



Why doesn't he stop?

When it comes to domestic abuse, too often people ask, “Why does she stay?” But to really tackle the problem, we need to ask a different question. One woman, trained to do just that, tells *Stylist* why challenging the attitudes of abusive men is key to ending male violence against women

WORDS: MOYA CROCKETT

Sadie Jones* is describing a man she knows. Let's call him Ben. "He's blacklisted from all the local housing associations; the council don't want to even hear his name. There's been loads of antisocial behaviour and criminal damage to properties, general violence, drugs, driving offences. So, he's in and out of prison, and when he comes out, he will form a relationship with a woman very, very quickly. The relationship will be intense, he'll move in with her very fast, and the abuse will start almost immediately." She pauses. "He's done that with multiple partners."

If you had the choice, you'd go out of your way to avoid a man like Ben. In the domestic abuse sector, he's known as a "high-risk, high-harm perpetrator": someone whose behaviour is causing serious and significant harm to people around them. Given what we know about domestic abuse – that it affects 2.3 million people in England and Wales every year, with two women killed by a current or former partner every week – it would be entirely understandable if your first instinct was to demonise him. But that's not how Jones operates. When she first met Ben earlier this year, her immediate goal was to try to "build a rapport". "I'm not here to be judgemental," she says.

Jones is a case manager at Drive, a project that aims to increase victim safety by working directly with perpetrators of the most extreme domestic abuse to support them in changing their behaviour. Launched on a pilot basis in 2016, it now delivers 16 projects across England and Wales, from Greater Manchester to Cardiff. Given the surge in domestic abuse over the course of the pandemic (there was a 65% increase in calls to the National Domestic Abuse Helpline between April and June 2020, compared to the first three months of the year), Drive has pledged to invest even further in its commitment to tackling domestic violence at the roots. And it's not the only perpetrator programme to do so, with several organisations calling upon the government to look beyond the criminal justice system to hold abusers to account.

Men currently make up 88% of Drive service users, and the vast majority of their victims – usually partners or ex-partners – are women. Most perpetrators are referred to the project through agencies such as the police, child-protection professionals and housing specialists, who share information about the highest-risk domestic abuse cases in a local area. And yet, participation in face-to-face work remains voluntary.

"Our main goal is to offer a trusting environment where we challenge users constructively," explains Jones, who currently works with around 30 perpetrators a year at a branch in the south of England. In the early stages of getting to know a service user, she'll often ask what he likes best about himself, or what he thinks other people would describe as his positive traits. "This generally encourages self-reflection," she says. "Because if he then begins victim-blaming or being aggressive, I can say: 'Actually, you've said you see yourself



in that way – and what I'm hearing is quite a departure from that." An approach like this is more often a success than not. "It's about asking them to do the work and build on their motivation to change," says Jones. "The minute you start pointing fingers, you've lost them."

CONFRONTING THE SOURCE OF VIOLENCE

Perpetrator programmes have existed in the UK since the late 1980s, inspired by similar initiatives in the US. Yet over the past year or so, as the pandemic has swung public attention back onto the perennial problem of domestic abuse, there are signs they're becoming more of a political priority. Ahead of the London mayoral elections in May, Sadiq Khan announced that he would continue funding "innovative programmes focused on addressing the behaviour of perpetrators of abuse" in

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the capital (he has now invested more than £16 million in these projects since taking office), and in August, the Home Office awarded £11.3 million to such programmes across England and Wales. The government has also promised to publish a "perpetrator strategy", led by Home Secretary Priti Patel, by April 2022, making further commitments to projects that

proactively tackle abusive behaviour. "We want to stop these crimes from happening in the first place by growing our understanding of who commits them and why," Patel told *Stylist*.

But if the idea of offering support to domestic abusers leaves a sour taste in your mouth, you're not alone. There have long been concerns that these programmes suck money away from services for female survivors of male violence, which are eternally underfunded and overstretched. Jones understands that many will hear about abusive people and think rehabilitation is a waste of time. But she is also quick to point out how the system works. Many perpetrators of abuse are not prosecuted; in fact, according to recent data gathered by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, as many as three in four domestic abuse offences reported to police are closed without charge. In most cases, Jones

says, this is due to a lack of evidence or the victim declining to take further action due to fear or shame. In other cases, survivors often don't want to engage with the police at all. "Ultimately, if we don't tackle the root cause of the behaviour – ie the perpetrator – when one abusive relationship is done and dusted, he's likely to enter into



→ a new one, and that cycle will start all over again," says Jones.

IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT ANGER

Clearly, there is not a simple one-size-fits-all approach to working with domestic abusers. "They're not a homogenous group – everything you think you know about abusers probably applies to about a quarter of them," says Ciara Bergman, head of perpetrator services at Respect, one of the charities behind the Drive project. With this in mind, every user receives a programme that is tailored specifically to them, with most programmes lasting between 10 months and a year. Case managers aim to see each service user regularly – sometimes several times a week – while also keeping in touch outside of meetings. "Sometimes I'll meet with a service user in a cafe for our initial conversations, when we're first getting to know one another," says Jones. "But after that, we might have one-to-one appointments in a space where they feel comfortable – maybe that's a meeting room I've hired, or it could be a private space in a council building."

The topics a user and manager will discuss vary, although certain themes do come up frequently. "We often explore topics like powerlessness, empathy, and early childhood experiences," says Jones. "If there are children

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involved, it can be really powerful to talk about what kind of dad they want to be, and whether they think their behaviour is aligned with those goals." On a practical level, staff also help service users deal with issues such as substance misuse, mental illness and housing insecurity. "There is no excuse on this planet for domestic abuse," says Jones, "but certain factors can heighten the risk of abuse, and we need to address those."

Ultimately, it's deep knowledge, brought about by intensive training, that enables Drive case managers to think on their feet. "One of my service users is heavily into the idea of respect," explains Jones, "so I'll unpick that with him. For him, being dumped by his partner is the ultimate disrespect; when his partner left, he began harassing and stalking her. So, I'll ask things like, 'What does respect really mean to you? What would actually happen if you didn't have it?'"

As for telling an abusive man he is fundamentally misogynistic, Jones says this is likely to do more harm than good. "I'll always look to have conversations with service users about masculinity – there's a lot to be learnt from exploring male role models and childhood experiences," she explains. "But the key is in creating a space to consider the role patriarchal beliefs and gender norms play in abusive behaviour, without projecting conclusions onto

them. We'll talk about the construct of 'man' and the qualities we associate with men. How does that work well for them? How does it *not* work for them? How would it feel to be vulnerable; to show an emotion other than stoicism or anger?"

SEEING RESULTS

Daniel¹ is a former Drive service user who knows what it's like to be vulnerable with his case manager. "There have been some times in this process that have been super-hard, emotional," he says. "[My case manager] was the one and only person that listened – there

that... and we need to find a resolution. I think that's my biggest takeaway – the feeling of worthlessness has gone."

Daniel is one of Drive's many success stories. Following an evaluation of 506 domestic abuse perpetrators who took part in the project between 2016 and 2019, researchers at Bristol University found that levels of abuse significantly dropped – with physical abuse falling by 82%, sexual abuse by 88%, and harassment and stalking by 75%. But while signs of the success of the programme are strong, Drive is clear that victims of domestic abuse are their priority, and must always be protected. If there is any sense a survivor may be in danger, case workers immediately engage with safeguarding and survivor support workers, as well as agencies such as the police or housing services.

"Perpetrators are master manipulators, so the one thing we don't want to do is give them more knowledge to become better abusers," says Shana Begum, a survivor herself and the founder of St Helens The Best Me CIC, a service providing coaching around domestic abuse in Merseyside. "For us, programmes like Drive are brilliant because they work on a case-by-case basis, alongside the victims. They will liaise with the victim, should they want to, and the victim is part of the process [when assessing] whether there has been real change in the perpetrator's behaviour."

She explains that while a perpetrator can give every indication of changing, often he will continue his behaviours at home, and so a wide range of strategies is needed, including preventative action. In addition to programmes like Drive, we need education in schools, as well as general awareness campaigns that start conversations about domestic abuse. "It's time we stopped talking about what women are going to do about domestic violence and abuse," says Professor Nicole Westmarland, director of the Durham Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse, "and heighten the responsibility of men within this problem of violence against women. Because, actually, men need to be in these conversations at all levels."

The need to challenge men's thinking around violence against women in all its forms is why *Stylist* launched its initiative #AFearlessFuture, calling on the Home Office to launch a long-term public awareness campaign aimed at men – something the government has now promised to do. As it stands, male violence against women is a problem that needs to be tackled from every angle, with programmes such as Drive remaining a key piece of the puzzle.

"We need to stop asking, 'Why does she stay?' and start asking, 'Why doesn't he stop?'" Jones says. "Week on week, we see little glimpses of light – small changes in people whose abusive behaviour was previously so entrenched that you wouldn't anticipate any sort of shift or movement. When you see that, it does make it feel worthwhile."

For more information on Drive's work, go to driveproject.org.uk. For support and information about domestic abuse, call the national domestic abuse helpline on 0808 2000 247, or visit womensaid.org.uk or refuge.org.uk

#AFearlessFuture: Stylist's campaign to end male violence against women and girls

Earlier this year, *Stylist* launched *A Fearless Future*, our initiative calling for a culture-shifting public awareness campaign that gets to the root of sexism, misogyny and the current epidemic of male violence against women and girls. In an open letter to Home Secretary Priti Patel, signed by more than 60 academics, campaigners, public figures and MPs, we demanded that the government put prevention at the core of its approach to this issue. Now, the Home Office has committed to the public awareness campaign we've been asking for – but we know there's still work to do to ensure a future free of fear for all women. To find out more and get involved, go to stylist.co.uk/a-fearless-future

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was no judgement, none at all... Instead, I'd have this idea and she'd say, Well, I know your intentions are good, but it could be interpreted as this – so let's think of another way to do it."

Having worked through a programme, Daniel is now allowed to spend more time with his children without restrictions. Still, he says the biggest gift the Drive project has given him is "emotional intelligence." "I'm far more aware of and capable of showing emotions. I will cry if I'm sad, I won't even bother holding it in. If I'm upset [with someone], I will say 'I'm not happy about