

Chris Ashton is now accepting commissions from Local Authorities to provide two day courses for men who want to become better partners and fathers. I am delighted that she can use her fees to provide the Freedom Programme to women survivors.

Here is an extract from the Men's Manual which is available on Amazon.

Introduction

How to set up the course

I have produced this manual in response to requests from hundreds of practitioners who have asked for a different approach to working with men who use violence against women.

I am Pat Craven a former probation officer who ran perpetrator programmes for Merseyside Probation Service between 1996 and 1998. I concluded that the programmes could have been much more successful if they were run in a very different style and by a different agency which was not subjected to the same constraints as a statutory body.

Imparting rules and instructions.

Everyone who attends is instructed to procure a copy of 'Living with the Dominator' and 'How Hard Can It Be...?'. They must complete the written course before attending and bring their completed copy to the event.

The letter I send to trainees when the event is confirmed includes a timetable and a list of the rules. A template of the letter is available at the end of this manual. However at the beginning of the weekend I always restate the rules as I will describe in the instructions on how to facilitate session one.

The Gender of the Facilitators

They can be either women or men. They should have experience of facilitating the Freedom Programme. They do not need a man to be present so he can be a 'role model.' Women facilitators give a message that women do not need a man to help them. However I have trained several men who understand the programme and they are also eminently suitable.

Partners

If a couple are still together, female partners should not be excluded. They should be in the room and be able to watch how he is reacting. They are the only people capable of assessing if he is learning anything or is changing. They are not only watching their own dominator but they are watching other men who are sitting in a group with him who are visibly changing. This also has the additional advantage of bringing the men's shortened version of the Freedom Programme to women who may not otherwise have a chance to attend the women's programme.

Many other women who have already completed the women's programme then bring their abusers to the men's weekend as a condition of allowing him to stay in the relationship. Many men in this situation often agree to attend the weekend in the belief that they need not take it seriously and can get away with paying lip service to it.

Measuring outcomes

Six out of 10 women who accompany their abusers tell me that the men have changed for the better. Four out of ten report no change but regard the event as a success because they can now make informed decisions. Another way of evaluating success is to count what percentage of couples who attend have their children returned from the care of the local authority.

Duration

Unlike the women's programme the men's programmes should not be for a few hours a week. They are much more effective if compacted in to 2 days. This means they do not return to society in between sessions and have all their beliefs reinforced every time.

Reports

Facilitators should never write reports for courts or social care. They cannot assess if he has changed or not. They also have a vested interest in seeming to have succeeded and often get funding just because they say a man has changed. In other words women can be put at risk by facilitators who write such reports. The only person who can assess whether the man has genuinely changed is the partner who is watching him interact with other men in his group.

Numbers

It is essential never to run the programme without sufficient men. It cannot work because success depends completely on the men learning from and informing each other. If there are not enough and the facilitator is actually telling the men what to think the programme will fail. They can only learn from each other. If the programme fails it will reinforce their behaviour instead of challenging it.

Facilitators need the flexibility to cancel a programme if too few turn up. I never confirm an event as viable until I have at least twenty five couples as I know from experience that only around half of them may turn up. The minimum number should be sixteen men plus their partners.

Always be prepared to cancel the weekend if too few attend and always make this clear to everyone who books a place.

Observers

I welcome observers but I insist that they join the groups. We are all anonymous and no group member must know the identity of another unless they are the partner who came with them.

Discipline

Trainees must behave or leave. Court mandates are self defeating. What is the point of a man attending because his solicitor can appeal against his removal? If he gets away with abusive behaviour it will reinforce his belief that abusive behaviour is acceptable because it has worked again. It is crucial that when I facilitate of this programme I have freedom to set my rules and to enforce them.

I will not change my rules to attract funding or meet guidelines set by other agencies.

No personal information

Don't let the men talk about themselves. They all sincerely believe that their victims force them to use violence. The men who come to my programmes arrive expecting me to help them cope with this horrible woman who forces them to assault her. If we allow them to air their very distorted views we are colluding with them and putting women in danger.

Enforcement

If anyone does not keep my rules I ask them to leave. If they refuse to go I will not continue and I close down the programme. I tell everyone to leave and ask those who really want to be there to leave their contact details with me so I can invite them when I arrange another date.

Usually when the miscreant has left everyone else remains and we continue with the programme. When I expel anyone it usually results in excellent cooperation from everyone else.

Safety

Some accuse the Freedom Programme for Men of endangering women. They imagine a situation where a man can become so enraged by the programme or indeed by being ejected from the group that they attack their partner in revenge. This betrays a lack of understanding of the way abusers behave.

When an abusive man commits an act of violence it is always planned. So in this situation he may have decided to be ejected from the course so he can blame her for insisting that he attends. They do not just 'lose it' and attack their partners.