

Imagine a Man: Dundee Evaluation

July 2024



About No Knives Better Lives

No Knives, Better Lives, run by [YouthLink Scotland](#), works in partnership with young people and practitioners to understand and address the drivers of youth violence within a sustainable public health model, focused on primary and secondary prevention.

Through the programme, adults working with young people in Scotland receive professional training on youth violence prevention and access to a range of high-quality resources with the ambition of reducing youth violence and supporting young people to fulfil their potential.

For more information visit [No Knives Better Lives](#)

About YouthLink Scotland

YouthLink Scotland is the national agency for youth work and the collective voice for the sector in Scotland. We champion and advocate for the youth work sector so that all young people can access high-quality youth work. Our membership of voluntary and statutory youth work organisations and intermediaries, including every local authority, spans all of Scotland, and changes lives for the better every day.

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About Northern Star

Northern Star is an independent company that supports organisations through research and evaluation, strategic development, training and facilitation, and community development. Northern Star supports organisations who want to make a real difference for those they work with and for.

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Introduction

This evaluation explored the rollout of the 'Imagine a Man' programme in Dundee between May 2023 and April 2024. The evaluation was independently conducted between January and July 2024 by Northern Star.

Imagine a Man

Imagine a Man explores the concept of positive masculinity among boys and young men in Scotland. This project aims to address issues related to harmful gender stereotypes and promote positive masculinity and a more equitable society. The project is part of the No Knives, Better Lives prevention team's actions delivered by YouthLink Scotland.

Imagine a Man - Phase 1 (2021-22)

In Phase 1, the project aimed to understand the current state of masculinity in Scotland. This involved extensive research, including surveys completed by 1,230 young people, focus groups with 25 participants, and interviews with five adult practitioners. The key themes explored included:

- Stereotypes and Expectations: How societal norms and expectations shaped boys' and young men's behaviour.
- Risky Behaviour: The prevalence of violence and risk-taking activities.
- Community and Relationships: The role of community and personal relationships in shaping masculinity.
- Ideal Futures: Aspirations and visions for the future held by boys and young men.
- Support Needs: What support was required to foster a positive understanding of masculinity.

The findings highlighted a significant interest in discussing masculinity amongst young people and identified a lack of safe spaces and positive male role models.

Imagine a Man - Phase 2 (2022-23)

The second phase aimed to deepen the understanding of positive masculinity. This phase involved three youth groups from Dundee, Glasgow, and Shetland, who conducted further research within their communities and schools. The focus was on defining positive masculinity and identifying the necessary support structures to promote it. Key insights included:

- Willingness to Discuss Feelings: Boys and young men showed a readiness to talk about their feelings but faced barriers due to a lack of supportive spaces and role models.
- Role Models: A significant lack of positive male figures was noted, making it difficult for boys to find relatable examples of positive masculinity.
- Safe Spaces: The need for environments where young men could safely express their emotions and experiences.

A partnership between the Education Service at Dundee City Council, NHS Tayside and Police Scotland supported the youth group from Dundee. After establishing a relationship with the group, the practitioners supported the young researchers to explore positive masculinity. This was a new concept to the group and something they were keen to explore. They distributed an online survey to young people across Dundee (completed by 137 young people) and conducted a focus group (attended by 5 young men). The youth group created their own identity and name: MENding Mindsets.

Phase 2 culminated in the development of the Imagine a Man Toolkit and online training programme.

Imagine a Man - Phase 3 (2023-24)

Phase 3 aimed to deliver a comprehensive rollout of the Imagine a Man Toolkit and training programme across Dundee. The rollout planned both *universal* and *targeted* work with young people.

The universal work aimed to involve all 8 state-run secondary schools in Dundee:

Toolkit and Training

All key teachers, guidance and support staff at the 8 secondary schools were to receive an Imagine a Man Toolkit and could sign up/register for free to access an online training course. The training course aimed support school staff to develop the knowledge they need to for discussions and activities about positive masculinity. This online course contributed towards 3 hours of personal CPD.

Community of Practice

All teachers had access to an online Community of Practice aimed at sharing knowledge, ideas and progress around the delivery of a positive masculinity programme.

Customised advice and support

For unique or difficult situations, YouthLink Scotland offered customised advice or increased support where needed.

Targeted delivery

This aimed to use the MENding Mindsets model but with a newly recruited group of boys and young men: The new MENding Mindsets group planned to recruit 2 x volunteers from each of the 8 secondary schools (with a support person). The group of 16 young people would undertake an 8-week Imagine a Man programme exploring 'positive masculinity' supported by workers from Dundee City Council, NHS Tayside and Police Scotland. Following the 8-week programme, the young people would develop their own ideas for youth-led projects in their schools around 'positive masculinity'.

The Evaluation

The Imagine a Man team were keen to understand how the rollout was delivered in Dundee and what impact Imagine a Man had on teachers, youth workers and young people. The team commissioned Northern Star to support the evaluation of the programme.

Evaluation Methodology

The research utilised the following methods:

Online questionnaires

One for youth workers and one for secondary schools to gather data on Imagine a Man activity. We received low numbers of responses, 3 responses from schools and 8 responses from youth workers.

In Depth interviews

These were with project staff and partners (5 interviews in total).

Review of training session evaluations

Findings

Based on an analysis of the 5 interview transcripts and responses to the online questionnaires, several common themes and patterns emerge about the implementation of the "Imagine A Man" programme in Dundee.

In this section we will explore:

- 1. Leading the way - perceptions of positive masculinity**
- 2. Impact of Imagine a Man**
- 3. Feedback on the Imagine a Man Toolkit and training**
- 4. Rollout of Imagine a Man programme in Dundee**

1. Leading the way - perceptions of positive masculinity

It was clear in the evaluation that while the Imagine a Man programme is pioneering efforts to promote positive masculinity, the issue is yet to be a mainstream topic. The programme's focus on redefining masculinity and addressing harmful stereotypes is leading the way on this issue, outpacing the general awareness within society.

Feedback indicated that teachers and schools were yet to fully recognise the significance of this issue, or it was overshadowed by other priorities in schools. Imagine a Man faced challenges in gaining traction within the formal education setting. This highlighted a need for increased awareness and integration of positive masculinity concepts in the school community but required a longer timescale than was available for Phase 3.

Phase 3 of Imagine a Man began the work of supporting and training school staff to develop their knowledge and understanding. This is critical and needs to happen prior to any rollout of activity with young people.

2. Impact on Participants

Young people

Due to the limited rollout of the programme, it is difficult to assess the impact on young people. Staff who had delivered some activities with young people reported good discussions around masculinity whilst others found the activities a bit more challenging to deliver.

In the interviews, participants often talked about phase 2 of the project (youth-led research) and the effectiveness of Imagine a Man in addressing masculinity stereotypes. In phase 2 the programme increased awareness amongst young men about the limitations and negative impacts of traditional masculinity stereotypes. Participants became more confident in challenging these stereotypes and discussing the pressures they face due to societal expectations. The programme helped develop practical skills such as communication, leadership, and organisation. Participants were involved in planning and executing activities, which boosted their confidence. Empowering young men to take charge of the programme's activities led to increased ownership and engagement. Whilst we would expect to see similar outcomes on phase 3 of the project, limited delivery means we cannot assess impact on young people.

Partners

Partners reported an impact on their own knowledge and skills. They felt it changed how they thought about masculinity and the behaviour of boys and young men, making them more likely to consider underlying causes and drivers. They were more conscious of the language they used and recognised unconscious bias. They were keen to talk about positive masculinity with colleagues and other partners.

Evaluation participants reported that involvement in Imagine a Man has had an impact within their own organisations. Police Scotland awarded the MENDING Mindsets/Imagine a Man work an equality award, whilst the violence against women partnership in Dundee now has a group specifically looking at and working with young men. There is a plan to redesign the PSE curriculum in Dundee to align to wellbeing indicators and embed the Imagine a Man activities. In Dundee City Council, those staff who have engaged in the rollout are now committed to this work as are senior leaders.

3. Feedback on the Toolkit and training

Feedback on the Imagine a Man Toolkit and training was generally positive with participants noting some areas for future development.

Training

Teachers and youth workers in Dundee had opportunities to participate in online training. During Phase 3 there were 133 online trainees – 8 of these were from Dundee. There may have been more participants from Dundee, but the online training does not collect data on the local authority area of participants. We were not able to tell which participants were teachers and which were youth workers.

Youth workers had the opportunity to attend 4 face-to-face training sessions. All questionnaire respondents attended one or more training sessions and 6 of the 8 commented that the sessions were interesting, useful and helped participants understand the content of the Toolkit.

"It was very good, practical and interactive"
(youth worker)

One participant reported that group presentations and role play felt repetitive and would have preferred to spend the time in teams exploring how to implement in their area.

Face to face training was important and valuable but finding time to attend face-to-face training was difficult for everyone, but especially teachers and support staff.

Toolkit

During the time period of the rollout, there were 2,127 views of the positive masculinity resources online which included the Toolkit, although we were not able to tell how many of these were from Dundee. Each school received paper copies of the Toolkit, but we do not know if and how they were used.

The Imagine a Man programme focused on both the theoretical aspects of masculinity and on practical skill development with young people including communication, leadership and organisation and this was seen as a positive by evaluation participants. They also liked the openness and flexibility of the programme with the freedom to deliver activities in any order.

Some activities within the Toolkit were found to be too brief with sessions planned for 50 minutes often lasting only 15-20 minutes and very dependent on the attention span of group members (and skills of facilitators). They suggested optional timings for activities or more discussion topics.

Some workers felt less confident in modifying or adapting activities from the Toolkit, suggesting a need for ongoing support and perhaps more practical examples or scenarios during training sessions.

The Imagine a Man Toolkit was designed for 12–18-year-olds. Evaluation participants reflected on the need to start interventions at an earlier age to have a more profound and lasting impact on young boys before stereotypes become deeply ingrained. The content and language of the Toolkit were seen as too complex for younger participants, such as P7 pupils. Development of age-appropriate resources for 8–12-year-olds forms part of the work in Year 4 of Imagine a Man (2024-25).



4. Rollout of Imagine a Man Programme in Dundee

The planned rollout of Imagine a Man consisted of a universal approach through schools and a targeted approach using the MENding Mindsets model.

Universal Approach

As part of the scoping work, the Imagine a Man team met with Headteachers to present the programme and secure their commitment to participate. Headteachers were enthusiastic about the rollout but capacity in schools was limited and little activity took place.

Of the 3 schools that responded to the questionnaire, 2 had delivered some Imagine a Man activity. One school had delivered sessions with mixed S4 groups whilst the other school had mapped the Toolkit activities to the PSE curriculum with a view to incorporating the activities in the next academic year beginning August 2024.

Access to schools and teachers was coordinated through the central education team. This provided a central point of contact but also placed significant capacity demands on this member of staff. More direct contact between the Imagine a Man team and schools as well as provision of training in schools may help in future rollouts.

Targeted Approach

The targeted approach was led locally by partnership consisting of the Education Service in Dundee City Council, NHS Tayside and Police Scotland, the same partnership that delivered the MENding Mindsets group in Phase 2.

The partnership planned to work with a new group comprised of 2 young men from each of the secondary schools in Dundee. The partnership found it challenging to recruit young people to the group and there was no actual group activity within the timeframe of the project. Due to the difficulties in recruiting young people this year, the partnership is planning a different approach in the coming academic year and will work with existing groups.

Delivery through youth work.

The difficulties in engaging and recruiting schools and young people prompted the Imagine a Man team to try a different approach. They worked in partnership with Dundee City Council's Community Learning and Development Service and third sector youth work organisations to train and upskill youth workers to deliver the Imagine a Man programme.

The Imagine a Man team delivered four face-to-face training sessions in Dundee.

Training sessions

January 2024: Session 1 - 33 participants

January 2024: Session 2 - 29 participants

February 2024: Session 3 - 12 participants

March 2024: Session 4 - 16 participants

The training was delivered from January 2024 onwards. Due to the short timescale there was limited opportunity for youth workers to implement activities within the timescale of the funding and this evaluation. There was enthusiasm and commitment from the youth workers who participated in the training. Individual session evaluations showed that 29 of the 33 youth workers who attended the January 2024 training had identified ways they would use and embed Imagine a Man into their work in 2024-25.

Of the 8 questionnaire responses from the youth work sector received as part of the Phase 3 evaluation, 3 respondents had not yet started work whilst 5 had started planning or delivery with young people.

Of those youth workers that had started delivery, activities included:

- planning for one of the diversionary youth groups in the area;
- informal discussions with young people prior to using any of the activities;
- delivery of one or more of the activities with young people (2 youth work respondents).

One youth worker had delivered one of the Imagine a Man activities (community mapping) to a group of S2 girls. The youth worker reported that this session had been a "bit of a struggle" with that particular group but they knew of colleagues in their team who had delivered it to other groups with more success. The second respondent said they delivered activities to two different groups of around 20 young people. The activities were positively received and encouraged deeper reflections and conversations about masculinity.

Given the timing of the training and the timing of the evaluation it is very early days for the rollout through youth work and it would be valuable to revisit the evaluation in summer 2025.

Challenges

The rollout of the Imagine a Man programme in Dundee faced several problems:

Timescales

Exploring deep-seated cultural norms and stereotypes about masculinity is challenging and requires a long-term, sustained effort. The Imagine a Man programme is based on relationships; relationships between a teacher/youth worker and a group of young people and relationships within that group. It takes time for those relationships to develop and for young people to feel comfortable in those spaces. It also takes time for teachers and youth workers to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence to work with young people on positive masculinity.

The rollout started the process of engaging adults who work with young people. This was an essential precursor to delivery within their settings. The rollout deepened their knowledge and skills to engage in this issue but far more time was needed to progress to actual delivery in the classroom or youth group. The funding available for the rollout was awarded on a one-year basis which was at odds with the time needed to engage and effect change.

The one-year timescale for this phase of work was unrealistic and mismatched with the academic year. The Imagine a Man team were in discussions with Dundee City Council's education service from May 2023 which meant implementation didn't start until August 2023. This left a maximum of 7.5 months for implementation within the timescales of the funding. Allowing for school holidays, prelims and the exam period, there was little time for delivery.

Capacity and resources

Integrating the programme into the school calendar was a significant challenge. Schools had crowded curricula and competing priorities, making it difficult to allocate time and resources to the programme. Schools and teachers faced multiple demands for their time and resources were stretched.

Schools were facing behavioural issues that Imagine a Man may well have helped to tackle, but teachers and schools needed time and space to implement programs like this which was not available.

The challenge of limited resources also affected delivery partners. The lack of capacity was compounded by planning discussions which took place at strategic level with limited involvement from those at an operational level in partner organisations or schools.

Greater involvement in planning from those responsible for delivery would lead to more realistic and deliverable project plans.

Clarity of expectation

The Imagine a Man team were very aware of the demands on teachers' time and mindful of not being too taxing in terms of expectations and outputs, however there were no concrete deliverables and no named contact in each school with responsibility for delivery. Schools received boxes of Toolkits and an offer of training but no detail on what was expected in terms of delivery and output.

Adapting a youth work approach for school environments

Youth work emphasises voluntary participation, flexible engagement, and often informal, peer-led activities. In contrast, schools operate within a structured, curriculum-driven framework with mandatory attendance and predefined educational outcomes. This fundamental difference might make youth work Toolkits less effective in schools and highlighting the need for tailored approaches that bridge these different educational philosophies.

The Imagine a Man Toolkit deliberately used a youth work approach. Feedback from youth workers suggested that it was really useful in community and informal youth work settings but there was limited engagement from schools. Teachers who wished to integrate a youth work approach Toolkit into their classrooms faced additional tasks. Firstly, they needed to align the Toolkit's principles of voluntary and informal learning with the school's structured curriculum and this would involve adaptation of activities to fit within lesson plans and meet outcomes and experiences. These extra demands meant increased workload and the need for ongoing support to successfully implement the Toolkit. It is not possible to tell if limited school engagement was a result of the short timescales, limited resources, the youth work approach or a combination of these factors.

Evaluation participants thought that schools were good places to explore positive masculinity and future rollouts should consider provision of additional support for schools or resources tailored to the school environment.

Recommendations

Involve delivery partners in detailed planning

Whilst strategic level commitment to any future rollout is important, there should be greater involvement of delivery partners (especially schools and teachers) in the planning phase and a longer lead-in time. Any future rollouts would require significantly more time: more time for planning, for training and development of teachers/youth workers and for delivery. Funding would need to take account of this. The planning phase should develop clear shared outputs and outcomes.

Increase local support capacity

Future rollouts need more resource to deliver training and co-facilitate delivery with young people. A named coordinator in each local authority could provide local support and organisation of activity. There should be some financial contribution from Imagine a Man to the post and shared line management of the post. Although Imagine a Man is not in financial position to do this now this is something the project could factor into future funding proposals. The post could deliver training locally as well as go into schools and local youth groups to provide delivery support. They could also lead on local evaluation and understanding impact so that it can shape development of the programme as well as work nationally with other named co-ordinators and the Imagine a Man team.

Partner with youth work teams

In future rollouts, aim to make local youth work teams major partners in planning and delivery.

Develop school focussed resources

Resources tailored to schools with explicit links to the curriculum and key areas such as equalities might help future engagement in schools. Whilst the topic of positive masculinity was new to youth workers, the approach in the Imagine a Man programme was familiar and part of their existing practice. This was not the case for teachers and support staff, and they required more bespoke resources and support to foster a deep engagement with the topic.

Further develop the training

Over the longer term it would be helpful to make explicit links between the programme training and the GTCS Standards for Registration, Middle Leadership and Headship as well as the self-evaluation tool for schools – How good is our school? Initial training with teachers or youth workers should ideally have a face-to-face element.

Explore peer-led approaches

Peer-led approaches were highlighted as ways to deliver the Imagine a Man programme either through a new peer-led approach or through embedding in existing work such as the Mentors in Violence Prevention. Older students or young people could be trained to deliver sessions to younger cohorts, which can be beneficial in making the programme relatable and impactful. Peer education could help to create a more engaging and authentic learning experience for participants.

Adopt a systematic approach

As well as working through schools and youth work, Imagine a Man could consider how to engage other partners and organisations in conversations about masculinity partners such as parents, sports clubs and services such as social work, housing etc. Young people need to have these conversations consistently across their lives.

Case Study

Aidan Harper

Community learning and development undergraduate student at University of Dundee

As part of his Community Education BA (hons) degree, Aidan completed an internship with the Community Learning and Development East Youth Team at Dundee City Council. One of the requirements was to complete a piece of research as part of a dissertation. Aidan was first introduced to the concept of positive masculinity by his youth work manager, who shared the Imagine a Man – Building positive masculinity with young people toolkit. This was a new and exciting concept to Aidan, and he decided to explore it further with two groups of young people.

Aidan worked with 6 young males (in S3) as part of an existing health and wellbeing group. They were described as the “bouncy” group by their school, as they were energetic, seen as disruptive and disengaging from school. He also ran a session with younger boys who were P7s who attended a drop in at the local youth club. With both the P7s and S3s none of them had heard of ‘positive’ masculinity. Both groups appreciated the opportunity to have discussions about masculinity and what it meant to them, being “strong” and having “big muscles”, were typically seen as being masculine traits. Within the groups, the boys were respectful and open to having discussions in what the toolkit describes as a ‘brave space’. Since Aidan completed his work with the P7 boys, his manager has said they have observed positive changes in the boys’ confidence and ability to build relationships.

“Aidan’s research into positive masculinity and the role of youth work has had significant impact on the Dundee Youth Work Team, on an East team and at a city-wide level. Aidan’s research coincided with two city-wide training sessions to 30 plus staff as part of the Dundee Local Authority rollout, the aim of which was to upskill all youth work staff on positive masculinity and the role of youth work. It was envisaged that this would lead to the Imagine a Man toolkit being delivered on a city-wide basis. The East Youth team are currently looking at delivery options for our groups next term (Autumn 2024), incorporating sessions into our peer education deliveries or into our new boys Health and Wellbeing learning programmes. Aidan’s professional approach and enthusiasm for this topic has hugely encouraged staff and young people who will continue to address and challenge the issues arising from toxic masculinity”

Alison MacCaulay, Aidan’s placement manager from the East Youth Team (Community Learning and Development)

You can read Aidan’s dissertation [here](#). Aidan also won the Biggest Impact Award in his year at University of Dundee for his time on placement.