



MAKE THE CHANGE

Introduction and Aims of the Make the Change Programme

Make the Change is a voluntary programme for perpetrators of domestic abuse which can be accessed by males involved or not involved in the Criminal Justice System. The programme is based on the theory that violence and abuse are used to control people's behaviour.

The key principles and aims of the programme are:

- To promote the safety of women and children and prevent abuse
- To work collaboratively with other agencies to manage risk constructively
- To reduce recidivism of domestic abuse crimes

The programme is 14 weeks in duration and reflects the findings of McGuire (2002); that violence and abuse are used to control people's behaviour. McGuire says, "Therapeutic groups for men provide a unique experience for most men who typically have not had opportunities to openly and honestly explore their beliefs about intimate relationships." This is further supported by Tolman (1990) "men who have had the benefit of groups for abusive men disclose that the group process and group support were the most important elements in their change process."

The aim of the programme is to increase the offenders' insight into their violent behaviour and to model new ways of thinking and behaving through a variety of behavioural and cognitive techniques including; development of participants recognition skills of event sequencing and the emotions associated with the onset of abusive situations in order to control their responses. The use of self-assessment throughout the programme includes a range of techniques including psychometric assessments and individual activities along with didactic methods to enhance offenders' understanding of domestic abuse.

The programme addresses the issue of behavioural change (as opposed to anger management) and is designed for males who recognise that they are, or have used power and control to abuse their female partner or ex-partner and wish to address their behaviour. This abuse is more widely known as domestic abuse. Whilst we acknowledge that some women may also be abusers, this programme is specifically for men who abuse women.

Links to Theory

The programme has been developed around best practice from Duluth and other domestic abuse programmes. It is challenging in nature and participants are required to demonstrate their understanding of the subject matter, and to evidence changes in behaviour. The programme focuses on criminogenic targets, that is to say the patterns of thoughts and behaviour related to the abuse perpetrated. Also included is a cognitive component which encourages participants to focus on their attitudes and beliefs about women, relationships and themselves. Belief system change is said to “produce enduring and comprehensive alterations in attitudes and behaviours” (Rokeach, 1985)

The underpinning theory of the programme is supported by Duttons (1996) Nested Ecological Model which proposes that “several factors contribute to marital violence”. Lindzey et al (1998) This model conceptualises domestic abuse as a multi-dimensional issue and is considerate of the links between the social and psychological characteristics of perpetrators, for example experiences of abuse and degree of empathy. The perpetrators’ immediate patterns of interaction such as his environment and patterns of family interaction contribute as well as the influence of the perpetrators’ social context and wider influences such as culture.

The programmes’ theoretical perspectives are derived from Cognitive Behavioural Theory and Social Learning Theory. Cognitive Behavioural Theory combines both elements; cognition and behaviour and focuses participants on the here and now. It aims to alter thoughts which result in behaviour being affected positively. The aim of the programme is to develop participants’ ability to control their reactions to situations and to alter their thought processes and ultimately their state of mind. “It is suggested that cognitive restructuring of a violent persons perception of social events, and their relationships with others, can help in reducing aggressive behaviour and hostility” (Browne and Howells, 1996).

Social Learning Theory concerns the belief that learning takes place through observation and involvement with others. The programme offers participants a social context in which to learn and sessions are facilitated by the staff who demonstrate appropriate behaviour expectations throughout the course. Participants are encouraged to question and challenge other group members, in a respectful and mutually supportive manner. “Men in groups frequently identify with experiences of other group members, learn from examples provided by others, and give advice to others” Edleson and Tolman (1992). Within the group, participants come to understand the consequences of their behaviours and the losses suffered as a result. The theory suggests that such vicarious reinforcement increases appropriate behaviour amongst the group members. The programme also requires participants to consider the gains and losses of abusive behaviour and to share their experiences. The role of the facilitator is to continuously reinforce the pro social “message”.

Finally, moral reasoning is contained within the programme with the aim of enhancing participants’ skills to widen their social perspective. Group members complete problem-solving activities to increase understanding of the effects of their actions on others including children, family, neighbours and wider society.

