Anglesey - 1

# Characteristics of programmes in Wales

## Locality

Most programmes were based in South Wales, with the majority of programmes based in Cardiff (n=16), Swansea (n=13), and Neath Port Talbot (n=13). Only one programme was identified that was delivered across all of Wales (The 'Sound' Campaign).

## Gender

Thirty-three percent of the programmes (n=13) identified by the survey solely work with men and boys. The remaining programmes were accessible to people of all genders.

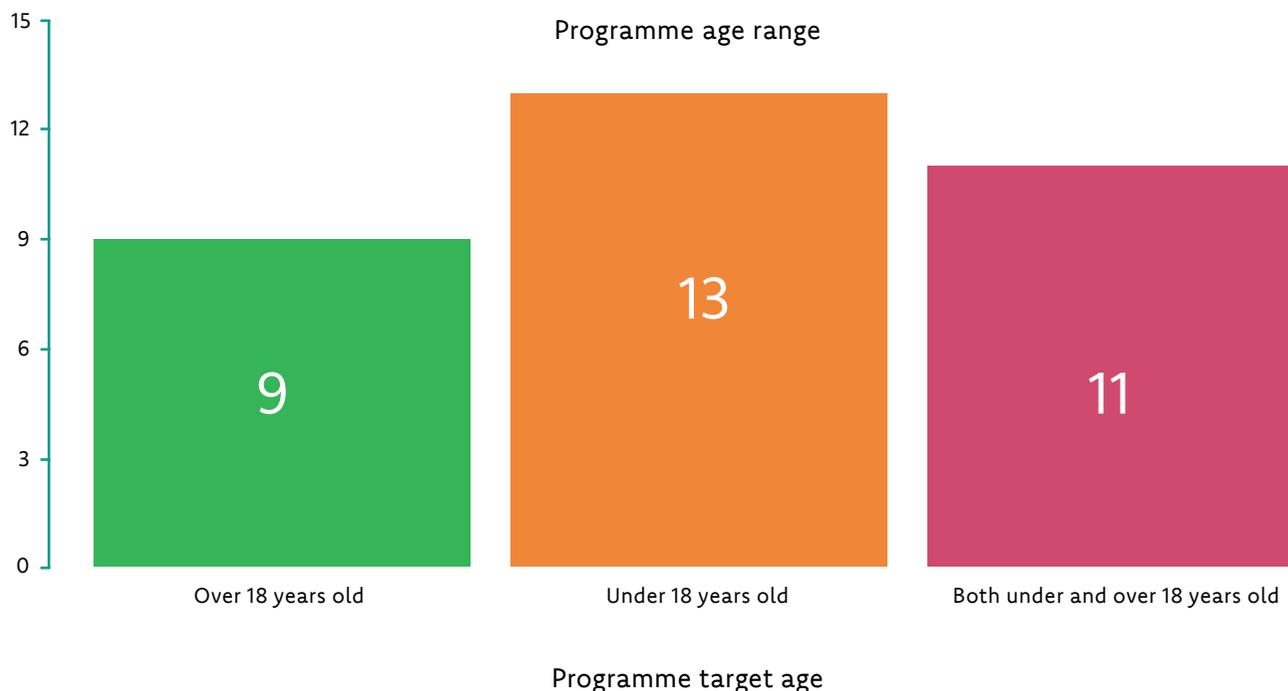
## Age

The programmes included participants from a wide age range, starting as young as three years old. Although many of the programmes were aimed at young people aged up to twenty-five, eleven programmes had much older age limits and would therefore be accessible to older members of the Welsh community. Though one of these programmes was not named by the participant in our survey, the others include: Reprovide, Domestic Abuse Intervention Hub, Inspiring Families, Choose2Change, CLEAR, Choices, The Family Programme, DRIVE, Parallel Lives, and the Equilibrium Healthy Relationship Programme.

However, it is important to note that many of these programmes with older age limits were family-focused, whilst some, such as Parallel Lives, only allowed for parents/carers involvement rather than the violent individual.

**Figure 2** indicates how the programmes were split between those only delivering services to those under 18 years of age, those only delivering services to those over 18 years of age, and those delivered to both categories.

**Figure 2:** Age of programme participants



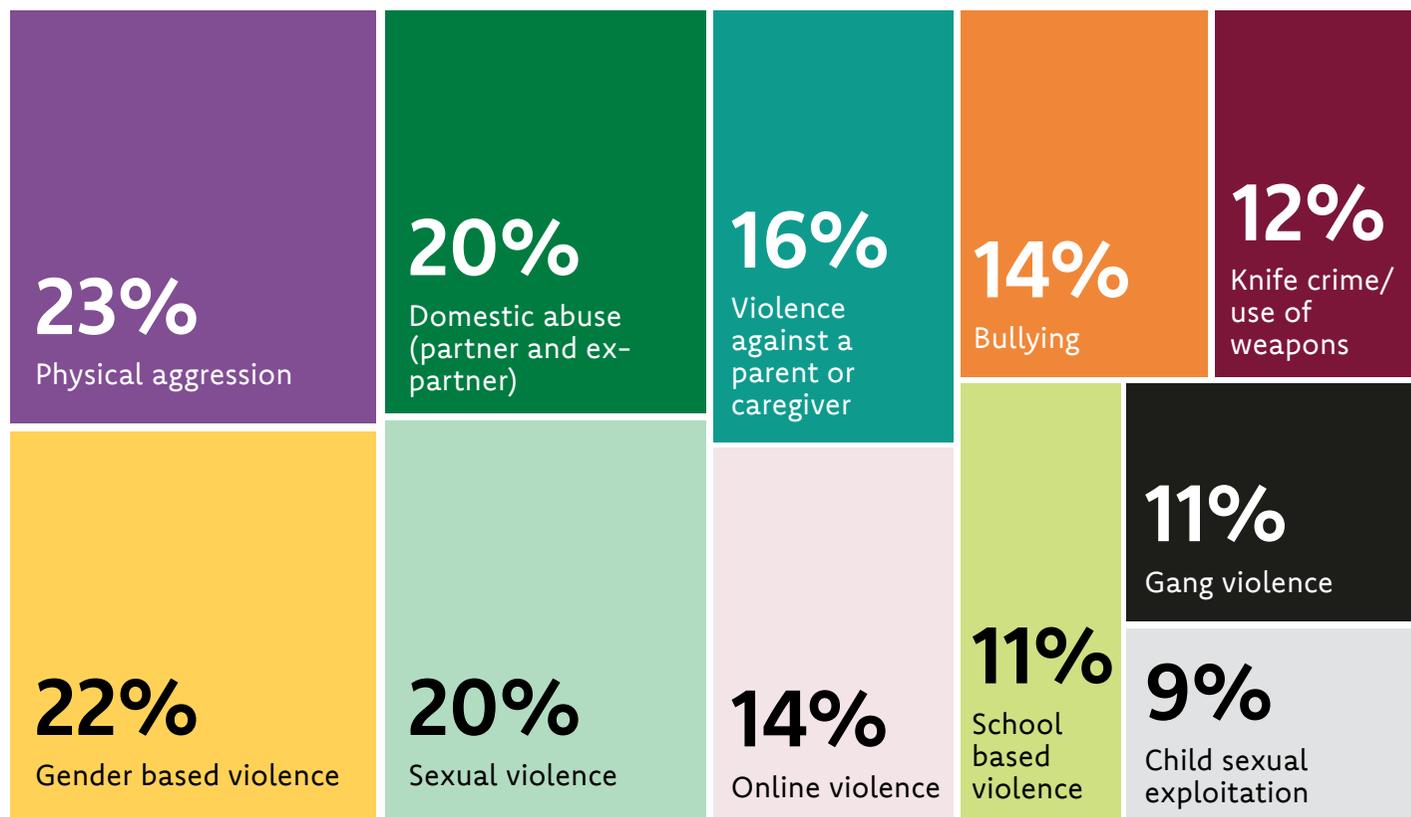
## Violence type

Across the thirty-nine programmes, the most common types of violence addressed were physical aggression (23%) and gender-based violence (22%), followed by domestic abuse (20%) and sexual violence (20%). The most uncommon types of violence addressed were child sexual exploitation (9%), gang violence (11%), and school-based violence (11%) (figure 3).

## Referral routes

Two of the interventions worked with school and college-aged pupils in an academic setting, as such, there was no referral route. The remaining programmes were self-referral (n=13), school referral (n=8), and referral by family members, parents, or guardians (n=12). Most referrals came from other professionals including social services, police, custody, courts, probation, children's services, GPs, mental health services, and emergency departments (n=30).

Figure 3: Types of violence addressed by programmes in Wales





## Programme aims

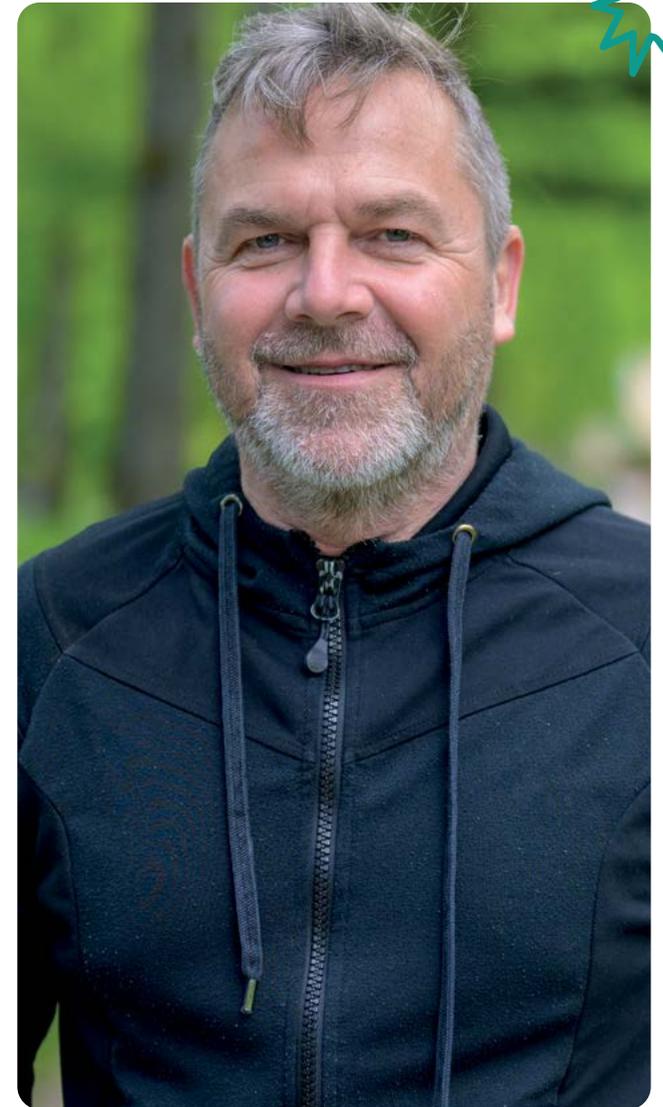
Throughout the programmes, there were generally consistent programme aims. They were:

- To understand the impact of violence
- To take responsibility for any prior violent behaviour
- To improve safeguarding
- To provide support to men and boys who feel negatively impacted by 'toxic' masculinity norms
- To support behaviour change
- To learn the skills to adopt positive responses to situations
- To explore alternative ways of dealing with conflict
- To reduce the risk of future violence
- To provide men and boys with tools to change violent/problematic behaviour
- To encourage men and boys to take accountability

## Evaluation

Twelve of the programmes reported that they had been evaluated. Five of the programmes (The Family Programme, Parallel Lives, Swansea Bay Violence Prevention Team, Cerridwen, New Pathways Sexual Behaviour Service) were currently being, or were in talks to have programmes evaluated by universities across South Wales. Nine of the programmes either provided no answer or had not been evaluated with no further details provided. We were able to find four programme evaluations from participating programmes. These are:

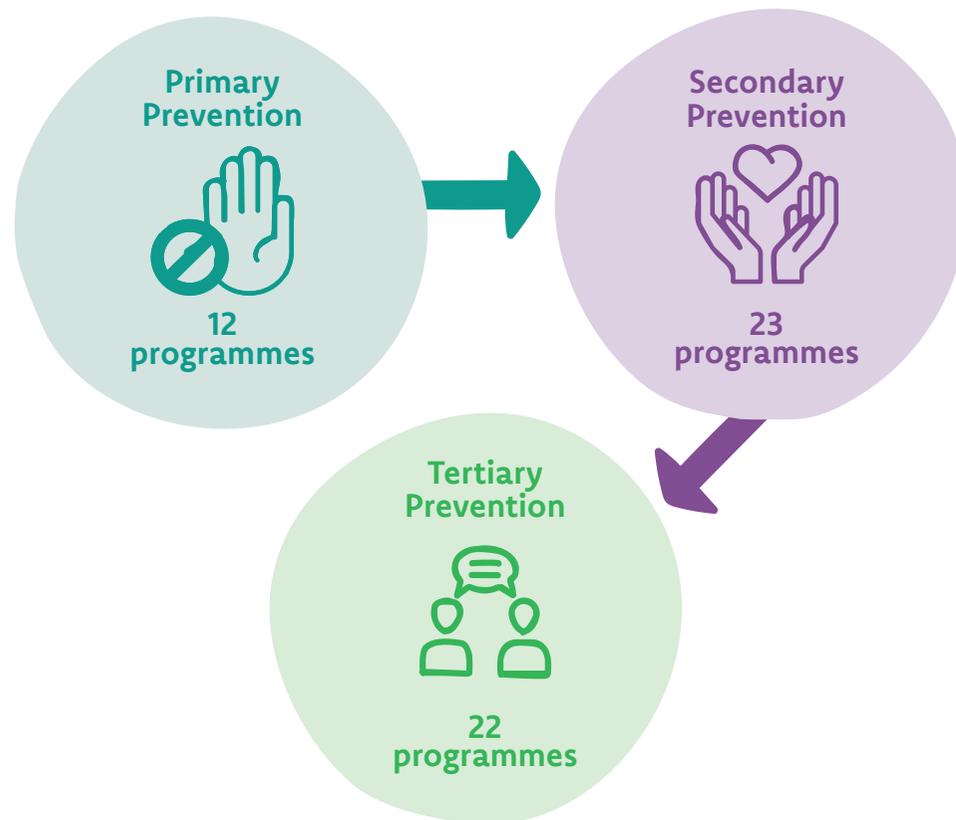
- Hester et al., (2019) *Evaluation of the Drive Project – A Three -year Pilot to Address High-risk, High-harm Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse*, Centre for Gender & Violence Research, University of Bristol
- Lovett, J. and Kelly, L. (2020) *Evaluation of Welsh Women's Aid Change That Lasts project - Interim report*, Welsh Women's Aid
- Morgan, G. and Janes, J. (2022) *Evaluation of Parallel Lives Programme*, Swansea University.
- Walker et al., (2023). Preventing Sexual Harassment Through a Prosocial Bystander Campaign: It's #SafeToSay. *Journal of Community Safety and Wellbeing*, 8(3).



## Prevention

The survey asked respondents to identify the type of prevention that was delivered by each programme<sup>1</sup>, with numbers for each type of prevention shown above. Some programmes offered a service that overlapped with more than one tier of prevention.

**Figure 4: Types of included violence prevention programmes**



## Risk factors

Respondents were asked to identify the types of risk factors that their programme sought to address. Results indicate that 26 of the programmes addressed individual risk factors, including school attendance, substance use, adverse childhood experiences, mental health, prior victimisation, and risk-taking behaviours.

Twenty-seven of the programmes indicated that they addressed community risk factors, including community violence, role models, peer group norms, county lines, impact of social media, poverty, resources, and amenities. Twenty-eight of the programmes indicated that they addressed societal risk factors, including harmful social trends, gender, cultural, and social norms.

## Inclusion

All programmes indicated that they made amendments to session design and delivery to account for men and boys with disabilities, neurodevelopmental needs, or language barriers. Examples of these adaptations include case workers making sessions shorter or longer, holding them more frequently, making them more interactive, adapting the language and content of the sessions, changing the environment where the session takes place, and use of translators for non-English speakers.

<sup>1</sup> – Primary prevention aims to prevent violence before it occurs, secondary prevention focusses on the immediate response to violence, and tertiary prevention focusses on long-term care and harm reduction after violence has occurred.

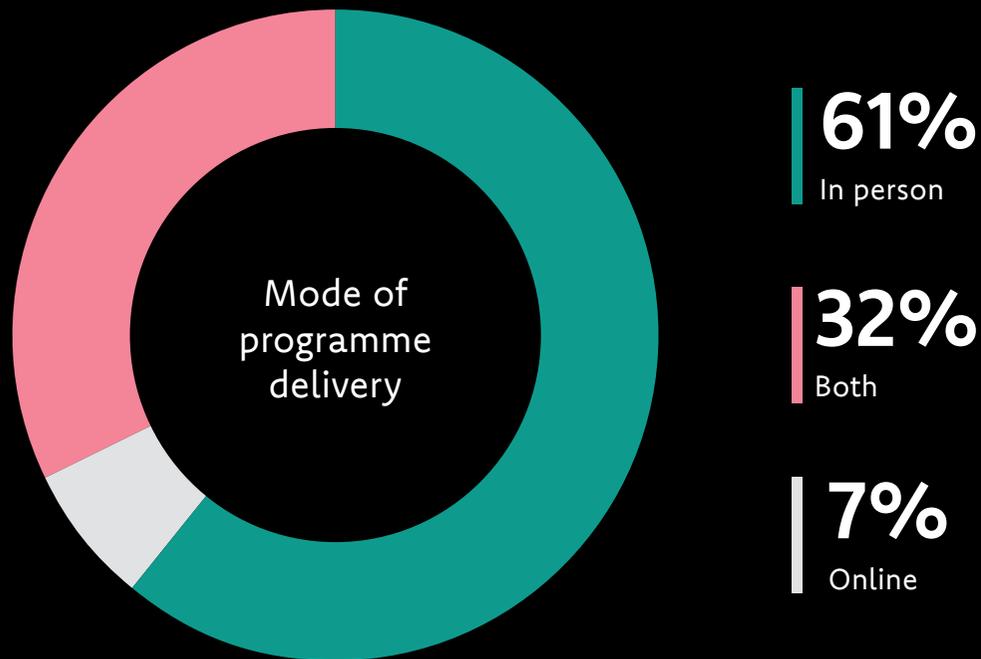
# Views on what works to engage men and boys in violence prevention

## Delivery mode

Just under two-thirds of the programmes were delivered in person (figure 5) (n=24). Other delivery methods included sessions delivered online (1:1 and group sessions) and campaigns. There was a consensus among practitioners that in person delivery is most effective. Delivering the programme in person allowed staff to support anyone who may need it, allowed non-verbal cues to inform the sessions, built positive supportive relationships between those in the session, improved risk management, and increased overall engagement. However, practitioners also reflected that online sessions could allow remote engagement for those who are not able to commute to a central location, and can also be a more comfortable option for those who may struggle to engage in person.

The programmes ran for varying lengths of time; the most common of which was 12 weeks. The shortest programme ran for two hours, whilst the longest ran for up to a year. Though formal feedback has not been gained on which programme length was most effective, one of our participants did mention that the short-term nature of their programme (six weeks) was a challenge.

Figure 5: Programme delivery mode



*“Given the short time frame, it’s not realistic to expect improvement in all areas of a service user’s wellbeing. Short termism is always a challenge.”*

## Delivery style

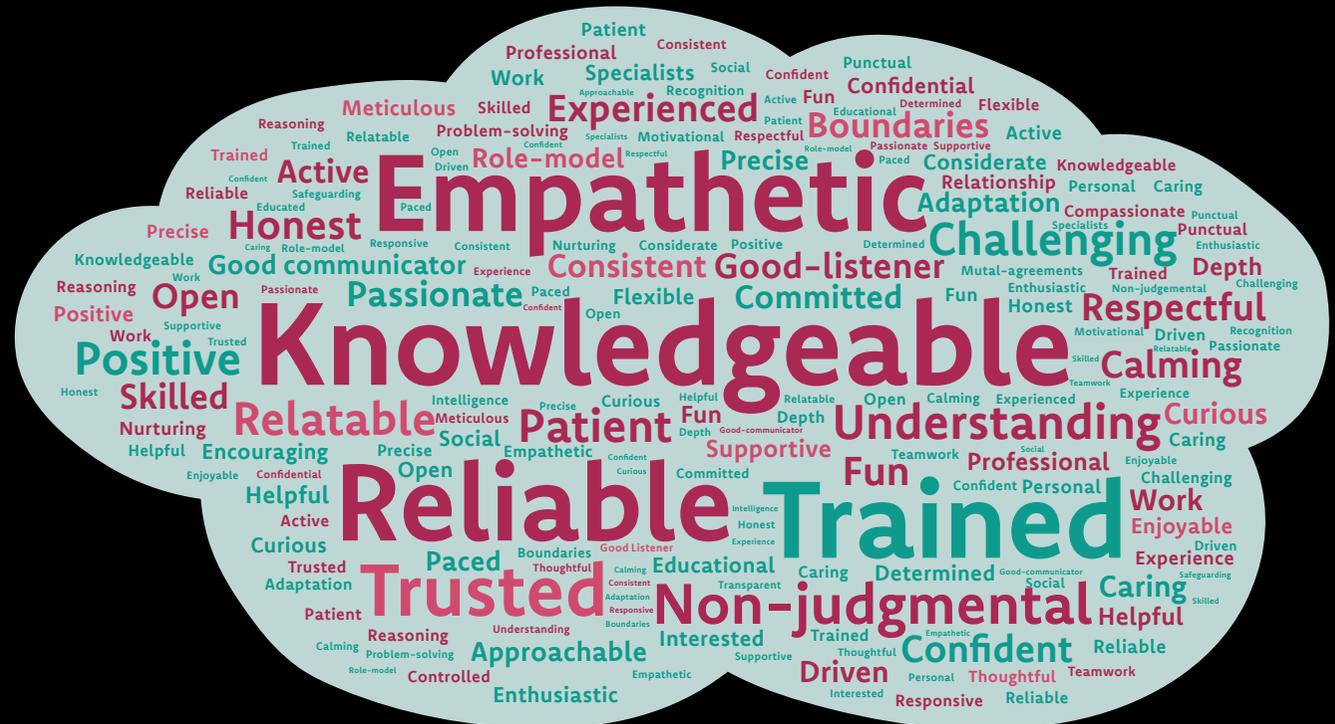
Practitioners felt that a variety of delivery styles is a good way of engaging multiple men and boys as one style will not work for all participants. Methods of programme delivery could include group discussions, individual work, reading, screen sharing, video clips, and listening to accounts of other people. Using modern day examples to illustrate issues and using film, social media and programmes can also be effective in engaging men and boys. Two programmes (YMCA Cardiff Boys Group, Sound) stated that the creative process used allowed for opportunities for programme attendees to self-reflect, understand the issues discussed, and take accountability of their potentially harmful actions.

Practitioners reflected that violence prevention programming with men and boys tended to be most effective when groups were formed from existing peer groups or if the participants had shared lived experience or demographics. This was seen to support the group to develop a shared understanding and a sense of belonging among the group.

## Staff characteristics

Participants shared many different characteristics of staff that were seen to be helpful in engaging men and boys in violence prevention programming. They are outlined in figure 6. The larger the word, the more programme leads said it was a helpful characteristic.

Figure 6: Staff characteristics that aid engagement with men and boys



## Staffing

Whilst this would differ for each intervention, having enough staff was seen as important so that participants had multiple opportunities to build trusted relationships with someone they could relate to. Sufficient staffing allowed participants to be engaged with and responded to in a timely manner, and regarding safeguarding, having enough staff allowed for 1:1 sessions, should a participant need a break away from the group setting.

Participants reported it often helped to meet the men and boys on a 'level playing field'. This was understood as acknowledging that some participants may not have had access to healthy and developmentally appropriate role models or family support in childhood and adolescence.

Participants also reported that having facilitators of different genders represented was an effective way of demonstrating healthy working relationships between people who identified as different genders.

Treating participants with respect, regardless of why they are in the programme, helped to engage them in the sessions.

This can be further aided by reflective practice and a robust supervision process, so staff were aware of any unconscious bias towards the men and boys, and helping staff members deal with any difficult issues and conversation topics.

## Settings for engagement

Participants discussed the importance of running sessions in safe spaces where open and honest conversations could take place; this could have been at home, school, or somewhere in the community. Programme participants needed to be supported to make healthier choices and ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to reach their life goals. This helped to promote their resilience and ability to respond positively to problems they may encounter.

When engaging boys, the programmes found it useful for staff to be flexible with location, time, language, duration, and content of the sessions. For example, boys like having their spare time after school, so arranging sessions which take place during school time can be a positive way of engaging them. Similarly, if the boys enjoy certain sports, having a staff member play that sport with the child or young person can help build rapport and trust. These activities can also be used as a reward for positive engagement.





## Perspective

Participants noted that during programme sessions, it can help to explore a range of different perspectives to help with understanding and empathy, as well as exploring the impact of violent behaviour. This can be particularly impactful if there is a mixed group where there is mutual trust to share and explore the individual experiences. Allowing family and friends to become involved in the process can also help support participants to build empathy and explore different topics within the context of their family, peer group, and community networks.

## Specific needs

Some men and boys may not be financially able to fund their travel to and from sessions. Paying for their transport is often a good way of ensuring that participants can engage. Similarly, providing food and drinks may help engagement and create a welcoming setting to build trust among the group and facilitators.

## Multiagency working

Participants reported that multiagency working significantly helped engage men and boys in violence prevention, particularly when professionals shared information to support an individual. Sharing information in a timely manner can help the programme deliverer understand any possible changes that may disrupt their progress in the programme.



# What does not work to engage men and boys

## Poor choice of language

Participants raised the issue of language use within programmes aimed at men and boys, particularly around the topic of labelling young men as criminals or deviants. To the right are some quotations drawn out of our survey, at the core of which is the issue of potentially deterring programme engagement as a result of wording choices that are interpreted by men and boys as collective negative labelling of young men as 'perpetrators'. This type of language can cause a defensive response among participants and decrease engagement.

This is particularly problematic in primary prevention or education-based programmes where those engaged have typically not enacted any violence. For these reasons, the language and messaging used within programmes must be carefully considered and compassionately approached so as not to provoke a feeling of upset among the participants. However, this must be balanced with the importance of acknowledging the fact that many acts of violence are carried out by men.



*"Initially in pilot stage young boys expressed that they felt targeted and labelled as a result of content. Appropriate adaptations were made to reflect this and bring balance whilst not losing the purpose and impact of the programme."*



*"The terminology around 'perpetrator' is a barrier to self-referral and engagement. We use parent with the adjunct 'abusive/non-abusive'. Rhetoric used is around 'problematic' behaviours to initiate conversations where 'abusive' is a barrier with education around what constitutes abusive behaviour to follow once barrier to engagement has been removed."*

Similarly, participants also highlighted how language that emphasises cooperation with law enforcement, government, or other authoritative institutions may also be prone to disengagement among men and boys. It is important to, again, strike a balance between recognising the imperative role these agencies play in prevention and reaction to violence, whilst also considering factors such as distrust or fear associated with law enforcement, for example. A key quotation from one of the survey participants is illustrated below:

*“They [men and boys in the programme] recoiled at discussions over police conduct and trust in law enforcement / governments, persecution, and judgement. [It is an] overt challenge to their honestly held beliefs.”*

### Unbalanced groups

When doing group work, the staff needed to be careful to balance the group members in terms of numbers, diversity, and be mindful of the more dominant members of the group who may have steered the conversations and not allowed the quieter members of the group to speak. Similarly, if all the participants were already a friendship group, they may mirror each other’s responses rather than reflecting on their own behaviour, to conform to the social norm of their group.

### Unsupportive networks

Men and boys need a supportive network around them while they try to understand their own behaviours, and possibly change. If close family and friends are not supportive, it can often result in the men and boys having difficulty staying motivated.

### Short-termism and inflexibility

Short term sessions or programmes do not necessarily achieve the intended outcomes as they do not last long enough to elicit change. Similarly, non-flexible session hours can hinder the progress made by men and boys as some may need to attend sessions outside of the 9-to-5 norm.

### Unrelatability

Staff members, case studies, and any context provided by programmes that participants cannot resonate with can sometimes hinder their engagement with programmes.



# Discussion

**This section of the report will place the key findings of the mapping survey within the context of the academic evidence base. To inform this, a literature review was conducted which identified 33 articles and reports (Walker et al., 2024).**

Many of the facilitators and barriers to engaging men and boys in violence prevention programmes explored within the mapping survey echoed those highlighted within the academic literature. Namely, taking a trauma informed, person centred approach, including addressing specific needs of participants and using positive, empowering language. Interventions need appropriate delivery styles and settings, with different methods of delivering the key messages to optimise engagement. Staff should ensure all participants have equal opportunities to share their experiences and learn. Staff need to be compassionate, relatable, and knowledgeable about the discussion topics.

It is important to note that the series of documents that make up this toolkit for engaging men and boys in violence prevention have accumulated information and resources from many different sources. Whilst the key findings are evidence-informed, they are intended as recommendations that practitioners should consider, to optimise engagement of men and boys in violence prevention programmes. It is not intended as a checklist. Men and boys are not a homogenous group, and interventions should therefore be designed to meet the specific needs and requirements of the people it aims to target.





## Intervention type

Flood (2019) outlines a range of different strategies for the engagement of men and boys in violence prevention efforts. These include:

- 1 Strengthening individual knowledge and skills**  
Enhancing an individual's capability of preventing violence and promoting safety.
- 2 Promoting community education**  
Reaching groups of people with information and resources to prevent violence and promote safety.
- 3 Educating providers**  
Informing providers who will transmit skills and knowledge to others and model positive norms.
- 4 Engaging, strengthening, and mobilising communities**  
Bringing together groups and individuals for broader goals and greater impact.
- 5 Changing organisational practices**  
Adopting regulations and shaping norms to prevent violence and improve safety.
- 6 Influencing policies and legislation**  
Enacting laws and policies that support healthy community norms and a violence-free society.

The range of interventions identified through this mapping exercise focus on levels 1 and 2 of Flood's framework. These involve working 1:1 with individuals to support skill development and increasing capacity to prevent violence, reaching communities through educational and group programmes, and/or communication and social marketing interventions.

There was less evidence through this mapping study for interventions in Wales which match Flood's other strategies. This suggests that there may be opportunities in Wales for broadening the types of interventions that are available to engage men and boys in violence prevention.

## Duration

The programmes run for varying lengths of time; the most common of which is 12 weeks.

The shortest programme runs for two hours, whilst the longest runs for up to a year. There is significant evidence that programme duration matters in violence prevention programming. Programmes with longer duration are more likely to have a significant and lasting effect. Short term, tokenistic interventions will not have the desired effect in terms of violence prevention (Anderson and Whitson, 2005). Participants need long term engagement, that is ongoing and in-depth. To achieve this, many interventions will also need a long-term commitment of funding (Burrell et al., 2021; Graham et al., 2019; Men Engage, 2018; Ringin et al., 2021).

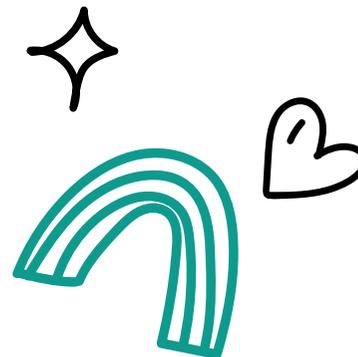
## Setting

Participants reported that finding the right space was an important component in delivering impactful interventions. These spaces need to be accessible and inclusive to all who engage with the programme. Programmes delivered in person were found to be more engaging than online sessions, which is a finding supported by the academic literature (Burrell et al., 2021; Caamano et al., 2021; Men Engage, 2018; Spotlight Initiative, 2021).

## Timing

There is evidence to suggest that interventions work best when they are delivered at a time when participants are inspired by changes in their own life, for example, becoming a parent, particularly for those who want to be a 'good parent'. For fathers in particular, interventions can shift the man's role from protecting their daughter, to empowering her, for example. Parenthood can also be a good conversation starter to get participants comfortable with the session facilitator (Men Engage, 2018).

In relation to boys in particular, younger men are more likely to be violent towards an intimate partner. It is at this younger age, or even before, when boys should be engaged in intimate partner violence prevention programmes (Capaldi et al., 2012; McNeish et al., 2023; National Education Union, 2023).



## Gender transformative approach

Interventions delivered using a gender transformative approach are positive, strengths-based, and focus on transforming gender roles to rebalance power relations through critical reflection (WHO, 2019). A recent systematic review on 'what works to prevent violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence' found strong evidence on the effectiveness of gender transformative approaches (Addis and Snowdon, 2023). Interventions that explore the norms, behaviours, and relationships associated with ideals of manhood, and encourage critical reflection, have been shown to be more successful than those which assume all men aspire to dominant forms of masculinity; and then highlighting why that's a negative (Carlsson et al., 2015). For men who do identify, on some level, as masculine, violence prevention professionals need to consider that there are many different expressions of masculinity, and every man and boy will relate to that concept differently (Hamel, 2019; Hanssen et al., 2021; MenEngage, 2018).



## Varied teaching styles

Practitioners felt that a variety of delivery styles is a good way of engaging multiple men and boys as one style will not work for all participants. Men and boys are not a homogenous group. Therefore, programmes are more effective if they target specific groups of men and boys, to ensure the messaging is relatable. Co-designing the programme with members of the target group will help ensure the messaging and content of the intervention is relatable and culturally relevant. Moreover, presenting men and boys with ‘stereotypical’ male behaviour may deter men and boys from engaging with the intervention as they often do not recognise those behaviours within themselves (Beyond Equality, 2022; Burrell, 2020; Flood, 2016).

Using contemporary examples to illustrate issues and using film, social media, and programmes can also be effective in engaging men and boys. Two programmes (YMCA Cardiff Boys Group, Sound) stated that the creative process used allowed for opportunities for programme attendees to self-reflect, understand the issues discussed, and take accountability of their potentially harmful actions.

## Language use

The language and messaging used within programmes must be carefully considered and compassionately approached so as not to provoke a feeling of upset, anger or defensiveness among participants. Similarly, as outlined by survey respondents, if the programme places too much emphasis on police, or authority, the participants can be deterred from engagement due to a lack of trust in law enforcement, government, persecution, and judgement.

A positive approach should be taken, which encourages men and boys to do their share towards initiating change in their community, rather than holding low expectations of the participant’s capabilities. Participants should be encouraged and supported to develop their strengths and skills to create positive change, rather than focussing on risk factors for violence. Giving men and boys the practical tools that they need to be effective allies and bystanders has proven beneficial (Caamano et al., 2021; Flood et al., 2021). Solely framing men as offenders and women as victims can be counterproductive as men and boys can also be victims of violence themselves (Hanssen et al., 2021; Jewkes et al., 2015; McNeish et al., 2023; Verbeek et al., 2023).

## Empowerment

Men and boys can be offenders and victims, but they can also be allies and prosocial bystanders. The literature suggests that there is a general lack of accessible information on male allyship; most of the public facing resources talk about men as ‘perpetrators’. This labelling immediately deters men and boys from engaging further. Instead, men and boys should be encouraged to view their allyship as a positive element of their self-identity, not something that is always associated with enacting violence. They should be encouraged to take on their own ambassador role and to take their learning into their wider community (Carlson et al., 2015; Caamano et al., 2021; Flood et al., 2021).

There is a growing evidence base for the impact prosocial bystanders can have over the prevention of violence (Addis and Snowdon, 2023; Walker et al., 2023). As a primary prevention method, empowering men to be prosocial bystanders, to recognise problematic attitudes and behaviours, and to safely challenge them is essential to changing the social norms and acceptability of violence (Walker et al., 2023).

## Staffing

Practitioners identified a range of staff characteristics that were helpful. Most important was empathy, meeting participants on a level playing field, listening, and treating participants with respect. Providing high quality staff training, reflective practice, and a robust supervision process was also prioritised as highly important. Staff also need to encourage the men and boys positively, by being honourable, respectful, and non-judgemental, rather than referring to them, and treating them as ‘perpetrators’. The staff and facilitators should instil an air of hopefulness that things can change. Being heard allows participants to learn about non-violent and equitable ways of relating to other people (Beyond Equality, 2022; Burrell et al., 2021; Carlsson et al., 2015; Hanssen et al., 2021, MenEngage, 2018).

Research has suggested that the staff and facilitators should be relatable to the men and boys they are targeting; they should be seen as ‘one of them’, which is why using community leaders, and peer influencers can help with engagement (Burrell et al., 2021; Jaime et al., 2016; Verbeek et al., 2023).

However, choosing the right community leader or role model is imperative. Using people with high status, like celebrities, is not encouraged as it can often highlight the socio-economic gaps between the celebrity and participants; this lack of relatability will deter engagement (Carlson et al., 2015; Jewkes et al., 2015; Spotlight Initiative, 2021). Further, engaging community leaders in the intervention can help counteract any harmful social norms within that community and emphasise that violence prevention must be a community effort. When coupled with a community-based intervention, it can result in optimum engagement (Garcia et al., 2021; Verbeek et al., 2023).



## Intersecting needs

Eight of the programmes surveyed made explicit mention of their ability to be flexible to the needs of individuals enrolled, for example, by referring these participants to organisations that help with seeking suitable housing, assistance with alcohol and substance issues, and mental health support. In doing so, these programmes offer a more holistic and whole-system approach to prevention by acknowledging and supporting the nuanced needs of those enrolled.

Men and boys may have certain risk factors or specific needs that can affect their engagement with violence prevention programmes (Funk, 2018). For example, work by Lorenzetti et al. (2021) found that 96% of men surveyed discussed the need for men to receive support and services focused on wellbeing and building healthy personal relationships to affect violence prevention. Other men may need support to stabilise their life structures (e.g., housing) before they are able to positively engage; others may need support for substance misuse or mental health difficulties. In Marisol et al.'s (2017) work of 286 men convicted of domestic violence and attending community-based domestic violence prevention programmes, 114 were found to have alcohol abuse problems.

Research has demonstrated that, where these intersecting needs are present, they account for more of the variance in male relationship violence than beliefs about male dominance (Murphy and Smith, 2010). Thus, demonstrating that violence prevention programmes may need to address these intersecting needs before addressing violent behaviour (Capaldi et al., 2012; Crooks et al., 2007; Flood et al., 2021; Hamel, 2019; Jewkes et al., 2015).

## Evaluation

Most programmes and strategies engaging men and boys in violence prevention have not been evaluated in any robust way (Flood, 2019). This rings true for the Welsh landscape, where only twelve of the thirty-nine programmes reported an evaluation. Evaluation is critical to ensuring that we understand both the implementation and impact of interventions. This ensures that resources are not being wasted on interventions that are not effective, or possibly harmful.

The Wales VPU have published an Evaluation Toolkit<sup>2</sup> to help practitioners think about evaluating their services.

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2 – Violence-Prevention-Evaluation-Toolkit.pdf  
([violencepreventionwales.co.uk](http://violencepreventionwales.co.uk))



# Summary

This report provides a snapshot of Welsh interventions that engage men and boys in violence prevention and offers an evidence-informed discussion on what works for optimum engagement with men and boys. Thirty-nine programmes completed the mapping survey during summer 2023, with representatives from interventions across Wales. The snapshot of Welsh interventions showed that a third of programmes are solely for men and boys, most are delivered for those aged 18 and under, and gender-based violence and physical aggression are the most common types of violence addressed.

This report demonstrated that men and boys can be engaged in violence prevention activities and play an active role in preventing violence. There is a range of emerging practice across Wales, however, there is still very little evidence of what works, and this report seeks to summarise some early learning from a snapshot of programmes in Wales.



# Considerations for practitioners, researchers, and policy makers

## Considerations for practitioners

Consider  Instead of 

\*

### Project setup



#### Prevention strategy

Consider the full range of project strategies from 1:1 working through to family, community, and societal level change projects. Also consider whether the intervention will focus on primary, secondary, or tertiary prevention.

 Only working with the individual to prevent reoffending.



#### Coproduction and cultural relevance

Working with men and boys from the target audience to codesign projects and engage with the communities in which they live, play, learn and work to ensure the project is culturally relevant.

 Using a 'one size fits all' project design.



#### Evaluation

Evaluating the impacts of the intervention and adding to the evidence base for effective violence prevention programmes.

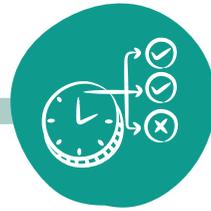
 Assuming your service is good without asking service users or staff for their feedback.



**+ Duration**

Running programmes for as long as possible for optimum engagement, relationship building, and impact.

**- Running single sessions.**



**+ Timing**

Delivering sessions at the right time in an individual's life when they are most likely to engage positively.

**- Engaging the individual when they are not ready, or not able, to engage.**



**+ Setting**

Holding sessions in accessible, safe, and comfortable settings that are appealing to your target audience.

**- Hiring venues that are clinical and difficult to commute to.**



**+ Gender transformative approach**

Using critical reflection to explore positive expressions of masculinity and empowering men and boys with the skills to and confidence to make positive change.

**- Focussing on the negative elements of masculinity.**





**+ Trauma informed approach**

Using a compassionate, trauma-informed approach in which facilitators centre the needs of project participants and are cognisant of the sensitivities of the subject-matter and the individual's circumstances and strengths.

**- Blaming the individual without considering wider factors.**



**+ Language use**

Using positive language like 'ally' and 'role model'.

**- Labelling all men as perpetrators.**



**+ Staffing**

Employing staff who are empathetic, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable, who can be a positive role model.

**- Employing unrelatable staff, who do not listen and do not respect the experiences of the individual.**



**+ Teaching style**

Using a range of different activities to help engage the target audience, allowing time for self-reflection, understanding, and accountability in a more creative environment.

**- Standing in front of a classroom lecturing on violence.**



**+ Empowerment**

Focussing on the strengths of each person engaged and empower them to use their skills as an ally or ambassador within their wider community.

**- Emphasising that men are the problem.**



**+ Intersecting needs**

Identifying any additional needs that the individual may have, and where possible, address these to optimise their ability to engage in the violence prevention activities.

**- Solely focussing on violent behaviour and male dominance.**





## Considerations for researchers:



### Evaluation

There is a need for stronger evidence around what works to engage men and boys in violence prevention. Researchers should consider collaborating with practitioners to evaluate the services and interventions being delivered to understand, for example, optimum programme duration, design, mechanisms for change, and the impact of that programme.



### Intersectionality

Researchers should look to explore and understand the experiences of violence amongst gender diverse groups and those with specific protected characteristics. Once there is an increased understanding of the violence they experience, specialist services can be better equipped to address a range of needs.



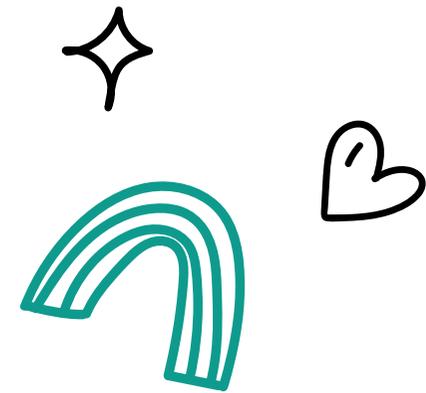
### Behavioural insights

Researchers need to explore what works to engage different groups of men and boys to effectively segment and target specific groups with violence prevention efforts.

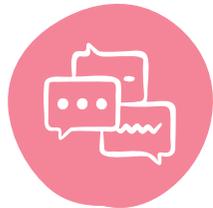


### Collaborate

Work with men and boys to gain their experiences and perspectives on violence prevention programming.



## Considerations for policy makers and commissioners:



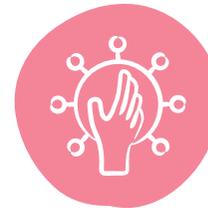
### Language

It is possible to engage men and boys in violence prevention efforts and to acknowledge that violence is often enacted by men. However, it is not OK to use blaming or inflammatory language that will immediately disengage your target audience. When writing policies and legislative pieces, it should be ensured that positive, and empowering language is used.



### Prevention

The majority of programmes focussed on intervening with men and boys who are at risk of engaging with violence. Engaging men and boys as allies in violence prevention and empowering them with the skills to prevent violence through universal, primary prevention programmes is an under-developed opportunity that commissioners and policymakers should seek to develop further.



### Postcode lottery

Only one all-Wales intervention was identified through this mapping exercise. Commissioners should consider encouraging more all-Wales interventions to ensure violence prevention initiatives are consistent and accessible across the country.



### Sharing learning

Commissioners should encourage collaboration and co-design in this emerging area of practice to share learning to generate consensus around effective practice.



### Funding

Funding should be made available for longer periods of time and must stipulate that meaningful evaluation be conducted to allow suitable and impactful violence prevention programmes to be implemented and sustained.

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# Appendix

## A: Participating programmes

- Action for Children – hospital provision
- Assia Domestic Abuse Services
- Braver Choices
- Carmarthenshire Youth Justice Team
- Cerridwen
- Choices
- Choose2Change
- CHYPS Healthy Relationships Workshops
- CLEAR (Change That Lasts Early Awareness Raising)
- CLEAR (part of Change that Lasts)
- Custody Suite Support (C.S.S.)
- CYP Male Independent Personal Advocate
- Delivering Resilience
- Divert (10-17 Diversion)
- Domestic Abuse Intervention Hub
- Don't Steal My Future
- DRIVE
- Driving Change
- Equilibrium Healthy Relationship Programme
- The Family Programme
- Family Support Service, Newport
- Family Support Team, Pembrokeshire
- Inspiring Families
- INTACT Early Intervention and Prevention
- Male Independent Personal Advocate
- Morriston Hospital Project
- New Pathways Sexual Behaviour Service
- Parallel Lives
- Plan UK
- Positive Masculinity Project
- Reprovide
- #SafeToSay
- Sound
- + (Positive) Choices Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programme
- Think Safe!
- Violence Prevention Team – Swansea Bay University Health Board
- YMCA Cardiff
- YMCA Cardiff Boys group
- Youth Respect Project



## B: Mapping survey questions

1. What is the name of the intervention?
2. Which local authority/authorities in Wales does it operate within?

All-Wales | Denbighshire | Pembrokeshire  
Blaenau Gwent | Flintshire | Powys  
Bridgend | Gwynedd | Rhondda Cynon Taf  
Caerphilly | Isle of Anglesey | Swansea  
Cardiff | Merthyr Tydfil | Vale of Glamorgan  
Carmarthenshire | Monmouthshire | Torfaen  
Ceredigion | Neath Port Talbot | Wrexham  
Conwy | Newport

3. What are the key aims of the intervention?
4. Is this intervention underpinned by any theories or principles?

Yes | No | If yes, please give details \_\_\_\_\_

5. What age range does the intervention cover?
6. Is the intervention specifically for men and/or boys?

Yes | No

7. What are the criteria for boys and/or men to be able to access the intervention? For example, resident in a specific location, child or young person in care, other specific demographics.

Please also include whether the men and/or boys have been identified as exhibiting or at risk of potentially harmful behaviours/attitudes.

8. How are men and/or boys referred into the intervention? Please include where these referrals generally come from.
9. Can you outline how the intervention aims to address violence prevention for men and/or boys? Please include details on the types of services that are provided.
10. What type(s) of violence does the intervention aim to address?

Gender based violence  
Online violence  
Knife crime/use of weapons  
Domestic abuse (partner and ex-partner)  
Sexual violence  
Physical aggression

Bullying  
Violence against a parent or caregiver  
School based violence  
Gang violence  
Child sexual exploitation  
Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

11. Does this intervention address the individual's risk factors? If so, how?
12. Does the intervention address community risk factors? i.e. peer group norms or relationships. If so, how?
13. Does the intervention address societal risk factors? i.e. harmful social norms, attitudes and beliefs relating to gender. If so, how?
14. Does this intervention operate in person, online, or a bit of both?  
  
In person | Online | Both
15. Do you find that one delivery mode (in person or online) is more effective than the other?
16. How long does this intervention last?

17. Are there any staff characteristics that you feel make the intervention work particularly well for men and/or boys? For example, relatability of staff members.
18. Are there any other elements of the intervention that you feel work particularly well when engaging men and/or boys in violence prevention activities? For example, incorporating the voices of women and girls to support understanding.
19. Are there any elements of the intervention that you feel do not work particularly well when engaging men and/or boys in violence prevention activities?
20. Do you make any adjustments for people with specific needs? If so, what do you do? For example, non-English speakers, cultural requirements, disability or neurodiversity.
21. How do you assess the progress made by the men and/or boys? Please include any assessment tools you use. And when is this progress measured? For example, baseline, midway and end.
22. How do you routinely measure the effectiveness of the intervention?

23. Has this intervention been formally evaluated?
- Yes | No | If yes, please give details  
-----
24. When the intervention comes to an end, are the men and/or boys referred on to other services? If so, please outline the services that you commonly refer into.
25. Does this intervention have links with any other interventions in this location?
- Yes | No | If yes, please give details  
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26. The researcher may have additional questions to ask based on your responses. If you are happy for the researcher to contact you in regards to this, please leave a contact email address: -----







# WALES WITHOUT VIOLENCE

[waleswithoutviolence.com](http://waleswithoutviolence.com)

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