



*Tackling violence and abuse
through bystander intervention*

Project Briefing and Results

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Tackling Violence through Football and Sport

- Globally, 1 in 3 women have experienced physical or sexual violence. ⁽¹⁾
- Domestic violence costs the UK economy £66 billion per year. ⁽²⁾

This project emerges at a critical moment – the prevalence of violence against women and girls has been thrown into the spotlight by recent campaigns like #MeToo and #TimesUp and is increasingly recognised as a global public health and human rights issue. The sporting arena has not been immune from this with multiple cases of prominent sports personalities being implicated and widespread media coverage of abuses of young players by coaches.

Sport presents a unique opportunity to challenge sexual and domestic violence and abuse. Players and coaches are often role models in the community, and wider society, especially for younger people, and have a genuine ability to change culture through setting a positive example for others.

Football Onside

Football Onside is the first evidence-led bystander intervention programme in the UK for the prevention of sexual and domestic violence and abuse. It has been developed by the University of Exeter Law School in collaboration with Exeter CTY Community Trust and supported by partners Public Health England, Devon County Council, Devon Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Services, Hollie Gazzard Trust and Plymouth Argyle Community Trust.

The programme takes the form of a 6-hour training delivered across three separate sessions and trains people working in football and sports to be 'active bystanders' and positive role models who can intervene safely and effectively when they witness unacceptable behavior – from sexist jokes or demeaning “locker-room” banter.

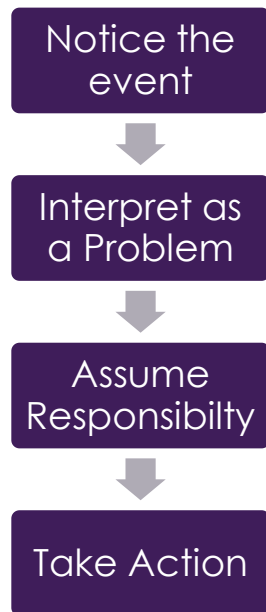
“Training coaches to model positive bystander behaviour is a great way to contribute to the kind of culture change we'd like to see in football and other sports – one of mutual respect where violence and abuse, including the jokes and comments that go along with it, become unacceptable.”

Jamie Vittles, CEO of ECCT

“As a young footballer I know I would have found it very difficult to speak out in an uncomfortable situation, this initiative means that that others may not find it so difficult and can change things for the better”

Scott Walker, ECCT

The Four Stages of Bystander Intervention



Football Onside covers:

- Bystander theories
- Understanding social norms
- Harmful masculinities
- Sexual and domestic violence
- Sexual harassment
- Child sex offences
- Safeguarding
- Role-plays for positive bystander intervention in sports settings

Bystander Intervention

Football Onside takes participants through the four key stages required to become an active bystander and change harmful cultures: noticing, interpreting as a problem, assuming responsibility and taking action (see left). When people intervene well, it sends a message to the wrongdoer, and to other potential wrongdoers, that their behaviour will not be accepted by the group. Positive interventions, in turn, show other bystanders that it's okay to speak out and therefore encourage future positive interventions. Through this process, group norms change – in this case, the norms that shore-up sexual and domestic violence and abuse. Football Onside engages participants to recognise the root causes of violence and abuse, such as gender inequality and harmful masculinities which objectify and de-humanise women. The programme equips participants with the skills to tackle 'locker-room' culture, sexual harassment and different forms of sexual and domestic abuse including that against children and men. In order to equip participants to better safeguard young people, the programme also covers child sex offences. Participants are empowered and motivated to take responsibility for ending violence as part of the community in which they live and work.

The Evidence

Research shows bystander programmes show promise as effective primary prevention of violence against women. Studies, including experimental, have found significant improvement in myth acceptance, bystander attitudes, efficacy and intent, willingness to help, actual bystander behaviours and a reduction in incidence of violence. ⁽³⁾

(1) WHO Report 2013; (2) Home Office 2019, Consultation and Domestic Abuse Draft Bill (3) Muij et al, A systematic review of bystander interventions for the prevention of sexual violence. Trauma, Violence and Abuse. 2019;1-16; Jouriles et al. Bystander programs addressing sexual violence on college campuses: A systematic review and meta-analysis of program outcomes and delivery methods. J Am Coll Health. 2018;66(6):457 p-66; Fenton RA, Mott, H. L., McCartan, K., Rumney, P. N. A review of evidence for bystander intervention to prevent sexual and domestic violence in universities. 2016.Public Health England

The Research

Method

We conducted **focus groups** and **interviews** with staff at Exeter CITY Community Trust to design the programme specifically for a football and sports setting. A **survey** conducted before and after the course gave us insight into whether those doing the course had changed in their attitudes and beliefs, knowledge and confidence to make bystander interventions. We also interviewed participants after the course to see if they had made interventions.

Key Findings:

Those who took the course had:

- **Reduced beliefs in rape and domestic abuse myths.**
For example, participants are now significantly less likely to exonerate the perpetrator or blame the victim for abuse.
- **Improved in their intention to help others and readiness to change themselves.**
- **Improved their knowledge of the law in this area and reported that this makes them more confident to intervene**
- **Increased in their confidence to be a bystander**
- **Reported that since the course they had intervened positively in a potentially harmful situation.**

"I have broader knowledge around abuse and feel empowered to intervene as a bystander"

We found that there was a statistically significant improvement across all measures

Who Took Part?

34

Participants

From: Exeter CITY
Community Trust
and Football Club
staff, coaches,
academy players,
Devon FA

88%

Identified as
men

97%

Identified as
White British

85%

Identified as
heterosexual

Ranging in age:

18-58

Years old



Further Results

84%

Of those who were in the situation verbally challenged sexist comments or jokes since the beginning of the intervention, compared to 40% before.

82%

Said they are now confident to speak up to someone who is swearing at a partner compared to 58% before the intervention.

83%

Said they were confident to talk to a friend, relative, or colleague who they think might be in an abusive relationship, compared to 67% before the intervention.

91%

Said they were confident to speak up to someone who was making excuses for using physical force in a relationship compared to 81% before.

90%

Signalled disapproval at sexist comments or jokes by using body language compared to 52% before.

5 out of 6

Participants had challenged their friend, relative or colleague who put their partner down. Before the intervention only 4 out of 11 participants reported doing so.

Football Onside:

Is evidence-based; Adheres to public health criteria for effective prevention;
Has been rigorously evaluated and shows effectiveness

Testimonials

"In a changing room, someone said something. I said, '**That's too far. Enough of that now,**' and no one ever made a comment like that throughout the whole day... So I don't think I would have done that without this [the programme]... Knowing that I stepped in and potentially **helped someone**, it really did make my day, and it put a smile on my face for the rest of the day..." Male, 18 y.o

"Since the course I have gained **more confidence** when needing to step up and say something. The ladies team not being treated equal, this course **empowered me to step up** and really say what I wanted. Sending an email to some hierarchy **to challenge** this behaviour. And challenging the fact there is one rule for one another for the boys/men." Female, 27 y.o.

"So if you go past somebody with the ball, you 'rape' them. Horrendous. But I've played football professionally and semi-professionally from 16, **so it becomes normal, but it's not**. It's a horrendous word. It's not used in that context, but it's not right to say. So someone said that at training and I said '**Do you know what you're saying when you say that?**' And he didn't, he was like 'Oh no.' When I said it to him, he was horrified. **But it's not right** and it's something that maybe I would have pretended I hadn't heard [before the programme]..." Male, late 30's

"I learned a lot about perceptions that can prevent interventions and also about different ways it is possible **to intervene safely and productively**. I think it would be a very positive step to get the academy u18 players to take part in the Football Onside programme if this is a possibility." Male, 31 y.o.

"Very useful course. This will certainly allow me to be better engaged with the **needs of young people**." Male, 58 y.o.

"I think the one thing that I got from the sessions is **how many different ways** there are of intervening **without actually being confrontational**. And again, that was **really, really useful**. I thought that was really helpful. And that's stuck with me since, definitely..." Male, 29 y.o

"Improved knowledge has got me to think about how even slight changes in behaviour can have a big impact on the way certain social stereotypes are viewed, and how they can be altered." Male, 37 y.o

The Research Team:

Dr Rachel Fenton is a Senior Lecturer in Law and Speak Out Guardian at the University of Exeter. Rachel is a national expert on bystander programming for the prevention of sexual violence, sexual harassment and domestic violence and led a multi-disciplinary team for Public Health England on reviewing the literature, developing and evaluating the first evidence-based bystander programme for University settings ([The Intervention Initiative](#)). This work has been implemented and cited internationally and nationally including by Select Committees, the United Nations as well as the UK and Welsh governments. Rachel has subsequently led the development and evaluation of Football Onside and Active Bystander Communities. Rachel has talked about her work in Parliament, on BBC 1 news, Victoria Derbyshire, Woman's Hour, Today on Radio 4, Radio 5 and The Sunday Politics Show and written for The Guardian, The Times Higher and The Conversation.



Dr Nathan Eisenstadt is a Senior Research Associate at the University of Exeter with particular expertise in violence prevention, behaviour change and masculinity. Nathan co-designed and delivered 'Football Onside'. Nathan is lead qualitative evaluator on the Drive Project – a national pilot aiming addressing high risk perpetrators of domestic abuse and has worked with domestic abuse perpetrators. He is currently researching the micro-level dynamics of behaviour change and resistance to change in the context of a domestic violence perpetrator programme.



Anastasiia Kovalenko is a PhD Researcher at the University of Exeter Medical School. She is a social psychologist with an interest in bystander approaches to violence prevention. Prior to her PhD, Anastasiia worked on an EU-funded road safety project covering 10 countries and was also part of the team involved in UN 2020 Sustainable Development Goal promotion.



“Bystander intervention is about empowering all members of the community to speak up and challenge gender inequality and the drivers of violence against women. It's about helping people to find their own way to make an impact and make a difference. When nobody speaks up this empowers people to continue their unacceptable behaviour”