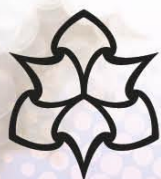


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Youth Justice Research**



**Manchester
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IN YOUR CORNER EVALUATION REPORT

JUNE 2026

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**Change
Grow
Live**



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and aims

In Your Corner (IYC) is a community-based mentoring programme designed to engage young men aged 18 to 30 years who are on probation and reluctant to access drug and alcohol services¹. By embedding participants in prosocial community activities, the programme aims to challenge attitudes towards substance misuse and hypermasculinity, enabling participants to lead healthier, more positive lives.

This evaluation, conducted between March 2024 and March 2026, assessed programme delivery and outcomes for 153 men referred to IYC.

Methodology

The evaluation adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative psychometric tools with qualitative data. A Theory of Change was co-produced with the project team. Quantitative measures included the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) and a Consequential Thinking Scale, administered at entry and exit.

Qualitative data were gathered through curated case studies and semi-structured interviews with 12 service users and two staff members, supplemented by focus groups with IYC and probation staff. A practitioner feedback survey was also completed by 16 probation officers.

Participant profile

Of the 153 men referred, 81% were aged 20 to 29 years and 77% identified as White.

Interventions were delivered predominantly in informal community settings: coffee shops (28%) and outdoors (24%) were the most common locations, reflecting the programme's agile, relationship-centred approach. In addition to the assessment, the average number of sessions attended was three, with only eight men completing all 14 sessions. Disengagement was most commonly attributed to 'change of circumstance'² (37%) or 'client disengagement'³ (33%).

Key findings

Mental health and wellbeing

WEMWBS scores showed substantial improvement: the average score rose from 39 at entry (indicative of probable clinical depression) to 56 at exit (approaching the high wellbeing threshold). Of 22 men who completed both assessments, 21 showed improvement. Given the high prevalence of adverse childhood experiences in this cohort, this is a particularly significant finding.

¹ <https://www.changegrowlive.org/advice-info/justice-probation/in-your-corner>

² This includes the following: moved out of area (i.e. transferred to another probation area); died; acquitted; returned to custody; order revoked.

³ This includes the following: no contact since referral; initial assessment completed but action plan not approved; initial assessment completed, action plan submitted and approved, and at least one session attended; initial assessment completed, action plan submitted and approved, but person fails to attend at least one session.

Consequential thinking and behaviour change

Among 18 men who completed the Consequential Thinking Scale at both entry and exit, notable attitudinal shifts were recorded. Agreement that ‘men need to be violent to get what they want’ fell from 22% to 0%, while agreement that ‘I can think about consequences before I act when I’m angry’ rose from 28% to 83%. Most strikingly, ‘willingness to seek support when needed’ increased from 33% to 100%, directly addressing the programme’s core aim.

Qualifications and aspirations

Fourteen men gained a total of 54 AQA Unit Award Scheme qualifications, covering topics including mental health awareness; identity and masculinity; and goals and aspirations.

Qualitative data highlighted renewed motivation for employment, further education and positive family relationships across the wider cohort.

Probation practitioner feedback

All 16 probation officers surveyed reported that IYC added value to their work with young men on probation; that the programme was effective; and that it improved engagement. Staff highlighted the importance of the programme’s informal settings and relational model in reaching this treatment-resistant population.

Conclusions

IYC demonstrated meaningful progress against its short- and medium-term outcomes. The programme’s relational, agile model, underpinned by staff with lived experience, cultural competency, and a non-judgemental approach, successfully engaged a population with significant barriers to participation. The use of informal community settings, rather than traditionally hypermasculine environments, proved effective, challenging prior assumptions in the field. While sample sizes for psychometric follow-up were modest, findings are consistently positive and warrant further investment and mainstreaming.

Key recommendations

1. Evidence from this evaluation should inform the continuation of IYC delivery and the possible integration of IYC into mainstream services.
2. The IYC referral pathway should be integrated into HMPPS Digital Service Commissioned Services to streamline probation referrals.
3. Clinical supervision and ongoing training for staff, particularly those with lived experience, should be sustained in all future iterations.
4. To optimise engagement and outcomes, a dosage of six to eight one-to-one sessions is recommended (up to a maximum of 16 sessions).
5. Reasonable adjustments should be embedded to account for the high prevalence of special educational needs within the cohort.
6. Relational continuity between staff and service users must be prioritised, as staff turnover/change is a primary driver of service user disengagement.
7. The Manbox educational component should be retained as a core feature of IYC’s psychosocial offer.
8. Consideration should be given to expanding the age range beyond 30 years and broadening the range of community activities offered.

The background is a complex abstract composition. The upper left portion features a grid of small, dark, circular dots on a light blue-grey background. To the right of this grid is a large, irregular shape in a vibrant magenta or pink color. The right side of the image is dominated by a large, textured area of deep blue and teal, with some lighter, almost white, speckles. A large, solid black rectangle is positioned in the lower half of the image, partially overlapping the other elements. The bottom edge of the image shows a dark, abstract pattern with hints of red and blue.

INTRODUCTION

Aim of In Your Corner

In Your Corner (IYC) aims to work with young men on probation (aged 18 to 30) who are reluctant to engage with drug and alcohol services⁴. By integrating them into prosocial community activities, IYC will challenge their attitudes towards substance use and hypermasculinity, enabling them to lead more positive, healthier lives.

Evaluation objectives

A number of objectives were identified for the IYC evaluation:

- To understand what happened, for whom, and why during a service user's time with IYC.
- To gain insight about service users accessing the IYC project.
- To document the journeys of service users through their involvement with IYC and to provide outcome data to identify specific contexts and mechanisms under which IYC contributes to positive outcomes.
- To explore the extent to which IYC achieved pre-identified outcomes against the Theory of Change.
- To document IYC's overall contribution to policy outcomes and impact.

⁴ <https://www.changegrowlive.org/advice-info/justice-probation/in-your-corner>

The background is a complex abstract composition. It features a grid of small, dark dots on a light blue background, which is partially obscured by a large, dark blue, irregular shape. This shape has a rough, splattered texture and is surrounded by areas of bright pink and magenta. The overall effect is one of layered, textured elements.

METHOD

This chapter details the methodology and rationale used for the evaluation. Each element of the methodology is presented.

Context analysis

At the outset of the project, a context analysis was planned. It aimed to understand the context and external environment in which IYC takes place; provide relevant focus; and inform the purpose and objectives of the project. To mitigate challenges, a participatory approach included regular meetings, review, observation and documentary research together with sustained dialogue with key stakeholders throughout the initial phase of the project.

Theory of Change

IYC evaluation highlighted the need to adjust the project delivery format to reflect the changing needs of participating service users and its sought outcomes. The project Theory of Change (ToC) was workshoped and co-produced with key stakeholders. The key steps of this iterative process included:

- An initial workshop between the researchers and project team to co-produce a ToC.
- A process of validating and refining sought impact: considering the evidence that supports the need for the goal and the logic towards sought impact identifying any pitfalls.
- Validating and refining the outcomes necessary for impact to be achieved.
- Confirmation and refinement of how IYC outcomes contribute to impact and reviewing any logic pitfalls.
- Review of problem analysis, assumptions, activities, outputs and their relation to impact and outcomes.
- Content for IYC delivery (Manbox) was also developed alongside educational staff and practitioners.

A ToC was co-produced and reviewed by the evaluation and project team. A tracker analysis was devised to capture demographic data on age and ethnicity of the male service users. The tracker also captures data on the completion of the IYC intervention topics (out of 14 sessions) interview location and reason for closure.

IYC included a range of accredited qualifications together with the one-to-one provision. Service users had the opportunity to access accredited awards (AQAs⁵) for completing activities. It is assumed that these will be of interest to the service in order to engage and motivate their active participation. A list of achieved AQAs is presented in the results section.

Assessment battery

IYC staff facilitated the completion of all assessment measures with each service user at the start and the end of their involvement with the project. Psychometric tools were anonymised

⁵ [AQA | Unit Award Scheme | What Is It?](#)

and returned to the evaluation team for analysis. The assessment battery comprised of the following measures:

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) was administered to the men when they started on the project and when they left the project (below).

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS)

Below are some statements about feelings and thoughts.

Please tick the box that best describes your experience of each over the last 2 weeks

STATEMENTS	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
I've been feeling optimistic about the future	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling useful	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling relaxed	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling interested in other people	1	2	3	4	5
I've had energy to spare	1	2	3	4	5
I've been dealing with problems well	1	2	3	4	5
I've been thinking clearly	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling good about myself	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling close to other people	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling confident	1	2	3	4	5
I've been able to make up my own mind about things	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling loved	1	2	3	4	5
I've been interested in new things	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling cheerful	1	2	3	4	5

A total score is obtained by summing the score for each of the 14 items. The scoring range for each item is from one to five, with the total score ranging from 14 to 70. Research has shown that a score of 60 or more indicates high wellbeing, a score of 41 to 44 is indicative of possible/mild depression, and a score of less than 41 is indicative of probable clinical depression.

Consequential Thinking Measure

The service users completed a Consequential Thinking Measure when they started the project and when they left the project (below). The bespoke measure was designed by the evaluation

and project team to ensure that, alongside the WEMWBS, the evaluation was able to capture the short-term impact of the project as outlined in the ToC.

	Men need to be violent to get what they want.	Strongly disagree	<u>Disagree</u>	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
	Men shouldn't show emotions that make them look weak.	Strongly disagree	<u>Disagree</u>	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
	Angry behaviour causes problems for others.	Strongly disagree	<u>Disagree</u>	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
	My reactions when I'm angry can cause problems in life.	Strongly disagree	<u>Disagree</u>	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
	I can think about consequences before I act when I'm angry.	Strongly disagree	<u>Disagree</u>	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
	I understand that some of the things I do can cause problems for others.	Strongly disagree	<u>Disagree</u>	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
	I can ask for support from services when I need it (for example: GP, drug/alcohol services, housing services etc.)	Strongly disagree	<u>Disagree</u>	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

Probation practitioner feedback survey

A practitioner feedback survey was designed to capture probation officers' opinions regarding the efficacy of the IYC project, and identify any barriers to co-operation and its referral mechanism.

Questions are listed below:

1. Which probation office do you work from?
2. Roughly how many young men (aged 18 to 30 years) are you currently working with?
3. Approximately how many young men have you referred into IYC?
4. Do you think the referral process works well?
5. How could the referral process be improved to increase engagement or uptake?
6. Does the IYC programme add value to your work with young men on probation?
7. Do you think the IYC programme is effective?
8. The IYC programme explores masculinity and its impact on identity, help-seeking and offending. Do you feel this focus is relevant and helpful for your work?
9. IYC uses informal community settings to build trust. Do you think this approach improves engagement with young men?
10. Are there any areas for improvement or anything you'd like to see developed further?
11. Any other feedback you'd like to provide?

Qualitative data

A series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 service users to capture qualitative data on their experiences of participating in IYC. In addition to this, two semi-

structured interviews and two focus groups (with three staff) were undertaken with IYC frontline staff. Two further focus groups were conducted with eight probation staff that refer into the IYC project.

Ethics

All participants were briefed about the study and informed of their right to withdraw participation or data at any time. Participants were advised of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. All participants signed an informed consent form prior to their participation with clear information as to the purpose and nature of the research.

Whilst the details of participants' lives are reported, every effort was made to exclude details which would enable them to be identified. Ethical approval was granted by the National Research Committee (NRC Approval Decision 2024-0880).

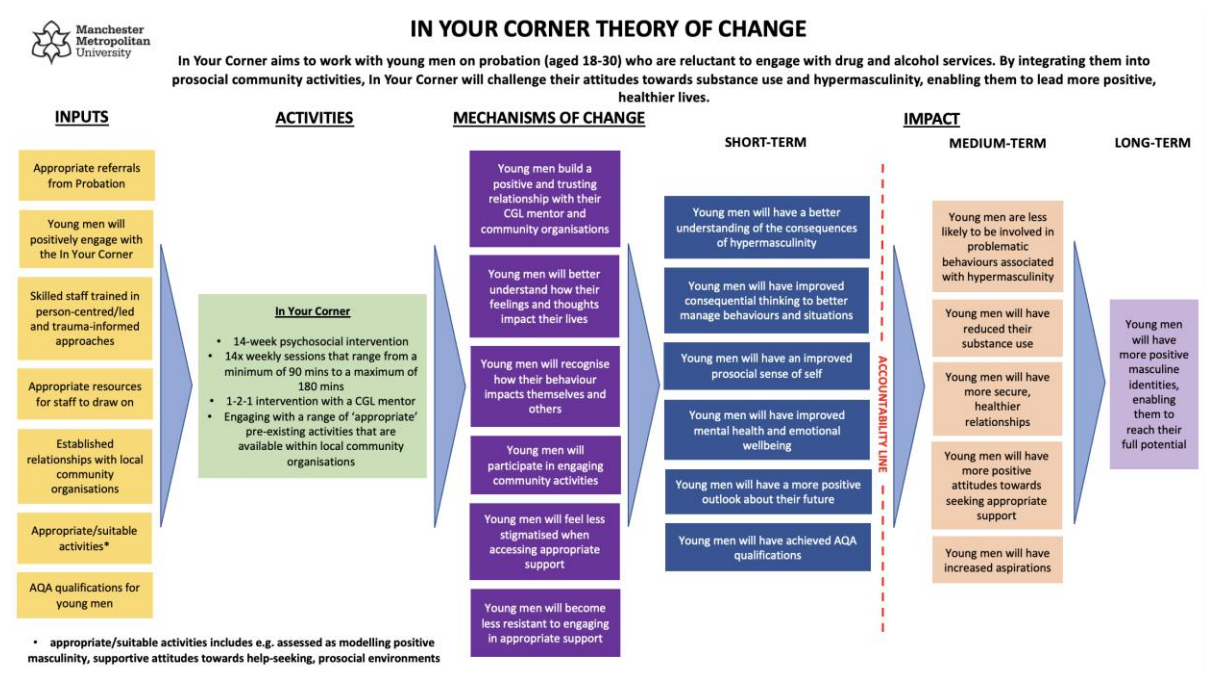


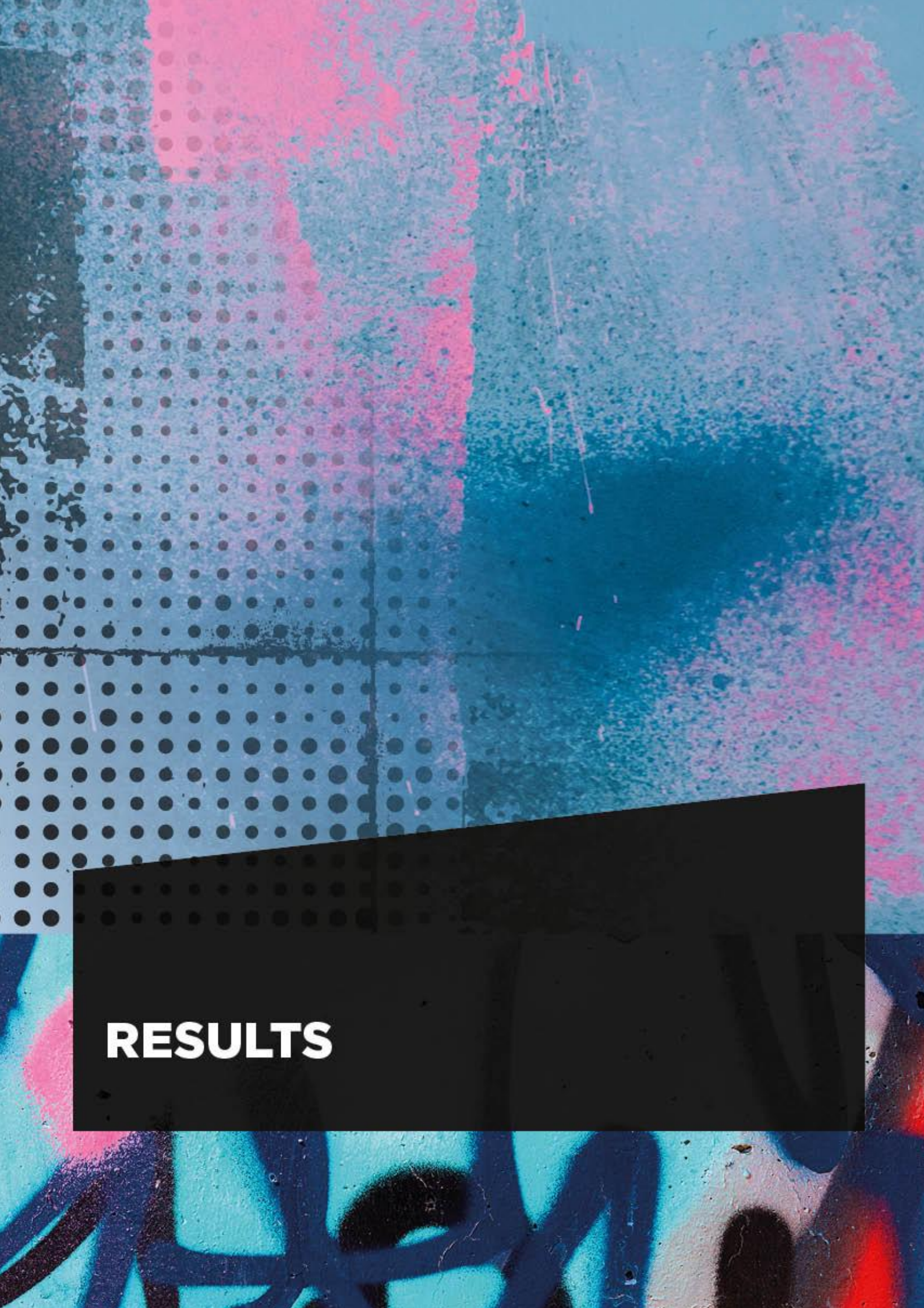
IYC THEORY OF CHANGE

Background

This section presents the IYC ToC (below) that was co-produced during the initial development phase. The purpose of the ToC is to help to explain how activities are understood to produce a series of results that contribute to achieving the final intended impacts of the project. The ToC seeks to describe a pathway from the need that it is trying to address, to the changes that it seeks to make (outcomes).

The ToC articulates the process of the IYC project and provides a basis for the evaluation. In addition to the planning and development benefits afforded by a ToC, it is useful for identifying the data which needed to be collected and how it should be analysed. Ultimately, with evidence against each element of the theory, it provides a framework to construct an evidence-based 'story' about the IYC project, its process, and its outcomes.





RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings from the research. Quantitative data and assessment analyses are presented together alongside outcome data and accompanying qualitative analysis.

Participant data

Between 31 October 2024 and 10 March 2026, 153 men were referred to the project. Over four fifths (81%) were between the ages of 20 and 29. Only 4% were 18 to 19 years of age (figure 1). Just over three quarters (77%) were classed as 'White' (figure 2).

Figure 1: Age range (n=153)

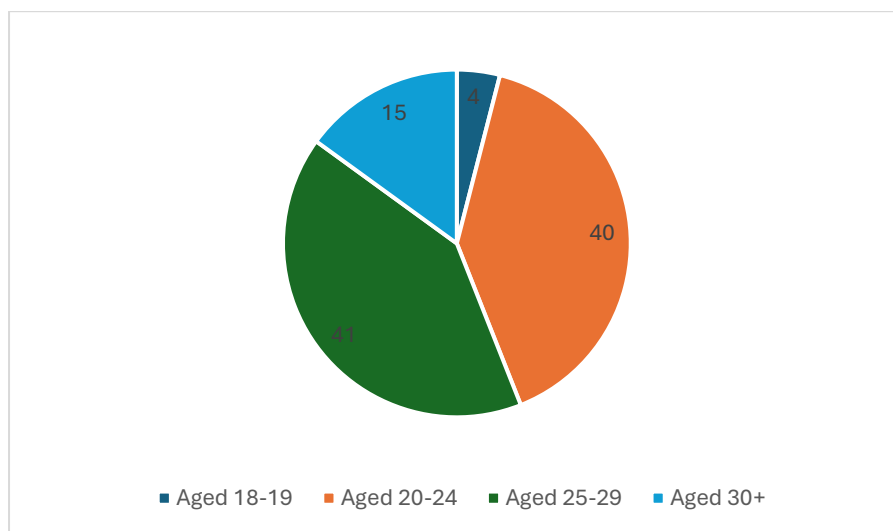
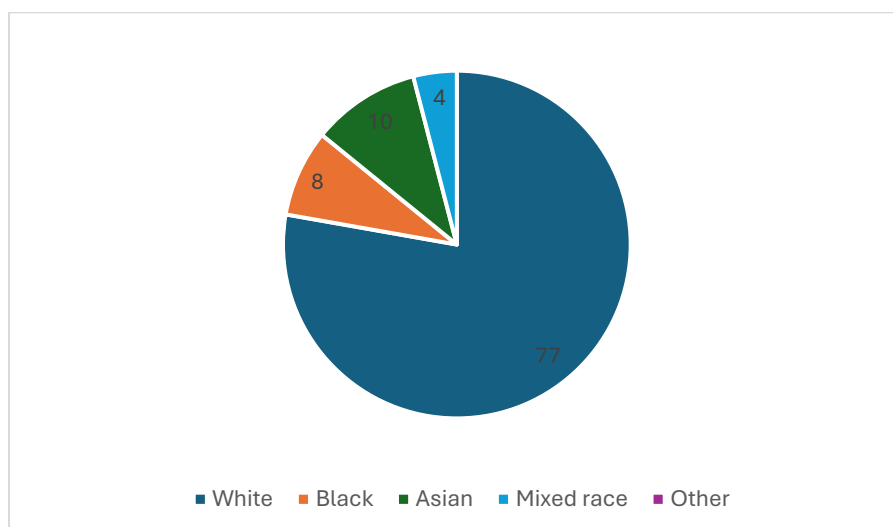


Figure 2: Ethnicity (n=145)



Tracker analysis

The number of sessions attended by the men while on the project ranged from no sessions to 14, with eight of the men receiving all 14 sessions (table 1). In addition to the initial assessment, the average number of sessions attended (i.e. interventions received) was three.

In line with this, as can be seen in table 1, it is unsurprising that the most commonly received interventions were those covered in the first three sessions: 'CORE, Getting to Know You 1' (71%); 'CORE, Getting to Know you 2' (54%); and 'CORE, ABC-E' (39%). The session times ranged from 30 to 122 minutes, with an average time of 68 minutes.

Table 1: Intervention topic (n=153)

Topic	Frequency	Percentage
Intervention 1 - CORE, Getting to Know You 1	109	71
Intervention 2 - CORE, Getting to Know you 2	83	54
Intervention 3 - CORE, ABC-E	59	39
Intervention 4 - Breaking the Cycle	24	16
Intervention 5 - In My Corner	35	23
Intervention 6 - "Crisis" of Masculinity	40	26
Intervention 7 - Understanding Your Life Story	36	24
Intervention 8 - Trauma & Links to Aggression	15	10
Intervention 9 - Trauma & Links to Avoidance	17	11
Intervention 10 - Reducing Stigma	30	20
Intervention 11 - Ripple Effects	29	19
Intervention 12 - Behind the Mask	16	10
Intervention 13 - Developing a Positive ID	13	8
Intervention 14 - Your Strength, Your Future	19	12

Of the 525 sessions that were conducted, 523 had the location of the session recorded (Table 2). The most common session location was 'Coffee shop' (28%) and 'Outdoor activity' (24%). Other common locations included 'Probation office'⁶ (15%) and 'Home visit' (11%).

⁶ As required by the West Midlands CRS commissioner.

Table 2: Session location (n=523)

Location	Frequency	Percentage
Coffee shop	148	28
Outdoor activity	127	24
Probation office	81	15
Home visit	55	11
Other	47	9
Sports venue	37	7
Community Hub	8	2
Supermarket café	11	2
Library	5	1
Retail outlet	4	1

The reason for the closure of cases was provided for 122 of the 153 men referred to the project (table 3). Of these, over a tenth (14%) of the closures were ‘planned’. For a third (33%) the ‘client disengaged’⁷, and for nearly two fifths (37%) there was a ‘change of circumstance’⁸.

Table 3: Reason for closure (n=122)

Reason	Frequency	Percentage
Change of circumstance	45	37
Client disengaged	40	33
Planned	17	14
Sentence expired	5	4
Working, care commitments or sickness	5	4
Ineligible/mistaken referral	6	5
Completed/ended early	3	2
Needs met elsewhere	1	1

⁷ This includes the following: moved out of area (i.e. transferred to another probation area); died; acquitted; returned to custody; order revoked.

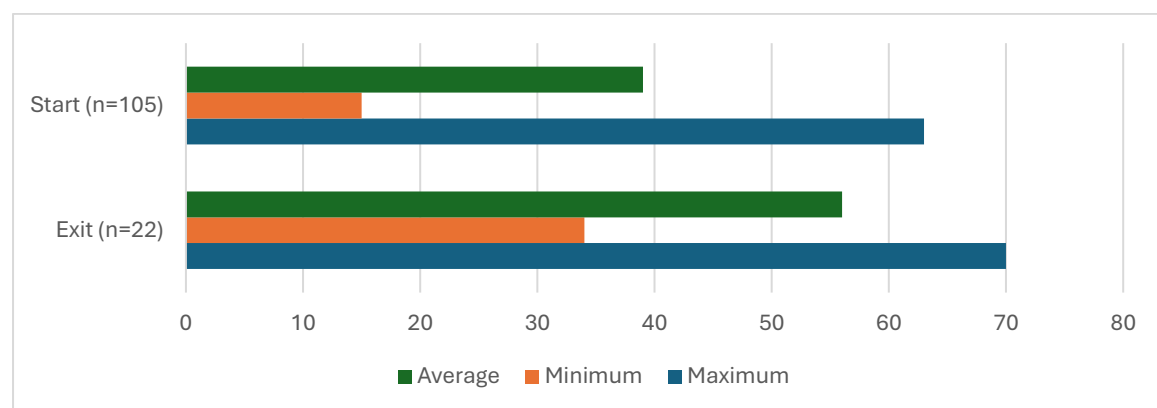
⁸ This includes the following: no contact since referral; initial assessment completed but action plan not approved; initial assessment completed, action plan submitted and approved, and at least one session attended; initial assessment completed, action plan submitted and approved, but person fails to attend at least one session.

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale

Of the 153 men referred, 105 completed the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) when they started the project. Of these, 22 also completed the WEMWBS when they exited the project. As shown in figure 3, the average score at the start of the project was 39 (minimum 15, maximum 63). At exit, the average score had increased to 56 (minimum 34, maximum 70). This indicates that, at the start of the project, the average score was indicative of probable clinical depression, while at the exit point, the average score was getting close to the high wellbeing threshold.

While the small sample means that any findings need to be treated with caution, for the 22 people who completed the WEMWBS at both start and exit, 21 showed an increase in their wellbeing score. Only one person's wellbeing score decreased while they were with the project.

Figure 3: WEMWBS scores



Consequential Thinking Measure

When they started with the project, a third (33%) of the men agreed that 'men need to be violent to get what they want' and just under half (49%) agreed that 'men shouldn't show emotions that make them look weak' (Figure 4).

While over three fifths (63%) agreed that 'angry behaviour causes problems for others' and over three quarters (76%) agreed that 'my reactions when I'm angry can cause problems in life', only a quarter (25%) agreed that 'I can think about consequences before I act when I'm angry', just under a third (31%) agreed that 'I understand that some of the things I do can cause problems for others', and a third (33%) agreed that 'I can ask for support when I need it'.

Figure 4: Consequential Thinking Measure at start (n=67)

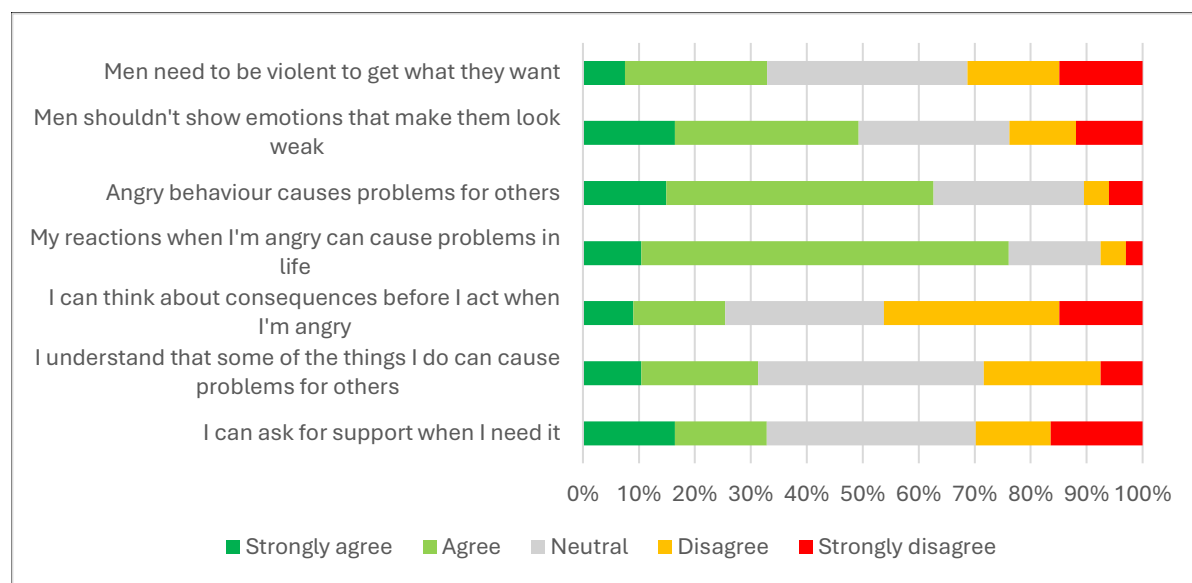


Figure 5: Consequential Thinking Measure at start and exit (n=18)

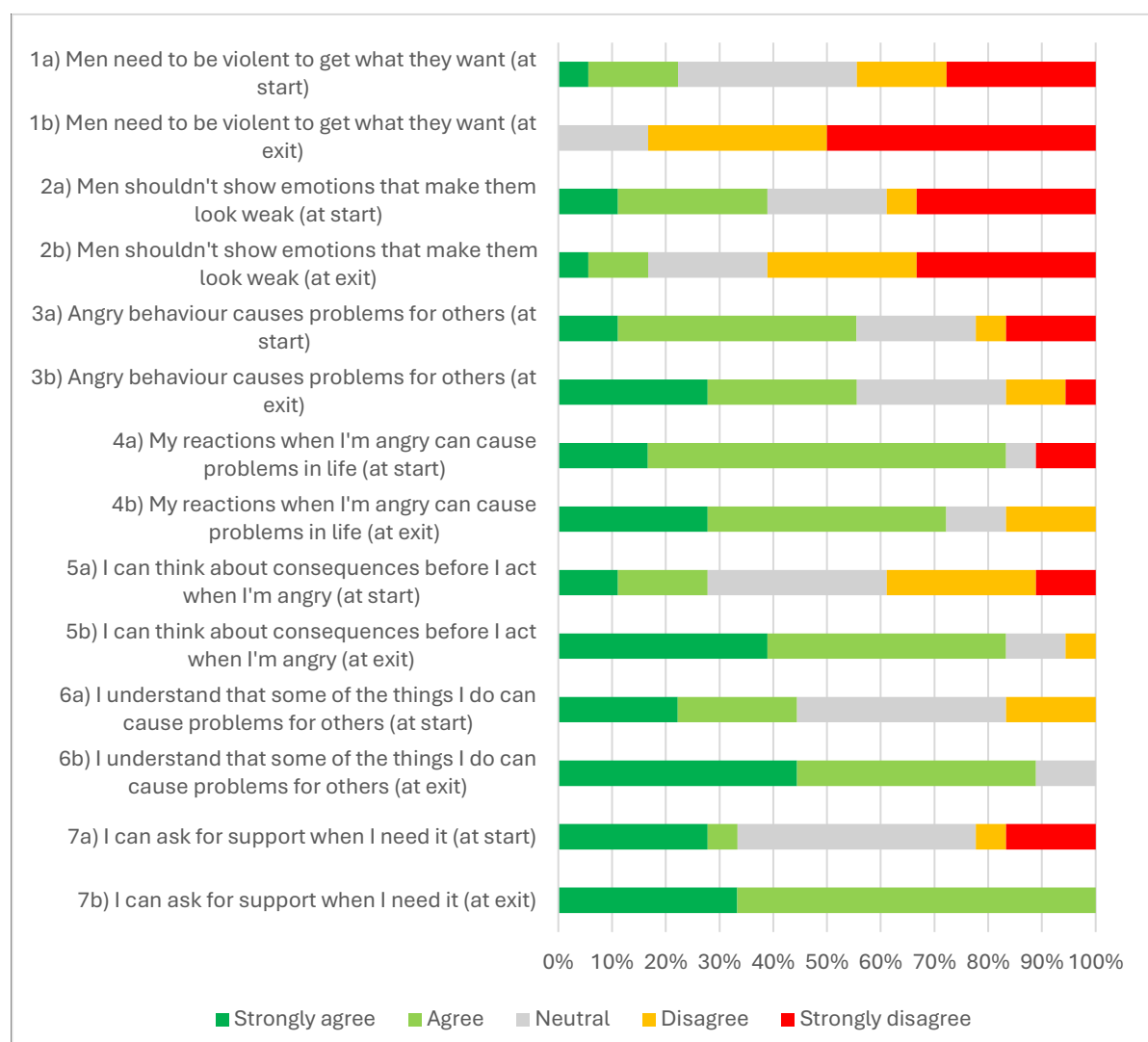


Figure 5 shows the changes that occurred for 18 of the men between when they started the project and when they exited it. While the small sample means that any findings need to be treated with caution, the comparison highlights some interesting ‘positive’ changes. For example, at the start, over a fifth (22%) agreed that ‘men need to be violent to get what they want’. Yet, when they exited the project, none of the men agreed with this statement and over four fifths (83%) disagreed with it. Similarly, when they started, around two fifths (39%) agreed that ‘men shouldn’t show emotions that make them look weak’. By the time they exited the project, this had reduced to 17%.

At the start of the project, over a quarter (28%) agreed that ‘I can think about consequences before I act when I’m angry’. By the time they exited the project, this had increased to over four fifths (83%). With the statement ‘I understand that some of the things I do can cause problems for others’, the percentage of those that agreed increased from under half (44%) at the start to nearly nine tenths (89%) at exit. Finally, while only a third (33%) agreed that ‘I can ask for support when I need it’ when they started the project, all 18 of the men (100%) agreed with it when they exited the project.

Total AQAs awarded

While with the project, 14 of the men gained qualifications via the AQA Unit Award Scheme (UAS). In total, 54 AQAs were awarded. The UAS allows students to engage with learning and have their achievements formally recognised. Learners are rewarded with a certificate each time they successfully complete an AQA. They can build up a portfolio of certificates to evidence their skills, knowledge and experience. The UAS aims to boost confidence, increase engagement and improve motivation.

Table 4: AQAs awarded

Name	Frequency
A multi-sensory introduction to World War Two (Pre-Entry Level)	1
Awareness of drugs and substance misuse (Level 1)	1
Basic fishing skills (Entry Level)	1
Building support networks when living independently (Entry Level)	1
Business studies: Marketing and communication (Entry Level)	1
Careers and work preparation (Level 1)	1
Cooking and food preparation (Level 1)	2
Cooking with pasta (Entry Level)	1
Cross-country running (Entry Level)	1
Discovering local history (Entry Level)	1

English: Using spoken English effectively (Entry Level)	1
Exploring the history of video gaming (Level 1)	3
Fishing: Casting (Entry Level)	1
Fishing: Recognising fishing tackle (Entry Level)	1
Gym and fitness training (unit 1) (Entry Level)	1
Identity and masculinity (Entry Level)	4
Introduction to tree cutting (Entry Level)	1
Life skills programme: Substance misuse awareness (Entry Level)	1
Mental health awareness (Entry Level)	8
My life: Goals and aspirations (Entry Level)	4
Parenting: Caring for babies and child development (Entry Level)	1
Philosophy of religion: What is God? (unit 1) (Pre-Entry Level)	1
Preparing and cooking meals on a budget (Level 1)	1
Relationships: Family and friends (Entry Level)	1
Religions: Christianity (Pre-Entry Level)	1
Sharing my life story (Entry Level)	1
Sharing my life story (Level 1)	1
Smoking, drugs and alcohol awareness (Entry Level)	1
Sports and wellbeing (Entry Level)	2
Studying boxing (Level 1)	1
Substance misuse (Level 1)	3
Tattoos: Safety, health risks and aftercare (Entry Level)	2
Understanding alcohol (unit 1) (Level 1)	1
Understanding sustainable urban drainage (Level 1)	1

On average, each of the 14 men were awarded 3.8 AQAs (minimum one, maximum nine). The 14 men were awarded 34 different AQAs. Of these, three were Pre-Entry Level, 21 were Entry Level, and 10 were Level 1. For context, a Level 1 AQA is broadly equivalent to a GCSE grade 1 to 3. Table 4 overleaf shows the names of the AQAs that were awarded.

Probation survey analysis

A small survey was designed and administered to probation staff (n=16) responsible for referring into the IYC project. Below are the results.

- 100% of probation referrals felt IYC added value to young men on probation.

- 100% of probation referrals felt that IYC programme was effective.
- 100% of probation referrals felt engagement with young men was improved.

Small suggestions within the open text box highlighted that more activities could be offered to widen the scope of men interested and thus increase engagement. Suggestions were also made to increase the age parameters, therefore not capping the age range for IYC referrals at 30 years old.

Qualitative data analysis

Getting to know the IYC cohort

Before a discussion of the themes as they relate to the ToC can be presented, it is prudent to provide an account of the qualitative makeup of the programme's cohort, thus providing essential context to the following outcome related findings. The starkest theme here was the sense of trauma that permeated the men's lives. It was a near universal element of their life experience and had constant implications for the work of the programme, further evidenced by the WEMWBS data at baseline.

From a staff perspective, the related trauma and poor mental health could present as an opportunity and point of distinction for the service. As the first extract here alludes to, the staff had the potential to provide something different to the men in the trauma-informed space. However, from the staff perspective, these adverse experiences were also a point of considerable risk. There was a recognition that this required a high level of professional skill, potentially at a level the staff were not comfortable providing. Support via clinical supervision was embedded into the IYC project from the start, and robust training was an added bonus in helping IYC staff deal with vicarious trauma within the cohort population.

"Nobody's spoken to him about the grief he's suffered. He lost his best friend to a motorbike accident and he's in crisis, like he's completely at a loss right now. And I sat in the probation room with him, and he was saying to the probation officer, 'I want to talk to you. I want to tell you things, but I can't.'" (IYC staff focus group)

"I've had some that were completely inappropriate: mental health was through the roof. I don't even know how, what are we doing here?" (IYC staff focus group)

"You are like recovery focused a lot and it's made me look at myself and think, I don't think I include it enough in the way that I deliver. I go around all the substances mainly and I've been dealing with them about just their place in society and how to feel and the trauma." (IYC staff focus group)

At the participant level, the accounts were littered with distressing experiences. As remarked here with participant 12, he not only was the victim of a violent attack but also lost the custody of his children as a result of his substance misuse. In other accounts, men had witnessed the sexual assaults of their care givers, been exposed to domestic violence as children, and had been placed into the care of the state. As was the case with participant 3, many of the men spoke of their thoughts and intentions of suicide. They painted a life of violence, poor mental health, trauma and wider structural failures to secure the help they desperately needed, both as children and as adults.

It is also likely, due to the ‘treatment-resistant’ nature of this population (i.e. those who have found existing treatment approaches difficult to engage with), that this theme is a vast underreporting of the traumatic experiences/needs within the sample. Finally, there was also the suggestion of many additional needs in the cohort which could present difficulties in their understanding. Participant 12, for example, even after the intervention openly discussed what masculinity was, his processing difficulties around his autism made it difficult for him to comprehend. Although not necessarily a problem, as was the case with participant 10 and his ADHD, the outside sessions were actually an enabling factor to his participation. However, clearly this could also be a barrier to engagement and meaningful change if not fully accounted for.

“My kids got taken from me after I was attacked. I was walking to the shop to get food for me and my kids. These lads came out of nowhere, a fair few of them, and asked me for a drag on my joint. I said no, and I got hit in the face with a knuckle duster. I could have gone down that path of, “Right, I’ve got nothing left [suicide].” (P12)

“I did try myself to commit suicide because I couldn’t cope with stuff [emotions, etc.] that I was going through. And like a passerby pulled me off a train bridge.” (P3)

“I don’t like explaining myself to anyone, so I’ve never had to. I raised myself in care. My mom was a crackhead. My dad disowned me. So, it’s like I’ve raised myself.” (P6)

“What is masculinity? I’m autistic, so I need things explained a bit – but I’ll be honest.” (P12)

“I’ve got ADHD. So, I hate being in the house and hate keeping still, but now we just go out and do things and so we used to go to McDonald’s and go for walks in the park and stuff. Yeah. And go to the gym.” (P10)

Short-term outcome reporting

Young men will have a better understanding of the consequences of hypermasculinity

Hypermasculinity did feature consistently in both staff and participant accounts. There was a clear level of engagement with the concept and how it had, and continued, to impact the men’s lives. As referenced in this first extract, the Manbox exercise in particular seemed to have improved participants’ understanding of constrictive gender roles. There was an element of conflict in the accounts surrounding the willingness of the men to participate in such conversations on the nature of masculinity. Exemplified by participant 11, many of the men did seem to appreciate the opportunity to engage in a critical discourse around the contemporary roles men are expected to play in society, often reflecting on their positionality within that.

“We’d have proper conversations about it, about what it means to be a man. Like we spoke about things like roles of men and women in society. What does it actually mean, like, hypermasculinity in itself?” (P2)

“I didn’t really understand what hypermasculine was or even heard of the word hypermasculine before in the corner came in my life. I thought there was only

one [masculinity]. So, I learnt a lot, and there is layer on layer, I learned a lot.”
(P11)

However, as indicated by the IYC and probation remarks, this had to be balanced with the resistance often generated with hypermasculinity i.e. their fear of vulnerability and emotional expression. No doubt this balance required a careful balancing act from the start at a pace appropriate for each participant and their needs etc.

“I find with that Manbox, if you bring it in too much, they don't feel comfortable talking about it, because they're not meant to talk about it”. (IYC staff focus group)

“Quite a lot of them still have the mindset that because they're men, they shouldn't talk about stuff”. (Probation staff focus group)

Although an improved awareness was no doubt generated in the participant sample, the crucial question was whether this newfound understanding of hypermasculinity translated to the level of behaviour and consequence. There was clear evidence at the staff level that they were able to link behaviour explicitly to a framing of hypermasculinity.

As seen within the IYC focus group, substance misuse provided a viable 'route in' to discuss wider discourses on risk-taking and violence within the men's lives. IYC staff were able to incorporate ideas of hypermasculinity into their clients' lives increasing its relevance, as opposed to an abstract theoretical concept. As an example, in the third extract the mentor was able to explain aspects of aggression and potential violence as understandable, and arguably a rational response to their challenging contexts.

“If I go in on a substance angle, then the masculinity stuff naturally comes. If I go in and start unpicking, you know, the use of crack, then it opens up vulnerability, but it also opens up like spaces around aggression.” (IYC staff focus group)

“You do the work you're meant to do, but it's a lot more sort of emotional wellbeing and then sort of trying to drip feed the ideas of hypermasculinity in a way that they can comprehend.” (IYC staff)

“It's okay to be angry. It's okay to feel like you want to protect your family. That's a loving thing to do.” (IYC staff)

Although this was not universal in the participant interviews, many of the men as a result of the IYC programme had begun to reflect on the costs associated with performing hypermasculine scripts. In participant 3's rather harrowing account, there was a recognition that such ideas – i.e. the refusal of hypermasculine men to seek out help when they needed it – could ultimately cost them, or him, his life. In other cases, the consequences of such hypermasculinity were far closer to home.

In this last example the combination of aggression and a refusal to ask for assistance had led to the removal of his children by social services. In this case, such a painful reminder of the costs associated with harmful masculinities has triggered a revaluation of the usefulness of such scripts.

“I'd rather speak out than, you know, go to his funeral and carry his coffin.” (P3)

“I lost my kids and I needed - I needed my kids back, if I’m honest. I needed to make that change. To stop being stubborn. And pretty much take all the help I could to make that change.” (P12)

Young men will have improved consequential thinking to better manage behaviours and situations

There were indications that participants were applying what they learned from IYC in their own lives, both in their behaviour and how they appraised potentially quite challenging situations. Consistent with the literature on hypermasculinity, aggression and violence are some of the most problematic aspects of the presentation and it was clearly a focus in sessions.

Illustrated here in the first two extracts, their newfound knowledge allowed them to take a step back in situations that would have previously elicited a violent response. There was a reduced sensitivity to insult and an ability to respond in a different way. As suggested here by participant 6, without this newfound awareness he would have caused grievous bodily harm to his ex-romantic partner and found himself once again incarcerated.

Additionally, many of the men could also behave differently within their current relationships. Participant 3 here, is discussing simultaneously changing his behaviour, i.e. not engaging in violence to achieve a goal but also attempting to manage his environment in order to avoid situations that may cause him to fail his wider objective of desistance, i.e. to regain custody of his children.

“Yeah, because you can get a bit angry, but obviously when you’re in that situation you’ve got to learn to deal with it – bite your tongue and just train.” (P1)

“I hated her [participant’s ex-partner] six months ago. See, now I seen her walking down the road with the same guy that she cheated on me with. Thumbs up. That’s it. Thumbs up. Keep moving. Back then I would have run them over.” (P6)

“I want to be a better person for my child. Most of my daughter as well. And like, that’s something I’m going to maintain and be focused on. It’s either fight or flight, and I’m choosing to flight and go away from negative situations and taking myself out a negative situation as fast as I possibly can.” (P3)

Professionals also observed these improvements, albeit reflected in slightly different ways. For staff, changes to behaviour often came from changes to their underlying belief systems. They routinely saw behaviour changes in their sessions as they interrogated these beliefs and their suitability of desistance. In this first extract, staff here discuss the importance of this change, and how it impacts participants’ behaviour in terms of accepting help and being less concerned with revealing vulnerability.

Improvements to behaviour were not confined to the sessions. There were many reports of wider behaviour improvements related to substance misuse (as evidenced in the probation staff comment below on a reduced need for alcohol monitoring). As demonstrated with the final example, this behaviour improvement was also noticed by many of the participants, with many able to at least reduce their substance use.

"He's gradually almost like, taking his armour off at each session, because he feels comfortable with me, you know, stop looking over his shoulder less, and it's just that's magic, that's priceless." (IYC staff focus group)

"It's finding out where did that start? Where did that come from? You know what I mean? And then if we start challenging that belief system sort of thing, then we can start to make ground because I can then forgive and accept. That's why I feel the way that I feel." (IYC staff focus group)

"I've had people, before the In Your Corner project became a thing, go through the CRS, go through CGL, and they've needed 20, 25 appointments before we've even made any progress. But with this, I've had some guys that have gone through it and they've got to appointment like seven, and they've come off alcohol monitoring tags." (Probation staff focus group)

"I used to smoke about 20 joints a day. And now I only smoke like four, three or four, if not, if not every day, it's like every couple of days, you know what I mean? And I'm looking to be able to quit completely in the future." (P7)

Young men will have an improved prosocial sense of self

It was clear from the data at every level that those engaging in the programme were demonstrating a range of changes in how they saw themselves. This newer 'prosocial' self was in its infancy but was certainly emergent in the data.

One of the primary impacts was the way in which the participants viewed themselves in their relationships, aiming to become a better version of themselves. Participants 7 and 12 were emblematic of this new trend, in wanting to be the type of man that was able to be emotionally present with his romantic partner and repair the prior effects of his criminal related behaviour. It seemed to demonstrate a growing awareness of the negative impact of actions in their wider social networks.

As participant 6 reflects, this wish for a prosocial self was not always easy, as the act of both recognising the problematic behaviours of the old self, and producing a new prosocial one, required significant effort and could be a source of ambiguity.

"Maybe even start opening up to my missus a bit more about things, because I'm with her every day, you know what I mean? I might as well start telling her what's on my mind and stuff like that." (P7)

"I want to apologise for my stubbornness and try and repair the damage with them [absent children] and myself. Be a better person. I'm not quite there 100% yet, but I want to be a better person. And with my partner, I'll be honest, I'm getting there slowly. I'm trying to achieve that as well." (P12)

"Any little petty crime. Make money, sell weed, do anything. Now, I don't do none of that. I've just got a job. It's not normal to me. It's discombobulating. It's not normal for me to live a normal life, just it's never been on the cards. It's never been a thing. Now it's normal. So, it's like my whole self is just a bit discombobulated." (P6)

There was considerable alignment between the experiences of the participants and the staff assisting them in this prosocial transformation. For the IYC staff, they often observed a host of positive changes in participants' presentation and a sense of identity that is more consistent with a newer prosocial self. These improvements might present as quite arbitrary to the outside, as the first extract demonstrates. However, it is worth noting the characteristics of the IYC cohort, selected for their historical treatment resistance, typically unwilling to engage in services. To their credit, not only were these men engaging repeatedly with the staff but there was a clear appetite for the sessions and changes in their apparent motivations as a result.

As the remaining examples illustrate, staff recounted a series of positive changes to aspects such as confidence and self-belief, undoubtedly a core component of any new, aspiring, prosocial self.

"Yeah, it's like when you get the lads that have continuously been afternoon lads on sessions, you know, 2:00 lads, and they're asking for sessions at 10 in the morning." (IYC staff focus group)

"It's just that self-worth, isn't it? Feeling that they are someone and sort of like a worth something. I'm a strong believer if you can start building that self-worth, then other things start to sort of like fall into place." (IYC staff focus group)

"You could see his confidence had grown loads. Like you could see even, like when I first had him, he would just speak in short sentences. It was kind of respectful. It was almost like pulling teeth, trying to speak to him. Whereas when he'd finished In Your Corner, he spoke loads, way more than what he did at the start." (Probation staff focus group)

Young men will have improved mental health and emotional wellbeing

Accessing the wellbeing and mental health contribution of IYC through participant voice was somewhat challenging. Although the data were suggestive of almost universal improvement, many men lacked the language necessary to describe the problem/change. In many cases as seen below, it was merely the opportunity to speak to someone who would not judge them which improved their mental health. As we can see from participant 6 it was the relationship with the IYC staff that facilitated such a therapeutic space.

"Because it helps with my mental health, you know what I mean? Like being able to talk to him, I know I know there's someone I can talk to about my mental health who I know is going to understand me." (P7)

'Like my mental state, it's improved quite a lot, to be fair. Like I have managed to make it so much easier for myself. I can only congratulate him on how he's turned me to a different person." (P3)

"I was going through my own little situation and he said to me, I can see something is bugging you and I told him. He didn't judge me, didn't say anything, just listened and that was all I needed at that time." (P6)

It is likely that certain aspects of hypermasculinity, in this case the men's lack of trust in others that was contributing to their personal difficulties. Regardless of the type of therapeutic

support, there clearly was an element of personal disclosure required, and some men reported great difficulty in doing this. As participant 12 states perfectly, such sharing of personal trauma and perceived vulnerability was experienced as a great risk, one that could signify rejection and abandonment. Accordingly, many IYC staff recognised the relatively high level of mental health need in the cohort and were able to adapt to accommodate mental health needs:

“I’m not an easy trusting person as well. So, like, yeah, we’ve got that type of relationship, but I feel like because I’m not good at opening up to people.” (P4)

“I’ve opened up to people in the past, and they’ve took it the wrong way, from what I’ve seen I was a bit shut off.” (P12)

“The mental health ones is the hardest one, isn’t it? You know what I mean? I’ve had a couple of referrals where it’s just, you know, it’s not appropriate, you know what I mean?” (IYC staff focus group)

Young men will have a more positive outlook about their future

A positive outlook looked very different to the men across the sample, but it was certainly a salient theme across the interviews. For some, being positive simply meant imagining a future without criminality, as participant 11 alludes to below in relation to staying out of prison.

What was striking from the men in the programme was the overall lack of self-esteem and self-worth. Participant 4 discusses his life, permeated as it was with violence. In the account he realised that he had already been branded as something inherently ‘bad’, an obvious indicator for lack of self-esteem in other areas. For many more men, a more positive outlook was merely feeling more positive about themselves. In another example, Participant 11 through the guise of his university assignment, was proud to show evidence of this more positive identity to his IYC mentor – a living, breathing demonstration of his new budding potential. As the final extract demonstrates, some of the staff certainly agreed that such positive identity work was taking place in their clients and this was progress that would be carried into their future.

“I’ve been much better because I probably would have gone back to prison by now if it wasn’t really better, you know what I mean? It’s going good for me. I’ve got a like a lot of triggers, so like I’ve done good, and these programmes have really helped me.” (P11)

“No positive praise [from caregivers] – growing up, like, I’ve like I’ve been a very like aggressive person. But one thing like this course helped me realise like, I’ve been an aggressive person is all I’ve been told is, ‘you’re bad.’” (P4)

“Because I was, I thought I’ll speak to [IYC mentor] about it and obviously I told him about my [university] assignments, just to, you know have someone to speak to you while up there.” (P11)

“Some of the conversations that I’ve had with individuals, they will hold for the rest of their life. They will pass that knowledge on to others and make changes that they don’t even realise that they’re doing it.” (IYC staff focus group)

Young men will have achieved AQA qualifications

While with the project, 14 of the men gained qualifications via the AQA Unit Award Scheme (UAS). In total, 54 AQAs were awarded. The UAS allows students to engage with learning and have their achievements formally recognised. Learners are rewarded with a certificate each time they successfully complete an AQA. They can build up a portfolio of certificates to evidence their skills, knowledge and experience. The UAS aims to boost confidence, increase engagement and improve motivation.

“I got one lad and it was one of my first really positive closures. Unfortunately, we never got to do his evaluation, but he finished with a load of AQAs, he's gone back into applying for jobs, he's got he has his daughter over the school holidays.” (IYC staff focus group)

Medium-term outcome reporting

Less involvement in problematic behaviours

Hypermasculinity fosters a wide array of problematic behaviours in those that perform it. It was clear from this theme that considerable progress had been made in reducing such behaviours, although there were points of tension. For example, it was clear that considerable progress has been made in challenging the motivations behinds the participants' substance misuse. As seen with participant 6, there were clients connecting the wider challenges in their lives to their drug use, thus allowing them to identify it as an unhealthy form of coping. Staff were actively challenging the behavioural patterns of their clients, encouraging a level of reflexivity that appeared to be assisting them in making better choices.

Clients' willingness to use violence was also a related theme. The content of IYC and the style of staff allowed men to unpick the validity of its use and seek alternative strategies to violence as a resource. Participant 3 below discusses his distancing from his hypermasculine and violent father through this newfound reflexivity, reflected across many other men's accounts and in myriad ways, as they disclosed reductions in their negative behaviours.

“I've watched my mum and my dad be animals – toxic, battering each other – since when I was a kid. I like this. I've been single since I was 15. Unfortunately, that's why for so long I drowned in myself with alcohol and drugs.” (P6)

“It has helped me because obviously, before, when I was actively using stuff and selling it, it has helped me keep on the straight and narrow.” (P1)

“I think that a massive part of all, you know, sort of like delivery sort of all drugs and alcohol delivery is that going back and reflecting and marking change and sort of like, you know, allowing them to see the sort of like, you know, there has been small changes made.” (IYC staff focus group)

“I grew up with like watching domestics from mum and dad and stuff like that and like it's made me a better person for one fact, I could reflect on the stuff that I went through in past.” (P3)

As referenced above, there was a tension to this positive change, which lay in the reflective readiness of the participants. The success of the programme seemed to, in addition to the expertise and content of the programme, rest on the willingness of the participant to change. Like participant 3 suggests, he was in a place where he was ready to accept the help that IYC

could provide. Interestingly, as we can see below, this was recognised by staff and participants alike. Such a shift in a person's identity could not be forced; it is likely that the men who benefited most from the programme had already begun to see the problems associated with their hypermasculinity, and as such, they were likely more open to a new perspective.

"I never really used to reach out for help when I needed it. But like between me and [IYC worker], it opened my eyes like, I needed to reach out when I was struggling and, like, I did." (P3)

"I've referred somebody else now who's 19 to In Your Corner. But my other service users, because I'm in the IOM team, a lot of them are not ready to kind of address their, like for starters, substance addiction." (Probation staff focus group)

"Sometimes you get all the information I want in the first time, but other times I don't, and you can tell when the blinkers come up, and when the wall comes up, you know, they're not quite ready to talk about it [masculinity] yet." (IYC staff focus group)

"It's made me realise you've got to be ready for that support to help you, because if you're not ready, it's not going to help you." (P1)

Reduced substance misuse

Although a reduction in substance misuse was a central aim of IYC it was not a primary theme in the data set. Many of the concerns/reasons for the participants were often more relational in nature, e.g., loss of relationships because of hypermasculine behaviours. However, for many of the staff, hypermasculinity and substance misuse were far more inextricably linked.

As the IYC staff suggest here, exploring the complex reasons for the men's substance use in the wider context of their lives was a way to link masculinity and drug use. Staff understood how these problematic behaviours could not only link but exacerbate one another, demonstrated by the example of domestic violence and substance misuse below.

Conversely, there was an absence in many of the men's accounts of seeing a linkage between substances and their notions of male coping. However, for those for which substance use was their primary concern, such as participant 11, the programme provided invaluable support in reducing his use.

"A lot of the stuff that, you know, that's getting supported through IYC might not have been kind of drug related. You know, that might not be the most pressing issue. It could be around kind of like attitudes and relationships and things like that." (Probation staff focus group)

"If I go in on and start unpicking, you know, the use of crack, then it opens up vulnerability, but it also opens up like space is around aggression, not feeling worthy, but trying to fit in with the crowd, trying to be like the lads that you respect on the block sort of thing." (IYC staff focus group)

"I think once you've got them on the hook about substances, then you can slowly work your way into the IYC stuff." (IYC staff focus group)

“His traits of hypermasculine, you know, his DV, his threats, his weapon use and all that stuff, yeah, is linked to his substance use, directly linked to his substance use.” (IYC staff focus group)

“I used to smoke about 20 joints a day. And now I only smoke like four, three or four, if not, if not every day, it's like every couple of days, you know what I mean?” (P7)

“Kind of like why I was drinking and like stuff like that. But when we spoke on it, I understood like, it's just I was using that as a coping mechanism.” (P11)

Long-term outcome reporting

Securing healthier relationships

Relationships sat at the heart of all these accounts, both as an objective for the men involved in the programme and for the staff attempting to establish them. On one level, as suggested by participants 6 and 2, they had clearly built secure and productive relationships with the IYC staff, even in challenging environments. The cohort overall displayed a widespread mistrust of services/points of authority which arguably hampered any notions of help seeking.

As discussed in the IYC focus groups and one-to-one interviews, this was also identified by staff, with trust building forming part of their explicit engagement strategy. Clearly, this had been successful, as many of the men had been able to overcome their issues around trust to make a meaningful connection, therefore overcoming a significant barrier for many involved.

“So I have felt comfortable enough to tell him. He doesn't seem like a malicious individual. So the workers that I've had at probation. I've heard them talking about my business as I'm leaving the room.” (P6)

“I've enjoyed it a hell of a lot. but we're actually finding ways right now to actually extend my time so I can still see my IYC worker like every week.” (P2)

“I think we take it that step further and we do gain the trust of them. We do build that relationship. And I think being able to be that that that voice between probation and them, I think I think you can't measure it.” (IYC staff focus group)

“It's just about building relationships with people. And I think once you do that and then they can see a value in what you do, it takes care of itself, really.” (IYC staff focus group)

This seemed to be achieved through a relational and holistic approach, which was clearly valued and believed in by the staff and participants at IYC. What was evident regarding the relationship building was the apprehension and risk attached to forming trusting relationships with IYC staff. As indicated by participant 6, forming new relationships of any kind was deeply uncomfortable to him. The majority of the sample had a similar aversion, particularly to forming connections with other males.

It is a testament to the skill of the IYC staff that these connections were made possible when working with such aversion and mistrust. Indeed, this social mistrust and fear of intimacy also transmuted to men's wider social network. As seen with participant 9, his family represented a

threat to his recovery and related desistance as many family members engaged in many of the problematic behaviours he was trying to personally avoid.

"It's so relationship focused. It's so important to meet with our clients and to give them the time and the space, the emotional space and the physical space and the space just to talk about anything and everything." (IYC staff focus group)

"If it wasn't [IYC worker], I don't think I'd do it, to be fair. And that's the God's honest truth. I don't do new people." (P6)

"But this time [recovery], without being so close to the family, because it's the family that try persuading me to go out drinking with them." (P9)

"I'm not really person to gravitate towards males. To be fair, I like I don't really intend to get along with many males to be fair." (P3)

Positive attitudes towards help-seeking

Before commenting on the potential success of the IYC staff, it must first be noted the level of resistance within the sample. It was clear from both staff and client accounts that attitudes around help seeking were a major concern and difficulty. As the focus group data highlights below, this armour of resistance had first to be penetrated. In any case, as in participant 8's disclosure, they often had prior negative experiences which had created a mistrust of services that had previously tried to engage with them. Service users often felt that, prior to IYC, their views had not been taken seriously, with disclosures centred around risk and 'box ticking' exercises, as opposed to staff that cared for their personal wellbeing.

"Our clients have this armour, whether it is a joint hanging out of their mouth, whether it is sort of like, you know, just the way they carry themselves." (IYC staff focus group)

"I had this counsellor last time. She didn't make me feel like she was listening to a thing I was saying, because you hear some of these therapists, you know, the, you know, the lady voice, they go, 'okay, how did that make you feel?' Stop, stop, just talk to me like a person." (P8)

"They are so young and they do have a lack of understanding and a lot of the time they haven't had that sort of guidance or anyone to say to them, you know, 'this behaviour is harmful', so they don't recognise it". (Probation staff focus group)

As indicated by the accounts below, in the majority of cases, the IYC staff were successful in making the participants more willing to ask for help with a range of problems. In some cases, mirrored here by participant 9, this extended to therapeutic interventions, and considering the cohort of IYC have inherent trauma, this is a noteworthy finding.

In a minority of cases, reflected in the final extract below, a few participants found the content too challenging. This is likely related to the previous theme regarding client readiness and openness to change as not all service users were ready to critically interrogate their gender-related ideas and practices.

"[IYC] made me a bit more open to starting to go to counselling. Like, I don't think I ever would have done it if I didn't join this programme, acknowledge that I needed help." (P9)

"I never really used to reach out for help when I needed it. But like between me and [IYC worker], it opened my eyes like, I needed to reach out when I was struggling and like, I did." (P3)

"I think I'd be a lot more open to getting support in it. Like, I would be a lot more open to getting support in the future about my problems." (P7)

"He doesn't want to talk about the Manbox. Like, he just doesn't. He made an excuse on one session we were sat in the park and he said, I need to go back to the use the bathroom." (IYC staff focus group)

Increased aspirations

Aspirations and ideas of the future differed for men involved in the programme, yet they were evident throughout their personal accounts. Indeed, many had a renewed motivation to apply for prosocial forms of work, etc.

For some it was further education, evidenced by those participants leaving the programme with a range of improved education outcomes, such as AQA qualifications. As highlighted by participants 1, 2 and 4's accounts, they had a range of employment goals in mind, from tattooing to starting their own business. Many other examples existed in the interviews too, such as retail and factory related roles.

What was evident throughout was that all men shared a sense of renewed autonomy. This autonomy was demonstrated not only by men's hopes for a positive future, but one in which they felt they had a stake in shaping. Not all participants were able to articulate this clearly, as participant 4 discusses below, but there was a growing sense of self-worth as the men reflected on what they hoped for their future selves.

"I got one lad and it was one of my first really positive closures. Unfortunately, we never got to do his evaluation, but he finished with a load of AQAs, he's gone back into applying for jobs, he's got he has his daughter over the school holidays." (IYC Staff Focus Group)

"I've got a couple of other friends down the road that come to my house to get tattoos from me. I do tattooing." (P1)

"Already done college. I finished it. I've got distinction on my course. So that's really good." (P2)

"I feel like I want to do something for myself, like start my own business or something, but I know that it's not going to happen overnight, and I know that I would have to work." (P4)

"I have goals for the future, but like my goals is more like... dreams, and it's like I wanted to do them, but I didn't really feel like they were achievable. And even though – I'm not going to lie – I don't feel like I have everything I need to get there, but I definitely feel like it's less of a dream and more of a reality now." (P4)

Based on the data presented above it is safe to assume that the IYC project demonstrated its success across a range of short and medium-term outcomes. In the next section we discuss the findings in more detail and how the IYC project met the outcomes highlighted in the ToC.

Case studies

Cycles of offending and violence

G is in his late 20s. He was referred to IYC 12 months ago. His assessment revealed that as a child he had often witnessed his dad (a known drug dealer) abusing his mum, and G was introduced to holding guns at the age of three. This pattern has repeated in his own life, having had a child in a relationship that featured domestic violence. Currently a restraining order prevents contact with his first child. Until recently, G had been in a relationship with a second partner but he was returned to custody for breaching his restraining order (preventing him from being violent to her) when he tried to attend the birth of his second baby. Sadly, in spring 2026, the family experienced a sudden bereavement.

Initially G was sent to prison for domestic violence and is now on a probation order for property crime. Everyone in his social world offends; it seems a normal part of life to him, and imprisonment is just an accepted risk associated with life. G has never had a job but had been dealing class A drugs to make money to support his child. He only uses cannabis himself. He recently stopped dealing drugs, however, as it had become too risky in terms of him potentially getting shot.

His initial engagement with IYC was patchy. G missed sessions if he was arrested, the police took his phone, or probation called him in. After a few sessions G disengaged. He was released from custody at the end of December 2025. Over the New Year he texted the IYC worker to ask if he could start working with him again. His probation officer then referred him back into IYC. Engagement was much more consistent the second time.

He is now on session 10 and plans to complete all 14 sessions. He accepts that he needs help in grieving for his baby and recognises that his peers are not a good influence on him. G now sees that he needs help. He has begun to access mental health support and is attending an activity hub for job-hunting and CV writing. The IYC worker has also introduced him to a local employment agency that assists people with criminal records to get work.

G is changing his ideas about what it is to be a man. He acknowledges that he sometimes makes bad decisions and wants to learn otherwise. He is still very derogatory about women, especially his partner, whom he blames for everything. He considers some of his previous offending as him 'doing the right thing': breaching restraining orders to give his child a birthday present, or to be there for his baby's birth.

He has a good relationship with his probation officer, who understands him. The IYC worker combines his appointments with G with visits to the local wellbeing service so that this support can continue after IYC has come to end.

Vulnerability and isolation

B is in his mid-20s. He has traits of ADHD but has never had a formal assessment. He was placed in local authority care in his teens due to his mother being put on the sex offender

register. B moved around a lot whilst in care and these early adverse experiences have damaged his ability to form trusting relationships. Since his teens, his offending has included theft from shops, attacking shopkeepers, domestic violence, punching a police officer, and illicit substance use.

B lives in a very rough part of the city. His flat has no front door and the glass in his kitchen door was smashed on the floor and not tidied for six months. He smokes spice and crack daily. As a result, his physical health is poor; he often has ulcers and/or cold sores. Although B didn't initially acknowledge feeling vulnerable, his drug use seemed to be a means of him temporarily escaping fear and other forms of distress. He was used to keeping people at a distance, feeling that no one cared about him.

Just before Christmas 2025, B started having contact with his mum. She invited him to visit her over the Christmas holidays. That brought up very distressing emotions for B, however, and he spent the money she sent him to travel to see her on illicit substances instead. Then he went missing for several days. When he returned, the IYC worker visited B and discovered that he had been beaten up the day before.

At the start, B's engagement with IYC was erratic. Indeed, any other support service would likely have closed his case. However, responding to his needs, the IYC worker focused first on B's difficulty forming trusting relationships. So, the IYC worker started by taking him to Greggs for breakfast to build a relationship. Then they progressed to 'walk and talk' sessions. This facilitated major disclosures. For example, B pointed out on one such session the location where someone had tried to rape him, saying, "It's just what happens." Fortunately, with the support of the IYC worker, he had already started accessing a local mental health hub, which has its own breakfast club. After he was attacked, B had gone straight to the mental health hub where staff phoned the police for him, and he subsequently went to hospital.

The IYC worker introduced B to the local substance use treatment service. He also started working with a tenancy support worker and began taking more care of himself. He now acknowledges that he's vulnerable and needs help. He actively seeks support and is continuing with his drug treatment. His physical appearance improves dramatically whenever he cuts back on using substances. Building relationships with professionals who will go the extra mile for him is an important step for B. Some days he still uses a lot of crack but he has given up using spice.

Coping with child sexual abuse

O is in his late 20s and has EU citizenship. He is on the sex offender register and is likely to be deported soon. He spent part of his childhood in the care system. In one of his early sessions with the IYC worker he revealed that sexual abuse was rife. He gave an example of staff having sex with residents on the sofa while other children were watching TV. Eventually the police raided the home, arrested the staff, and the children were dispersed to other care homes across the country. O struggles with depression but has no formal diagnosis or medication. His flat is in a rough part of the city which contrasts sharply with the toys he has displayed on the mantelpiece. He has been involved in dealing drugs and begging.

O struggled to engage with IYC initially, but once trust was built, he attended regularly and apologised if he ever missed an appointment. With the IYC worker, O started going to a mixed

martial arts (MMA) gym, visiting art galleries and going out for walks. His physical health improved. He lost weight and started doing well and building positive relationships at the gym.

O completed 14 IYC sessions. He achieved numerous AQA qualifications through IYC but couldn't recognise his own development. The worker noticed how sensitive he was during the MMA sessions – regularly asking whether each body contact was 'okay'. His self-care improved and he began eating well, taking better care of his appearance and dressing smarter. He also re-found his faith. When he started engaging with IYC he was using every possible drug, but O has now stopped using everything, even alcohol.

Summary

While much work remains for the three men featured in these case studies, together they provide clear evidence of the impact of the programme. For example, although very much still a 'work in progress' (i.e., the client's continued presentation of sexist views), G's story spoke clearly to the project's medium-term goals around problematic hypermasculine behaviours. He has begun to see the negative impact of violent actions in his life, with suggestions as to their reduction.

B's story spoke more to the relational and substance use goals of IYC. The programme seeks to create more secure relationships with service users, and this is certainly reflected in B's account. There was a sense of trust-building, despite difficult circumstances and the client's widespread experiences of trauma. This newfound trust was then able to be harnessed to encourage B and challenge his negative views on help-seeking. In line with IYC's ToC, this allowed the B to engage with services to support wider rehabilitation.

While O's case study reflected the trauma-heavy make-up of the IYC cohort, it also spoke to another desired outcome. O had entered the project using every form of substance he could access. However, by the end of the programme, he was approaching near abstinence.

The background is a complex abstract composition. It features a grid of small, dark dots on a light blue background, which is partially obscured by a large, irregular, bright pink shape. The bottom of the image shows a close-up of a person's face, with a focus on the eyes and nose, rendered in a high-contrast, almost stencil-like style. The overall color palette is dominated by blue, pink, and black.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

As highlighted in the ToC, the longer-term outcome of the IYC project was to influence young men's attitudes towards more positive masculine identities, enabling them to reach their full potential. Whilst this outcome was not specifically measured, data within the evaluation suggest small ancillary benefits towards this longer-term outcome. Further research could yield promise in relation to this longer-term aim.

Demographic data show that the main recipients of the IYC intervention were aged 25 – 29 years (41%) and identified as White (77%). The main locations for delivering the IYC intervention consisted of coffee shops (28%), outdoors (24%) and in the probation office (15%). Activities such as sports venues and community hubs featured less. Anecdotally, the reason for this is a combination of a lack of confidence among service users in environments where they reported feeling stigmatised and/or excluded.

The finding that coffee shops were the most popular location runs contrary to expectations around hypermasculinity and what is understood to work. Typically, within the literature, there is an assumption for the need for a 'hook for change' for such men. This usually takes place within an equally hypermasculine location, such as a boxing or martial arts space. These environments thus provide a legitimate arena in which to instigate change but form a vantage point of 'allowed intimacy'.

Limitations withstanding, this evaluation points to something valuable: a novel, relational and agile working practice. IYC staff harnessed a host of contextual factors, their lived experience, cultural competency, a non-judgemental approach with a real relational investment in these often-forgotten young men. By doing so, they were able to engage in challenging identity work, but without triggering the maladaptive behaviours typically associated with this group.

Of the 153 men referred, 105 completed the WEMWBS when they started the project. Of these, 22 also completed the WEMWBS when exited the project. As shown in figure 3, the average score at the start of the project was 39 (minimum 15, maximum 63). At exit, the average score had increased to 56 (minimum 34, maximum 70). This indicates that, at the start of the project, the average score was indicative of probable clinical depression, while at the exit point, the average score was getting close to the high wellbeing threshold. While the small sample means that any findings need to be treated with caution, for the 22 people who completed the WEMWBS at both start and exit, 21 showed an increase in the wellbeing score. Only one person's wellbeing score decreased while they were with the project. This is an important finding, as it clearly demonstrates that the IYC project successfully worked with the population it was designed to engage with.

The referrals from probation into IYC were identified correctly at source, and with the agile relational practices of the IYC staff, the project was able to retain the majority of the cohort throughout the intervention⁹. Considering the nature of the referrals and the cohort more generally, this finding demonstrates the success and ability of IYC staff in developing

⁹ It is important to be aware that HMPPS's 2024 *Pre-Release and Resettlement Policy Framework* (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hmpps-pre-release-and-resettlement-policy-framework>) reduced both the number of referrals from probation and the number of men who were able to complete the programme.

relationships that arguably assist with the service user's personal growth and mental wellbeing. This is no mean feat considering the profile and evidence of adverse childhood experiences amongst this cohort of men. Prior research suggests that those with higher rates of adverse childhood experiences have lower rates of emotional and mental wellbeing, and poor attachment styles when it comes to forming relationships with significant others¹⁰. The data suggest that the IYC intervention had significant impact on the service users' emotional and mental wellbeing as identified in the WEMWBS exit data and completion of AQA's related to mental health awareness. Therefore, success can be measured against the short term and longer-term outcomes relating to these factors.

The Consequential Thinking Measure shows the changes that occurred for 18 of the men between when they started the project and when they exited it. While the small sample means that any findings need to be treated with caution, the comparison highlights some interesting 'positive' changes. For example, at the start, over a fifth (22%) agreed that 'men need to be violent to get what they want'. Yet when they exited the project, none of the men agreed with this statement and over four fifths (83%) disagreed with it. Similarly, when they started, around two fifths (39%) agreed that 'men shouldn't show emotions that make them look weak'. By the time they exited the project, this had reduced to 17%. At the start of the project, over a quarter (28%) agreed that 'I can think about consequences before I act when I'm angry'. By the time they exited the project, this had increased to over four fifths (83%). With the statement 'I understand that some of the things I do can cause problems for others', the percentage of those that agreed increased from under half (44%) at the start to nearly nine tenths (89%) at exit. Finally, while only a third (33%) agreed that 'I can ask for support when I need it' when they started the project, all 18 of the men agreed with it when they exited the project.

These are interesting findings that show definitive promise for future IYC work, especially related to short-term outcome reporting on improved consequential thinking to better manage behaviours and situations. Additionally, the data also suggest that the agile approach that IYC adopted significantly contributed towards a 77% increase in service users being able to ask for support when they need it. Considering the overarching aim of the IYC project was to increase engagement in services and increase positive attitudes towards seeking appropriate support, this finding is a significant in terms of impact.

Exemplified particularly well in the case studies and qualitative interviews, the value of trusted relationships was juxtaposed with its related risks and fear of intimacy. The relational element of the IYC and the service users sat at the heart of this evaluation. The connections between service users and IYC staff once established whereby trust was gained (no small feat), men were able to create what Peggy Giordano famously referred to in the desistance literature as an 'openness to change.'¹¹ The desire (to begin) to cognitively transform and move away from their hypermasculine training, which had taught them that emotional suppression, the dominance of others, and a fear of vulnerability were the only way to live. Many of the men such as 'G' were starting to recognise how such behaviours, which undoubtedly provided real survival value in

¹⁰ Gray, P., Jump, D., and Smithson, H. (2023) *Adverse Childhood Experiences and Serious Youth Violence*. Bristol: Policy Press.

¹¹ Giordano, P.C., Cernkovich, S.A. and Rudolph, J.L. (2002) 'Gender, Crime, and Desistance: Toward a Theory of Cognitive Transformation'. *American Journal of Sociology*, 107(4):990–1064.

the world of crime or carceral environments, were no longer serving them on their journeys towards a new, prosocial self.

The value of these relationships was reflected in the data both qualitatively and quantitatively. Evidenced by radical improvements in help-seeking, from 33% to 100% respectively, and even service user's comfortableness with engaging with a mental health-related AQA qualification, contributed towards this openness to change.

Qualitative data highlighted how staff really listened and provided a non-judgemental male role model, one who had already 'made good'. This was an important facet in the design of the IYC intervention as it demonstrated that the IYC staff were similar enough to the men on the programme to form trusting relationships, yet reflexive enough that the service users could see that change was also possible for them through prosocial modelling. Although it is hard to confirm without further data collection, the existing data imply that the majority of service users inhabited an impoverished social world. Indeed, even service users with close friends or family discussed how these relationships could be sites of ambivalence in their wider goals of desistance, as many of those connections, while important, also engaged in many of the behaviours they were trying to avoid. The IYC mentor therefore represented a real change to the style of relating and relationships that the service users were used to.

The Manbox exercise in particular seemed to have improved participants' understanding of constrictive gender roles (appendix 1). There was an element of conflict in the accounts surrounding the willingness of the men to participate in such conversations on the nature of masculinity. Although an improved awareness was no doubt generated in the participant sample, the crucial question was whether this newfound understanding of hypermasculinity translated to the level of behaviour and consequence in their daily lives. Although this was not universal in the participant interviews, many of the men – because of the IYC programme – had begun to reflect on the costs associated with performing hypermasculine scripts. It is not surprising that the most commonly received interventions were those covered in the first three interviews: 'CORE, Getting to Know You 1' (71 percent); 'CORE, Getting to Know you 2' (54%); and 'CORE, ABC-E' (39%). Followed closely by Crisis of Masculinity (26%) Understanding Your Life Story (24%) and In My Corner (23%). Moreover, when considering dosage and attrition, a six-to eight-week content may be more favourable.

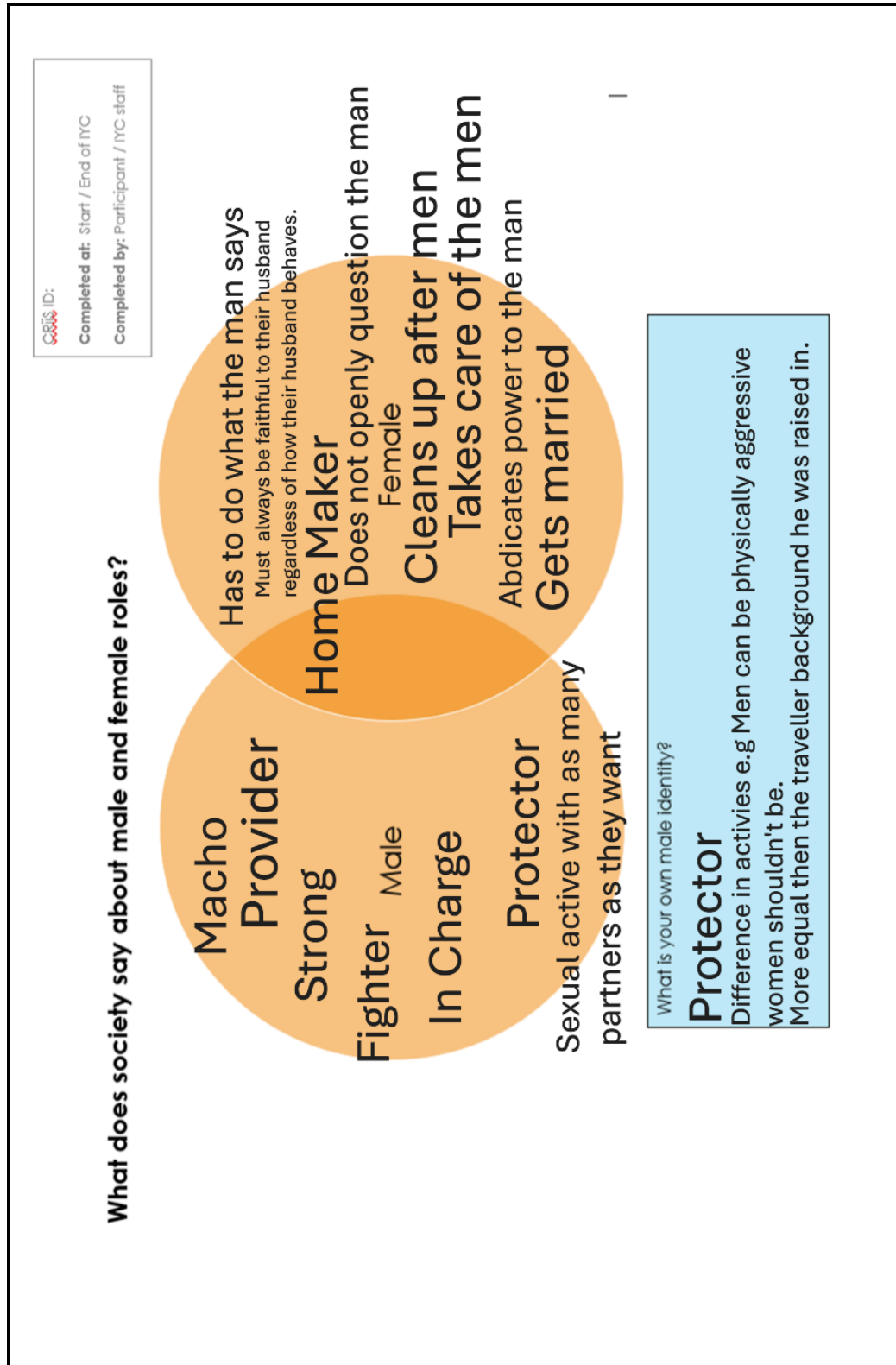
In total, 54 AQAs were awarded to 14 service users. This demonstrates IYC's success in achieving its short-term outcome goal of young men achieving AQA qualifications. The main topic and most frequent qualifications focused on identity and masculinity; mental health awareness; and goals and aspirations. This further demonstrates that the content of the IYC intervention was successful in working towards its short- and medium-term outcomes, as identified in the ToC. This is particularly pronounced on outcomes that focused on improved emotional and mental wellbeing, understanding consequences related to hypermasculinity, and increased aspirations.

Recommendations

The evaluation concludes with eight recommendations:

1. Evidence from this evaluation should inform the continuation of IYC delivery and the possible integration of IYC into mainstream services.
2. The IYC referral pathway should be integrated into HMPPS Digital Service Commissioned Services to streamline probation referrals.
3. Clinical supervision and ongoing training for staff, particularly those with lived experience, should be sustained in all future iterations.
4. To optimise engagement and outcomes, a dosage of six to eight one-to-one sessions is recommended (up to a maximum of 16 sessions).
5. Reasonable adjustments should be embedded to account for the high prevalence of special educational needs within the cohort.
6. Relational continuity between staff and service users must be prioritised, as staff turnover/change is a primary driver of service user disengagement.
7. The Manbox educational component should be retained as a core feature of IYC's psychosocial offer.
8. Consideration should be given to expanding the age range beyond 30 years and broadening the range of community activities offered.

APPENDIX 1: COMPLETED MANBOX





**Change
Grow
Live**

