



Addressing Misogyny and Violence Against Women and Girls

Bringing Coaching Boys into Men to
Northern Ireland

Nicole Devlin
Churchill Fellow 2023



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Finally, I would like to thank the various organisations, the NI Directors of the VAWG Strategy, schools, several politicians, and individuals in NI who took the time both before and after my trip to discuss how to move forward with implementing this program in NI.



Glossary

VAWG: Violence Against Women and Girls

EVAWG: Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (NI Strategy)

DV: Domestic Violence

SV/SA: Sexual Violence/Abuse

GBV: Gender-based violence

TIA: Trauma-informed approaches

FUTURES': Futures Without Violence

CBIM: Coaching Boys into Men

NI: Northern Ireland

UK: United Kingdom

US/A: United States/of America

PSNI: Police Service of Northern Ireland

About the Author



Nicole is currently a PhD researcher at Queen's University, Belfast. Her research is exploring how the impact of the Northern Ireland's Troubles trauma has impacted social identities. Nicole's background is in Psychology, holding a Bachelor of Science degree, and a Master of Science degree in Psychological Studies.

She is also passionate about addressing misogyny and tackling violence against women in Northern Ireland (NI). As a woman, she has seen first-hand the damaging effects of misogynistic attitudes towards girls and women.

There have also been several young females who have lost their lives through male violence, and this has inspired her to take action and bring about change in her community and further afield. Nicole has a wealth of experience working in the mental health field, and values trauma-informed approaches (TIAs).

This program Nicole has researched has further awarded her with knowledge and awareness on adopting TIAs to these issues, such as how service delivery and policy development can be informed by understanding sensitive and trauma-responsive skills.

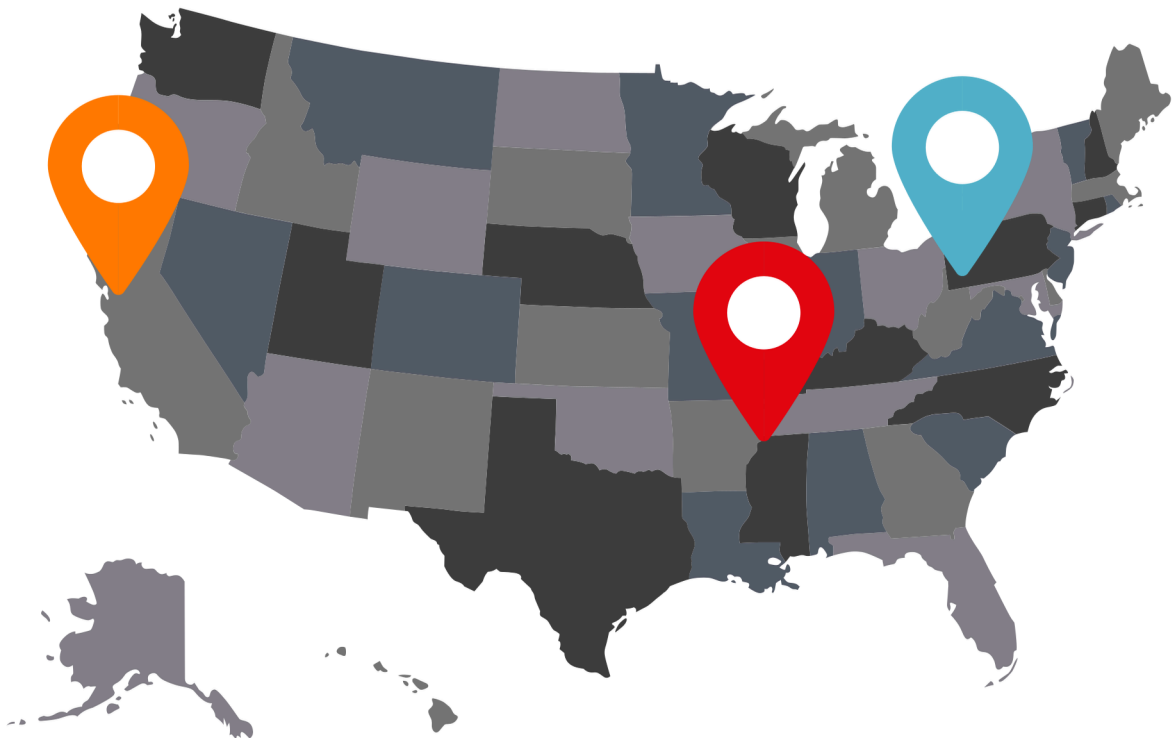
Tracking the Trip

San Francisco

- Futures Without Violence Head Office
- University of California, Berkeley

Memphis

- Heal 901, Youth Empowerment Organisation
- Freedom Prep Academy Flagship Middle School
- Freedom Prep High School
- Freedom Prep Academy Whitehaven Middle School
- Melrose Stadium



Pittsburgh

- Pittsburgh Action Against Rape
- University of Pittsburgh Youth & Adolescent Centre
- South Park High School
- Chartiers Valley School
- Carnegie Mellon University
- Brashear High School

Executive Summary

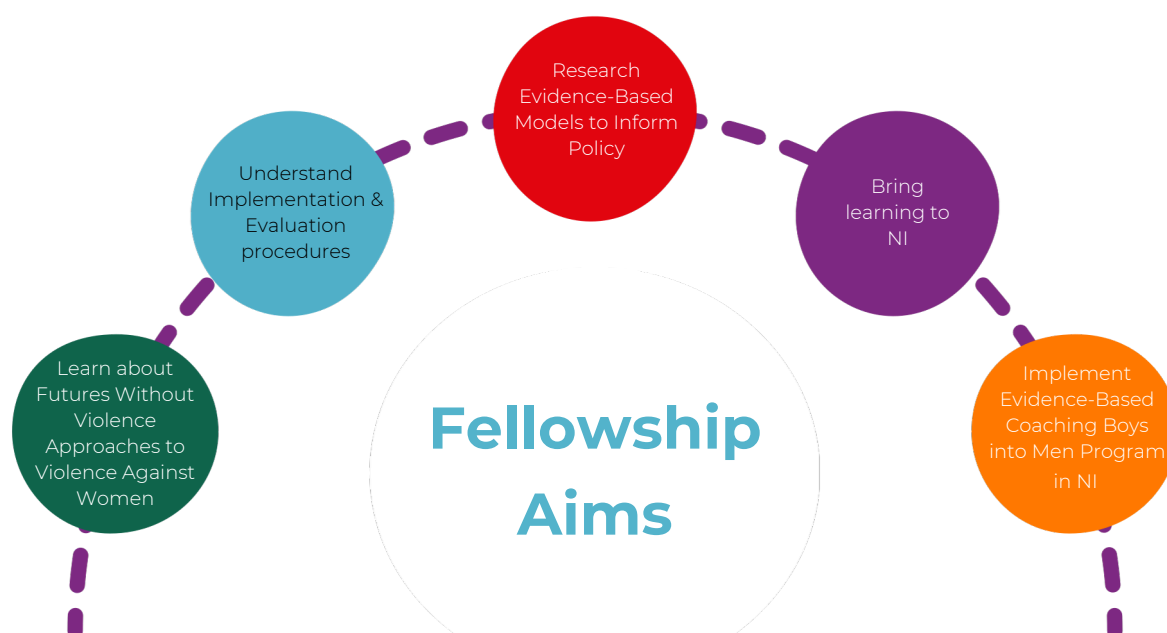


Figure 1. Fellowship Aims

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) constitutes both a global public health crisis and a violation of fundamental human rights. The United Nations *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women* (1993) defines VAW as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women. Despite its global prevalence, the scale of the problem in Northern Ireland (NI) is particularly alarming. Recent reports describe NI as one of the most unsafe regions for women in Europe, with rates of domestic violence and femicide comparable to those in countries with much larger populations, such as Romania (Lagdon et al., 2023). Between 2017 and 2023, 39 women were murdered in NI, and the Police Service of Northern Ireland currently responds to a domestic violence incident every 16 minutes. Yet NI remains the only jurisdiction in the United Kingdom without a dedicated strategy to address VAWG.

This report examines international evidence-based approaches to preventing VAWG, with a particular focus on the *Coaching Boys into Men* (CBIM) programme developed by Futures Without Violence in the United States. CBIM trains sports coaches to engage male athletes in structured conversations about respect, consent, and healthy relationships, thereby challenging harmful gender norms and preventing future violence. The programme has been rigorously evaluated, with studies demonstrating significant increases in positive bystander behaviours and reductions in relationship abuse and sexual violence (Miller et al., 2020; Fields et al., 2022).

While the below graph highlights, a total number of eight women's lives lost to male violence in NI, since 2017, 39 women have been murdered. The Police Service of Northern Ireland reports that they are called to a domestic violence incident every 16 minutes. Over the past decade, 42 women have been murdered in NI, which remains the only part of the UK without a specific strategy to deal with VAWG, with a Member of Parliament claiming, "It is a situation which underscores that the country has a distinct issue with the threat" (Nuala McAllister, 2023). Many factors can be attributed to VAWG, recognizing misogyny as one of the root causes.



Figure 2: Pyramid of Gender-Based Violence
(The Executive Office, EVAWG, 2023)

Murders in Europe committed by a partner

Rate per 100,000 inhabitants in selected countries, 2017

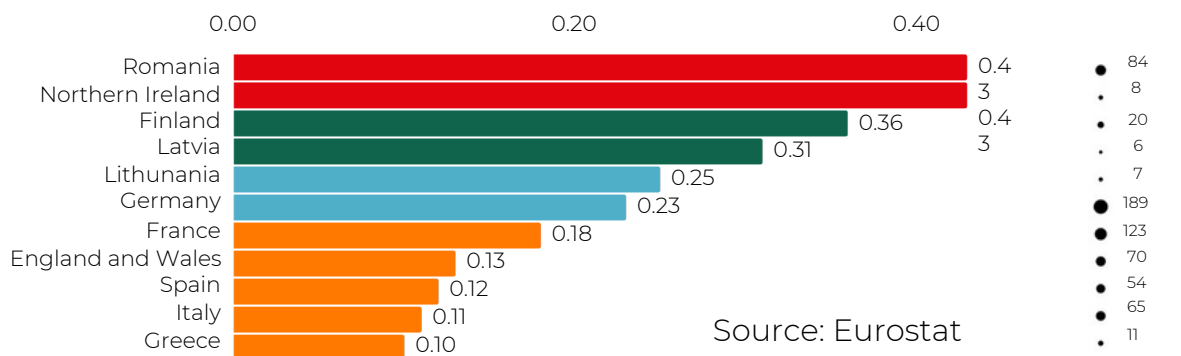


Figure 3. Femicide: The murders giving Europe a wake-up call – BBC News

The Churchill Fellowship provided an opportunity to investigate how CBIM is implemented across multiple U.S. contexts, including San Francisco, Memphis, and Pittsburgh, and how lessons learned might inform policy and practice in NI. Key findings include:

- The importance of engaging men and boys as allies. Prevention programmes are more effective when men are positioned not only as potential perpetrators but also as partners in achieving gender equality.
- The central role of coaches and trusted adults. The success of CBIM depends on the relationship between young people and their mentors, who serve as influential role models.
- The necessity of trauma-informed approaches. Programmes must recognise and respond to the broader social determinants of violence, including poverty, systemic racism, and intergenerational trauma.
- The critical role of evaluation. Sustaining and scaling prevention initiatives requires robust evidence of effectiveness, adaptability, and cultural relevance

The NI Executive's *Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) Strategic Framework (2023–2030)* calls for education, prevention, and the integration of international best practice into local policy. CBIM aligns closely with these priorities and offers a proven, evidence-based model for engaging young men in violence prevention. This report therefore recommends piloting CBIM within NI schools and communities, accompanied by rigorous local evaluation, to generate the evidence required for long-term integration into the EVAWG Strategy.

Men as Allies

Women hold a central role in shaping society and the generations to come. Violence against women and girls does not end with women and girls, the impacts are far-reaching including significant impacts on our young boys and men. There is growing international consensus on the importance of engaging boys and men in VAWG prevention, from the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994 to the Experts Meeting on Involving Boys and Men in Achieving Gender Equality at the UN in 2004. Excluding men has rendered many programmes aimed at gender equality ineffective in achieving their goals, due to men's resistance and non-cooperation.

Such programmes approach boys and men solely as perpetrators and offenders. Girls and women are treated in such interventions as survivors or potential victims. It is time to shift the focus from approaching boys and men as problems that need to be addressed and obstacles to gender equality to a positive development approach that acknowledges that boys and men, like girls and women, have their own needs and are complex individuals, that they do care about what happens to their partners and their families and in their communities, and that they are a fundamental part of the solution.

As boys and men represent half of the population and are predominantly society's 'gatekeepers', they should be considered as partners/allies in achieving the goal of gender equality. It is fundamental to work with girls and women and in partnership with boys and men to challenge the root causes of rights violations, such as unequal gender and power relations and hegemonic forms of masculinity. Thus, the participation of men is critical to the success of any VAWG-prevention programme.

Violence against women: Some – not all – boys and men are part of the problem; all of them need to become part of the solution!



What is Coaching Boys into Men?

Coaching Boys Into Men program, an initiative by Futures Without Violence organization. This initiative aims to empower sports coaches to engage with young male athletes in schools, fostering healthy relationships, mental health practices, and dismantling the harmful stereotype that equates violence with strength. CBIM is broken into 12 weekly sessions supported by CBIM “Training Cards”. Each Training Card discussion is facilitated by coaches and takes about 15 minutes. The 12 Topics/Training Cards are below.

Program Topics

Learning What Respect Means & How to Identify Abusive Behaviors

How to Speak Out & Stand Up When Witnessing Harmful Behavior

Promoting Gender Equity and Healthy Culture on Teams

CBIM is broken into 12 weekly sessions supported by CBIM “Training Cards.” Each Training Card discussion is facilitated by coaches and takes about 15 minutes. The 12 Training Card topics are:

1. Respect & Personal Responsibility

2. Mental Health Matters

3. Insulting Language

4. Disrespectful Behavior Toward Women & Girls

5. Digital Disrespect

6. Understanding Consent Part 1

7. Understanding Consent Part 2

8. Bragging About Sexual Reputation

9. When Anger & Aggression Cross the Line

10. Taking a Stand Against Relationship Abuse

11. Conflict & Communication

12. Making a Pledge for Respect & Equity

<https://coachescorner.org/impact/>

Community CBIM Advocate Training

Online Zoom Session between 17th July to 21st July 2023

Prior to visiting the United States, I participated in an international training programme delivered by Futures Without Violence which certified me as a Community Coaching Boys into Men (CBIM) Advocate (see Appendices). This qualification enables me to train coaches and teachers within my community to deliver the CBIM curriculum. The training was conducted online over one week and combined asynchronous learning with live sessions



CBIM Advocate Training Schedule

Note: All independent materials, activities, and questions are accessed through the Articulate online system. All times are ET. Defer to calendar invitations for correct times based on your time zone.

Live Session: Monday, 7/17		
Session Time	Length	Agenda
11:00am-12:30pm ET	1.5 hours	• Welcome • Introduction to CBIM • Looking at the week ahead – training overview & logistics

Independent (Asynchronous) Work Estimated 4-5 hours to complete; To be completed by Wednesday, 11:00am ET Independent Work To Be Made Available Through Online Portal	
Module Topic	Length
1) CBIM Core Elements	25 min
2) Activities on Key Messages – Man Box & Relationship Behaviours (Optional if participant is expert in these content areas)	1 hour

3) Introduction to the Coaches Kit / CBIM Curriculum	30 min
4) Training and Supporting Coaches	1 h 15 min
5) CBIM & Mental Health	1 h 15 min

Live Session: Monday, 7/19		
Session Time	Length	Agenda
1:00-5:00pm ET	4 hours	·Independent Work Debrief o (Core Elements; Key Messages; Mental Health) ·Training Card Practice · Coaches Clinic Practice

Independent (Asynchronous) Work	
Estimated 1.5 hours to complete; To be completed by Friday, 1:00pm ET Independent Work To Be Made Available Through Online Portal	
Module Topic	Length
1) Introduction to Pitching CBIM	35 min
2) Evaluation Methods	15 min
3) FAQ about CBIM	25 min
4) Community Planning Preparation	15 min

Live Session: Monday, 7/21		
Session Time	Length	Agenda
1:00-3:30pm ET	2.5 hours	·Pitch Practice ·Community Planning ·CBIM Community of Practice and Resources · Closing



It was hugely beneficial attending this training, where I got the opportunity to speak with other facilitators working across the US, and some further afield, who are implementing this program into their city/state/country. Furthermore, it was essential to hear from others who had experienced different cultural barriers and obstacles in dealing with youth. Hearing this was extremely valuable when thinking of how this program can be used and adjusted to meet different cultural needs in NI.

The asynchronous component required participants to engage with five modules addressing CBIM's core elements, curriculum structure, strategies for supporting coaches, and links between CBIM and mental health. Each module involved interactive exercises and independent study. Live sessions provided opportunities for discussion, practice with training cards, and community planning.

Engagement with facilitators from across the United States and beyond was particularly valuable, as they shared experiences of implementing CBIM in diverse cultural contexts. These discussions illuminated potential challenges, such as cultural barriers and resistance to addressing issues of gender and violence with young people. Importantly, they also offered insights into strategies for adapting CBIM to specific community needs, which has direct implications for implementation in NI.

The training emphasised that advocates do not deliver CBIM directly to young people but instead equip coaches and teachers to do so. This distinction reinforces the importance of pre-existing trust between educators/coaches and students. Furthermore, the programme addressed methods for pitching CBIM to schools, evaluation techniques, and the wider societal role of community advocacy. Overall, this training provided a critical foundation for considering how CBIM could be contextualised and applied within NI.

Introduction

Context for Visits and Findings

San Francisco, California

Futures Without Violence Head Office



The first site visit in the United States was to the headquarters of Futures Without Violence (FUTURES) in San Francisco. Founded in the 1980s, the organisation initially sought to address the lack of public discourse and policy attention to domestic violence, particularly within the health sector. Over time, FUTURES expanded to include a range of initiatives that promote prevention and cultural change, with a strong emphasis on engaging men and boys in gender-based violence (GBV) prevention. Notably, the *Coaching Boys into Men* (CBIM) programme emerged from this broader public education agenda.

FUTURES operates through multiple departments, including public education campaigns, healthcare provider training, and initiatives addressing reproductive coercion and human trafficking. These strands of work share a common aim: to shift cultural norms and institutional practices that sustain gender inequality and violence. For example, FUTURES has developed programmes on teen dating violence prevention that use social media to challenge harmful stereotypes and promote respectful relationships.



A central theme of discussions at FUTURES was the role of evidence-based interventions in driving policy change. This insight is particularly salient for Northern Ireland, which has recently adopted the EVAWG Strategic Framework (2023–2030). The framework outlines a seven-year plan structured around four themes, six outcomes, and 19 priority areas, with a strong emphasis on prevention, education, and cultural transformation. Crucially, it calls for the integration of international best practice and evidence-based programmes. CBIM, having been rigorously evaluated across multiple U.S. contexts (Miller et al., 2020; Fields et al., 2022), represents precisely the kind of intervention envisaged within the framework.

The alignment between FUTURES' work and the NI EVAWG Strategy is therefore evident. FUTURES emphasises multi-sectoral collaboration, trauma-informed approaches, and the engagement of men as allies - principles that are also embedded within the NI framework. Lessons from FUTURES can inform how CBIM might be embedded in NI, particularly in relation to identifying delivery partners, building capacity among coaches and educators, and ensuring sustainability through policy integration.

This visit highlighted the importance of considering how global evidence can be adapted to local contexts. For NI, the implementation of CBIM within schools and community organisations could directly support the EVAWG outcomes of increasing young people's safety, promoting respectful relationships, and challenging misogynistic attitudes at their root.



University of California, Berkeley

As part of the research phase, I visited the University of California, Berkeley, where I met with long-standing gymnastics coach JK Okada, who has implemented the CBIM programme for several years. His experience provides valuable insight into the challenges and opportunities of adapting CBIM within higher education and competitive sports contexts.

Initially hesitant to become a CBIM coach, Okada's trajectory towards advocacy was shaped by exposure to a TED Talk by Joe Ehrmann, which critiques the phrase "be a man" and its damaging implications for boys' development. This message resonated with Okada's own reflections on how young men are socialised to suppress emotion, equate strength with dominance, and define masculinity through athletic achievement. His shift from reluctance to active leadership illustrates the transformative potential of CBIM, not only for young athletes but also for coaches themselves.

Okada emphasised that sports offer a unique and powerful platform for cultural change. Athletes often occupy positions of influence within their peer groups, schools, and wider communities. When equipped with the language and confidence to challenge harmful behaviours, they can act as catalysts for wider social transformation. Importantly, Okada noted that the success of CBIM depends on coaches demonstrating genuine commitment: athletes must perceive their mentors as authentically invested in promoting respect, equity, and inclusion.

The discussions at Berkeley also highlighted issues of adaptability. While CBIM was originally designed for younger adolescents, Okada has modified its delivery for university students who face distinct developmental challenges, such as navigating independence, forming intimate relationships, and managing social pressures. In this context, CBIM sessions are extended beyond the 12-card structure to encourage deeper discussion around consent, diversity, equity, and mental health. This adaptability underscores the programme's capacity to address different cultural and age-specific needs, an important consideration for implementation in Northern Ireland.

Another key theme was the importance of male role models. Okada observed that many community advocates for CBIM in the United States are women, which can sometimes present barriers for young men engaging with the material. Recruiting male coaches and high-profile athletes to champion CBIM was suggested as a way of enhancing credibility and influence. This recommendation has particular resonance in NI, where sporting figures often hold considerable cultural authority and could serve as powerful advocates for prevention initiatives.

A striking parallel can be drawn with the late Art McCrory, the highly respected Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) coach in Northern Ireland. Following his passing, tributes highlighted not only his sporting achievements but also his deep care for the wellbeing and personal development of his players. McCrory's legacy illustrates that effective coaching extends beyond technical skills or competitive success; it encompasses mentorship, compassion, and the cultivation of resilience and respect. His example demonstrates the potential for coaches in NI to serve as credible role models who, like Okada, can influence cultural attitudes and support the implementation of CBIM.

Finally, discussions acknowledged the influence of online spaces and social media on young men's attitudes, particularly the growing visibility of figures who promote misogynistic or hyper-masculine ideologies. Okada and colleagues stressed the need for CBIM to counter these narratives by providing alternative models of masculinity grounded in empathy, respect, and emotional openness.

Taken together, the UC Berkeley visit demonstrated that CBIM is not only a curriculum but also a broader cultural intervention. It challenges harmful norms, equips young men with critical tools for healthy relationships, and positions coaches as agents of change. For Northern Ireland, these lessons highlight the need for culturally sensitive adaptation, the recruitment of credible role models such as coaches in the GAA, and the embedding of CBIM within sporting institutions that already play a central role in community life.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania via Zoom:

Valencia Peterson; Founder and Executive Director of Open-Door Abuse Awareness & Prevention (ODAAP)

Due to unforeseen circumstances, I was unable to complete an in-person visit to Las Vegas; however, I conducted an extended online meeting with Valencia Peterson, founder and Executive Director of *Open-Door Abuse Awareness & Prevention (ODAAP)* in Philadelphia. Peterson's contribution was particularly valuable as she combines lived experience with a trauma-informed, community-based approach to violence prevention, grounded in the use of sport as a healing mechanism.



Peterson incorporates the playbook *“Nothing Heals Like Sports”* into her practice, using it as a framework to educate young people on the links between trauma, emotional regulation, and resilience. While the CBIM curriculum focuses primarily on prevention by addressing healthy relationships and bystander intervention, Peterson highlighted how the integration of sport can also facilitate early intervention. For young people exposed to community violence, racial trauma, or systemic inequality, structured sporting environments can provide opportunities for connection, trust-building, and healing. She drew upon Bruce Perry's research, which suggests that sport can act as a therapeutic tool, providing “relational dosing” that enables young people to experience safety and positive attachment more consistently than traditional therapeutic settings.

A critical feature of Peterson's work is the integration of trauma-informed approaches. She highlighted that many young people enter CBIM programmes with pre-existing experiences of adversity, such as poverty, racism, parental absence, or exposure to violence. Without accounting for these realities, prevention programmes risk disengagement or re-traumatisation. By contrast, trauma-informed adaptations, such as flexibility in delivery, sensitivity to emotional triggers, and prioritising safe relationships, can maximise the effectiveness of CBIM.

This perspective has significant implications for NI. The NI EVAWG Strategic Framework identifies trauma-informed practice as a cross-cutting principle for prevention and intervention, yet practical models for embedding TIAs remain underdeveloped.



The ODAAP model illustrates how CBIM can be adapted to meet the needs of communities with high levels of trauma exposure. In NI, this could include addressing the legacy of the Troubles, intergenerational trauma, paramilitary influence, and socioeconomic deprivation. Peterson's emphasis on non-judgmental and individualised approaches aligns directly with the need for culturally responsive interventions in NI.

Another notable theme from Peterson's work is the role of sport in building community trust. She described how athletic programmes often provide one of the few consistent, structured spaces for young people in under-resourced areas. Coaches, when equipped with CBIM, can therefore act as frontline practitioners of prevention. Importantly, Peterson argued that coaches require not only training in CBIM but also ongoing partnerships with mental health professionals and community organisations to sustain their impact.

For NI, this underscores the need for a multi-sectoral approach to CBIM implementation. Schools and sports clubs could serve as primary delivery sites, but partnerships with youth services, mental health organisations, and domestic violence agencies would be essential to ensure trauma-informed support. Moreover, Peterson's emphasis on intersectionality, particularly in recognising the compounded effects of race, poverty, and gender, provides a framework for considering how CBIM might address the specific cultural and social dynamics of NI, including class divisions and the residual impacts of sectarian conflict.

In summary, the Philadelphia case study demonstrates that CBIM is not simply a violence-prevention curriculum but can serve as a vehicle for healing, resilience-building, and cultural transformation when embedded within a trauma-informed framework. Peterson's work with ODAAP provides a model of how CBIM can be adapted to address systemic inequalities while strengthening community capacity - lessons that are directly transferable to the NI context.

Memphis, Tennessee

The next stage of the Fellowship involved a visit to Heal 901, a youth empowerment organisation based in Memphis, Tennessee, which has adopted CBIM as part of its broader violence prevention strategy. Heal 901 integrates CBIM with a range of wraparound services, including partnerships with local mental health clinics and community organisations, thereby ensuring that prevention efforts are embedded within a holistic support network for young people.

During my visit, I observed how Heal 901 introduces CBIM to schools. Meetings typically involved principals, pastoral care staff, and coaches who would be responsible for programme delivery. These sessions demonstrated the importance of securing institutional buy-in before implementation, highlighting the need to present CBIM not only as a violence-prevention initiative but also as a tool for promoting positive masculinity, wellbeing, and community safety.

Heal 901 staff emphasised that CBIM could not be implemented in isolation from the broader structural and cultural challenges faced by Memphis communities. Discussions focused on issues such as poverty, police brutality, gun violence, substance misuse, racial trauma, and the lack of parental or emotional guidance available to many young people. Staff explained how these challenges often impair emotional regulation and conflict resolution, making young people more vulnerable to adopting harmful norms of masculinity. In this context, TIAs were viewed as indispensable. Staff described how CBIM sessions were adapted to accommodate the lived experiences of participants, ensuring that discussions on respect, relationships, and bystander behaviour were contextualised within the realities of their daily lives.

This holistic approach reflects international best practice in violence prevention, where multi-sectoral collaboration and trauma-informed principles are increasingly recognised as critical to effectiveness.



In practice, Heal 901 works closely with mental health practitioners who provide expertise on trauma and resilience, enabling coaches to better support participants experiencing adversity. By embedding CBIM within a wider network of community support, Heal 901 demonstrates how prevention can be sustained beyond the sports field.

For NI, the Memphis model offers several important lessons. Although the specific challenges differ, parallels can be drawn with NI's experiences of paramilitarism, poverty, intergenerational trauma from the Troubles, toxic masculinity, and family dysfunction. Just as Heal 901 has adapted CBIM to address racial trauma and systemic inequality, any NI adaptation must consider the legacy of political conflict and its impact on social identities, community cohesion, and young people's wellbeing.

The Memphis visit also underscored the importance of positioning CBIM not only as a violence-prevention tool but as part of a community resilience framework. By framing CBIM as a way of equipping young people with skills in emotional regulation, empathy, and conflict resolution, Heal 901 demonstrated that the programme can contribute to broader social outcomes such as improved mental health, reduced community violence, and strengthened social trust.

In summary, the Memphis case study illustrates how CBIM can be effectively embedded within a community ecosystem that acknowledges systemic challenges while promoting resilience. For Northern Ireland, it provides a model of how CBIM could be adapted to local cultural contexts, with strong partnerships across education, mental health, and community organisations ensuring that prevention is not treated as a stand-alone intervention but as part of a coordinated strategy to reduce violence and build safer, healthier communities.

“A threat to injustice anywhere, is a threat to justice everywhere.”



Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the following people and organisations who hosted me throughout my stay in Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine, Dr Millers Lab: Dr Alana Field, Staff Scientist, Courtney McFeaters, Research Coordinator; and Pittsburgh Action Against Rape: Bernie Colbert; Educator; and Paul Mulbah; Violence Prevention Specialist and Coach.

Pittsburgh Action Against Rape (PAAR)



At PAAR, I met with Senior Educator Bernie Colbert, who explained how the organisation integrates CBIM into its broader prevention and education programmes. PAAR has been serving the Pittsburgh community for over five decades and delivers a wide spectrum of services, from trauma-informed therapeutic support for survivors of sexual abuse to community education on bystander intervention and digital safety. What emerged strongly from this discussion was that CBIM does not stand alone but forms part of a continuum of prevention and intervention services. This reinforces the argument that in Northern Ireland, CBIM should be embedded within a wider infrastructure of domestic and sexual violence agencies, ensuring continuity of support for both prevention and response.

South Park High School, Pittsburgh



South Park HS (schola.com)

During a visit to South Park High School, I observed how PAAR staff introduced CBIM to educators and coaches. School staff were reassured that they did not need to be subject experts in order to deliver the programme; rather, the value lay in creating open conversations with students about respect, consent, and healthy relationships. Importantly, the school recognised the benefit of having community partners such as PAAR to provide ongoing support and training. This highlighted that schools alone cannot sustain CBIM; long-term success requires partnerships with specialist organisations who can provide expertise, evaluation, and reinforcement.

University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine.



At UPMC's Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine division, I met with members of Dr. Liz Miller's research team, who have conducted some of the most rigorous evaluations of CBIM. Their work has demonstrated both the effectiveness of the programme and the barriers to its sustainability, such as lack of time, redundancy, and limited institutional support. These insights underline that implementation requires not only trained coaches but also structural support from schools, community organisations, and policymakers.

Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh

At Carnegie Mellon University, I observed the CLEAR programme, a college-level adaptation of CBIM that targets older male students. Senior athletes described how participation had allowed them to engage in meaningful peer discussions about masculinity, respect, and relationships, often challenging assumptions they had previously held.



Particularly notable was the practice of older students mentoring younger participants, creating a peer-led cycle of influence that extended beyond the initial delivery. This intergenerational dynamic illustrates how CBIM can evolve within educational institutions, reinforcing values year after year. For NI, a similar approach could be applied within universities or youth sports academies, ensuring that prevention work continues into young adulthood.



Nicole with Freshman students from Carnegie Mellon University

Brashear High School, Pittsburgh

My visit to Brashear High School provided one of the most compelling demonstrations of CBIM in practice. I observed a session on “Mental Health Matters” with a group of male athletes aged 15–16.



The discussion extended well beyond the prescribed 15 minutes, as students actively engaged with the material, offered personal reflections, and encouraged their peers to contribute. This illustrated how, when delivered by a trusted coach in a supportive environment, CBIM can create a safe space for dialogue that transcends sport. The session underscored that prevention programmes are most effective when they feel relevant and participatory to young people. In NI, similar outcomes could be achieved by working with schools and sport clubs to create contexts where young men feel empowered to discuss sensitive issues openly.

Collectively, these site visits illustrate both the adaptability and the effectiveness of CBIM in diverse cultural contexts, highlighting the potential for its integration into the Northern Ireland context, particularly within schools and community-based organisations.



The Importance of Socialisation Processes



Figure 4. Socialisation process in the USA according to Joe Ehrmann.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pYjlgOYgLvo>

Addressing violence against women and girls requires attention to the socialisation processes that underpin harmful gender norms. Research suggests that boys are frequently socialised to equate masculinity with toughness, emotional suppression, and aggression (Earp et al., 2018). Such norms contribute to the perpetuation of misogyny and violence, reinforcing patriarchal structures that privilege male dominance.

Joe Ehrmann's widely cited reflections on masculinity highlight how early socialisation often leads to "alexithymia," the inability to identify or express emotions. Men experiencing alexithymia are at heightened risk of depression, social isolation, and substance misuse (Lo, 2023). In this context, violence may emerge as a maladaptive mechanism for asserting control. These dynamics underscore the necessity of interventions that challenge restrictive gender norms and provide young men with healthier frameworks for emotional expression and interpersonal relationships. International evidence supports the argument that prevention must begin early, particularly within schools.



Figure 5. Socialisation process in the USA according to Joe Ehrmann.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pYjlgOYgLvo>

The World Health Organisation (2021) estimates that nearly one-third of women globally experience gender-based violence, with prevalence highest among younger age groups. Within educational settings, gender-based violence often manifests as harassment or coercion, yet it is frequently underreported. This lack of recognition hinders both prevention and intervention.

In NI, the EVAWG Strategic Framework identifies education and early intervention as priority areas. CBIM aligns closely with these priorities by directly addressing attitudes and behaviours associated with misogyny, unhealthy relationships, and sexual reputations. By leveraging trusted figures such as coaches and teachers, CBIM offers an evidence-based mechanism for reshaping harmful socialisation processes and promoting respectful, equitable relationships among young people.

Conclusion

While the EVAWG Strategic Framework has identified the need for education, early intervention, and prevention work in this area, it comes as no surprise that this issue of violence towards women is not only a global health issue but also a violation of human rights. GBV is a significant public health problem affecting millions globally.

The World Health Organization reported in 2021 that 30% of women between 15 and 19 suffer or have suffered gender-based violence in their sexual affective relationships. Moreover, according to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, one in 10 European women has been a victim of sexual violence, including both before the age of 15 and after the age of 15. Indeed, gender violence occurs more and more at early ages, and it happens everywhere, including in schools (WHO, 2021). In the school context, gender violence is reported only occasionally and is less identified as a major problem in childhood. It involves acts or threats of sexual, physical, or psychological violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated because of gender norms and stereotypes and enforced by unequal power dynamics. Therefore, the lack of awareness about GBV in childhood and very early in life may hinder opportunities for its prevention and effective intervention.

Given my research undertaken through the Churchill Fellowship, I believe that CBIM could be framed and seen as one component of the Preventive measures in the EVAWG Strategy. Such as, with one of the outcomes presented in the EVAWG Strategy, Outcome 1 (page 26 of EVAWG Strategy), two of the CBIM cards focus on challenging and changing attitudes and norms with the ultimate aim of preventing future violence. CBIM looks at identifying what is abuse and what are healthy relationships. In the strategic framework, where it talks about the changes that are needed in terms of outcomes, it is highlighted that women and girls should feel safe and protected; this is a huge element of the CBIM focus.

This can also be seen in the context of 'healthy and respectful attitudes towards girls' and 'bragging about sexual reputations'. In the priority areas, they are very much aligned with CBIM; one example, as seen in the EVAWG Strategy: Integrated long-term campaigns to change social norms; individual sectors can promote positive attitudes and behaviour to prevent violence against women and girls. Such sectors can include sports or schools (both early and higher education).

In the US, there are two primary local advocates for the CBIM program, that coordinate, game support, and train coaches are local DV and sexual assault agencies that have prevention components of what they do. They also have youth development violence prevention organisations (for example; Heal 901 in Memphis). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has violence prevention funds, and these are distributed to state public health departments, who then distribute those funds to local organisations.

The question is, if this goes into effect in NI, what would it look like? How would it be implemented? There is no other program that operates in the sports 'space' that does what CBIM does. It would be essential to identify the right partnerships in NI to champion CBIM, such as domestic/sexual violence organisations, or youth development organisations with a focus on trauma, safety, and well-being of young people. CBIM is most successful when coaches and staff from local domestic or sexual violence prevention agencies have strong partnerships.

Where EVAWG and CBIM Link:

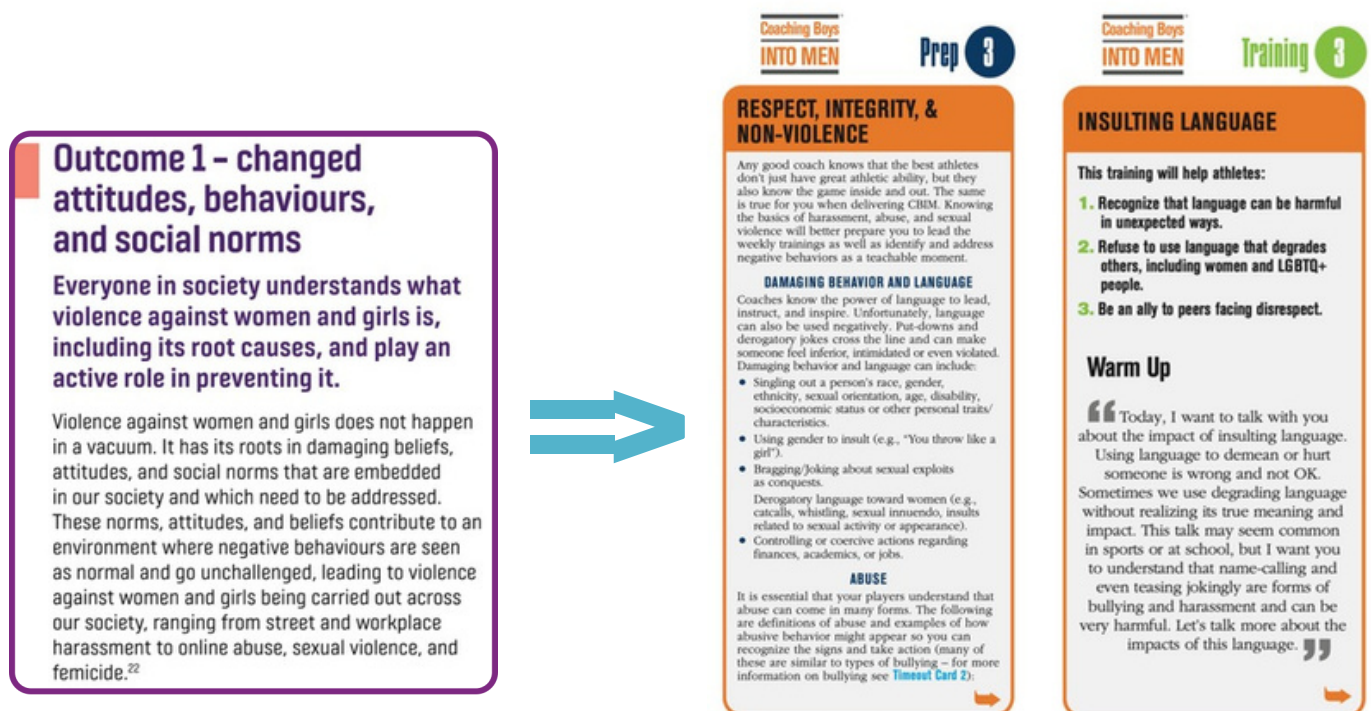


Figure 6. Relationship between Outcomes identified in the EVAWG Strategic Framework and the CBIM topic aims.

NI Executive Plans for EVAWG Strategy

I am going to use the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy (for Northern Ireland) to inform recommendations on addressing misogyny and violence against women and girls, as well as implementing CBIM in NI. The EVAWG Strategic Framework for NI highlights several action points to take this program forward. Identifying all of the ways CBIM touches upon different components that are laid out in this strategy, which can be seen in the 'Overview of Strategic Framework' section.

An overview of the Strategic Framework

This co-designed Strategic Framework sets the agenda for all of government and society to end violence against women and girls. It is ambitious, long term, and wide reaching. It is a living document which will be adapted along the journey according to emerging needs.

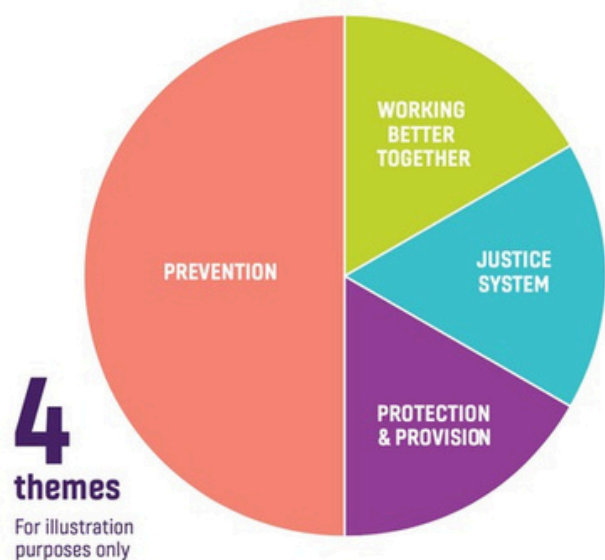


Figure 7. Extracted from the Ending Violence Against Women & Girls Strategic Framework.

This Strategic Framework is made up of four themes; six outcomes; and 19 priority areas, which inform a series of actions that will take place over the next seven years. Sports are a powerful institution; they are a cross-section of life in many ways, with how they get integrated into the family, community, public consciousness, celebrities, and all these different pieces. CBIM is both a specific program that can be implemented, and a much broader public campaign that can come from it. A preventative approach can have important messages to come from it, such as having young men who have gone through the program, and in turn, telling their stories and why these issues matter to them. It then becomes more than this micro-level program.

The Strategic Framework Principles

The way we work together to solve this problem is just as important as the actions that we take. The co-design group established eight principles which will form the basis for the outworking of the Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls in our society.

Guiding Principles for the Implementation of the Strategic Framework

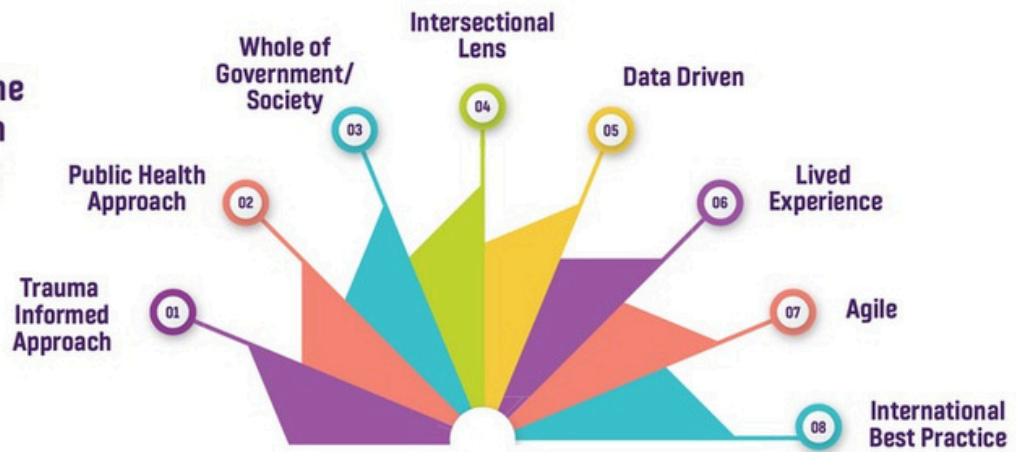


Figure 8. Extracted from the Ending Violence Against Women & Girls Strategic Framework.

1. **Trauma-Informed Approach:** How do we train coaches/teachers? For example, how do they understand the trauma that young people have experienced?

2. **Public Health Approach:** Increasing protective factors for youth, in terms of their mental health and the connection they have with adults by forging stronger relationships. At the same time, we are implementing a gender-transformative model that is about questioning and adjusting gender expectations.

3. **Whole of Government/Society:** Embedding collaboration in everything we do (from various different sectors).

4.**Intersectional Lens:** Intersectional identities, such as class, race, gender; from a curriculum standpoint, these are addressed in the CBIM cards. However, to meet the needs and cultural issues of NI, this program can be adapted and adjusted, where necessary.

5.**Data Driven:** CBIM fits into NI's practice due to their evidence-based data driven studies. Studies in NI would be required to demonstrate the efficacy of this program here, whilst also taking in different cultural and context needs in NI.

6.**Lived Experience:** Hearing the voices of those people with personal rather than 'text-book' experience informs best and better practice. CBIM can be a youth voice focused program. Youth can advocate on behalf of the program and their voice can be part of the conversation.

7.**Agile:** Taking a collaborative approach across all sectors to ensure progress is continuously made.

8.**International Best Practice:** CBIM has illustrated numerous studies highlighting the efficacy of this violence prevention program.



Recommendations

A final reflection is that the most singular attribute of all providers I visited was the organisational mission that galvanised systems and to change cultures and drive transformative change. I believe that with strong leadership and focus we can achieve similar change, with similar outcomes in reducing violence against women in Northern Ireland.

- 1 The introduction of evidence-based practices in violence prevention utilising the Coaching Boys into Men (CBIM) approach.
- 2 A Northern Ireland Criminal Justice, Directors of the EVAWG CBIM Strategy and Educational Authority Youth Service Collaboration informed by knowledge & understanding of best practice and implementation elsewhere.
- 3 To identify and implement tools and processes proven effective elsewhere and how these can be embedded in practice.
- 4 To identify and focus on changes demonstrated elsewhere as having the most impact.
- 5 To develop effective staff and coaches/community youth engagement, training structures and programmes.
- 6 To develop and implement an effective CBIM communications in the new EVAWG Strategy.
- 7 To have a NI CBIM approach informed by lessons learned elsewhere and what they might now do differently.
- 8 To train a number of Community Advocates to 'train the trainer' to facilitate sessions to schools across NI.
- 9 To develop a NI CBIM Advisory Network Group and collaborate with Futures Without Violence.
- 10 To pilot CBIM with a secondary school in NI and evaluate it.

Post-Trip Activities

- Presentation at WomenEd NI Conference, Ulster University Belfast, September 2023

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/churchill-fellowship_northern-irelands-femicide-rate-is-among-activity-7113878479741308928-iLAX?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_ios



- Member of the All-Ireland Network on Sexual Violence Research

<https://ainsvr.org/>

- Media Interviews

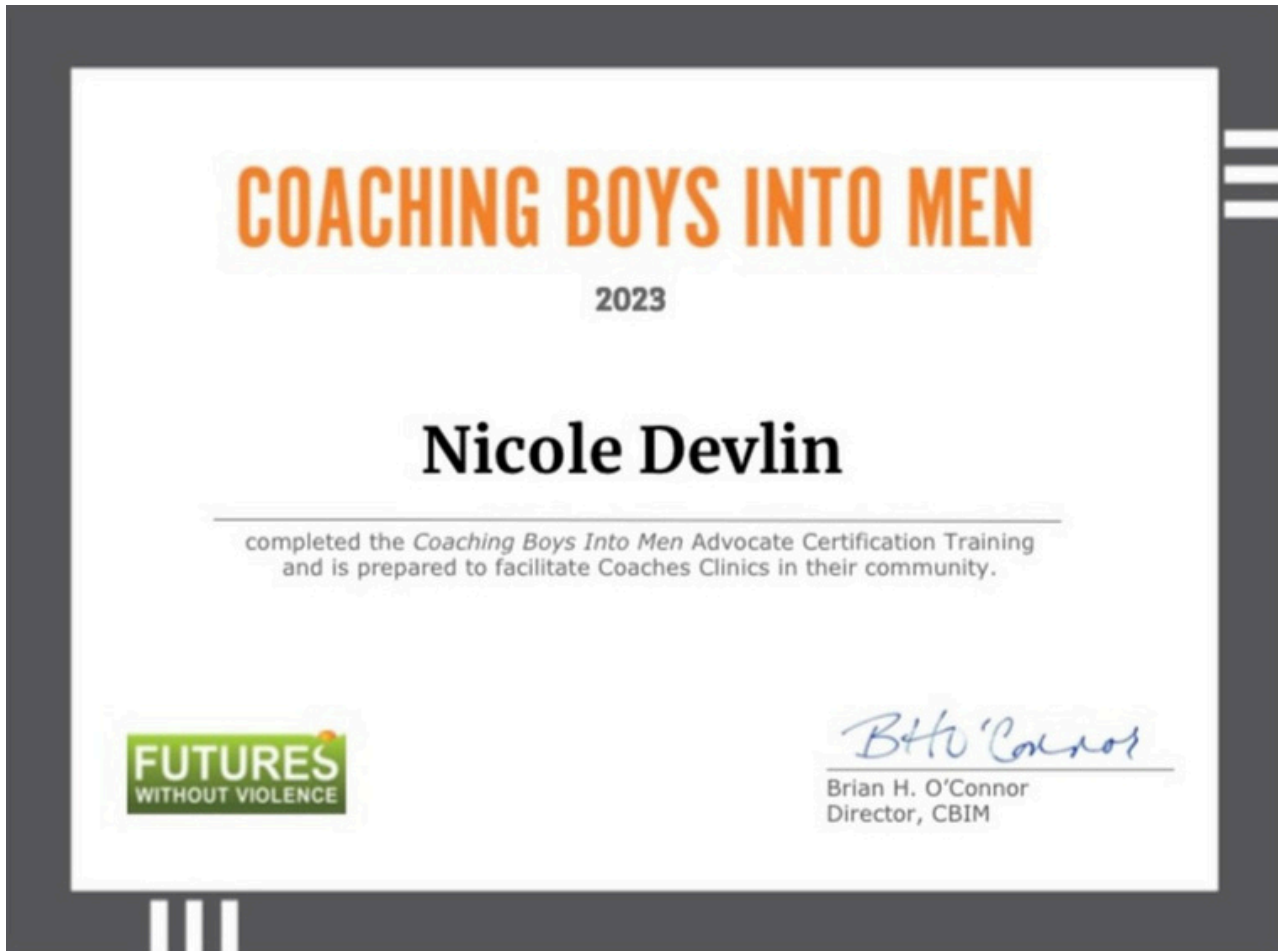
<https://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/psy/News/NicoleDevlinFellowshipOct23.html>

- Futures Without Violence International Advisor

<https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/>

Appendices

- Coaching Boys Into Men Community Advocate (Facilitator)



- Be A Man: Joe Ehrmann at TEDxBaltimore 2013
https://youtu.be/jVlIXutc_Ws?feature=shared



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