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Increased emphasis on engaging with boys and men will lead to better outcomes for all: Jesuit Social Services

An increased emphasis on engaging with boys and men – who are overwhelming the perpetrators of violence as highlighted by the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children - will ultimately support them to be their best selves and to lead healthy lives free from violence and develop positive relationships, says Jesuit Social Services.

“We know that men’s behaviour is at the heart of the problem of gendered violence - but men can be part of the solution by making the decision to challenge their own thinking and change their own behaviour,” says Matt Tyler, Executive Director of The Men’s Project at Jesuit Social Services.

“As Social Services Minister Amanda Rishworth outlined in her address at the National Press Club today, we must focus on addressing the drivers of violence before it occurs and intervene earlier when people are in trouble and causing trouble.

“While of course all victims of violence and sexual violence need support, it is clear that there is a gendered element to the vast majority of violence across Australia. Around 95 per cent of all victims of violence experience violence from a male perpetrator – it is clear that we need to work towards a culture and a society where everybody can lead healthy, safe lives and hold respectful relationships and that engaging with boys and men to prevent violence is a critical part of this.”

The Men’s Project’s Australian-first [Man Box research project](#) explores the attitudes to manhood and the behaviours of young Australian men aged 18 to 30. The Man Box finds that many young men feel social pressures to be ‘a real man’ and that those that strongly endorse stereotypical norms about what it means to ‘be a real man’ are more likely to use violence, sexually harass women and experience mental health challenges.

“This research shows the significant costs to young men and others of being ‘in the man box’ – meaning they personally endorse a range of norms related to rigid gender roles, aggression, control and acting tough. Breaking free of these stereotypes will improve the health and wellbeing of both men and women – we want to see initiatives that teach our boys to be good human beings, not just good men,” says Mr Tyler.

Minister Rishworth told the National Press Club that more nuanced approaches to addressing men’s violence, through prevention and early intervention, are critical.

“Through our work with young men in schools and those who spend time with them every day, including teachers, sports coaches and youth workers, we agree that working with boys, from a young age, to be themselves can ultimately decrease their adherence to harmful masculine stereotypes as they get older,” says Mr Tyler.

“Beyond that critical work, we know that every single member of the community can play a role in supporting the young men in their lives – their sons, brothers, partners and peers – to talk about the pressures they face, and to model positive alternatives. We can all play a role in helping men break free of the man box – and to prevent them from ending up there in the first place.”

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