

CASE STUDY – DOMESTIC ABUSE PREVENTION PROGRAMME (DAPP)

The Service User (SU) was referred to our service back in February 2025 by the family social workers following a domestic abuse incident against his ex-partner, which, at the time of referral, he was on bail for. In his initial assessment, despite being open and honest about his unhealthy behaviours, the SU tried to minimise the impact of this by talking about the behaviour that his ex-partner had displayed towards him.

After noticing this was a pattern within the appointment, the SU was asked by the facilitator to consider how he would feel if his daughters were treated the way he had treated his ex-partner, even if they had behaved the way he stated she had. It was evident that this was a turning point for the SU. Even at this early stage, he reflected how he had never thought about things in this way before and that this made him look at everything completely differently.

Within the initial assessment, the SU had shared that years earlier he had completed the behavioural change programme, BBR, as part of a previous sentence but had not been at the right place in his life to be able to accept his wrongdoing and start making positive changes in his behaviour. Since separating from his ex-partner and finding sobriety, the SU shared that he now felt ready to make necessary changes in his behaviour to improve himself for the sake of his children.

Due to the SU's readiness to change, there were no identified barriers to him attending the programme in his initial assessment. However, during the check in for session 3, the SU made a disclosure to the facilitator that he had been in contact with his ex-partner with regards to childcare arrangements. Whilst on bail, the SU's adult son had been acting as a third party, but on this particular occasion his son had not been responding, so the SU had chosen to contact his ex-partner directly. Within the disclosure, the SU stated that his communications had been amicable, that he had made the family social worker aware and they had not clarified to him that this was breach of bail that may need to be disclosed to the police. At this point in the session, the facilitator had the difficult conversation with the SU that due to the nature of his disclosure, they may need to make the police aware.

Due to his anxiety around losing his children, it was clear that the facilitator's response had caused the SU some upset and unsettled him, so the facilitator kept him on the call while they spoke to their line manager for clarity around how to proceed. Despite the SU stating at the time that he was angry and worried, he practiced a breathing technique to keep himself calm, which allowed him to respectfully articulate how he was feeling and communicate that he did not feel emotionally able to continue with the session.

With support from their line manager following the session, the family social worker was contacted and later confirmed that the SU had made the same disclosure to them. In conclusion, it was agreed on both sides that the SU was not suspected to be a risk to his ex-partner so the disclosure was not passed on to the police, however, the SU was advised to continue using the third party at least until his bail was lifted to not negatively affect the outcome, which the SU confirmed they understood and adhered to. Over the course of the few days following, the disclosure was investigated, the Service User (SU) was provided updates and once he was given confirmation that the information he shared would not be disclosed to the police, he apologised and expressed how much he was enjoying the programme so far and expressed that he very much wanted to continue.

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During check in of session 3, the SU shared, *"Today, I pulled into a road as this other driver come swinging round the corner. The guy was screaming and shouting out the window and I started laughing and told him to chill out. Where usually I would have to shout back, I didn't this time."* The SU reflected on the difference between how he handled himself compared to how he might have managed the situation 6 months ago. He stated, *"If that had happened before, I would have rammed my car into him because I didn't care. So, something is definitely changing in me."*

Also within session 3, the SU had been introduced to ACE's (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and was asked to reflect on what he felt had been the impact of his own behaviours and relationship issues on his children. The SU reflected, *"[Me and my ex-partner] we used to argue all the time. There is one memory that sticks in my mind where we were screaming and shouting at each other, and I looked at the girls and they were just watching the TV. I realised that this isn't f****g right. That's how I used to be. That memory will stick with me. I reckon if we argued now they would be shocked, but because it was an everyday occurrence they didn't bother, I hope to God they won't remember. Our older child is 7 or 8 now. [But back then] she got really naughty, for example, she would say no if she was told to do something. But can you blame her if she saw us talking to each other the way we were."*

Session 5's focus was around understanding emotions and identifying triggers for anger. When exploring his triggers for anger, the SU had been able to identify that a key internal trigger for his behaviour was, *"My own thinking process around everything. I'm not so bad now, but using my ex as an example, when we first broke up, if she went to Nando's the night before I'd be making a story up in my head about what she was doing or who she was with and I'd get the hump about it. Then the next time I'd be thinking, 'I bet she is meeting that guy from Nando's' and it would snowball from there."*

During the check out for session 5, the SU reflected how, *"At the beginning of the programme I was sharing the blame saying 'look at what she's done' but I don't care about what she's done, I'm just looking at me which is good. I think I'm quite good at realising when I'm p***** off, angry or sad but I think I need to learn to catch them first. For instance, anger lasts for 90 seconds, it comes into my mind, and I counted to 90 and it works. I think I'm taking away that I should listen to my body a bit more instead of listening to my intrusive thoughts."*

When the SU was asked to check in for the week at the beginning of session 6, he shared how he had used the Time Out skill and replacement thoughts to manage his emotions. He explained, *"Today, I had to get half stone and half topsoil. Halfway to the job, they said they didn't want the topsoil, so I had to go back and take it out. When I got to the job, they left me waiting. I asked them to hurry up and they asked me to drive round the front, then they were like, 'Actually, can you put it on a bucket...'. I nearly blew my lid, so I said, 'I'll be back in a minute'. I had a little time out, went round the back of the lorry and thought to myself, 'Chill out. It's not that big a deal'."*

At the check in for session 7, the SU shared, *"I had a bit of a breakthrough with my ex-partner when I dropped the kids home last Sunday night. I worked on bank holiday Monday, so I told her I'd drop the girls back at normal time. Their current partner came out to get them, so I held out the bag for them and I put my hand out to shake his hand. I told him there were doughnuts in the bag too that I bought for the girls. I think he was waiting for a punch or something, but he did shake my hand. I just want everything to be amicable."*

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Session 7 explored different communication styles and the SU was able to reflect on the communication style he uses now compared to what he had used in the past, *"Now I am assertive whereas before I would be aggressive quite a lot. I'm a nicer person in general with no alcohol. I wouldn't stop and think before."*

Session 8 explored conflict resolution strategies which allowed the SU to reflect on how he had previously gone about resolving problems with his ex-partner. He acknowledged that in the past he had resorted mostly to, *"Avoiding and definitely accommodating because I would do whatever she wanted at first. I think a lot got pushed under the carpet because we would have an argument, but it would end up being 'shall we get a beer and have the conversation later' then it would never happen. I think we were both too busy about getting on it. Avoiding issues ruined the whole relationship because nothing ever got resolved. Everything was left open. You need to talk about things to get it finished, but it never got finished and I was always panicking about things I never got answers for, and she was probably panicking about things she never got answers for. It was just a panic, a worry constantly. I was always worried about who she was seeing and what she was doing. I would over analyse anyway, but when I was sniffing gear and drinking all that was worse. I'd pull apart a story and then that would be another thing that was then on my shoulders."*

In the check out for session 8, the SU was very reflective about his past behaviours and how far he has come, *"I never made the girls my main priority, all I cared about was coke. Now I do everything for them. They knew I drank alcohol, when I walked through the door, they would run at me with a can of beer. When I stopped, I sat them down and told them I would never drink alcohol again. I replay that memory daily over and over in my head. It's like weighing scales, drink and drugs on one side and that memory is on the other side, so I keep it topped up to the max. I think about what sort of dad would I be If I did ever fall off the wagon, drank and did cocaine again I wouldn't be able to live with the guilt or look at myself in the mirror. I wouldn't be able to live with myself. And they'd know because I wouldn't be there to pick them up. My new cocaine and alcohol is picking them up at the weekend. I drift through the week, and everything revolves around picking them up at the weekend. That's my new buzz. It's magical. I park at the end of the street when I pick them up and I see them come down the street. As soon as they get across the road, they are like dogs off a lead. That feeling is priceless. It's the best thing. Letting them down, I have no words for it."*

It was clear to the facilitator throughout the intervention that the SU had been able to demonstrate clear progress in managing his emotional responses, thinking, and interpersonal dynamics through reflective practice and skill application. This was particularly evident regarding his beliefs, emotional regulation, and thought management. Overall, the SU's reflections, commitment, use of tools, and behavioural changes across sessions clearly demonstrated an increase of emotional insight, healthier beliefs, and improved interpersonal skills which resulted in a positive outcome, and a reduction in risk from High to Standard Risk.

Following the completion of the programme, the SU expressed his desire to continue learning and developing his skills as he felt there was more he could do. During his time on the programme, the DAPP Intervention was being developed to include additional content relating to topics that the facilitators felt Service Users (SUs) would benefit from. To be responsive to the SU's motivation to continue developing, he was offered additional sessions that would reflect his need. These sessions include The Worry Tree, attachment styles, thinking biases, The helicopter View tool, boundaries and endings.

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The SU's final statements from the programme were:

"At the beginning, I was adamant I never wanted to be in a relationship again. I'm not saying never now but I want to carry on working on myself first. I'm not jumping into nothing. When I got with my ex-partner, I moved in within 3 months, and I thought it was love. Was it love? I've never be in a place when I have been on my own. I think what will be, will be. If I did get with anyone new, I definitely can't be with someone who does cocaine, someone drinking alcohol would probably be alright, but I wouldn't want it around me all the time. I would need to be boundaried. I need someone to respect the boundaries I have. The kids are number 1, if I did get with someone, they will have to work around the girls. I remember at the beginning of the programme, I was so bitter, and I remember you saying this is about you and not my ex-partner. That's made a massive impact. I don't know if it's what I learnt, or how far I have come but I listen more now, I engage better with people and think about them more. I was selfish and so wrapped up in that bubble of life. I just feel a lot happier. Being more open and actually exploring my feelings instead of just flying off the handle. I was already using the replacement thoughts but now I have a name for the tool which has helped me use it more because I recognise it."