Reflections on the state of the DFV Behaviour Change sector in 2025.

Address by Tim Kelly at DVConnect's AccountabilityConnect event on Monday 27th October 2025. Provided by Tim Kelly, and courtesy of DVConnect.

Thanks to DVConnect for inviting me to be a part of this day.

I want to start by pay respects to the original people and their Elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge the traditional lands of Indigenous peoples where I was born and currently reside. I want to recognize the land of the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabek that form Turtle Island.

I also want to honour with gratitude the enduring stewardship of Indigenous peoples — past, present, and future. That we commit ourselves to listening, learning, and working together toward genuine reconciliation and responsibility in both my homeland and this place I am honoured to visit.

I also want to honour the courage of women and children that navigate the complicated administrative maze dealing with living with violence daily.

When I heard the theme of today, I thought of all the small bridges we've tried to build in my homeland and in communities across the world — bridges between men's programs, women's services, child protection, health, and justice.
Each bridge took courage to build.
But we've mostly built them one at a time… not yet as a network.

So when I'm asked, "Where are we now?"
My honest answer is: I think we're on the right road, but we're still driving separate vehicles.

We've professionalized the work, tried to clarified frameworks, and I think in some ways made major gains in safety for women and children.
But too often, the men we work with are still being managed by a system — not engaged by it.

After nearly 4 decades in this field, one thing I've learned for certain, information alone doesn't change behaviour.

Most men I've worked with already know violence is wrong.

What they often don't know is how to stay with shame, or how to repair trust once it's broken.

I believe our systems mirror that same struggle.

We're good at naming the problem and creating policies to control the problem— less comfortable sitting in the discomfort of change.

We measure completion rates and risk reduction, but rarely depth, reflection, or repair.

In my own province in Canada, we've built promising approaches — we have established nearly 40 PAR (mens behaviour change programs) located in every court jurisdiction, we have fathering interventions like Caring Dads, we have supported community-based counselling services and restorative justice projects. Here in Australia, as we heard at the SPEAQ forum— innovative programme like Men's Line, START and innerBOY, programs that teach empathy, self reflection, personal responsibility, and emotional regulation.

We've built on decades of work responding to men's use of violence,
-but much of the system still orbits around risk, compliance, and crisis.
Programs like the ones named earlier have shown that change is possible when we move closer to men's lives—when we connect their roles as fathers, partners, and community members to empathy and accountability.

But the system itself often doesn't model what we ask of men: curiosity, reflection, partnership, and responsibility.

Our referral pathways still silo, our language still "others," and our measures of success still privilege attendance over transformation.

So where are we?

◄ We are in a sector that has the knowledge
—but not yet the integration.
We have theory-rich practices but still a compliance-heavy ecosystem.
We are fluent in trauma but less in repair.

We need a system that sees men not as clients to manage but as people embedded complex lives, in family systems and our communities.

That means bringing prevention, early intervention, and specialist responses into the same conversation
—not as separate funding streams, but as a continuum of care and accountability.

But the structures around them still reward compliance more than connection.

So that's where we are:
Brilliant in crisis response.
Less coherent in prevention.
Fluent in trauma.
Less fluent in healing.

And we're learning that not every man fits the old binary boxes.

Gender is more fluid and culturally shaped than the frameworks we currently use.

If we want a system that's truly sustainable, it must hold space for all gendered experiences — cis, trans, non-binary — while holding firm to accountability and safety.

Where we need to head is toward a system that treats empathy as infrastructure — not a soft skill, but the backbone of prevention and repair.

That means three possible directions to consider:

1. Prevention.Embed fatherhood, care, and gender equity into the public story. Reach boys in schools, dads in workplaces, and men in communities long before the crisis point. Make curiosity and respect visible as a strength to be honoured.
2. Early Intervention.Connect the dots between child protection, family law, health, and justice.The first professional who meets a struggling man/father — a doctor, a teacher, a probation officer — should be able to have a values-based, accountable conversation, not simply make a referral.
3. Specialist Response.Strengthen program quality and workforce capacity.Every facilitator, counsellor, and supervisor should work from a trauma- and violence-informed foundation — acknowledging harm while seeing the possibility of change.

These directions must also be anchored in place — for me on the land I occupy and call home.
The First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples of Canada have, for generations, modelled what kinship, connection, and collective accountability can look like.

Their teachings remind us that responsibility is relational — it lives in family, land, and community.

And we can't talk about violence without naming colonial violence — the residential-school legacy, forced displacement, and systemic racism that still shape families and services today.

If we want real accountability, we must also be part of decolonising the systems that cause harm.

What to Keep and What to Change

Keep:
• A strong foundation based in feminist analysis that keeps power and control at the centre.
• The unwavering commitment to women's and children's safety.
• The understanding that accountability and care are partners, not opposites.

And — vitally — keep women's and survivors' voices at the centre.

Their lived experience is the moral compass of this work.

If we're serious about a sustainable future, it must be one co-created with those who've carried the cost of violence.

Survivor voices show us not just what safety means, but what healing requires: time, truth, and trustworthy systems.

Change:
• Move from program thinking to ecosystem thinking. Ask not, "Does my program work?" but "What ecosystem allows this man — and his family — to stay safe and connected after the program ends?"
• Redefine success. Not "Did they finish the group?" But "Are their relationships safer six months later?"
• Transform workforce culture. Replace reactivity with reflection. Make supervision supportive, not policing. A reflective workforce is a safer workforce.

And maybe most importantly —
We must model the change we ask of men.

If we want empathy in homes, we must embody it in our institutions.

If we want accountability from clients, we must practise it between agencies.

If we want courage from families, we must bring courage to leadership tables.

How We Begin
So how do we begin, knowing the limits — and assuming no new money?

1. Re-orient the first conversation. When a man calls for help or sits in a child-protection meeting, imagine if the first question wasn't "What did you do?" but "What's been happening for the people around you?" That simple shift moves him from self-justification to empathy.
2. Protect reflective practice. In a sector addicted to urgency, slowing down is radical. Reflection isn't optional self-care; it's violence prevention.
3. Bridge data and story. Funders need numbers; communities need narrative. We need both — evidence that empathy can be measured.

The real barrier isn't funding — it's tempo.
Our systems move at the speed of crisis.
Healing moves at the speed of relationship.
Change happens only as fast as trust allows.

Closing

If we want men to take responsibility, our systems must show them what responsibility looks like.

If we want to cultivate empathy, we must embed it in how we lead, not just what we deliver.

And if accountability truly connects, it's not just connecting men to programs — it's connecting systems to each other, and all of us to the shared work of creating safety.

This is how we move from managing violence to transforming relationships.

From gender binaries to gender belonging.

From colonial frameworks to collective accountability.

And from survivor testimony to survivor partnership — ensuring women's and children's voices continue to shape what comes next.

That's the community we can build from here —
one where accountability isn't just a program outcome, but a community value.

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