

**USER VOICE**

ONLY OFFENDERS CAN STOP RE-OFFENDING

**THE VOICE OF PEOPLE ON  
PROBATION:**

**SUPPORTING  
PERPETRATORS OF  
DOMESTIC ABUSE FOR  
BETTER OUTCOMES**

**JULY 2023**

# Contents

**Page 3 - WRITERS AND CONTRIBUTORS**

**Page 4 - FOREWORD**

**Page 5 - KEY FINDINGS**

**Page 6 - PROJECT OVERVIEW**

**Page 9 - APPROACH**

**Page 10 - IMPACT OF PROBATION EXPERIENCE**

**Page 17 - IMPACT OF INTERVENTION EXPERIENCE**

**Page 23 - CASE STUDY**

**Page 29 - PEER LED SOLUTIONS**

# USER VOICE

User Voice is a nationwide UK charity created and run by people with lived experience of the criminal justice system.

We exist to reduce offending by working with the most marginalized people in prisons, probation, and youth offending services. We ensure they have the opportunity to be heard and to influence change. User Voice operates elected Peer Councils and peer-led, solution based, research consultations in prisons and the probation service throughout the UK.

User Voice and HM Inspectorate of Probation share the same goal of creating change that results in high-quality probation and youth offending services that change people's lives for the better.

As part of User Voice's relationship HM Inspectorate of Probation, over 2,500 people have had their voice heard as part of thirty-four regional inspections of Probation Deliver Units and three thematic inspections over the past year. The relationship between the two organisations continues to grow as thousands more will have their voices heard in the years to come.

This report that outlines the voice of people on probation for the inspection titled 'A thematic inspection of work undertaken, and progress made, by the Probation Service to reduce the incidence of domestic abuse and protect victims' and is just one part of the full inspection. Therefore, we recommend reading the full report published by HM Inspectorate of Probation that we make reference to in this report to get a complete picture.

# WRITERS AND CONTRIBUTORS

## **Project and Research Lead:**

Christopher Purnell

## **Lived Experience Peer Researcher:**

Garry Waller

## **Research Support:**

Angelika Wilinska

Anna D'Apuzzo

Bess Gorman

Callum Hanniffy

Elizabeth Lydon

Macarena Salinas

Tone Ovenberg

Tonje Grendsen

# FOREWORD

At His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation, we believe that it is important to give a voice to those who are supervised and impacted by the services we inspect. Therefore, as part of our commitment to participation and increasing user involvement, we commissioned User Voice to conduct interviews with people on probation for our thematic inspection into domestic abuse. This report produced by User Voice to sit alongside our inspection report, presents the findings from their research project to help better understand how the Probation Service is supporting perpetrators of abuse to reduce the incidence of domestic abuse and protect victims.

Approximately 30% of people on probation are identified as current or previous perpetrators of domestic abuse, and it is clear that the impact of domestic abuse is significant with 2.4 million adults being victims of domestic abuse across England and Wales in 2022. Further, one in seven children live with domestic abuse at some point during their childhood. These figures are concerning and therefore, the effective management of domestic abuse should be a key priority.

As part of this research project User Voice asked 55 people on probation identified as perpetrators of domestic abuse, who had been managed by the Probation Service, questions around their experience of and support received from probation; the effectiveness of intervention programmes and what the service needs to do to better help perpetrators of domestic abuse, to reduce reoffending. It was positive to hear the views of one participant on their intervention programme who stated that: "It had a tremendous impact on myself. It opened my eyes to a few things you would have never even thought was abuse. You know it's quite an eye opener".

Those who felt that their intervention programme was not impactful cited reasons such as a lack of an individually tailored programme to meet their needs and being overloaded with information. This shows that there are still improvements that are required to support perpetrators of domestic abuse in order to reduce such offences. The report findings also highlight the importance of the relationship those on probation have with their probation practitioner.

We would like to thank User Voice for their work on this report and for contributing towards our important goal of increasing the voices of people on probation.



**Justin Russell**  
**HM Chief Inspector of Probation**

# KEY FINDINGS

- Intervention programmes provide positive experiences for participants that aids desistance from further incidents of domestic abuse.
- **67%** of those attending intervention programmes stated that their experience has had a positive impact on them avoiding further domestic abuse incidences. The majority of the others rely on self-motivation.
- Probation experience varies from person to person.
- All aspects of an individual's probation experience are greatly affected by the relationship with their probation practitioner.
- People on probation need flexibility. There needs to be an agreement between the individual and their probation practitioner on an order that suits their offence but also their individual needs.
- Just over half of people on probation feel heard by probation as their stories are listened to by probation staff. However, the majority feel like they don't have a say in how probation is run.
- Participant led solutions include better training for probation staff, flexibility and the involvement of lived experience.

# PROJECT OVERVIEW

**2.4  
million**

People in England and Wales aged 16 years and over are estimated to have experienced domestic abuse within the year ending March 2022.[1]

**1.5  
million**

Incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the police in England and Wales within the year ending March 2022.[2]

**10.4  
million**

Adults aged 16 years and over are estimated to have experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16 years. [2]

**22%**

Of adults over the age of 16 in the population have experienced an incident of domestic abuse. [2]

**134**

Domestic homicides occurred in the year ending March 2022. [3]

**12**

Serious Further Offence notifications that were identified as potential domestic homicides were received by HM Prison and Probation Service between April 2020 and March 2021.[2]

**84**

Females were victims of domestic homicide in the year ending March 2022. 81 of which were killed by a male suspect. [1]

The magnitude of these statistics highlight why it is imperative that we better support both victims of domestic abuse and perpetrators of domestic abuse to avoid repeat incidences of abuse.

One of the best and easiest ways to do so is to listen to both victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse to see how they are currently being supported. By doing so you better understand what works well with the support they're receiving, what their biggest issues are, and what they believe can be done to better support individuals in the future.

This consultation is the first of its kind and aims to better understand how the Probation Service supports perpetrators of domestic abuse by speaking to the perpetrators themselves. The objective was to understand how or if the service meets their needs. Furthermore, our objectives were:

- To understand the experience of people on probation and what support they have (or haven't) had both in general and in relation to their offence.
- To understand the effectiveness of intervention programmes in reducing reoffending and helping rehabilitate participants.
- To collate people on probation's views on what probation needs to do to better help perpetrators of domestic abuse.
- To highlight any good practices that could be built upon by the service.

Through gaining insight into the objectives above from those with lived experience, peer-led solutions can be developed with the aim of better supporting people on probation and therefore protecting victims of domestic abuse.



# APPROACH

## PRE-FIELDWORK

- Research materials were developed with the involvement of lived experience panel.
- Participant recruitment had two facets:
  - HMIP forwarded the contact details of the cases they were inspecting.
  - A mapping exercise was undertaken to highlight any third parties that worked with perpetrators of domestic violence.

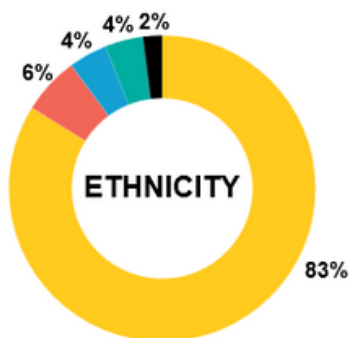
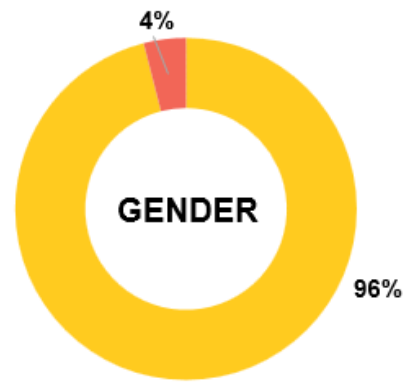
## FIELDWORK

- Remote semi-structured interviews were conducted by 1 lived experience peer researcher across various regions in England.

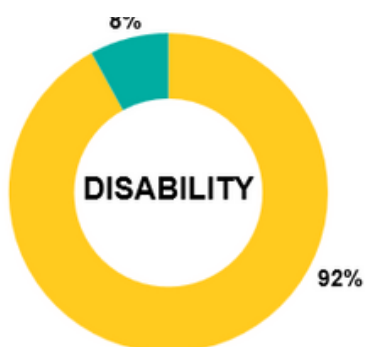
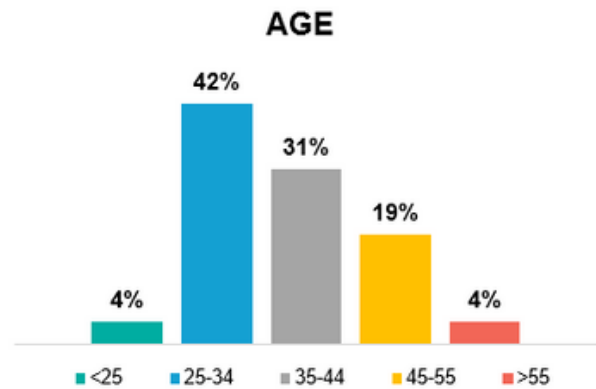
## DATA ANALYSIS

- All interviews were transcribed.
- Thematic data analysis was completed on all responses.
- An analysis session was held with all the research staff involved on the project. The purpose was to identify key themes in the data and areas of focus for the report.

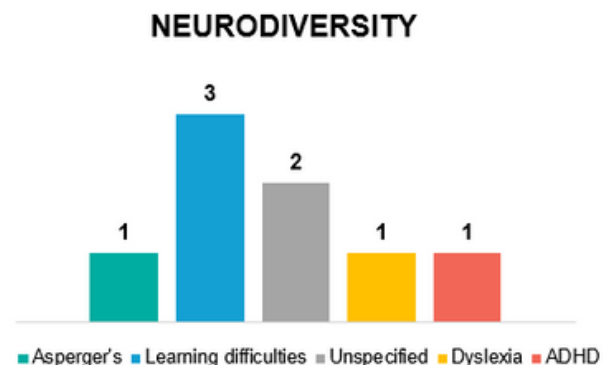
# RESEARCH SAMPLE



- White British
- Black Caribbean
- British Asian
- Mixed Heritage
- White European



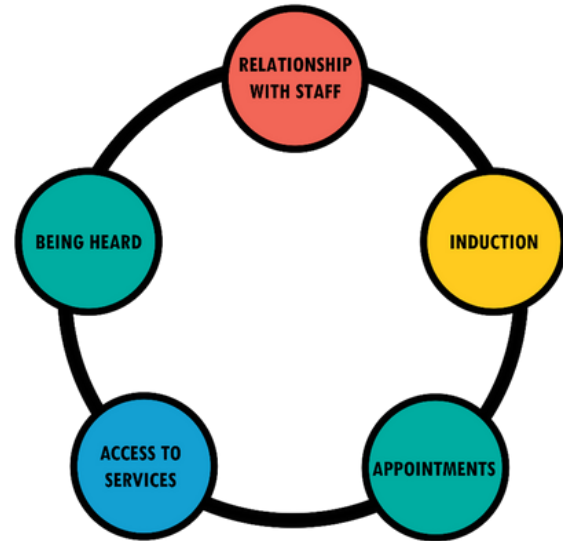
- Yes
- No



# IMPACT OF PROBATION EXPERIENCE

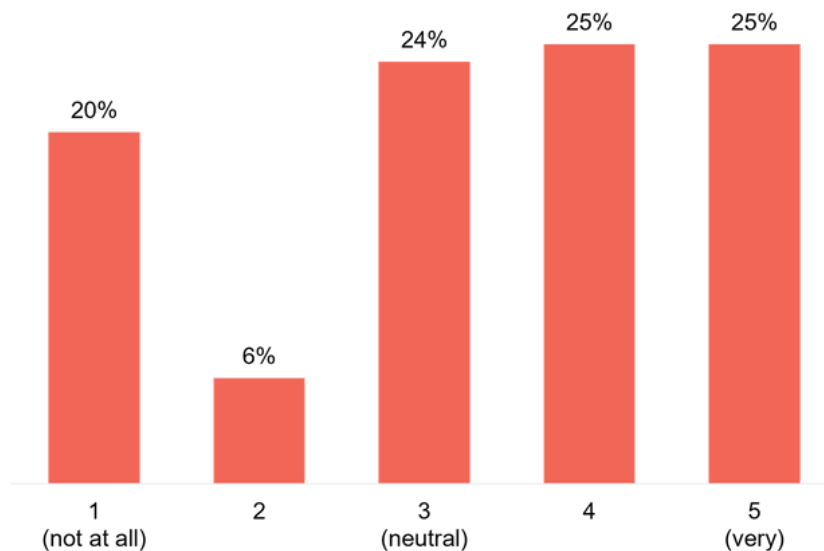
The role of the Probation Service is to supervise individuals serving community orders while protecting the public. This includes supervising and supporting perpetrators of domestic abuse that have been either released after serving a custodial sentence or are serving a community sentence.

For the purpose of this consultation, we broke down an individual's probation experience into five key areas to better understand how or if they're being supported in each of the five areas to prevent further incidents of domestic abuse. These five key areas were:



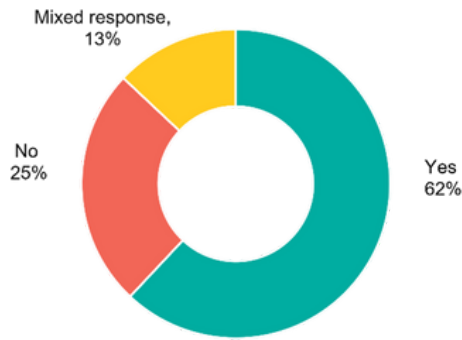
Their relationship with probation staff; their experience with induction; their experience with their appointments; their ability to access services; and to what extent they feel heard by probation. Overall, probation experience varied greatly. Therefore, how impactful the support given by the Probation Service to help the individual to avoid further incidences of domestic abuse also varied greatly.

**Q:** Please state on a scale of one (not at all) to five (very) how well you feel supported by probation in helping you to avoid further domestic abuse incidences:

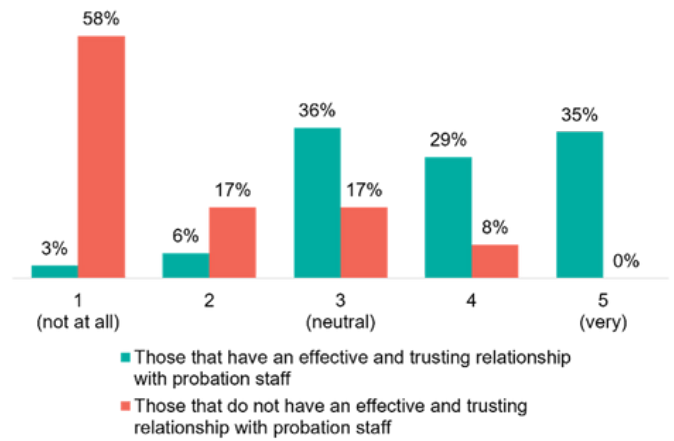


What is clear from the findings is that outside of their intervention programme experience, the quality of the individual's relationship with probation staff, mainly that of their probation practitioner, is the key component of their probation experience that affects how well they're supported to avoid further incidences of domestic abuse.

**Q: Do you think you have an effective and trusting relationship with probation staff?**



**Q: Please state on a scale of one (not at all) to five (very) how well you feel supported by probation in helping you to avoid further domestic abuse incidences:**



**6 in 10** participants stated that they have an effective and trusting relationship with probation staff.

These trusting relationships were developed through good modes of communication in which people on probation felt like no judgement was passed regarding their index offence. Those that reported having a positive relationship with their probation practitioner spoke of a mutual respect between both parties. When this is the case, people on probation are more likely to have open conversations about their life and offence, which they perceive to be beneficial to their rehabilitation.

An effective probation practitioner is seen by people on probation as somebody who offers support for their individual needs and often goes above and beyond for the individual on their caseload.

*“Two officers who have gone above and beyond to help at all costs. They check in to see how I am. If I can’t make it or if she can’t we just communicate, so there’s always communication.”*

*“I just feel like I can say anything to her. I can tell her, and she doesn’t judge, you know.”*

*“She’s respectful. I respect her because she respects me.”*

*“They have offered me support and always weekly check in with me... She’s always said that if I need to ring her anytime, I’m always welcome.”*

However, many people on probation expressed that they didn’t feel like they had an effective and trusting relationship with probation staff. **75%** of the thirteen participants that stated that they do not have an effective and trusting relationship with probation staff feel unsupported by probation to avoid further incidences of domestic abuse.

People on probation felt that it was difficult to develop an effective and trusting relationship with probation staff when they do not experience continuity with the same probation practitioner throughout their probation order. This revolving door of probation practitioners results in an inability to develop the connection necessary to be well supported and therefore has a negative impact on their rehabilitation.

In many cases, people felt like had developed an effective and trusting relationship with a probation practitioner to have them leave the service. It then takes time to develop such a relationship with a new probation practitioner which is seldom facilitated by a handover that involves both practitioners and the person on probation.

*"I've had three probation practitioners in the space of a year. Every time I get comfortable with a probation practitioner, they up and go to another office."*

*"I've had five different probation practitioners and I've been on it only a year or so you don't really get a chance to build a relationship with them."*

As previously stated, trusting and effective relationships can be developed though good modes of communication. However conversely, relationships with probation practitioners are poor when people on probation experience poor modes of communication.

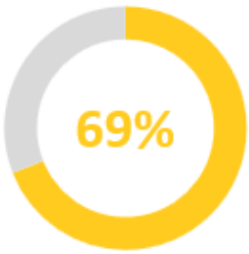
In many cases, people on probation either experienced a distinct lack of communication or ineffective modes of interaction that are perceived to be rude or condescending. The way probation practitioners interact with people can often lead to them putting up barriers which affects their progress.

*"I don't really hear from them often. When you go to appointments, they just ask you how you've been, it's just a catch up... There's not really anything on how to stop anything."*

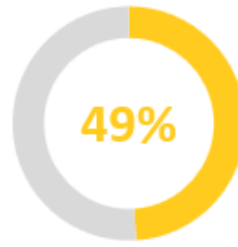
*"It's like the person you're dealing with is pretending to care about what's going on in your life."*

*"My probation officer can be quite condescending sometimes, speaking and looking down to me and that."*

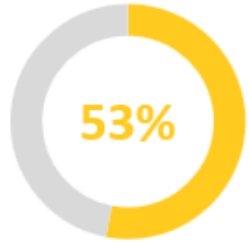
*"Some talk to you like a piece of shit, it's just a job for them."*



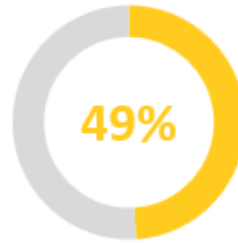
Just over two thirds (69%) of people on probation stated that their induction was useful and informative.



Just under half (49%) of people on probation stated that they get what they need out of their appointments.



Just over half (53%) of people on probation stated that their voice is heard by probation.



Just under half (49%) of people that need support stated that probation have helped them access the services they need.

All five areas of probation experience outlined in this report were found to be greatly affected by the effectiveness of the individual's relationship with their probation practitioner.

For example, all thirteen people that stated they don't have an effective and trusting relationship with their probation practitioner said that they don't get what they need to out of appointments. Many described the appointments as "pointless tick-box exercises" with people left frustrated and not taking any real value from them.

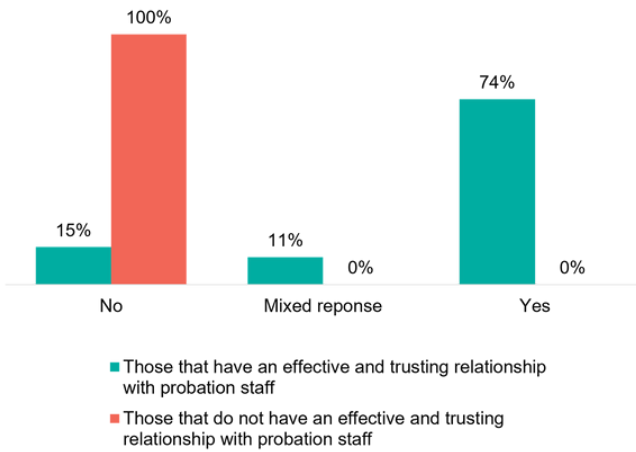
*"The appointments were just a tick-box exercise, it was three buses to get there and it's not worth my time at all. I don't have much of a social life due to my order. They haven't got it right, I don't see the progression."*

In contrast, **3 in 4** people that have an effective and trusting relationship with their probation practitioner stated that they get what they need to out of their appointments.

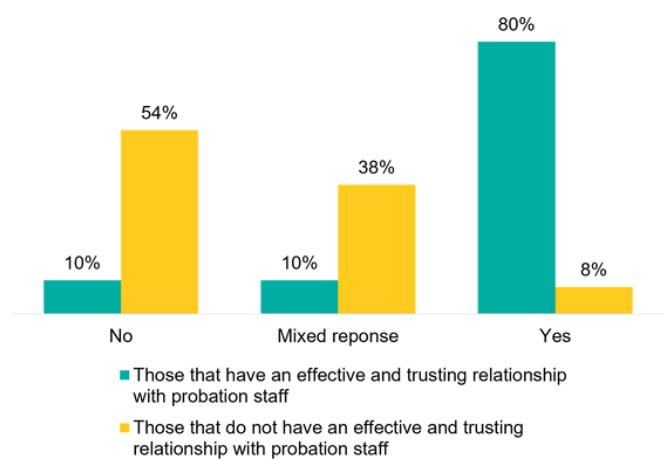
This is mainly due to probation staff being accommodating, flexible and respectful. In such cases, people on probation feel supported with their rehabilitation which often leads to both desistance and the foundation for an improved quality of life and focus.

*"I did get what I needed in the sense it has helped me look at my behaviour and realise that I don't want to keep on being on probation. I would much rather start my own business."*

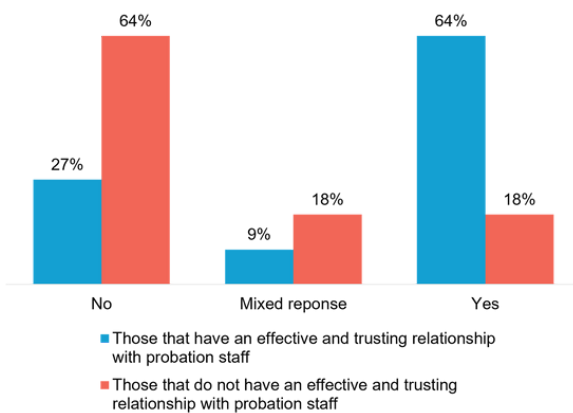
**Q: Do you get what you need out of appointments?**



**Q: Do you feel like your voice is heard by probation?**



**Q: Have probation helped you access the services you need?**



There is a clear variance in interviewee’s perception of the quality of supervision that perpetrators of domestic abuse experience from the Probation Service and their individual probation practitioners. The full thematic inspection report released by HM Inspectorate of Probation further highlights the issues faced by probation staff that lead to this variance in experience.

Across the inspection, HM Inspectorate of Probation found that staffing shortages in the Probation Service have led to reductions in expectations around minimum levels of contact with people on probation, partnership working, and the delivery of interventions. Taking everything into consideration, high caseloads were found to often prohibit them from being able to complete meaningful work. [2]

These findings align with the voice of people on probation. Below are two participant led solutions that address people’s issues with the contrast in experience with probation practitioners:

# SOLUTIONS

## The Issue:

People on probation are experiencing a revolving door of probation practitioners. This lack of continuity inhibits trust and creates frustration for the individual.



## Suggested Solution:

Better support for probation practitioners to prevent frequent changes to individual cases and make caseloads more manageable for staff.

*“Had four different probation practitioners in six months, which leaves you very distressed and anxious and it’s not easy. There has to be a way to have the same probation practitioner consistently.”*

## The Issue:

The variance in experience that people are experiencing with probation practitioners is vast and people’s rehabilitation suffers because of it.



## Suggested Solution:

In depth training that involves both people with lived experience and those staff that are noted by people on probation as getting it right.

*“The probation officer does not know how to help with the opened-up feelings and thoughts. Probation practitioners need to be able to help those emotions back in working order... probation should be trained up more efficiently in mental health. If they are going to discuss it, they should be able to support it.”*

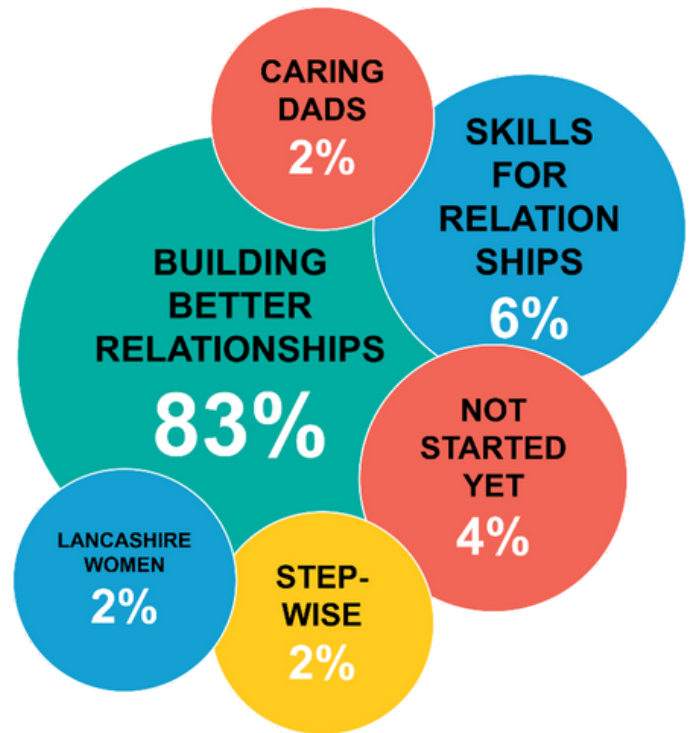


# IMPACT OF INTERVENTION EXPERIENCE

Out of the **55** participants in the consultation, **5** different types of intervention programme were attended by participants with **4%** still waiting for their intervention programme at the time of the consultation.

The vast majority of participants (**83%**) had either completed or were nearing the end of the Building Better Relationships (BBR) intervention accredited programme.

Building Better Relationships is a His Majesty's Prison and Probation (HMPPS) moderate-intensity cognitive-behavioural programme for adult men convicted of an Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) offence.



BBR is targeted at adult male perpetrators in custody and the community who are assessed as (a) having a history of partner abuse that has resulted in a current IPV-related conviction, and (b) being of moderate risk of re-offending. Intervention needs targeted by BBR can be classified into three domains: (1) pro-offending thinking styles; (2) emotional awareness and management; and (3) relationship problems.[4]

We asked people on probation how impactful their experience with the intervention programme that they attended has been in helping them to avoid further domestic abuse incidences. Overall, **2 in 3** participants believed that their intervention programme has had a positive impact on them avoiding further domestic abuse incidences. **57%** of the forty-two participants with experience of BBR reported the same.

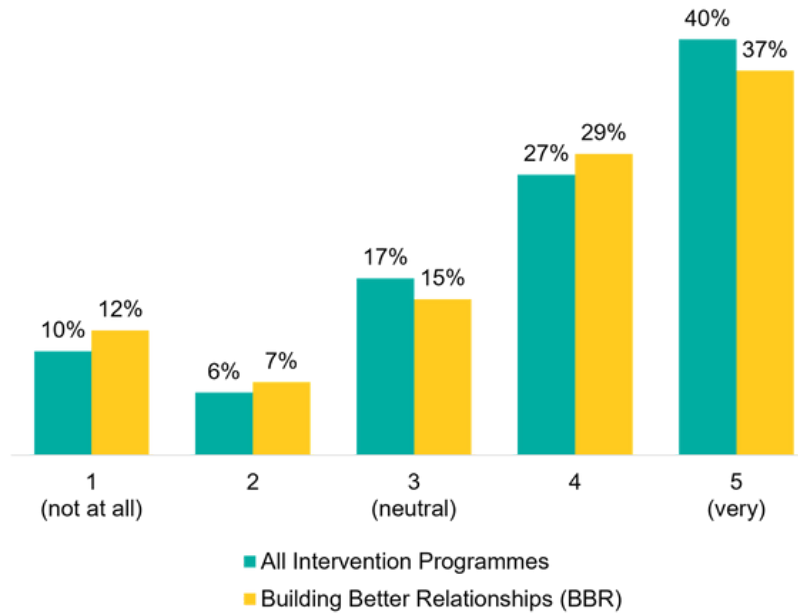
**16%** of participants responded that the programmes haven't been impactful in helping them avoid further domestic abuse incidences (**19%** for BBR). However, most of the people on probation that didn't think the intervention programme was impactful stated that they were already self-motivated to not be involved in further incidences of domestic abuse. Therefore, the intervention programmes didn't have an impact on them personally.

*"I didn't need the course in order not too reoffend - I already knew it was the worst thing I had done in my life. It has been educational. It's not a total waste of time."*

*"Myself is my motivation. It wasn't helpful as the courses are always the same that I did throughout my sentence. It wasn't beneficial as it was repetitive. It was like a refresher. I didn't learn anything new."*

**Q:** Please state on a scale of one (not at all) to five (very) how impactful the intervention programme has been in helping you to avoid further domestic abuse incidences:

It's clear from the findings that the majority of participants found their intervention programme to be either helpful or very helpful in terms of supporting them to avoid further incidences of domestic abuse. Four key themes emerged as to why participants found them to be helpful.



## INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES ARE AN 'EYE-OPENER' AND A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

The most prominent theme that emerged from the semi-structured interviews with people on probation was that their intervention programme experience has been a catalyst for a positive change in their mindset.

Participants reported that the programmes offered many an opportunity to self-reflect and provided insight into why they were behaving the way they were and allowed them to own their mistakes. As well as being able to understand their own behaviour, people reported that the programmes allowed them to have a better understanding of the perspective of the victim.

An interesting take-away noted by multiple participants was that it gave them a better understanding of what constitutes abuse. For some, BBR opened their eyes as to why the behaviours they were exhibiting were abusive which then then allowed them to better understand themselves and put the mechanisms in place to make sure that this doesn't happen again in the future.

*"It's making me go over what was going on in my life at the time. It's building me back to how I was before. Big eye opener."*

*"Before going on the course my mind set was one way and after the course it was another. It made me take a step back and realise I was in the wrong. So, taking that forward it will help me."*

*"This was the third time on the same offence, but the first time I got anything out of it. I did find it helpful, it did prevent things from happening again. I loved going over things I had done and realise where I went wrong."*

*"I struggled with the course at first a lot... But, I stuck it out, got it done and now situations in my life have completely changed me as a person. The course helped me with that, it helped me in my head, mentally. It was a little bit like therapy."*

*"I'm enjoying it. It's an eye opener... I used to walk around with a chip on my shoulder, it really changed me as a person."*

*"It had a tremendous impact on myself. It opened my eyes to a few things you would have never even thought was abuse. You know it's quite an eye opener."*

*"I got insights into how children and women experience abuse and learnt a different perspective."*

## **PEOPLE ARE ABLE TO DEVELOP VITAL COPING MECHANISMS THROUGH INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES**

Those on probation that took part in the consultation reported that their intervention programmes have directly helped them to avoid reoffending and commit further incidences of domestic abuse. The coping mechanisms learned on the programmes gave many an increased ability to control their emotions, not to be reactionary and make better decisions.

Participants also stated that they learned skills and coping mechanisms for their everyday life. For example, one participant stated they learned how to speak to friends and family in a more productive manner. Whilst another said that they have used the coping mechanisms to diffuse issues in the workplace.

*"The coping mechanisms were spot on. Had I learnt this sooner I wouldn't have been in this position."*

*"I haven't done the same offence since. I've been able to avoid and control certain situations."*

*"Since being released and being in BBR I've had a new partner, we've got into a couple of disagreements and I've used the skills I've learned in BBR - took some time, stepped back, see where she was coming from. It's made a really positive impact on me in that sense, instead of relying on instincts."*

*"It has taught me quite a lot to be honest. Just to control how I go about speaking with people. It has helped me out with people. Made me step back a bit and think about what I'm actually going to be saying."*

*"I'm a lot more aware of my decision making and know how to handle myself."*

## **INSIGHTFUL AND CARING TUTORS FOSTER UNDERSTANDING AND IMPROVE RESISTANCE**

People on probation reported that in most cases, the person leading the programme was helpful and understanding, which led to a better experience and increased learning. The effective relationships with the often-relatable staff resulted in an increased capacity to take information and coping mechanisms onboard.

Some participants mentioned that their programme tutor created a positive environment that made people on the course want to come back.

*"The way my tutor explained things was brilliant. He also let me speak and have an opinion which is important. He was brilliant."*

*"I have learnt a lot from it... If I didn't have her [the tutor], I would not have gotten through it."*

*"I wouldn't understand things a lot just with the courses and that, she [the tutor] works with you, and you understand her. It's been better and like, she always sets you goals and stuff. So, it helps you just keep your head down, and you know, keep working."*

*"Some things are obvious, but you don't think about it and when they talk about it makes you realise. The way they explain it makes it so easy to understand."*

## **A POSITIVE GROUP ENVIRONMENT LEADS TO AN IMPROVED INTERVENTION PROGRAMME EXPERIENCE**

The majority of people found the group setting of the intervention programmes to be beneficial, although some did state otherwise.

Participants stated that they benefitted personally from helping each other understand their situations and found it useful to be around others that have similar shared experiences with themselves.

Similar to what was noted regarding the role of an effective programme tutor, a positive group environment and comradery between the people on the programme increased the likelihood for people to complete the programme and therefore learn the skills and coping mechanisms necessary to decrease the risk of committing further incidences of domestic abuse.

*"There's a couple of things I will take out of it which I can probably use in the future. The fellas I was with, we were obviously there to help each other. It's good to help each other."*

*"There's also something about being in a group, where you got people going through similar things in regards to struggling with child contact, all that kind of stuff that goes on. Whilst it has good and bad sides, you don't want to get caught up in that victim mentality but at the same time it helps knowing I'm not the only one going through those things."*

*"We had a good team and a good group, and we bounced off each other and it wasn't a dreadful feeling to go to. It was a cohesive group, and we shared our experiences. The activities were good."*

*"The lads I'm doing the course with, we're all on the same boat, we're bonding. So the comradery is a good thing I'd say."*

# EFFECTIVE PRACTICE CASE STUDY

## HOW ATTENDING BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS HELPED JASON TAKE A STEP BACK AND BETTER MANAGE DIFFICULT SITUATIONS BY TAKING A VIEW FROM ABOVE

Jason, a 27-year-old male, grew up in the care system from a very young age. Jason therefore grew up in similar circumstances to many of those that have lived experience of the criminal justice system. An estimated 24% of the adult prison population have previously been in care, and nearly 50% of under 21-year-olds in contact with the criminal justice system have spent time in care.[5]

Throughout Jason's childhood he was labelled as 'naughty' which eventually came to a head in secondary school and college, a period which he describes as "very rocky." At a young age he started to get involved in minor offences such as "jumping trains and not paying for tickets."

At the age of 21 Jason was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome which for him was a long-needed explanation for his perceived naughty behaviour and offered insight into why school was particularly difficult for him. His diagnosis of a neurodiverse condition, coupled with his time in care, means that he shares multiple comorbidities with others that find themselves serving both community and custodial sentences in the UK.

*"I was adopted at about the age of three, I was in and out of social services for a while when I was a very young kid. Had a bit of a very rocky schooling especially in secondary school and college. I was diagnosed when I was 21 with Asperger's syndrome, the school didn't pick it up so when they felt that I was actually being what would be deemed as a naughty child, it actually wasn't, it could have been justified by the Autism..."*

*... At that time, I had some minor offences for jumping trains and for not paying tickets, things like that."*

In 2019, Jason split up with a girlfriend and started a relationship with another woman. Things moved fast and Jason and his girlfriend decided to move in together. This is when he feels the relationship became "contentious."

This contentiousness is what Jason considers led to the index offences he was charged with and plead guilty to. Jason described momentarily losing his inhibition and losing his temper. For him, it was like a "red mist" came over him.

*"It was 2019 and I had split up with one girlfriend and then got with another girl. We were together probably about half a year and then decided that we were going to move in together and the relationship was very contentious. It was very up and down, she was trying to get reactions and then eventually did which led to the subject offences."*

*It was almost like a red mist came up and at that point I didn't fully know what I was doing and I lost my temper."*



Jason was first arrested and released on bail but then was arrested again for perverting the course of justice as the two continued to live together. As part of his sentence, Jason was required to attend the Building Better Relationships (BBR) programme as part of his probation order.

*“After the first offence I was arrested and then released on police bail with conditions obviously not to contact her but we stayed in a relationship and continued living together because I was paying the rent for the house at the time and I then got arrested for perverting the course of justice...*

*...I pleaded guilty to subject offences got released from custody with immediate effect by the judge because he decided to suspend the sentences. And part of the sentence for the subject offences was to attend the BBR programme as part of my probation requirement.”*

After a four or five month wait, Jason started to attend weekly group sessions for the BBR programme. A programme that he found to be well structured and led by “really good facilitators.” He found the facilitators to be respectful and that they adapted the programme to the individuals on the course which resulted in what Jason views as being beneficial to the rehabilitation of each person attending.

*“Obviously it took quite a while to get registered onto the BBR programme because the probation service was still coming out of COVID restrictions. It was probably about a four- or five-month delay.*

*I found BBR to be very well structured, had some really good facilitators as well which was really helpful. One facilitator, XXXXX, she stayed with the course throughout so from start to finish she was there. So, we had different facilitators for different modules, but they were all really understanding, they didn't judge, they took everyone's opinions and offences into consideration. So, it wasn't always particularly focused on one type of abuse. It wasn't always physical abuse, it was psychological as well.”*

Jason seemed most impacted by the tools and coping mechanisms he learned on the BBR programme. He spoke about the benefits of specific tools he learned such as ‘the helicopter view tool’ which he says has not only helped him manage situations in his new relationship, but also managing interactions in his social life.

Jason spoke that there were discussions within the group on the course about the true benefits of learning these tools in that environment and how these tools, and the course in general, should be taught routinely in schools to help stop people getting involved in incidents of domestic abuse.

*“It was a structure and the tools that the facilitators used in the session that helped me. They made the tools work for everyone. With the helicopter view tool, the learning tree and things like that it was always adapted in the sense that actually you could use it around both physical and mental abuse as well.*

*The helicopter view tool in particular for me was quite helpful. I don't know if you know much about me, I'm working as the assistant manager in Sainsbury's and I actually use the helicopter view tool at work.*

*It's about taking a step back and trying to view it from other people's point of view, look at it from your point of view and look at it from a neutral person's point of view. Then you look down and it's almost like a helipad, you're looking down as if you're landing and then you make a decision based on that. It can take longer but it's usually about 5-10 seconds to just quickly step back, think about it and then act...*

*...So certain tools such as the timeout and helicopter view tool I've managed to use in my new relationship. I'd particularly use time out if we were having an argument. I'd have time out and I say "Look, I'm going for a walk I'll be about 5-10 minutes" and leave it at that. Obviously, I feel in a relationship, trust is very important, and so obviously my location was on for her so she could see where I was going so she knew I wasn't at risk to myself...*

*...It came up quite a lot during my course, and we believed as a group, that actually BBR or something similar should be taught in schools. Not necessarily primary school because that is a bit early but definitely secondary school, maybe year seven, year eight, when they're starting to become teenagers going into relationships.*

*I think if they did talk something similar to BBR in PSHE and discuss relationships. I wouldn't be able to prove it but, I suspect that 75% of the offences potentially wouldn't occur."*

Jason spoke about a specific moment in the course that was a lightbulb moment for him. There was one video shown, despite the video being outdated, that really hit home for him to recognise what he had done.

Jason will continue to use the tools he learned on the BBR programme and was grateful he was able to attend. He was aware that not everyone who needs the BBR programme gets access to it and for him, he feels like they're missing out on a lot. He feels like they're missing out on an opportunity to better understand their behaviour and a chance of reflection.

*"It was a video in particular but it's just that it was quite an old, it was an oldish video but it just always had a nerve and it was just enough to make me think mmm shit, now I get it...I will carry on using the tools that were given by BBR. I've now got all of my paperwork from it so obviously I do read it every now and again just to go over, just to go from over it in my head, refresh myself for some of the tools and things..*

*People who don't get onto the programme are missing out on a lot. They're missing out on that opportunity to learn about what they may have done, that chance of reflection and the chance to make themselves a better person.*

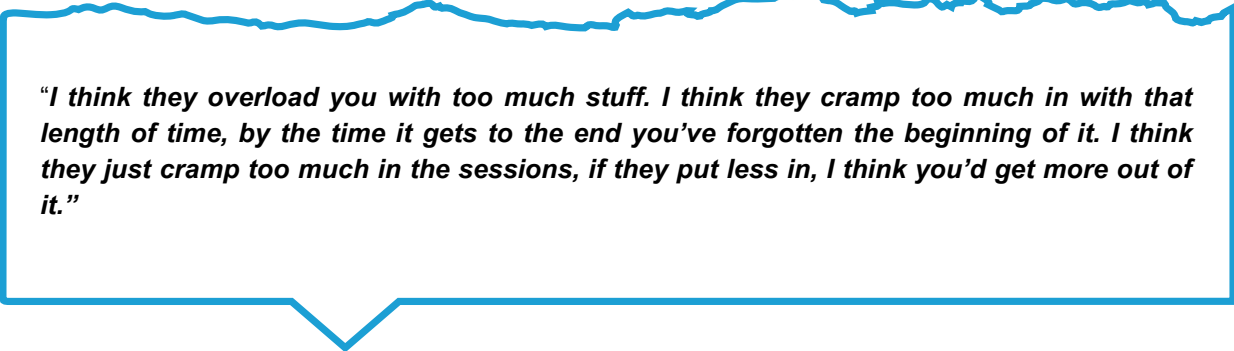
*If they are going to miss out on that it's quite sad because maybe that 50% are going to be the ones that end up back into custody, back in prison. Personally, I feel like it's not fair on them or the victim, and I feel like everyone who has committed the offence should be given the course. They should definitely be given it."*

## CHALLENGES WITH THE CURRENT APPROACH TO THE BUILDING BETTER RELATIONSHIPS (BBR) PROGRAMME

Despite participants stating that there are clear benefits to the BBR programme such as the four key themes previously noted, there are also clear inherent issues with the BBR programme.

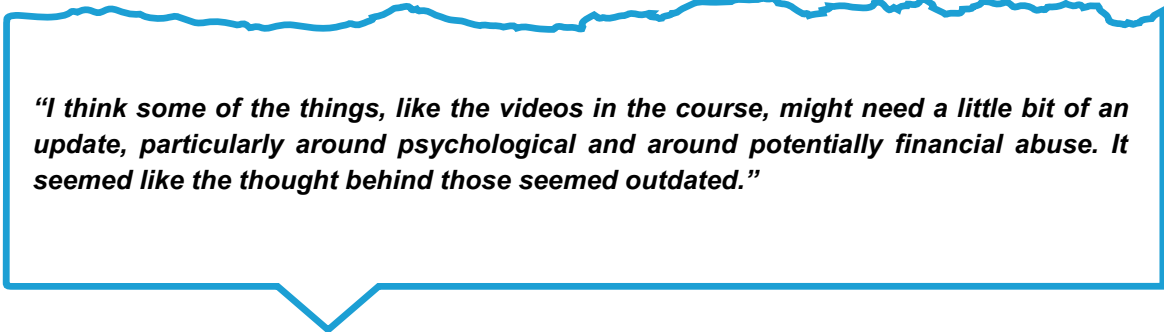
Although the majority of those that didn't think their intervention programme was impactful cited self-motivation as the reason, some participants felt that content of the intervention programme did not meet the needs of those attending the programme.

For example, some people that attended the BBR programme found that there was too much in the course itself and the useful aspects often got lost in a sea of information overload.



***“I think they overload you with too much stuff. I think they cram too much in with that length of time, by the time it gets to the end you’ve forgotten the beginning of it. I think they just cram too much in the sessions, if they put less in, I think you’d get more out of it.”***

Participants also mentioned that the BBR programme seemed out-of-date both in terms of some of the theory and the “old and dated” content used in the programme. The BBR programme was first delivered in 2012 and there hasn't been an update to the programme since that time. Therefore, it is understandable that participants found it to be outdated as it was drafted over a decade ago.



***“I think some of the things, like the videos in the course, might need a little bit of an update, particularly around psychological and around potentially financial abuse. It seemed like the thought behind those seemed outdated.”***

Some individuals stated they felt left in the dark after the programme had completed and that the content of the course was not reinforced in anyway as part of their orders. Some felt that they need further reminders and conversations to stay on the correct path. A group of participants were left to support each other through a group chat on when it's clear that probation could be doing more to better support individuals after the programme has been completed.

*“The only problem I would say is that some people could benefit from help afterwards you know... There were a few of the boys who were on the course with me who actually took my number. They were just talking to this thing and then left out in the wild sort of thing. They kept contact with me and they were asking me for help and stuff. I just advised them as best as I could.”*

HM Inspectorate of Probation’s fieldwork for the inspection found that between 21 June 2021 and 30 September 2022, 3,287 out of a total of 6,723 requirements (49%) for BBR requirements were recorded as commenced. This means that thousands of people were waiting to access the course with the remaining waiting list comprising of 2,757 people, as 679 had been terminated for other reasons. Of the individuals on the waiting list, 18% had already waited over 52 weeks to start the programme. Furthermore, data from the casework conducted by HM Inspectorate of Probation found that 45% of domestic abuse interventions had not been delivered when they should have been.

As well as there being clear issues with perpetrators of domestic abuse getting access to the intervention programmes they need, HM Inspectorate of Probation’s report also highlights issues regarding rates of completion for BBR where 3 in 10 were noted as having successfully completed their BBR requirement.

Amongst the many reasons for an individual not completing their BBR requirement, people on probation reported issues with travel amongst one of the more significant barriers to doing so.

*“Only trouble I had was just getting there, I had to get multiple buses because I ain’t got a license.”*

# CONCLUSION: PEER LED SOLUTIONS

Although there are clear issues with the BBR intervention programme that need addressing by a formal review and a subsequent update of the programme, the findings in this report suggest that there is a clear need for programmes that are tailored specifically to perpetrators of domestic abuse.

The lessons learned during intervention programmes such as what constitutes abuse coupled with the coping mechanisms taught as part of the course are vital in protecting future potential victims of domestic abuse.

All the solutions below came directly from insights from people on probation. The solutions are aimed towards amending specific parts of the probation experience, improving the quality of staff performance, and increasing the effectiveness of intervention programmes.

### **The Issue:**

People on probation often feel like they can't relate to probation staff as they don't understand their background or their experience.

### **Suggested Solution:**

Incorporate more people with lived experience in both the intervention programmes and on probation staff.




*“There needs to be people who are more educated and have lived experience. That way they can offer you proper help based on your experience.”*

### **The Issue:**

People lead busy lives and need flexibility in their orders. Flexibility was a driving factor in building a positive relationship with probation staff.

### **Suggested Solution:**

People's schedules and personal lives should be considered and discussed during their induction to find the best structure to their order that works for both the probation practitioner and the individual.




*"They're no flexible with appointments. If I don't turn up, I get breached, so I have no choice. We need more flexibility around our lives."*

### **The Issue:**

People on probation often travel long distances to appointments which they feel are pointless.

### **Suggested Solution:**

Consider more remote appointments for those that travel long distances and reimburse travel for those that need to spend a lot on public transport to get to the office.



*"If they want me to go there, they should pay for me to go there."*


*"I think some of the practitioner check ins could've been done over the phone or virtually... Why do we have to trek all the way across a county just to go and see someone for 10 minutes?"*

### **The Issue:**

A minority of people had an issue with certain modules in the BBR programme.

### **Suggested Solution:**

Review the methodology and modules via consultation with people that have completed the course to see what could be improved.



*“In BBR I think they should be a bit clearer about their methodology. They’d randomly put on a DVD that has nothing to do with the session, they need to explain why they put it up.”*


*“One thing I would build on the BBR. The first module is really judgy, it assumes that you have a certain mindset and believe certain things. The later it passed on the course it got more relevant.”*

### **The Issue:**

One the intervention programme is complete; some feel that they need further reminders and conversations to stay on the correct path.

### **Suggested Solution:**

Bring the language and the learning from the courses into the probation experience and appointments. There, continuing the support.



*“The only problem I would say is that some people could benefit from help afterwards you know... There were a few of the boys who were on the course with me who actually took my number. They were just taking to this thing and left out in the wild sort of thing. They kept contact with me and they were asking me for help and stuff. I just advised them as best as I could.”*



## **Building on what is already there:**

Many stated that the intervention programme needed improvement and was the biggest contributor to them not being involved in further instances of domestic abuse.

***“The positive is that it has changed me. Probation haven’t changed me the course has pretty much changed my life. It’s changed me in loads of different ways.”***

***“Just to carry on what they’re doing because they’re doing an amazing job.”***

# REFERENCES

[1] Office for National Statistics. (2022).

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseprevalenceandtrendsen glandandwales/yearendingmarch2022>

[2] His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation. (2023). A thematic inspection of work undertaken, and progress made, by the Probation Service to reduce the incidence of domestic abuse and protect victims.

<https://www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2023/07/Domestic-Abuse-Thematic-inspection-report-v1.3.pdf>

[3] Office for National Statistics. (2022).

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/homicideinenglandandwales/march2022>

[4] Ministry of Justice. (2023). Evaluating the Building Better Relationships (BBR) programme.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1149864/evaluating-the-building-better-relationships-programme.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1149864/evaluating-the-building-better-relationships-programme.pdf)

[5] Ministry of Justice. (2012). Prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds: Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/278837/prisoners-childhood-family-backgrounds.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/278837/prisoners-childhood-family-backgrounds.pdf)



FOR MORE INFORMATION  
PLEASE CONTACT: USER VOICE  
20 NEWBURN STREET  
LONDON SE11 5PJ

TEL: 020 3137 7471  
EMAIL: [INFO@USERVOICE.ORG](mailto:INFO@USERVOICE.ORG)  
WEBSITE:  
[WWW.USERVOICE.ORG](http://WWW.USERVOICE.ORG)

© USER VOICE  
2023