"Are you onside?"

Evaluation of Bystander Intervention training delivery to community sports organisations across Merseyside: 2023-25

HEG Health Equalities Group • HEALTHY STADIA

About Health Equalities Group and Healthy Stadia

Health Equalities Group (HEG) is a public health charity working to improve the wellbeing of communities across the UK. We're an independent voice for preventative public health in the North-West and beyond.

We believe everyone deserves to live a long, healthy, and happy life. But right now, not everyone gets that opportunity. That's why we work with local authorities, charities, the NHS, and central government to help improve the conditions that hold back so many of our communities.

Healthy Stadia is a programme of work delivered by HEG, that takes a settings-based approach to public health using the unique reach and cultural resonance of sport to promote public health and reduce health inequalities.

Project overview

Title	*"Are you onside?"*: Evaluation of Bystander Intervention training delivery to community sports organisations across Merseyside: 2023-25
Evaluation period	January 2023 – March 2025
Commissioner	Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership
Lead organisation	Health Equalities Group (Healthy Stadia programme)
Partners	NWG Network Kindling Interventions
Methodology	Mixed-methods, pre-post evaluation with quantitative and qualitative data
Intended audience	Local and regional commissioners, public health professionals, sport development organisations, safeguarding leads, and violence prevention policymakers
Author	Michael Viggars, Senior Project Manager, Health Equalities Group

Acknowledgements

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1. Executive summary

Overview

"Are you onside?" is a pioneering primary prevention programme designed to challenge sexism, misogyny, and violence against women and girls (VAWG) in community sport through evidence-based bystander intervention training.

Funded by the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (MVRP) and delivered in partnership with Kindling Interventions and NWG Network, the programme was implemented across Merseyside between 2023 and 2025. The training draws on the Football Onside methodology developed by the University of Exeter Law School and tailored specifically for the community sports sector.

This report presents findings from a mixed-methods evaluation of the programme, including pre- and post-training survey data, qualitative reflections from participants, and focus group insights from Everton in the Community.

Key findings

- Statistically significant improvements were observed across all five measured domains: belief in importance and responsibility, confidence and comfort, perceived norms, perceived approval, and motivation and outcome efficacy.

- The largest shifts occurred in confidence to intervene and perceived peer approval, with medium-to-large effect sizes (r = 0.38 and 0.30 respectively), both of which are critical enablers of active bystander behaviour.

- Qualitative feedback revealed that participants felt better equipped, more aware, and more responsible following the training. The language used suggested a shift from passive awareness to active accountability.

- Focus group participants described the training as transformative but also emotionally taxing, particularly for female staff who frequently assume informal safeguarding roles. They also raised concerns that, in the absence of senior leadership support, cultural change may stall or become siloed.

- Evidence from Everton in the Community suggests that organisational size and complexity may moderate the impact of training, with larger, hierarchical settings requiring additional structural tools to support cultural change.

Programme reach

- A total of 19 training programmes were delivered to 13 community sports organisations.

- An average of 12.9 participants attended each session.

- A further 10 organisations were engaged in discussions, but training could not be delivered in five of these due to staffing or scheduling constraints.

Implications for practice

While the *"Are you onside?"* programme demonstrated clear improvements in participants' attitudes, confidence, and motivation, the evaluation also highlights the limits of individual-level interventions when delivered in isolation. Sustainable culture change in sport requires:

- Visible leadership endorsement and role modelling

- Structural integration into safeguarding and equality policies

- Ongoing opportunities for reflection and reinforcement

Recommendations

- Integrate training into wider organisational development plans, ensuring alignment with safeguarding, EDI, and workforce strategies.

- Engage senior leaders early and meaningfully, recognising that their commitment is vital to cultural change.

- Develop supplementary tools, such as leadership briefings, policy audits, or role-specific action plans, for organisations with complex hierarchies or larger workforces.

- Embed reflective practice mechanisms, such as peer supervision or action learning sets, to support staff post-training.

- Continue to monitor and evaluate longitudinal impact, including behavioural outcomes and organisational change indicators.

Conclusion

"Are you onside?" offers compelling evidence of how bystander training can build the foundations for a more inclusive and respectful sport culture. It should be viewed not as a stand-alone intervention, but as a key component of a whole-organisation approach to violence prevention and gender equity. With the right leadership, policy support, and strategic integration, this training has the potential to catalyse lasting change in community sport settings.

2. Background and rationale

Sport as a gendered and unequal space

Sport continues to function as a deeply gendered and often exclusionary institution, reflecting and reinforcing broader societal inequalities. Despite advances in policy and representation, it remains a domain in which men disproportionately occupy positions of power, visibility, and influence. Structural and cultural barriers persistently limit the full participation of women and girls, not only in athletic competition but also in coaching, governance, and leadership roles. This imbalance is further entrenched by a culture that continues to tolerate, minimise, or ignore behaviours rooted in sexism, misogyny, and violence against women and girls (VAWG). These behaviours are not always overt or violent; they are often subtle, normalised, and woven into the everyday fabric of sport participation and administration. Together, they constitute a hostile environment that undermines the safety, dignity, and aspirations of women and girls at every level of the sporting pyramid.

The reproduction of male dominance in sport is sustained through both interpersonal interactions and institutional arrangements. Cultural norms, such as the valorisation of aggression, competitiveness, and stoicism, reinforce masculine ideals that often marginalise or penalise those who do not conform. As documented in numerous studies, women working or participating in sport routinely experience a spectrum of microaggressions, exclusionary language, and overt acts of discrimination and harassment. These experiences are rarely isolated or episodic. Rather, they are part of a systemic pattern underpinned by hegemonic masculinity and normative tolerance of sexist behaviour (1). The cumulative effect is a deeply unequal playing field that requires targeted and sustained intervention.

Particularly in male-dominated environments such as football, rugby, or elite coaching, cultures of silence and complicity can flourish. Research has demonstrated that organisational hierarchies, group loyalties, and a desire to preserve team cohesion can prevent individuals from speaking out or challenging harmful behaviour (2). When sexism or abuse does occur, the response is often muted or managed internally, further reinforcing a lack of accountability. These dynamics not only discourage women from participating in sport but also create climates where harmful attitudes and behaviours can escalate unchecked.

Sociological perspectives on power and silence in sport

These institutionalised power dynamics are well explained by Connell's (1987) theory of hegemonic masculinity (3), which articulates how dominant forms of masculinity are valorised at the expense of other gender expressions, sustaining male dominance and subordinating women. In sport, hegemonic masculinity is often manifested through aggressive, competitive, and exclusionary behaviours that marginalise individuals who do not conform to these ideals. Connell's framework provides a critical lens through which to understand how gendered power hierarchies are embedded and reproduced in the sporting field.

Bourdieu's (1978) concepts of habitus and field also offer valuable insights (4). The sporting field, as a structured social space, shapes and is shaped by the practices, dispositions, and norms of those within it. The habitus of individuals in sport, developed through repeated exposure to norms that value physical dominance, emotional stoicism, and hierarchical loyalty, can make challenging harmful behaviour difficult, as doing so often contradicts deeply

internalised dispositions. These dynamics underscore why cultural change in sport is challenging and why efforts to embed interventionist norms must engage both individual agency and institutional context.

Additionally, Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory sheds light on the performative nature of behaviour in team environments (5). In sporting contexts, athletes and coaches frequently perform 'front stage' roles that prioritise image, cohesion, and loyalty over personal conviction. This emphasis on maintaining appearances can discourage intervention in problematic situations, particularly when such actions risk disrupting team harmony or personal standing. Understanding this tension between private belief and public performance is essential for designing bystander interventions that resonate with participants' lived realities.

Bystander intervention as a primary prevention strategy

Bystander intervention has emerged as a promising approach to primary prevention within this context. Unlike reactive strategies that address harm after it occurs, bystander interventions aim to shift the cultural conditions that allow such harm to flourish. Grounded in theories of social norms, behavioural intention, and moral engagement, these interventions empower individuals to recognise and challenge problematic behaviour before it escalates.

A key theoretical framework underpinning these interventions is Latané and Darley's (1970) five-stage model of bystander behaviour (6), which identifies the sequential stages individuals must pass through to become active interveners: noticing an event, interpreting it as problematic, feeling responsible to act, knowing how to intervene, and taking action. As Deitch-Stackhouse et al. (2015) argue, progression through these stages is highly sensitive to social cues and perceived peer norms (7). Misperceptions of these norms, believing others are less concerned or less likely to intervene, can inhibit action at any stage. Correcting such misperceptions is central to social norms-based violence prevention strategies.

By framing all members of a sporting community as potential interveners, bystander models promote collective responsibility and cultural transformation. They seek to dismantle the "bystander effect", a psychological phenomenon where individuals are less likely to act in the presence of others, by providing the knowledge, confidence, and crucially, the social permission needed to act (8,9).

While the evidence base for bystander training is well-established in university and military settings, its application in sport remains comparatively underdeveloped. Existing research indicates that well-designed bystander programmes can reduce rape myth acceptance, improve bystander self-efficacy, and increase willingness to intervene across a range of scenarios (8,9). However, successful translation into sport contexts requires adaptation to the unique cultural, structural, and relational dynamics of sporting environments.

A recent feasibility study of bystander interventions in community sports contexts (10) underscores this point, highlighting the necessity of contextually tailored interventions for coaches and community sport settings. The evaluation, conducted by Dr Anastasiia Kovalenko and Professor Rachel Fenton and published in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (2024), examined the *Football Onside®* programme, an evidence-based intervention originally developed by the University of Exeter Law School. Their study demonstrated the value of co-design, experiential delivery, and repeated engagement in embedding cultural change within sport. Crucially, the research showed that coaches can act as influential role models in

promoting respectful attitudes and behaviours towards women and girls. These insights directly informed the rationale for adapting *Football Onside®* for the "*Are you onside?*" programme, which applied the same principles within the specific cultural and organisational context of community sport in Merseyside.

Recent studies have begun to explore the efficacy of bystander interventions in more depth. Key determinants of positive coach-bystander behaviour have been identified (11), including perceived behavioural control, outcome expectancies, and normative beliefs. Adriaens et al. (2024) evaluated a multi-level intervention targeting youth athletes and their coaches, noting promising improvements in intervention confidence and behavioural intent (12). In parallel, qualitative research from McGinty-Minister et al. (2024) has foregrounded the lived experiences of women in sport, reinforcing the urgent need for interventions that address the gendered power relations embedded in everyday sporting interactions (1).

The *"Are you onside?"* project and this evaluation

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the prevalence and complexity of violence in the UK. However, efforts to prevent such violence remain in their early stages. Research emerging from the United States and other high-income settings has highlighted the potential of bystander interventions, approaches that shift the focus away from solely targeting perpetrators or supporting victims and instead empower witnesses to recognise, disrupt, and challenge harmful behaviours. By reframing men not as potential perpetrators but as active allies, such interventions have also been shown to positively engage men as agents of change (13,14). When implemented effectively, bystander training can disrupt harmful social norms, increase confidence and efficacy among participants, and reduce tolerance of abuse (9,15).

Bystander programmes are increasingly recognised as a form of primary prevention for violence against women and girls (VAWG). Primary prevention refers to proactive strategies that aim to stop violence before it occurs by addressing the root causes and cultural conditions that give rise to it. In the context of sport, this means shifting attitudes, norms, and behaviours across entire organisations and communities, not just responding to incidents when they happen. A robust body of literature supports their effectiveness in improving bystander attitudes, self-efficacy, intent to intervene, and actual bystander behaviours, alongside reducing rape myth acceptance and, critically, lowering the incidence of violence itself (9). These interventions, when adapted to setting-specific dynamics, show strong promise as foundational tools for violence prevention.

There is also a growing body of practice-based evidence emerging from UK programmes beyond Merseyside. Initiatives such as 'Mentors in Violence Prevention' (MVP) in Scotland and the 'Active Bystander' programme in further education settings have demonstrated positive shifts in bystander attitudes and behavioural intentions. These examples point to the adaptability and scalability of bystander methodologies across various sectors, including sport.

Importantly, sport, though often remembered fondly as a positive developmental space, is not immune to harm. The CASES study, conducted by Edge Hill University as part of a Europe-wide investigation, revealed the widespread nature of interpersonal violence in sport (16). In a UK sample of over 1,400 adults aged 18–30, 73% reported experiencing at least one form of interpersonal violence as children in a sports context. The most prevalent form was psychological violence, including verbal aggression, humiliation, exclusion, and coercive

initiation practices. These findings underscore the urgent need for interventions that not only improve safeguarding but address the culture of sport that permits such harms to persist.

Bystander interventions thus represent an opportunity to complement existing safeguarding approaches by embedding trauma-informed, culturally aware, and proactive mechanisms for preventing harm. In sport, they offer a means to challenge the everyday sexism and discriminatory practices that underlie broader patterns of violence.

Box 1. "*Are you onside?*" vs. "Football onside"

"Are you Onside?" is a project funded by the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership, primarily to deliver bystander intervention training to community sports organisations on Merseyside.

The bystander intervention training is largely based on the **"Football Onside"** methodology, the first evidence-based bystander intervention training programme specifically designed for community sport, this initiative was delivered in partnership with Kindling Interventions and NWG Network. The **"Football Onside"** model itself was created by researchers at the University of Exeter Law School in collaboration with Exeter City Community Trust and was informed by expertise from Public Health England, Devon County Council, Devon Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Services, Hollie Gazzard Trust, and Plymouth Argyle Community Trust.

"Are you onside?" was chosen as the name of the project to ensure that community sports organisations who are not primarily associated with football, would see value in the training.

This evaluation contributes to this evolving body of work by assessing the impact of the *"Are you onside?"* bystander intervention programme, a multi-year initiative implemented across community sports organisations in Merseyside between 2023 and 2025. The training aimed to raise awareness of VAWG, sexism, and misogyny in sport and equip participants with the skills and confidence to challenge these behaviours within their organisations. Delivered to coaches, development officers, safeguarding leads, and others involved in sport delivery, the intervention was grounded in behaviour change theory and delivered in a supportive, participatory format. The training design actively responded to the sociological barriers discussed earlier; addressing hegemonic masculine norms, fostering confidence in navigating peer dynamics, and creating space for critical reflection on the performative expectations that inhibit intervention. The pre-post evaluation design captured changes in attitudes, confidence, perceived norms, and sense of efficacy, offering insight into the potential for bystander training to support cultural change.

Beyond measuring short-term shifts, this evaluation also contributes to broader policy conversations about gender equity, safeguarding, and organisational responsibility within sport. By foregrounding the need to make sport environments safer and more inclusive for women and girls, it supports the case for embedding bystander principles within sport development frameworks. As sport increasingly positions itself as a vehicle for social good and wellbeing, the imperative to address the everyday sexism and harm experienced by women and girls becomes not only a moral concern but a matter of public health, equity, and organisational integrity.

3. Aims and objectives

Aim

The *"Are you onside?"* programme was developed in response to persistent gender inequalities and the prevalence of violence against women and girls (VAWG) within community and grassroots sport. The project aimed to build the capacity of community sport organisations to recognise, challenge, and prevent harmful behaviours through bystander intervention training. The objectives below reflect the strategic intent of the programme and its commitment to embedding evidence-informed approaches within a real-world, practice-based setting.

The programme sought not only to improve individual knowledge, confidence, and readiness to act but also to contribute to a wider cultural shift within sport; towards environments that are safer, more inclusive, and actively engaged in the primary prevention of VAWG. In doing so, the evaluation was designed to assess both the proximal impacts of training and the broader contextual factors that shape its implementation and sustainability.

Objectives

1. To deliver a sector-specific, evidence-informed bystander intervention programme to community sports organisations across Merseyside over a three-year period, supporting staff and volunteers to recognise, challenge, and prevent harmful gendered behaviours.

2. To strengthen the knowledge, skills, and confidence of coaches, safeguarding leads, and other key stakeholders to intervene safely and effectively in situations involving sexism, misogyny, and the risk of violence against women and girls (VAWG).

3. To evaluate the immediate and short-term impacts of the programme through a mixed-methods approach, capturing changes in attitudes, confidence, perceived norms, and organisational readiness to support active bystander behaviours.

4. To contribute to the primary prevention of VAWG in community sport by supporting cultural change through shared accountability, gender equity, and inclusive norms.

5. To generate learning on the implementation of bystander training in sport, including how organisational size, leadership engagement, and hierarchical complexity influence the sustainability and scalability of cultural change.

Training objectives

- To increase knowledge, confidence, and practical skills among sport coaches, staff, and volunteers to safely intervene in situations involving sexism, misogyny, or violence against women and girls.

- To promote a shift in individual and collective attitudes, social norms, and organisational culture towards greater accountability and gender equity in community sport.

- To position men and boys as proactive allies in challenging harmful behaviour and fostering inclusive, respectful, and safe sport environments.

- To contribute to the primary prevention of violence against women and girls by embedding bystander principles within safeguarding, equality, and development frameworks in grassroots and semi-professional sport.

4. Programme development and partnerships

Commissioning Process

The "*Are you onside?*" project was commissioned and funded by the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP) as part of its broader commitment to preventing serious violence and addressing the root causes of harm in communities. The VRP is one of 18 Violence Reduction Units established across England and Wales under the national Serious Violence Strategy. Operating as a partnership model, the VRP brings together Merseyside Police, Fire and Rescue, local government, probation services, youth offending teams, and health, education, and community leaders to drive preventative, place-based responses to violence.

Recognising the role of community sport settings in influencing cultural attitudes and safeguarding practice, the VRP commissioned Health Equalities Group to develop and deliver "*Are you onside?*" – a public health training programme aiming to build workforce capacity and promote bystander approaches to prevent violence against women and girls (VAWG) within community sport settings.

The programme began with a review of the original materials provided by Kindling Interventions, streamlining of content to allow greater engagement with participants, and updating the content with culturally relevant examples of sexism and misogyny from across community and professional sport. This review was followed by a pilot programme delivered to staff and safeguarding personnel at Liverpool County Football Association. Following positive feedback and growing stakeholder interest, HEG began liaising with community sports organisations across Merseyside across Year 2 and Year 3.

Table 1. Delivery of "*Are you onside?*" across Merseyside, Year 1-3.

Year 1 (pilot)	Year 2	Year 3
October 2022 – March 2023	April 2023 – March 2024	April 2024 - March 2025
• Liverpool County Football Association	• Tranmere Rovers in the Community • Everton in the Community • LFC Foundation • MSP (Active Partnership for Merseyside)	• Cheshire FA • Liverpool School Sports Partnership • LJMU Level 5 Sports Coaching students • St Helens Leisure Services • Open programmes

Delivery throughout the three years was led by Michael Viggars, Senior Project Manager at Health Equalities Group, supported by colleagues from NWG Network and Kindling Interventions. The project was informed by academic evidence on bystander interventions and tailored to reflect the specific challenges, organisational structures, and safeguarding responsibilities within community sport settings.

Programme development

The "*Are you onside?*" programme was designed and delivered with flexibility to accommodate a diverse professional audience working in and around community sport settings. Over the course of three years, the training reached a wide range of roles including coaches, safeguarding leads, inclusion officers, youth mentors, and mental health professionals. Sessions were delivered in small-group, in-person formats, with delivery tailored to local organisational needs and capacities. The table below summarises the key features of the programme delivery, including participant groups, delivery format, organisational reach, and evaluation methods.

Table 2. Overview of training, delivery, and engagement

Target group/professions	- Community sports coaches - Development officers - Welfare officers - Safeguarding leads - Youth mentor - Inclusion coordinators - Youth intervention leads	- Employability coordinator - Health manager - Support worker - Primary school lead - Partnership manager - Mental health managers - Volunteer manager
Training duration and format	Two in-person variants including: • x3 two-hour workshops • x2 three-hour workshops Both formats accommodated a maximum of 25 participants, with venues organised predominantly by host organisations (listed below).	
Organisations receiving the training	- Liverpool County Football Association - Tranmere Rovers in the Community - Everton in the Community - LFC Foundation - MSP (Active Partnership for Merseyside) - Cheshire Football Association - LJMU Level 5 Sports Coaching undergraduate students - St Helens Council sports development/leisure services team - Liverpool School Sports Partnership - Open programmes	
Delivery partner and staff	**Healthy Stadia:** • Michael Viggars, Senior Project Manager **NWG Network:** • Kevin Murphy, Safeguarding Sport Lead • Angie Harper, Sport Engagement Lead • Bina Parmar, Team Leader Direct Delivery	

Training partner	**Kindling Interventions:** • Professor Rachel Fenton, Co-founder and Director • Dr Nathan Eisenstadt, Co-founder and Director	
Evaluation timepoint	**Quantitative:** • Pre-programme • Post-programme	**Qualitative:** • Pre-programme • Post-programme • Focus group post-training

The "*Are you onside?*" training programme was structured around three core sessions (see Table 3), each designed to build knowledge, shift attitudes, and develop practical skills related to bystander intervention and the prevention of VAWG in sport. Where organisations could only commit to receiving two sessions, the content from Session 2 was redistributed between Sessions 1 and 3.

The sessions were delivered sequentially to allow for a cumulative learning experience, with each building on the previous. The table below outlines the thematic focus, learning objectives, and anticipated outcomes for each session, providing a clear framework for how the programme aimed to engage participants, challenge harmful norms, and equip individuals with the confidence and tools to intervene safely and effectively.

Table 3. Session objectives

Session 1: Introducing the bystander *Thematic focus: Raising awareness of the need for bystander action and understanding VAWG in sport*
Objectives: 1. Introduce the concept and rationale of bystander intervention in the context of VAWG. 2. Explore societal and sport-specific manifestations of gendered violence and discrimination. 3. Understand barriers to intervention, including the "bystander effect" and misperceptions of norms. 4. Create a safe group agreement for participation and emotional safety.
Outcomes: • Increased recognition of harmful behaviours • Awareness of how passive bystanding perpetuates harm • Recognition that attitudes in sport mirror wider social inequalities
Session 2: Understanding the problem *Thematic focus: Building knowledge of the pyramid of harms, myth-busting, and consequences of inaction*
Objectives: 1. Deepen understanding of sexual harassment, assault, child sexual abuse, and grooming.

2. Deconstruct rape myths and cultural narratives that enable VAWG.

3. Examine the psychological, legal, and social impact of sexual violence and harassment.

4. Equip participants to identify and challenge victim-blaming and minimisation.

Outcomes:

- Increased confidence in recognising harmful behaviours

- Reduced acceptance of rape myths and justifications

- Greater empathy with victims and survivors

Session 3: Intervening with confidence

Thematic focus: *Skill-building for effective bystander action*

Objectives:

1. Introduce a three-pronged bystander model (intervening with wrongdoer, victim, and allies).

2. Teach and rehearse a range of intervention strategies (humour, distraction, empathy, de-escalation).

3. Explore the importance of follow-up and deeper conversations ("changing the person").

4. Provide opportunities to rehearse intervention in realistic scenarios.

Outcomes:

- Increased confidence in applying a repertoire of intervention strategies

- Ability to tailor responses to situation, role, and risk

- Increased intention to intervene in future incidents

5. Evaluation design and methods

Evaluation design

This study employed a mixed-methods evaluation design to comprehensively assess the impact of the *"Are you onside?"* bystander intervention programme, implemented across community sports organisations in Merseyside between 2023 and 2025. The methodological approach combined quantitative and qualitative components to ensure both breadth and depth of insight into the programme's effectiveness. The evaluation was theoretically grounded in established bystander intervention models, which collectively informed the selection of domains and survey constructs. At the same time, the design remained pragmatically attuned to the real-world complexities of delivering and evaluating primary prevention in grassroots and semi-professional sport settings.

The quantitative component utilised a within-subject, pre-post design to measure short-term shifts in attitudinal and normative domains associated with prosocial intervention. Complementing this, the qualitative component comprised two key strands: written reflections collected via the post-training survey and an in-depth focus group with staff from Everton in the Community. This integration of data types provided rich triangulation and a layered understanding of both individual-level change and broader cultural and institutional dynamics.

Participant and organisation overview

Across the duration of the project, a total of 19 training programmes were delivered to 13 community sport organisations, with an average of 12.9 participants per session. Organisations were approached based on their geography (i.e., operating in Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, St Helens or Wirral), and their expertise in delivering sport, physical activity, health, education and employability programmes in community settings.

In addition to those who received the training, a further 10 organisations were engaged and expressed initial interest. However, despite follow-up, only five responded to further communication, and training could not be coordinated due to scheduling constraints or the organisations' limited capacity to release staff for participation. This highlights ongoing structural and logistical barriers to programme uptake, even among willing stakeholders.

During the project, 245 individuals received the bystander intervention training. Of these, 233 were invited to anonymously complete the pre- and post-evaluation survey, questions within the survey were also not compulsory. A total of 73 completed both the pre- and post-training surveys in full and were included in this analysis. This cohort consisted of 58 male and 15 female participants. Participants were drawn from a wide spectrum of roles within the sport ecosystem, but were predominantly in frontline delivery roles including grassroots coaches, safeguarding leads, and development officers.

Participants ranged in age from 18 to over 65 years, representing a demographically diverse cross-section of Merseyside's community sport workforce. This diversity added to the ecological validity of the findings and provided a valuable lens through which to interpret the data across different types of sport engagement and levels of responsibility.

Table 4. Age profile of participants who completed pre- and post-evaluation

Age	No.
18-24	10
25-34	26
35-44	23
45-54	9
55-64	3
65+	2
Total	**73**

Survey instrument development

The quantitative evaluation instrument was composed of 17 Likert-scale items, specifically designed to align with the psychosocial constructs identified in Verhelle et al. (2022), who developed a validated framework for understanding coach-bystander behaviour in sport contexts. The instrument was piloted with two deliveries (n=12) and later refined largely on a practical basis. These items were categorised into five domains that underpin bystander readiness and effectiveness:

- Belief in the importance of and personal responsibility for addressing sexism and misogyny
- Confidence and comfort in initiating intervention or boundary-setting
- Perceived norms and social support
- Perceived peer approval of interventionist behaviour
- Motivation to intervene and perceived outcome efficacy

Each item employed a five-point Likert response format tailored to the construct (e.g., agreement, comfort, confidence), and responses were scored from 1 to 5. One negatively phrased item was reverse-coded to ensure consistent directionality of scoring. While not formally validated psychometrically, domain-level internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Three of the five scales exceeded the $\alpha \geq 0.70$ threshold, suggesting acceptable reliability for evaluation purposes.

Quantitative analysis: Pre- and post-training survey data

All quantitative data were anonymised and processed in accordance with ethical and data protection standards. Item scores were aggregated into domain-level means, which were then compared between pre- and post-training responses using Wilcoxon signed-rank tests, a non-parametric method appropriate for ordinal data and suitable given the sample size.

Effect sizes were calculated using the Wilcoxon z-statistic divided by the square root of the sample size ($r = Z/\sqrt{N}$), with thresholds based on Cohen's guidelines: 0.1 (small), 0.3 (medium), and 0.5 (large). In addition, individual-level change was categorised into three groups (improved, unchanged, and worsened) to allow for further exploration of participant-level responsiveness.

Sex-disaggregated analysis was conducted using Mann-Whitney U tests to determine whether gender influenced baseline attitudes or responsiveness to training across the five domains. This allowed for interrogation of differential intervention effects and an assessment of whether the programme engaged all participants equitably.

Qualitative analysis: Thematic analysis of survey feedback

Qualitative data were collected through open-ended questions appended to the post-training survey. These questions were designed to elicit reflections on the usefulness of the training, the anticipated impact on professional roles, and perceived alignment with existing safeguarding practices and organisational priorities.

A reflexive thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach, was conducted. Initial familiarisation with the data was followed by open coding, theme development, and interpretive synthesis. In addition to thematic patterns, attention was given to discursive features, such as brevity, vagueness, or omission of organisational critique, which were treated as analytically meaningful. Emergent themes included:

- Increased personal insight and sense of responsibility
- Uncertainty around organisational infrastructure and support
- Cultural silence and gendered hierarchies
- Expressions of cautious optimism alongside latent tension

These reflections added essential interpretive depth to the quantitative findings and highlighted how individual-level gains might be constrained or enabled by broader institutional culture.

Qualitative analysis: Focus group with Everton in the Community

A follow-up 60-minute focus group was conducted with a purposive sample of five frontline delivery staff from Everton in the Community, offering further qualitative triangulation. The focus group was conducted by the same person who delivered the training to participants, ensuring a level of comfort and familiarity. Participants discussed their experiences of the training and the extent to which it had altered their professional practice, language use, and perceptions of organisational accountability.

Thematic analysis of the transcript yielded five key themes:

- Heightened self-awareness and behavioural reflection
- Growing confidence in addressing inappropriate attitudes and beliefs
- Recognition of emotional labour, particularly among female staff
- Continued normalisation of sexist discourse within sport
- The need for strategic leadership and sustained institutional investment

This strand of the evaluation deepened understanding of how training was internalised and translated into workplace behaviours. It also illuminated structural challenges to sustained change, including weak organisational follow-through, cultural inertia, and the absence of routine reinforcement mechanisms.

6. Key outcomes and impact

Quantitative analysis

Summary of psychometric properties and domain-level outcomes

Table 5 synthesises the psychometric reliability of the five domain scales alongside central tendency measures, statistical significance testing results, calculated effect sizes, and the distributions of individual-level change. Each of the five domains demonstrated statistically significant differences between pre- and post-intervention scores, reflecting measurable shifts in participant perspectives. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for these domains ranged from modest to strong, indicating generally acceptable internal consistency across most scales.

Table 5. Psychometric properties, pre-post comparison, and participant-level change across intervention domains

Domain	No. of items	Cronbach's Alpha	Median pre	Median post	*p*-value	Effect size (r)	% improved	% unchanged	% worsened
Belief in importance and responsibility	4	0.59	3.75	4.25	<0.001	23.64	67.1%	19.2%	13.7%
Confidence and comfort	2	0.44	3.00	4.00	0.0004	37.63	54.8%	27.4%	17.8%
Norms and social support	3	0.73	3.33	3.67	0.0025	56.71	53.4%	19.2%	27.4%
Perceived approval	3	0.72	4.00	4.67	<0.001	30.14	65.8%	17.8%	16.4%
Motivation and outcome expectation	4	0.70	4.00	4.50	<0.001	33.41	64.4%	17.8%	17.8%

The Norms and Social Support domain (α = 0.730) and the Perceived Approval domain (α = 0.723) exhibited the highest internal reliability, suggesting that the items within these scales consistently measured coherent underlying constructs. The Motivation and Outcome Expectation domain (α = 0.700) also met the commonly accepted threshold for reliability. The Belief in Importance and Responsibility domain showed slightly lower reliability (α = 0.586), and Confidence and Comfort yielded the lowest value (α = 0.442), potentially reflecting fewer items or greater variability in how participants interpreted and responded to these items. Despite these variations, most domain scales performed well enough to support interpretation and evaluation.

Magnitude and distribution of change

Effect sizes across the domains ranged from r = 0.24 to 0.57, with most falling into the moderate or large effect range based on Cohen's conventions[1]. These effect sizes reflect not only statistical significance but also the practical relevance of the intervention's impact. The most substantial observed changes occurred in the *Confidence and Comfort* domain and the *Perceived Approval* domain, both of which are strongly linked to participants' self-efficacy and perceptions of peer support. These domains are particularly important because they underpin the capacity for active bystander behaviour and indicate readiness to act when witnessing harmful behaviours.

In the *Belief in Importance and Responsibility* domain, which showed more modest statistical change (r = 0.24), 67.1% of participants reported improvement. This domain already showed relatively strong endorsement at baseline, and the intervention appears to have reinforced those values further. In contrast, the *Norms and Social Support* domain displayed more heterogeneity in participant response. While 53.4% of participants improved, 27.4% showed declines, which may reflect ambivalence or lack of clarity about their organisational or cultural environment's receptiveness to intervention. Such variation underscores the need for multi-level approaches that include not only individual training but also broader organisational support and leadership alignment.

As illustrated in Figure 1, most domains saw the greatest number of participants falling into the "Improved" category, with only small proportions reporting no change or decline. The strongest improvements were seen in *Responsibility and Importance*, *Motivation and Efficacy*, and *Peer Approval*, indicating that the training had a broadly positive effect. However, the distribution of change also signals that a one-size-fits-all approach may not suffice, and further adaptation or reinforcement of the training may be beneficial to sustain changes, particularly in environments where norms remain ambiguous or unchallenged.

Differences by sex

A stratified analysis of domain scores by sex revealed a statistically significant difference at baseline in the *Belief in Importance and Responsibility* domain. Female participants scored higher than males (p = 0.009), suggesting a stronger pre-existing alignment with the values of gender equity and intervention. This baseline difference disappeared post-intervention (p = 0.185), indicating that male participants experienced a notable attitudinal shift that effectively narrowed the initial gap. This finding demonstrates the potential of the intervention to elevate levels of engagement and responsibility among men, who are often the primary focus of bystander programmes due to their pivotal role in reshaping gendered power dynamics.

No other statistically significant sex differences were found in either pre- or post-training scores for the remaining domains. As demonstrated in Figure 2, both male and female participants showed improvement across all five domains, and the effect sizes observed did not diverge meaningfully by gender. This suggests that the training intervention was broadly inclusive and equitably effective, providing support for its continued use across mixed-gender cohorts in

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[1] *Effect sizes: 0.1 = small; 0.3 = medium; 0.5 = large. An effect size of r = 0.57, for instance, suggests a large practical shift in participants' attitudes, indicating that the training was highly impactful in that domain.*

sport-based settings. These findings strengthen the evidence base for the intervention's ability to address disparities while enhancing shared responsibility and collective efficacy.

Visual representation of change

The visual figures accompanying this analysis offer further clarity on how the intervention influenced participant responses across key domains. Figure 1 illustrates the proportion of participants who showed improvement, no change, or a decline in scores across each domain. This figure highlights the overall directionality of impact, confirming that most participants demonstrated positive shifts, particularly in areas linked to motivation, perceived approval, and a sense of responsibility.
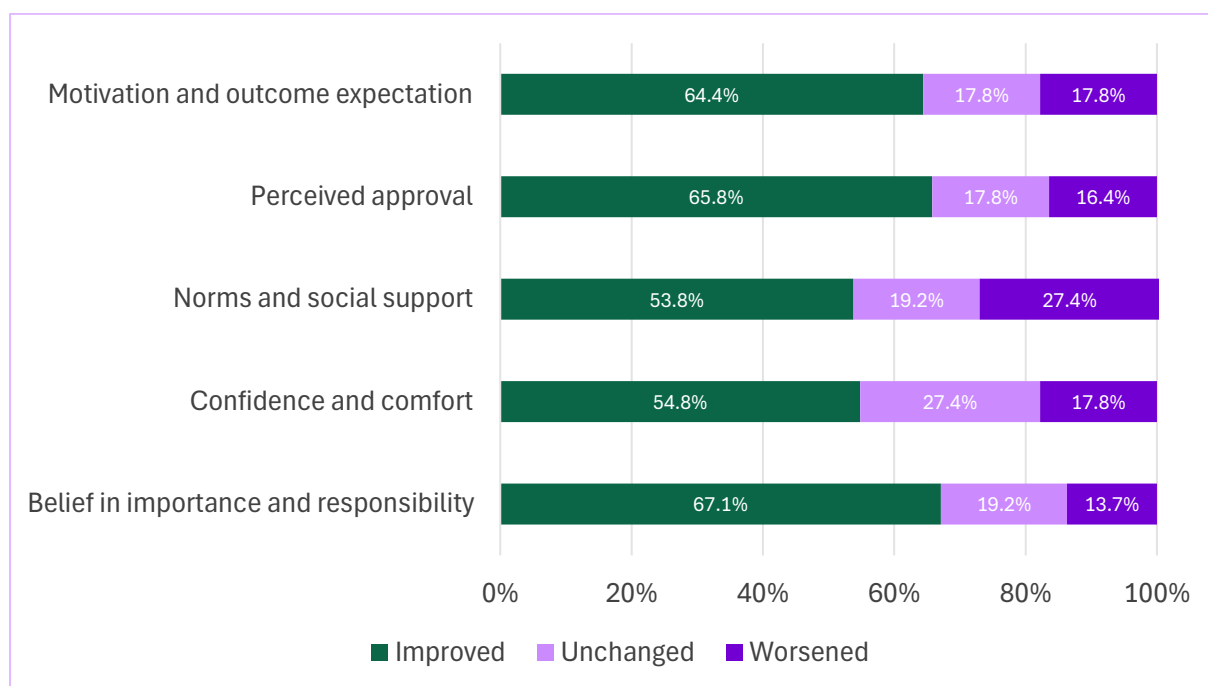

Figure 1. Participant level change by domain

Figure 2 provides a comparison of pre- and post-intervention domain scores disaggregated by sex. This visualisation reveals convergence in gendered attitudes, particularly in the domain of *Belief in Importance and Responsibility*, where initial differences were largely resolved following the training. It also supports the conclusion that the intervention was broadly inclusive and effective across genders, reinforcing shared values and confidence in taking action.
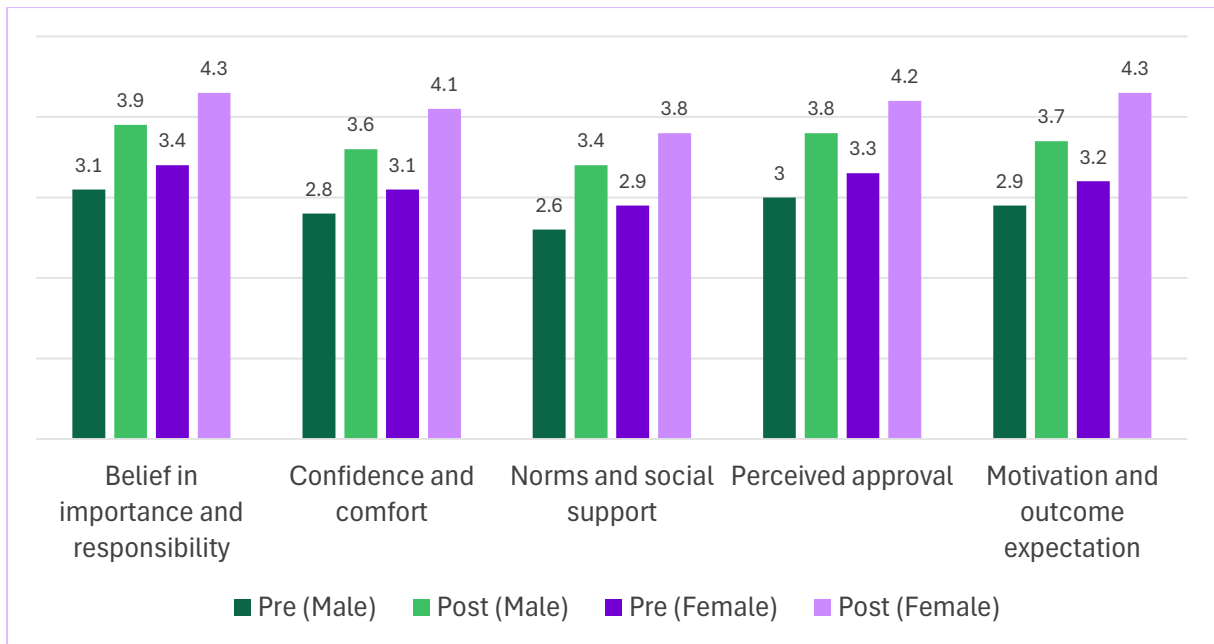
Figure 2. Mean pre- and post-training domain scores by sex

[Figure 3](#) presents the effect sizes associated with each domain, contextualising the statistical findings within recognised thresholds for small, medium, and large effects. This figure allows readers to understand not just the direction or significance of change, but the practical magnitude of the intervention's impact. The use of reference lines enhances interpretability and helps translate the findings into actionable insights for programme refinement and policy advocacy.
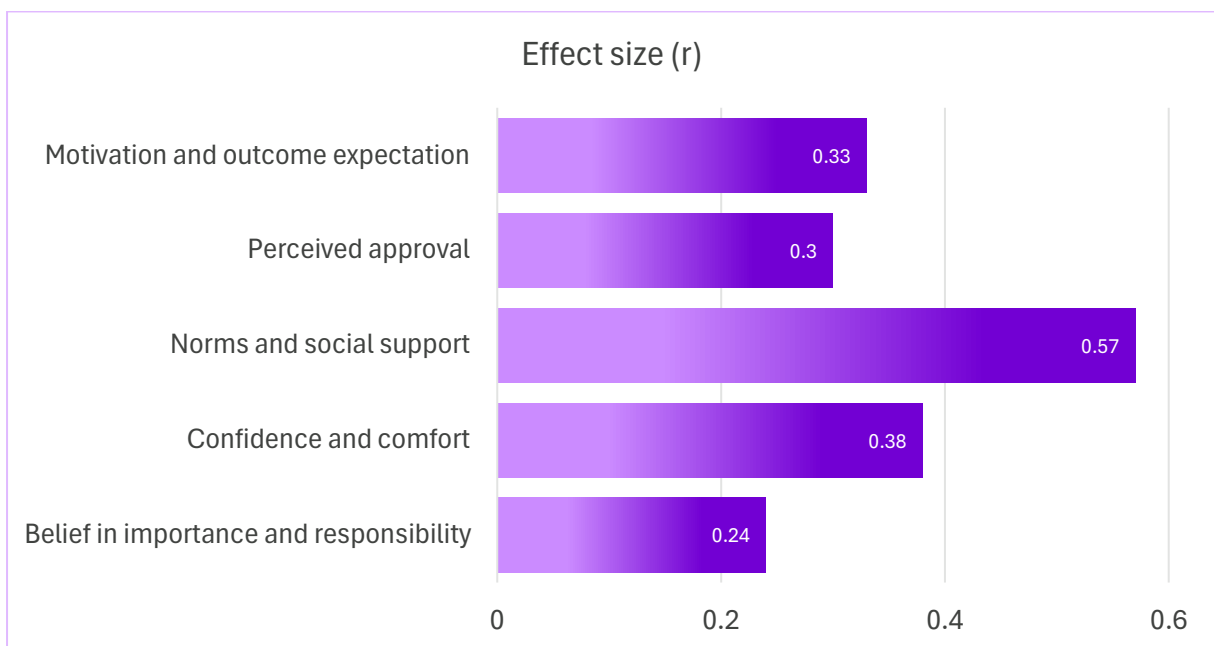

Figure 3. Effect size by domain

Together, these results provide compelling evidence of the proximal effects of bystander intervention training in sport. They show that the programme significantly influenced key cognitive, attitudinal, and normative domains associated with prosocial intervention behaviour. They also suggest that the training was accessible and impactful across genders, and that it may be particularly effective in shifting peer approval perceptions and enhancing individual confidence. While areas such as perceived norms may require complementary strategies, such as leadership commitment, policy reform, and peer-led reinforcement, the evidence supports continued investment in and refinement of bystander interventions within community sport. These findings position the *"Are you onside?"* initiative as a valuable component of broader primary prevention efforts aimed at tackling violence against women and girls in sport settings.

Qualitative analysis

Thematic analysis of open-ended survey feedback

Insights into cultural and structural barriers

Alongside the statistical findings, participants were invited to reflect on their experiences of the *"Are you onside?"* training. Their written feedback provides important insight not just into the perceived strengths of the sessions, but also into the broader cultural and organisational dynamics that shape how violence against women and girls (VAWG), sexism, and misogyny are understood and addressed within sport.

Overall, participants welcomed the training, often describing it as "powerful," "important," and "enlightening." Many stated that it helped them better understand how everyday sexism manifests in sport and how they might safely intervene. Several individuals described feeling more confident, more aware of their responsibility to challenge inappropriate behaviour, and more motivated to speak up. These reactions suggest that the training succeeded in equipping staff and volunteers with a stronger sense of agency.

However, when examined more critically, the language and framing of some responses also reflect the wider institutional barriers that shape individual attitudes and actions. While participants expressed personal readiness to act, few commented directly on how their organisation supports – or limits – the ability to intervene. There were limited references to organisational policies, leadership culture, or systems for reporting and responding to harmful behaviours, perhaps reflecting the frontline nature of most participants' roles. In this sense, many responses framed intervention as a personal choice, rather than as a shared institutional responsibility.

In some cases, participants offered very brief or non-committal feedback; phrases such as "N/A," "Not really," or "It was all useful." While this may indicate satisfaction, it may also signal a deeper discomfort in naming challenges or a lack of perceived permission to critique organisational culture. In male-dominated, hierarchical environments such as sport, speaking out about sexism or abuse, particularly in an evaluative context, may feel risky. This underscores the reality that individuals may now *feel more prepared to intervene*, but may still operate in environments where power dynamics, silence, or complicity inhibit meaningful action.

This raises a critical point for commissioners, policy leads, and sport sector decision-makers: interventions like *"Are you onside?"* cannot succeed in isolation from leadership commitment and organisational change. Coaches, volunteers, and safeguarding leads may carry the burden of cultural transformation, but they do not always have the authority, visibility, or institutional backing to shift norms on their own. Without clear signals from senior managers, through policies, communication, and everyday practice, efforts to address sexism and VAWG can remain siloed, fragile, or tokenistic.

The data suggest that while participants left the training with greater insight and intention, there remains a disconnect between individual preparedness and organisational readiness. Addressing this gap will require targeted engagement with senior figures in sport, including governing bodies, club executives, policy-makers, and board-level leads, who have the authority to reshape culture, invest in prevention, and hold organisations to account. These leaders must move beyond endorsing training as a box-ticking exercise and begin asking deeper

questions about their role in enabling, tolerating, or challenging the conditions that allow gender-based harm to persist.

In summary, participant feedback illustrates the impact of the training at an individual level but also highlights the systemic challenges that remain. If sport is to become a safer, more inclusive space for women and girls, then bystander training must be seen not as the end point, but as the beginning of a broader institutional shift; one that includes everyone, especially those in positions of power.

Focus group insights

Critical appraisal of focus group with staff from Everton in the Community

From awareness to accountability: deepening reflective practice

A key impact of the project, evident throughout the transcript, is the extent to which participants internalised the training as a prompt for personal and collective reflection. Multiple contributors described how the training encouraged them to examine their own language and attitudes, particularly in informal, familiar spaces like office banter or conversations with colleagues:

> *"It made me think more about myself before I said something. It might not be offensive to me or my friends, but someone else might hear it and think differently."*

Rather than dismissing inappropriate language as "just banter," participants now appeared more alert to the relational and reputational consequences of their words. This indicates a movement from passive awareness to active self-monitoring; a hallmark of effective primary prevention.

However, this emerging accountability often remained individualised, with limited reference to formal structures or senior leadership. Without ongoing support from organisational systems and policies, this reflective shift, though genuine, may risk petering out over time.

Working with complexity: gender, culture, and trauma-informed responses

Several staff members described working with young people who had internalised misogynistic beliefs, often shaped by family contexts, trauma histories, or wider social media influences. The training was seen as helpful in building the confidence to challenge harmful views without escalating shame:

> *"It might have been something I wouldn't challenge before... but now I've got more confidence and a better idea of how to speak to him about it."*

This is a powerful indicator of the training's success in equipping practitioners to navigate the moral and emotional complexities of their safeguarding roles. It also reflects a growing shift toward trauma-informed intervention, where the aim is not simply to punish or correct, but to understand and reshape belief systems over time.

That said, the transcript highlights the emotional labour involved in this work, particularly for female staff, who are often managing the dual burden of role-modelling respect and absorbing the weight of gendered hostility. This suggests that future delivery of *"Are you onside?"* should

consider formal mechanisms of staff support, supervision, or peer debrief, particularly for those in frontline roles.

Discourse of normalisation and the fight against "social acceptability"

Participants frequently identified a major barrier to progress: the normalisation of sexist, misogynistic, or gender-disrespectful language, especially compared to racism or homophobia, which were seen as more firmly addressed through education and campaigns:

> *"I still think this [sexism] is the biggest issue... It's probably more socially acceptable than racism or homophobia at the minute."*

This insight is significant. It underscores a critical gap in the broader equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) agenda, where gendered disrespect continues to fly under the radar, particularly in settings that are otherwise proud of their progressive credentials.

The reference to lack of public campaigns or visible deterrents was especially telling. While anti-racism work in sport has gained traction, often accelerated by media attention and political moments, gender-based violence prevention still lacks the same cultural urgency or symbolic capital and is fixated on women and girls – more often than not the victims of institutionalised misogyny, rather than the perpetrators. This suggests that *"Are you onside?"* has a potentially important role to play in mobilising public discourse, not just private reflection.

Embedding change: from staff training to organisational culture

While the impact on individual staff members was consistently positive, there was a strong collective recognition that systemic change requires more than frontline enthusiasm:

> *"We can't train everyone. We need senior managers to take this seriously... make it part of how we do things."*

This critical observation echoes broader findings across violence prevention and safeguarding literature: training alone does not equal transformation. What is needed is leadership commitment, policy alignment, and sustained visibility of the issue within organisational priorities.

Box 2. Case vignette 1: *"You're offside"*

Reframing accountability through shared language at Everton in the Community

In the weeks following the *"Are you onside?"* bystander training, staff at Everton in the Community began using the phrase "offside" as a simple, effective way to challenge inappropriate or harmful language in the workplace.

One participant described how this footballing term, already familiar and culturally embedded among staff and young people, had organically evolved into a tool for informal accountability:

> *"It's a proper way to call someone out. I'm the type of person who'd always want to challenge something, but I've never known how to go about it. Now I can just say, 'That's offside.'"*

This approach allows staff to intervene without escalating tension or alienating others, particularly useful in peer groups or informal settings. As another participant reflected:

> *"You probably won't have a serious conversation with everyone, but you can say, 'You're offside,' and it works. It's a call-out without being confrontational."*

Importantly, this use of *"offside"* became a shared shorthand that others in the room could recognise and respond to. It helped to signal boundaries, challenge sexist or inappropriate comments, and open space for reflection, without resorting to formal discipline or shaming. As one participant put it:

> *"Everyone then is aware that what was said wasn't okay, even if they weren't directly involved."*

The phrase operates both as a cultural bridge rooted in the language of sport, and as a practical intervention tool, especially for staff who may otherwise hesitate to speak up. It reduces the emotional and professional risks associated with calling out colleagues, while reinforcing group norms around respect and inclusion, and perhaps group-level reflection on the appropriateness of language and behaviour.

This case reflects a broader principle underpinning effective bystander work: that change is most sustainable when individuals are equipped not only with the *motivation* to intervene, but with the *language and confidence* to do so in their own social context. *"Offside"* has become more than just a word; it is now a symbol of shared responsibility within this community of practice.

7. Discussion

This discussion offers a critical synthesis of the quantitative and qualitative findings, integrating statistical trends with narrative insights to assess the mechanisms, limitations, and practical implications of bystander intervention training within community sport settings. Drawing on public health, behaviour change theory, and implementation science, the discussion positions the *"Are you onside?"* programme within a broader context of cultural transformation and primary prevention, while also recognising the complex implementation dynamics that shape real-world effectiveness.

The quantitative data revealed statistically significant improvement across all five evaluated domains, with medium-to-large effect sizes observed in areas most closely aligned with behavioural readiness: Confidence and Comfort (r = 0.38) and Perceived Approval (r = 0.30). These findings suggest that the training enhanced participants' self-efficacy and perception of peer support, two key antecedents of prosocial bystander behaviour. Additionally, improvements in Motivation and Outcome Expectation indicate a strengthened belief in the value, legitimacy, and feasibility of intervention. The domain of Belief in Importance and Responsibility showed the highest proportion of participants reporting improvement (67.1%), despite a more modest effect size (r = 0.24), likely reflecting already elevated baseline scores. These findings signal the programme's ability to reinforce favourable attitudes while also instilling confidence in prospective action.

Qualitative reflections provided rich converging evidence of this positive shift. Many participants described the training as transformative, using terms such as "eye-opening," "relevant," and "confidence-boosting." A common thread was an increased awareness of the everyday nature of sexism and misogyny, coupled with a clearer sense of personal and collective responsibility to intervene. This suggests that the training succeeded in moving participants from passive awareness to a more intentional stance on challenging inappropriate behaviour. Focus group data extended this narrative, revealing a marked shift in how participants assessed their own language and conduct, especially in informal or social settings. The transition from unconscious complicity to conscious accountability was consistently reflected across reflections and is a promising indicator of the early stages of cultural change. Moreover, some participants highlighted a newfound ability to speak more confidently with young people about attitudes shaped by trauma or online influences, further demonstrating the depth of the intervention's influence on professional practice.

However, the findings also underscore critical limitations. In the *Norms and Social Support* domain, 27.4% of participants reported a decline in post-training scores, suggesting that improvements in individual confidence may not be matched by perceived organisational receptivity. This disconnect matters. According to social norms theory, individuals are far less likely to act in environments where intervention is not perceived as common, acceptable, or socially sanctioned. Qualitative data reinforced this disparity. While participants expressed growing personal readiness to intervene, there were fewer references to structural or policy-level enablers. Where organisational context was mentioned, it often revealed a vacuum in leadership, cultural endorsement, or clear mechanisms for reporting.

Focus group participants were particularly attuned to this dynamic, consistently emphasising the need for senior leadership to reinforce and sustain the training's messages. They articulated that without managerial backing, efforts to intervene could be undermined or

isolated, leading to emotional exhaustion or disengagement. Notably, these reflections came from staff at Everton in the Community, a large, well-established community sport organisation, underscoring how organisational size and complexity may introduce additional barriers to cultural change. In such settings, even when training is delivered to all staff, its effects may be diluted by hierarchical silos, weak horizontal communication, or lack of coordinated leadership. These observations suggest that scale alone does not guarantee impact. Rather, larger organisations may require supplementary strategies to support implementation, including greater engagement with senior leadership, policy audits, or role-specific action plans that scaffold training with structural reinforcement. Whether such adaptations should be embedded into the core design of bystander training or offered as targeted enhancements in high-complexity settings warrants further investigation.

The theme of emotional labour, especially among female staff tasked with informal safeguarding roles, was also prominent. Women described feeling expected to model appropriate behaviour, manage disclosures, and absorb hostility, often without explicit support from colleagues or management. These accounts underline the gendered asymmetries that persist in sport, even within environments committed to inclusion.

The training appeared to be especially effective among male participants, who demonstrated marked improvement in the *Belief in Importance and Responsibility* domain, narrowing the initial gender gap observed at baseline. This is significant, as men remain overrepresented in leadership and coaching roles in sport. Bystander interventions that successfully engage men as allies – rather than framing them as risks – are essential to long-term cultural transformation. Still, the evaluation also reveals that gender-inclusive outcomes do not necessarily equate to gender-equitable environments. While men showed attitude change, women continued to describe constrained conditions for action, signalling an important nuance for programme refinement.

In triangulating these findings, it becomes clear that the *"Are you onside?"* programme achieved notable proximal impacts: shifting attitudes, enhancing confidence, and prompting reflection on embedded norms. These changes are not insignificant. In fact, they are a necessary, though insufficient, precondition for cultural change. Training interventions can cultivate readiness, but they must be accompanied by strategic organisational change if they are to translate into durable shifts in behaviour and institutional culture. This includes clear signalling from leadership, formal integration into safeguarding systems, and sustained opportunities for reflective dialogue. If these supports are absent, training may inadvertently create dissonance between personal intent and institutional inertia.

Limitations

This evaluation offers a robust assessment of the *"Are you onside?"* programme, yet several limitations warrant consideration when interpreting the findings. First, the study relied on a pre-post design without a comparison group, and the relatively small, matched sample (n = 73) introduces potential non-response bias. Participants who completed both waves of the evaluation may differ systematically from those who did not, possibly skewing results towards more engaged or motivated individuals.

Second, while the evaluation included a diverse range of community sport organisations, the variation in setting, delivery model, and organisational readiness was not formally accounted

for in the analysis. These contextual factors may influence the effectiveness and reception of the training, limiting the generalisability of the findings beyond the immediate implementation environment.

Third, although the report includes sex-disaggregated analysis and a discussion of gendered dynamics, other axes of inequality – such as race, class, age, and disability – were not systematically examined. This limits the ability to fully understand how different forms of marginalisation may intersect and shape experiences of sexism, intervention readiness, or organisational culture within sport.

Finally, while the evaluation captures immediate and short-term impacts of the training, it does not assess longer-term behavioural or cultural outcomes. Furthermore, questions remain about the adaptability of the intervention across other cohorts or delivery settings. Although the training has demonstrated strong applicability and resonance within community sport environments, members of the delivery team have expressed reservations about its transferability. Specifically, they noted challenges in delivering the training to groups such as stadium stewards, due to limited time, shift-based work patterns, and difficulties in engaging senior leaders with less direct exposure to safeguarding priorities. Similar concerns were raised about academy coaches, who may be less attuned to the relevance of gender-based violence prevention, and small grassroots sports organisations often led by volunteers, which may lack the internal capacity or resource flexibility to accommodate structured training.

These constraints highlight the importance of tailoring implementation strategies to setting-specific needs and readiness levels, and they suggest that further exploration is required to understand how the intervention can be adapted and scaled without compromising its core principles.

Box 3. Recommendations

While the *"Are you onside?"* training demonstrated substantial value in enhancing awareness, readiness, and self-efficacy among participants, standalone training is insufficient to transform entrenched norms or fully recalibrate the culture of community sport. To achieve sustained impact, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Embed bystander training within a whole-organisation approach:**

   Training should form one component of a broader strategy that includes policy review, organisational development, and leadership training. Cultural transformation requires alignment between individual competencies and institutional expectations.

2. **Engage and equip senior leaders:**

   Executive staff and board members must be explicitly engaged in the bystander agenda. This can include tailored workshops, policy briefings, and participation in reflective forums. Without visible leadership buy-in, cultural messages may lack credibility and traction.

3. **Institutionalise post-training support structures:**

   Mechanisms such as peer learning groups, reflective supervision, and named 'champions can help embed learning. These structures are especially important for those in junior roles or those who experience heightened vulnerability when challenging norms.

4. **Monitor outcomes over time:**

   Introduce follow-up surveys, focus groups, and internal reviews to assess whether training impacts persist and translate into behavioural change. Learning loops should inform ongoing adaptation and improvement.

5. **Address gendered and role-based risks and responsibilities:**

   Ensure the emotional labour associated with cultural change is recognised and mitigated. This includes risk assessments, staff welfare checks, and the equitable distribution of expectations for modelling inclusive behaviour.

6. **Explore the role of organisational size and complexity:**

   Future research and programme planning should consider the impact of organisational size and hierarchy on intervention efficacy. In larger organisations (e.g., 20+ staff), hierarchical complexity may dilute the influence of training unless supplemented by additional implementation tools; such as formal accountability structures, communication strategies, and leadership development pathways. Whether this insight should inform universal practice or context-specific tailoring warrants further exploration.

7. **Prioritise participatory design in training delivery:**

   Future iterations of the programme should actively involve participants in shaping the content and format. Co-design can increase relevance, foster ownership, and uncover context-specific barriers to intervention. Participatory methods are also likely to surface more diverse voices and reduce the risk of replicating institutional blind spots.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the central role of bystander training in building the cultural scaffolding for violence prevention and gender inclusion in sport is affirmed. Yet this evaluation also calls for greater realism about the limits of individual-level intervention in the absence of structural readiness. To realise its full potential, training must be embedded within an ecosystem that reinforces shared accountability, elevates supportive norms, and addresses the unequal distribution of responsibility across genders and roles. The evidence from this evaluation provides a compelling case for continued investment in bystander programmes but equally makes clear that their success hinges on wider organisational and cultural alignment. Without such alignment, the seeds planted by training may take root, but they may not flourish.

The *"Are you onside?"* programme represents a compelling example of how evidence-based training can positively influence attitudes, motivation, and normative beliefs within community sport. It demonstrates that change is possible, but also that such change is contingent on organisational context. When implemented in isolation, training may raise awareness but fail to shift behaviour; when embedded within a strategic, whole-club approach, it has the potential to catalyse deeper and more durable transformation.

As sport continues to grapple with issues of sexism, violence, and exclusion, interventions like this must be seen not as endpoints but as entry points into broader organisational change. Only through collective, strategic, and sustained effort, anchored in leadership commitment and structural reform, can sport fully realise its potential as a space of safety, equity, and respect for all participants.

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Appendix 1 – Survey instrument items

#	Item	Domain	1	2	3	4	5
1	I don't think sexism, misogyny and violence against women and girls is a big problem in sport	Belief in importance and responsibility	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
2	I think I can do something about sexism, misogyny and violence against women and girls in sport	Belief in importance and responsibility	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
3	For me, being vigilant for signs of sexism, misogyny and violence against women and girls is...	Motivation and outcome expectation	Not important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Important	Very important
4	Do you feel able to explain to someone what sexism, misogyny and violence against women and girls looks like, and what appropriate behaviour is?	N/A (not included in analysis)	Certainly not	Probably not	Maybe	Probably	Certainly
5	Do you believe that addressing misogyny and sexism in sport should be a key priority for your coaching organisation or club?	Belief in importance and responsibility	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
6	Do you believe that addressing misogyny and sexism in sport should be a key priority for you in your role?	Belief in importance and responsibility	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
7	When setting boundaries to prevent sexism, misogyny and violence against women and girls, I feel...	Confidence and comfort	Very uncomfortable	Somewhat uncomfortable	Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable	Somewhat comfortable	Very comfortable
8	How many other people in your organisation/network would set firm boundaries?	Norms and social support	Nobody	Some people	About half of the people	Most people	Everybody
9	When I set firm boundaries to prevent sexism, misogyny and violence against women and girls, most coaches and colleagues would...	Perceived approval	Disapprove	Somewhat disapprove	Neither approve nor disapprove	Somewhat approve	Approve

10	For me, intervening in case of an incident of sexism, misogyny, or violence against women and girls is…	Motivation and outcome expectation	Not important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Important	Very important
11	When intervening in case of an incident of sexism, misogyny, and/or violence against women and girls I feel…	Confidence and comfort	Not confident	Slightly confident	Moderately confident	Confident	Very confident
12	How many other people in your organisation/network would intervene in case of an incident of sexism, misogyny or violence against women and girls?	Norms and social support	Nobody	Some people	About half of the people	Most people	Everybody
13	When I intervene in case of an incident of sexism, misogyny, or violence against women and girls, most coaches and colleagues would…	Perceived approval	Disapprove	Somewhat disapprove	Neither approve nor disapprove	Somewhat approve	Approve
14	For me, reporting an incident of sexism, misogyny or violence against women and girls, to the safeguarding officer is…	Motivation and outcome expectation	Not important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Important	Very important
15	How many other people in your organisation/network would report an incident of sexism, misogyny and violence against women and girls to your safeguarding officer?	Norms and social support	Nobody	Some people	About half of the people	Most people	Everybody
16	When I report an incident of sexism, misogyny and violence against women and girls, most coaches and colleagues would…	Perceived approval	Disapprove	Somewhat disapprove	Neither approve nor disapprove	Somewhat approve	Approve
17	When I report an incident of sexism, misogyny and violence against women and girls, to the safeguarding officer, I believe the situation will…	Motivation and outcome expectation	Get a lot worse	Somewhat worsen	Neither improve nor worsen	Somewhat improve	Improve a lot