

Evaluation Meeting of the Freedom Programme for Men

Date 26/07/06

Venue Dean Road family Centre

The group initially consisted of twelve men, However, two decided it was not for them and dropped out, a further two were asked to leave the group due to their behaviour and a further two men left on week six and eight to take up places at detoxification and rehabilitation centres. Six men completed the course. All of the men were there as part of a community sentence order and two had been ordered by the court to attend a more in depth domestic violence program facilitated by the probation service

Joy Dymont, from Wrexham Probation Service and Margaret Southall from Wrexham Children and Young People Service were invited by the facilitators of the group, to meet with the men at the final session to evaluate with them the usefulness of the programme and develop an understanding of what they had gained from attending the group.

The meeting took the form of semi informal discussion with Joy and Margaret, asking specific questions of the group.

All of the men agreed that they had benefited from attending the programme. There was a general consensus that in the future they would stop and think about their behaviour and could identify triggers in their abusive actions. Some of the men had not previously considered other forms of abuse such as emotional, verbal or economic. One of the men stated that this was 'eye opening' to him.

The men were asked what they would do differently in the future. One of the men minimised his behaviour, stating that this is a two way process and that his partner was equally responsible for his violence because of her own aggressive actions towards him. It was noticeable that this was not challenged by other group members. Other men evidenced how they had thought about changing their behaviour and could identify strategies for dealing with this without resorting to abusive actions. This included recognising triggers, such as drugs or alcohol and taking time out to think before responding to a potentially abusive situation.

In respect of the impact of domestic abuse on children, there was a mixed response. All of the men except one had young children. One of the men had himself witnessed abuse in his own childhood and therefore, believed that this was learned behaviour, from his own experiences. Another man did not accept that the abuse of his partner had an effect on his children as they had not witnessed it. The fact that they had been in the household and heard the abuse was lost on him.

The men were asked what, if anything in the program was not helpful to them. All agreed the first session was the most difficult. The introduction of an abusive man as the 'Dominator' was described as 'attaching a label' to them also that some of the behaviours applied to the dominator did not sit easy with them, for example sexual control. However, there was general agreement that this process helped the group become aware of other forms of abuse even though they did not believe it applied to them.

Asked what they would say to other men considering attending the group, all of the men agreed the program was worth the time commitment and that they had benefited from attending. They believed that to get the most from the experience men had to be truthful to themselves and to other participants, about the reasons for attending and take responsibility for their own behaviour.

The facilitators of the group were spoken of highly by the men, one described them as having done 'a brilliant job'.

The program clearly had a beneficial impact with perpetrators of domestic abuse. The men had found some aspects of the work challenging and others took what they felt comfortable with and minimised the rest. However, the program works on challenging entrenched attitudes towards women and gender stereotypes which condone abuse. Access to perpetrator programs such as this, in conjunction with local, collaborative, partnership services are essential in protecting and supporting women and children who experience domestic abuse in their every day lives.

Margaret Southall
Head of Service
Safeguarding and Support- Family Support

Men's Feedback from the Course

I would like to thank Carol, Sian and Ian for their time. I have found it very educational and worthwhile. I would be happy to assist with further courses if I was invited as I feel that I could help other people. It's just the right length of time (11/2 hours per week over 13 weeks).

I found the course very useful not just to my relationship but to my everyday life, it has taught me to deal with a more methodical, calm and asserting attitude i.e. I am able to recognise when my behaviour is being triggered into an abusive episode and deal with it in an appropriate manner i.e. a non-violent way. It has also enabled me to identify other people's behaviour toward others and myself when it occurs thus avoiding a potential bad situation.

The course was informative and I hope that what I have learnt will stick with me for future relationships.

Biscuits were great.

My only negative comment about the course was the reverse psychology at the beginning where 'we' made the rules. We should just be told the rules. It would have commanded more respect from me in the beginning.

Good points were that the course is not too long so as not to lose interest. At some points is hard hitting. Sian and Carol did a brilliant job.

The course highlights things in your mind, and helps you to recognise the signs before an incident occurs.