

Carrots, Sticks and Change:

The voice of men and ethical considerations when engaging involuntary clients in Domestic Abuse Interventions

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Involuntary Clients (Trotter, 2022)



Most significant public-protection issues we face

Not just the prevalence, it's the severity and the patterning

30% of high-risk perpetrators account for over 90% of repeat victimisation

Risk doesn't disappear, it relocates

38% of women killed by their ex-partner from 2009 to 2018 were killed within the first month of separation and 89% in the first year (Female Census)

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 strengthened the statutory response

UK's ratification of the Istanbul Convention in 2022 signalled a commitment to prevention

VAWG Strategy: £53 million invested to expand Drive, £8 million for educational programmes

Purpose of behaviour change programmes is clear:

- To stop abusive behaviour
- To change direction
- To support men to become non-abusive
- To protect victims, children, and the wider public

Starting Point:

1. Court-mandated referrals
2. Social services involvement
3. Police-led referrals
4. Voluntary self-referral

A mandated = gets them through the door but it doesn't create readiness.

A voluntary referral = readiness but often comes with crisis or emotional overwhelm.

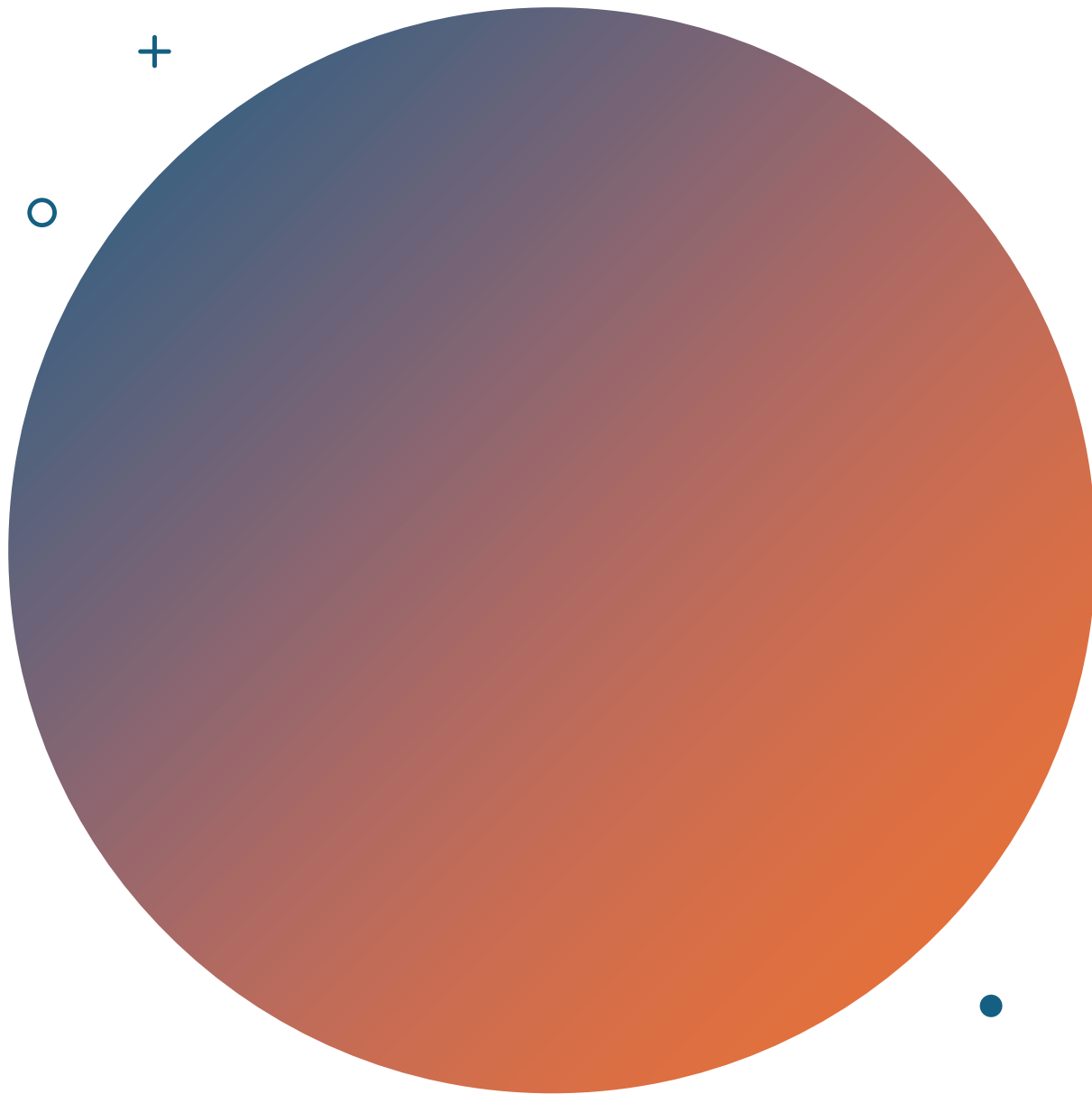


Image: Brett Jordan

Open2Change is a specialist behaviour change programme supporting individuals aged 16+ who recognise harmful behaviours in relationships and want to make positive change.

Delivered through structured 1:1 support, Group and our Early intervention support, the programme focuses on accountability, safety, and long-term behaviour change to reduce harm and support healthier relationships.

- Early intervention, Group & 1:1 tailored intervention programme
- Early intervention for harmful behaviours in relationships
- Focus on accountability, change, and safety



- One-to-one programme for men using abusive behaviour; delivered across Swindon, Bath & surrounding areas
- Designed for men who can't access, won't engage with, or aren't suited to group programmes
- Individual sessions with trained facilitators focusing on responsibility, behaviour patterns & safer responses
- Tailored work to pace, learning needs, risk level & personal circumstances
- Core components: motivation & readiness; beliefs & attitudes; emotional regulation; communication & conflict skills; accountability; safety planning
- Relational depth: space feels safer, more personal; men disclose more, reflect more, tolerate discomfort better
- Real-time risk response due to one-to-one intensity and facilitator challenge
- Integrated partner support ensuring victim & child safety remains central
- **Overall aim:** stop abusive behaviour, reduce risk, and support men to build safer, healthier relationships

Moran (2011:27) suggests perpetrators of domestic abuse can be 'stubbornly uncooperative, defiant of authority, or resistant to control group.'

Probation practitioners working with perpetrators of domestic abuse have suggested that their experience of engaging with these men has revealed a feature of high resistance to engagement unlike other clients under probation supervision (Morran, 2006; Morran 2011).

Sticks:

Barriers to engagement

Demotivational

Punishment

Consequences

Penalty

Closure



“I don’t even wanna even talk about it.
I don’t even see my kid because of my
spiteful, vindictive ex.

God strike me down but that’s the truth.”

“It’s 9 years now,
the same circle,
got to do this, got
to that. And this
time, you’re not
seeing your kids.”

“If you are willing to come here and make the change yourself, then they’re willing to help you.

It’s not like, it’s not like I’m being told to come here, like I was with probation.”

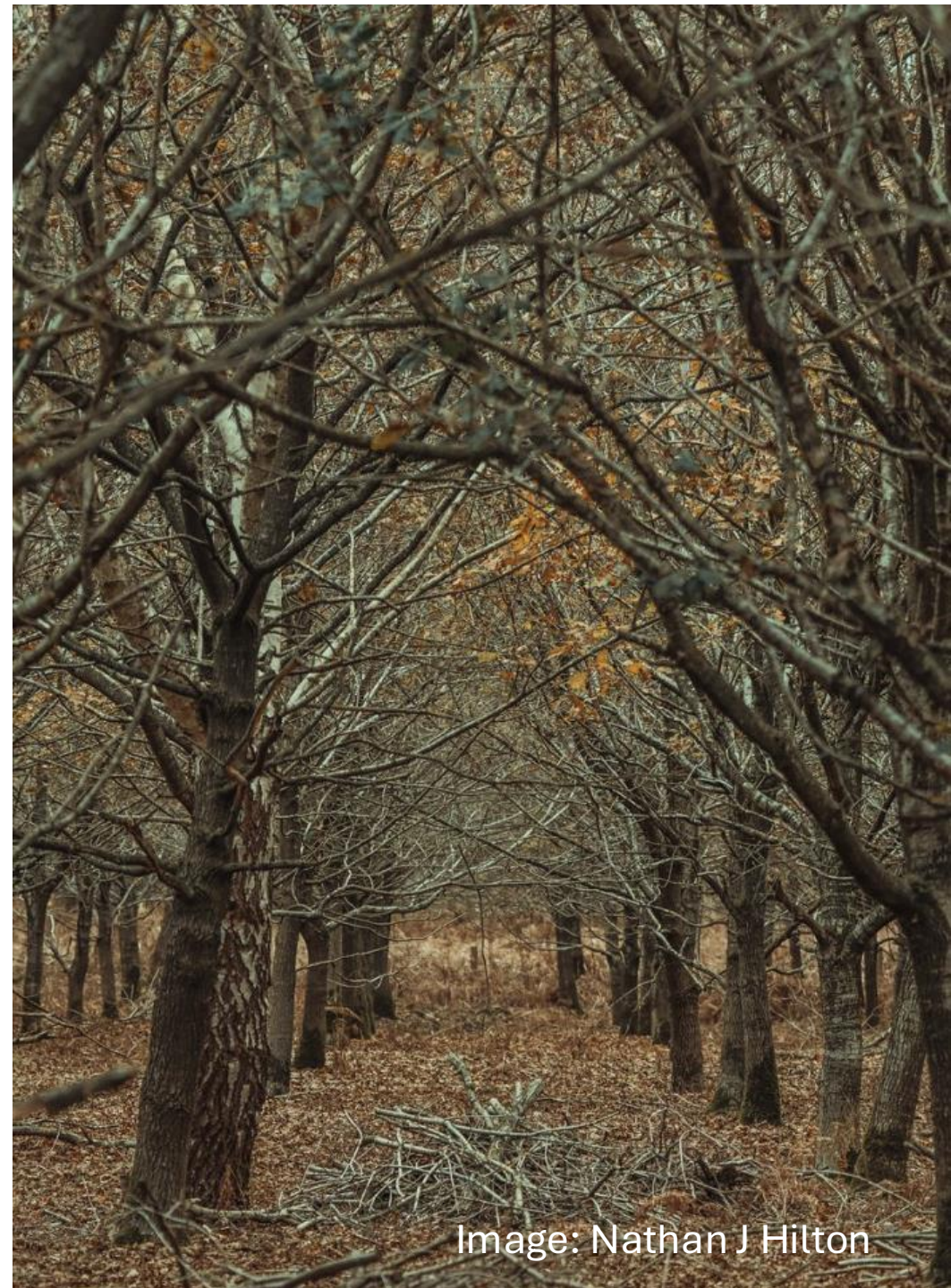


Image: Nathan J Hilton



Carrots: enhancing
motivation and engagement
to consider making change

“She speaks with me as if she’s known me for years, you know, doesn’t talk down to me, doesn’t treat me like I’m a bad person.”

Yeah. I wouldn’t open up as, as much as I have, If I felt like I’m being judged or if I’m being kind of put down or felt, you know.”



Image: Sedanur Kunak



Image: Cottonbro Studio

“It’s an art in itself isn’t it?”

You can have a conversation with somebody for two hours and walk away thinking, they didn’t listen to a fucking word that I said. Do you know what I mean? Then you can talk to somebody for five minutes and you think, yeah, they actually got me.”



“Whatever they do, it works, it really works. A lot more people need to go on this. They need to understand that it’s not just, it’s not the same type of programme as every other type of programme.

This course, this will break the ground for you, to the point where you can actually find the root of your problems and find out why you act the way you act. And I think that was the biggest help to me.”

***Open2Change* programme was helping or had helped participants' sense of wellbeing**

“At first I thought it’s another fucking course to go on. Now I crave the meeting. I want to go, I enjoy going. It’s not just a programme to me now. This is helping me. This is, this is the way forward for my life. I need this really.... I’m not constantly overthinking it and keeping it inside. So it’s mainly mentally it’s helped because I’m not so down all the time and shut away. So I get to speak about things and that helps in my day to day mood.”

“I am a completely different person. I wouldn’t stand here and have a conversation with you now. That was the kind of person I was. I would just tell you to fuck off. It’s just not happening. That’s how I was.

I’m not like that now. I am a completely different person now from doing all this. I think that’s because of the realisation of pointing out, you’re not that sort of person now. I remind her of that because some days I fall back into that mindset of that’s who I am. I am not. I am not a bad person, even now. I am me. This is where I wanna be, this is what I want for my life. [*programme facilitator*] reminds me of that.”

Summary - you can actually *make sticks from carrots*

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