



**GENDERHOPES**  
WORKING TO END GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

**Interview of the Month**  
**David Brockway**  
**Great Men Project Manager, The GREAT Initiative**  
**February 2016**

**1. GenderHopes: Can you briefly explain what the aims of The Great Initiative are and how it works towards achieving these?**

David Brockway: The aims of The Great Initiative are to help create a world in which women and men, boys and girls have an equal opportunity to thrive, both at home (in the UK) and internationally. Our approach works through the concept of “disrupting gender stereotypes”. This can take many forms, for instance, in our flagship Great Men project we help boys to discuss and approach gender from a new point of view.

**2. You are responsible for the Great Men project aimed at teenage boys. From your experience, how do they react to gender issues and do they see it as important? Which concrete changes do you see when working with boys?**

The boy’s reaction to gender issues tends to be one of initial skepticism or confusion, followed by surprise and shock, ending usually with gratitude and an interest in finding out more. “Gender” is seen as a “women’s issue” by many in the UK, so often boys aren’t sure why they are discussing it. The boys tend to have a positive reaction to our workshops – this can sometimes be difficult for them when discussing the use of sexist language which has sadly been normalized for many of them – but because our approach is really positive and gives them opportunities to help others, rather than casting them as perpetrators, they end up wanting to promote better behaviours. Their reaction is (perhaps understandably) much more positive towards issues that more directly impact them; these are mainly around the use of violence, showing emotion and the importance of asking for help, and above all, that they’re allowed to be themselves. It’s hard to say what concrete changes we see as these can take years, and many of the issues we discuss are experiences that they may not encounter for years to come. However, the clearest indicator we usually get is that the boys say they will be more open in expressing themselves emotionally and in supporting their peers when they do so.

**3. How can we combat the ‘rape culture’ and ‘victim shaming’ that is prevalent on some university campuses and promote a safer public environment for both men and women?**

In brief, empathy. A huge amount of young men just don't understand how their actions can impact others. The normalisation of groups of muscle-bound "lads" running around chanting sexist songs etc. has been turned into some sort of boys will be boys scenario that we should expect to see on our High Streets. In reality, this is a hugely threatening experience for many people. Combatting this norm can actually be surprisingly easy, once the men (and often women) promoting these behaviours take the time to sit down and hear from others how these experiences have affected them, they tend to be willing to change quite quickly. The challenge is in setting up those initial conversations and getting those involved to see why this is something that they should and can be part of changing. I think that in Universities this is something that should be tackled on a group level. University campuses can be a great place to create a safe and friendly community, discussions and lessons on ending rape culture can be promoted as something that the student populace do together, rather than something designed to punish a minority, thus reducing the chance of those who most need it, skipping the opportunity as a result of fear of being criticised. Beyond University, it becomes more of a challenge, but the same approach can be applied. I particularly think that mass media has a lot to answer for on this issue, and that we need to educate the younger generation about what they come across online – there is much good and bad on the internet, we shouldn't just ignore it as a place where children will be exposed to things they may not see elsewhere as the truth is very different, even positive messages often require parental guidance to be properly understood.

**4. While the UK and many European countries have come a long way in terms of gender equality, where do you think that the main catalyst for improving the situation lies at this time?**

Gender inequality is global. It transcends class, ethnicity, religion and national borders. The catalyst for the campaign for equality will always come from the many remarkable people who go out of their way to find the sources of inequality and campaign against them. As a man working in gender equality, I believe that men especially must make more of a stand against the problems and inequalities faced by millions of women daily. It is not only our duty as caring individuals who want the best for our fellow humans, but as men we are also in a position to open up honest and needed discussions with other men that female campaigners (who make up the vast majority of people working in gender equality) may not have access to. This can be in organised male-only discussions, but equally in casual traditionally all-male environments such as the pub or football pitch.

## **5. What can our readers do to combat gender inequality?**

Don't shy away from telling someone when they've offended you. This extends to all forms of inequality, but is especially prevalent within gender as the language of gender abuse is so normalised. Some young people start using the language to sound cool or fit in, even though it makes them uncomfortable to do so, without others around to let them know this isn't okay the lesson they learn is that this must be acceptable. The same applies for adults. Using offensive language can sometimes be a "test" of the opinions of others in the vicinity. The lack of opposing voices is then taken as acceptance by the individual promoting abusive language. The power of simply telling someone that they have offended you and that you will not sit in silence in the atmosphere they have created is great. Warning, you will at some point be met with the retort, "don't be so sensitive". Luckily this can be countered with the simple retort, "Why not? I see your benefit, getting away with your insult and remaining in an environment that's comfortable for you, but creating an environment uncomfortable for all those not sharing your views. Let me be clear: I'm not too sensitive, the problem resides in your behaviour"

## **6. What is in the pipeline for The Great Initiative? Are there any upcoming projects that you can share with us?**

At the moment we're working on expanding our Great Men project across London. We've been running workshops across London and England for the last 3 years, now we're focusing on deepening our work to create greater impact. This year that means scaling down the range of schools we're working in, but hopefully within the next couple of years the new & improved workshop will be available for schools across South London.

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*David is the manager of the Great Men project. Over the last 3 years along with his team of volunteers, he has run workshops with over 3,000 UK school boys asking what masculinity means to them. David believes that gender equality is something that impacts everyone and that men have a responsibility to address the imbalances that gendered stereotypes create in our society. Before working at Great, David worked for an international childcare charity and the FCO.*