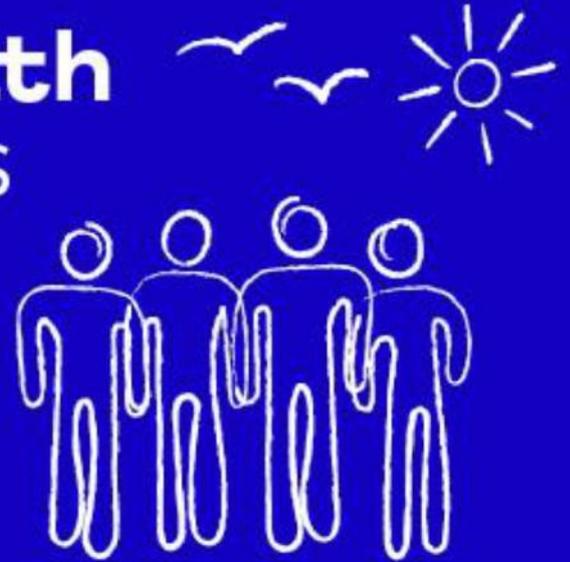


# Men's Mental Health Project In Hastings



## Community Development Fund 2021-23

## Background

### How did we collect feedback from men in Hastings?

This report is based on the feedback received from men through conversation and survey responses. We engaged with **34 men** in Hastings in total. The breakdown of engagement is as follows:

**Men's Health week stall in Hastings Town Centre** – 6 conversations

**Groups in Hastings that engage men\*** - 16 conversations

**Survey Responses** – 12 responses

**Email** – 2 conversations

\* Groups engaged with include, over 50s walking football group, over 27s football group, bat and chat, men's shed & Band of Brothers.

Conversations were centred around what men currently do to look after their mental health, what they enjoy about the activity they are engaged in (if applicable), what they would like in Hastings to further support their mental health and wellbeing and any barriers to engaging with services and discussing their mental health.

The survey focused on very similar areas including what men do to look after their mental health, what they would like to see in Hastings to support their mental health, what would encourage them to get involved in a group activity that supports mental health and how men currently find out information about organised activities. The survey was promoted through our Twitter and website, in addition to local groups and organisations sharing the link through their website and/or social media.

### **Key quotes from the survey and conversation:**

"I find it hard to open up about difficult things. Men tend to suffer in silence. We need to normalise these conversations with friends."

"I don't really know where to look for help or things to do"

"It's nice getting out of the house and being in the fresh air"

"I enjoy banter with likeminded people"

"I would like an activity with a practical goal or outcome"

"I'm lonely. I really struggled in lockdown"

"I would like a safe space to talk, we need to get over the stigma of mental health"

"I want to let go of the stresses of the week and have a laugh"

"I want to have a purpose"

**Key themes identified from conversation:**



Please note that the sizing of the word reflects the popularity of the response.

### **Activities:**

From the engagement work, it was clear that many of the men were seeking group-based activities with other men of a similar age where they could socialise and also take up a hobby that provided a practical goal or outcome. Furthermore, many men wanted a relaxed and informal environment where they could have fun and build friendships with like-minded people. Many of the activities suggested were outdoors, the most popular of which were walking, fishing and gardening groups. There were also some creative suggestions such as creative writing, painting and art groups. In addition to more sporty suggestions such as cycling, running, football and golf.

### **Mental health support:**

Several men explained that they were unsure where to look to find support and had little knowledge of services available in Hastings. Furthermore, they believed the only support available to them were helplines, which they felt were impersonal. When asked about support they would like see in Hastings, a common suggestion was in fact wellbeing centres/hubs where they could drop in for informal chats and to find support. This could suggest that information about current services in Hastings such as wellbeing hubs, mental health services, support groups and projects is not easily accessible to men. In addition, a number of men stated that they have been quite isolated and have found lockdown particularly hard. Isolation was most prevalent amongst older men who expressed interest in creating social connections.

### **Engagement and Accessibility:**

From the conversations had with men and the survey responses, men said they would be more likely to engage in an activity or group that was friendly and informal. It was important for the group or activity to be inclusive, welcoming of beginners/new comers and for it to be for fun and not too serious. Other key engagement factors included more choice activities for older men and men with disabilities. Furthermore, men suggested that activities should be clearly outlined with a set timetable with a variety of times, for example mornings, afternoon and evening sessions to suit everyone's work and life schedules. Many men who currently attended group activities enjoyed the casual and relaxed approach of their chosen group. The level of commitment was up to them and therefore allowed for flexibility around other commitments.

### **Awareness of men's mental health:**

There were many conversations regarding the fact that men find it difficult to talk about their mental health with others, even close friends and family. It was challenging to discuss the topic of mental health in large groups, it was much more productive to have conversations in smaller groups as this reduced any worries or concerns. Additionally, conversations were much more fruitful when they flowed organically and topics were introduced by participants rather than directing or forcing conversation. Furthermore, many of the men recognised that conversations happen more naturally whilst taking part in an activity and found it much easier to talk to other men whilst engaging in an activity.

There was lots of discussion about men suffering in silence due to the stigma associated with mental health and because they may appear weak. Toxic masculinity was a key factor in many discussions and lead onto conversations about normalising conversations about men's mental health without shame and stigma.

When asking about how men take care of their mental health, some men's views of mental health were that to have a 'mental health problem' it has to be very severe illness. There was little

understanding of the fact that everyone has mental health and that your mental wellness can fluctuate throughout your life. This view was most prevalent in men of retirement age, as such asking questions using the term 'mental health' was often difficult and so reframing questions was important. For example, asking them about their wellbeing was a much better approach and asking more direct questions about what they enjoy and find difficult provided much better conversation.

**Summary of barriers and recommendations for services/projects to better engage men**

Barriers	Recommendations
Formalities and pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informal groups</li> <li>• Relaxed Environment</li> <li>• Activity is not taken too seriously</li> <li>• Friendly and fun</li> <li>• Welcoming of beginners ie. taster sessions               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of activities focused on meeting general wellbeing needs, rather than more formal mental health services</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Reduce pressure or expectation to achieve</li> <li>• Encourage participants to set personal goals to achieve and encourage positive reflection of their development</li> </ul>
Mental Health terminology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledge that everyone has a different understanding of what mental health means</li> <li>• Encourage men to talk about mental health and wellbeing but ensure there is no pressure to do so</li> </ul>
Stigma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of smaller groups</li> <li>• Use of activities to facilitate conversation</li> <li>• Normalise conversations about mental health</li> </ul>
Isolation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create opportunity for social connections and peer support</li> <li>• Easily accessible</li> <li>• Consider how to reach isolated men               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider ways to encourage participants to build social connections ie. team activities, buddy schemes, group chats etc.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Poor accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase choice and accessibility for older men and men with disabilities</li> <li>• Make registration easy and allow for men to take part flexibly</li> <li>• Allow for a sliding scale of commitment in terms of participation</li> <li>• Provide a clear timetable</li> <li>• Clarify who the activity/service is for and what is required</li> <li>• Provide practical information ie. travel and parking</li> <li>• Review methods of outreach to ensure information reaches all men</li> </ul>

This feedback was utilised to develop the criteria for the community development fund and enabled us to support groups that were funded to better engage men in the community.

## **Community Development Fund**

The grants provided by the Men's Mental Health Project were designed to help individuals, groups and communities in Hastings to support the mental health of men, particularly between the ages of 30-59 years and living in deprived wards including Baird, Tressell, Castle, Central St Leonards and Hollington. The fund should be used to create positive changes by growing ideas, developing new projects or strengthening existing projects to support men's mental health. For example, the fund could be used by a current group to start a new group specifically for men, or by an individual or group to purchase equipment or invest in training to start a new activity for men in Hastings. We were simply looking for brilliant ideas for projects, initiatives, activities or events that will build positive change by raising awareness for men's mental health and supporting men to look after their mental wellbeing.

### **Criteria for project or initiative:**

The project or initiative should aim to meet the criteria below:

- be aimed at men particularly between the ages of 30-59 years
- benefit men across the whole of Hastings or men in deprived wards
- engage and benefit men at risk of mental health problems
- be easily accessible and inclusive
- promote awareness of mental health and available support
- promote one of the 5 ways to wellbeing (connect, be active, learn, give and take notice)
- meet one or more of the themes identified in our engagement work (see word cloud)

**Individuals and organisations could apply for up to £1500.**

## **Funded Projects**

### **2021**

- **MenWalkTalk** – Men’s walking Group
- **Education Futures Trust** – Bushcraft Group
- **Seaview** – Digital Inclusion Project
- **Fellowship of St Nicholas** – Fathers Morning playgroup
- **Men’s Network**
- **Project Rewild** - Take Action Man
- **The Sanctuary** – Surf n Turf
- **Arts on Prescription** – Men Aloud

### **2022**

- **Creativity on Sea** – Beauty from Destruction
- **Creativity and Wellbeing Workshops**
- **Lifese Music** - Landscape Soundscape
- **Arts on Prescription** – Men Aloud 2
- **Hastings Kickboxing Association** – Men’s Wellbeing Kickboxing group
- **Craig’s Cabin** – Men’s Night Walks
- **Men’s Network**
- **Paramount Housing** – Games Table
- **Active Hastings and Believe in You** - Men, Mind and Muscles
- **East Sussex Recovery Alliance** – Mindful Bakers

### **2023**

- **East Sussex Recovery Alliance** – Mindful Bakers
  - **Project Rewild** – Wild Swimming
  - **Hastings Kickboxing Association** – Men’s Wellbeing Kickboxing group
  - **Wave Arts** – Chess and Chat
  - **Grappling for Mental Health**
  - **Dark Circles Record Shop** – Beat Connections
  - **Greener Futures** – Men’s Gardening and Conservation Group
- 
- Projects that have been funded twice

## MenWalkTalk

### Men's Walking Group

#### Overview:

MenWalkTalk successfully set up their group in **Alexandra Park in Hastings**. They employed a walk leader, who is lead the Hastings Walk and liaised with local organisations and partners about the MenWalkTalk offer in Hastings. They have completed a number of walks so and had good attendance from **12 different local men**, who have formed friendships and created WhatsApp group. Currently, the walks initially ran once a month and increased the frequency to weekly with greater attendance.

#### Quotes:

*"Thank you everyone for the much needed walk today"*

*"I definitely wouldn't have been in this positive mood if I didn't force myself to go"*

*"It was nice to walk in the park and meet new people"*

*"The Sun came out for us, was lovely to walk with new friends"*

*"Keep up the Good work. A lovely group and a great experience"*

*"I went on my first walk last week. A great group of fellas. The group leader made me feel welcome and the whole experience was very positive. You do not realise how many men's lives you are touching"*



#### Contact

<https://menwalktalk.co.uk/>

[matt@menwalktalk.co.uk](mailto:matt@menwalktalk.co.uk)

## Education Futures Trust

### **Bushcraft Group**

#### Overview:

EFT ran a 6-week course exploring **Bushcraft for beginners**, where they used a variety of practical outdoor activities to engage local men. They enrolled **10 local men** with who expressed that their mental health was a challenge or barrier. They provided the opportunity to work side-by-side with other men who had shared, lived experience of poor mental health and other challenges in a supported outdoor setting (the forest school area at the Firs, which sits within the deprived Baird ward). Activities included **team building exercises** and challenges, the principles and practicalities of **fire lighting** and building, **foraging** and **cooking on fire**, **nature identification**, **using storm kettles** safely, **shelter building** and **knots**, **tracking and trailing** and a small amount of **whittling**. All sessions took place in a **fire circle**, which supported discussion that promoted sharing of experiences and skills, and which were a vehicle for staff to introduce the **5 Ways to Wellbeing** and other 'light touch' self-led mental health support tools and services. Staff also supported men to identify positive 'next steps' and signposted men to support services within the community.



**Bushcraft for Beginners**

- Increase confidence
- Improve health and wellbeing
- Learn to use tools and light fires
- Find out more about the world around us
- Find, cook and eat wild food
- Make things from found materials

**Where:** The Firs Forest School area, off Oak Tree Road, Hastings TN34 2AJ  
**Who:** Local men aged 18+

**Cost:** Free for all participants in receipt of benefits

**When:** Fridays 28th January - 11th March 2022 (NOT 16th Feb), 10am - 12 midday

**BOOKING ESSENTIAL - LIMITED PLACES**  
Contact the EFT office on **01424 722241**  
or [shab@educationfuturestrust.org](mailto:shab@educationfuturestrust.org)

**Mind in Brighton and Hove** | **NOT 1 Hastings** | **Education Futures Trust**

Our children. Our families. Our community.  
Registered Charity Number: 1144171 | Company Number: 7352022

#### Feedback & Quotes:

X talked about the challenges of a recent diagnosis, and how coming to the group helps him *'stay strong and keep worries in perspective.'*

*"It's easier to get together outside...you don't have to talk if you don't want...it's not weird if you are doing a task"*.

*"This is now the highlight of my week."*

*"I didn't think I'd manage that today, but I'm pleased I did"*

Y commented that coming to the group has given him time to reflect on some of the advice his parents gave him as a child, allowed *'some pieces of the puzzle to fall into place'* so that he is *'beginning to understand and appreciate' what he was offered as a child'*.

*"You don't have to talk if you don't want to, you can introduce yourself to people in your own time, you are safe here. I've only just started to admit how much I struggle in crowded spaces, but I need to. I can now tell my family if I need to leave somewhere, and have ways of managing, I now always have a 'plan b' which means that I'm doing more than I used to."*

*"It provided a good opportunity to get outside and learn several outdoor related skills, including fire making and trail making."*

*"I look forward to coming and enjoy what we do, especially fire making and communication."*

*"I like being in a group learning, being in a team and whittling, foraging, fire lighting."*

5 participants completed a pre- and post-course **scaling exercise based on the 5 Ways to Wellbeing**:

- I take part in activities that promote learning and set myself goals
- I get plenty of regular physical activity each week
- I take notice of the world around me and am good at living in the moment
- I feel connected to others and form social relationships easily
- I help other people and take part in community activities where I can.

All 5 reported either maintenance or improvement in all areas.

All 5 rated the course a 5 out of 5 for enjoyment.

#### **Key successes:**

- 4 participants are now volunteering for the organisation, variously supporting our holiday Forest School offer, the food project, the Without Walls programme and the new DIY course, steps which were promoted by the volunteer peer mentor and linked closely to the 5 Ways to Wellbeing.
- 8 participants have expressed an interest in taking part in future delivery, including the Whittling for Beginners which will be held in the same outdoor area at the Firs at end of April 2022.
- 1 participant felt confident enough to support the facilitators to staff a stall at the recent MIND wellbeing event at the Stade Hall, where he spoke to others including the mayor about his experience.



#### **Evaluation Data (8 men)**

**Ages:** average 47

#### **Contact**

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

[office@educationfuturetrust.org](mailto:office@educationfuturetrust.org)

## Fellowship of St Nicholas

### Fathers Drop in and Play

#### Overview:

FSN Fathers group held 8 **drop in and play sessions** for fathers, grandfathers, male carers and their children. The sessions were a safe and secure environment that men could gain more confidence by being with peers and supporting their children. Where some families that are living in crowded accommodation, it meant they had space for play both indoors and outdoors. The activities that were on offer gave opportunities for family members to bond and to have positive experiences. **11 families and fathers/grandfathers** were supported to access other services that benefited the whole family unit received information to support their mental health and wellbeing.



#### Family 1 Case Study

Baby born in lockdown, Dad reported that the group was a great way for him to be able to spend time out with his daughter and other children.

FSN were able to give advice on Makaton signing as the children were not meeting their speech and language development as well as general advice which encouraged the participants to talk openly about experiences/issues to help support each other.

The family have now been referred to speech and language for specialist support.

#### Family 2 Case Study

The child has additional needs and was not being able to access early years' settings due to behavioural issues that nurseries felt they were unable to support. Dad reported that he was able to access the drop in for his child to be with his peers and for him to spend time with his child.

Dad was keen to be more involved with the running of future groups in the future as he had received the support that he needed.

#### Family 3 Case Study

Dad's current accommodation is not suitable to be able to see all 4 boys at the same time. The group gives them an opportunity to spend time as a family.

Dad is now accessing the wellbeing Hub, and was able to take his children to the panto with some tickets donated by Warming up the Homeless.

#### Contact

<https://www.fsncharity.co.uk/>

[tgasson@fsncharity.co.uk](mailto:tgasson@fsncharity.co.uk)

## Seaview

### Digital Inclusion Project

#### Overview:

Seaview delivered a **men's digital inclusion project**. The project was aimed at helping men access mental health crisis support and continuing to stay healthy by using the 5 ways to wellbeing, online resources and apps. They created a group called '**The Digital Men's Mental Health Group**' which was targeted at men who had limited digital knowledge and were excluded from benefitting from the wealth of resources available online. They equipped **8 men** with Amazon Fire Tablets and provided them with intensive support on how to use them in order to maximize the benefits that can be gained. They have since continued to run groups periodically using the tablets purchased from the funding.

#### Key Successes

The groups have been centred on the five ways to wellbeing and this has had a very enriching effect on the men's relationship with each other. They are very encouraging and helpful and have flourished in a safe space.

They all started out with a similar standard of digital skills and there has been no judgement on their individual progress from one another. They are all proud of their personal achievements and the achievements of the group. A previously digitally excluded group are now digitally included and equipped with their own devices. Each device is loaded with Apps that meet their needs and promote wellbeing.

They are able to access mental health support and have learnt about how technology can help them maintain an ongoing mentally healthy lifestyle.

Two of the men have become digital champions for the group and are continuing to help assist the newcomers.

Several of the men continued on to the wellbeing group that is facilitated every week at Seaview.



#### Contact

<https://www.seaviewproject.co.uk/>

D.Perry@seaviewproject.org.uk

## Men's Network

### **Overview:**

In 2021, The Men's Network established good foundations by building a network of **101 men** who attend **18 events** organised, including **walks, online groups, film showings, fitness for fella's session**, introduction to **photography** classes and **food preserving**. Their Network included **76 followers** on Facebook and **51 subscribers** to events and newsletters. The network reached a wide variety of men from those with mental health issues-schizophrenia, bipolar to alcoholism and unemployed to new fathers, recently retired and those in work looking to create new connections. Events were carried out in all parts of Hastings including: Hollington, Ore, Central St Leonards to name a few. They also connected men to the other funded projects by promoting them amongst the Network and have built strong connections with the Arts on Prescription project.

In 2022, The Men's Network have continued to grow their Network during their second year of funding with a Network of **170 Facebook followers** and over **100 newsletter subscribers**, they have also developed a website. They had **150 people** attend their **23 events** held between August – December 2022. The events have included regular walks in various locations around Hastings and online group meetings with focus on particular themes including relationships, parenting and work. Other events have included sea swimming, bike rides, yoga, Qi-Gong, Pilates, Pot Luck Community Meals, chutney making and community gardening. The best attended events included apple pressing, oyster mushroom workshop, outdoor film viewing and the men's fire circle and BBQ. The project allows men to connect with other men in the area to discuss topics of healthy masculinity, connect with nature, learn new skills and undertake different activities and exercise to improve their mental health.

### **Photos:**



### **Key Successes:**

- 2 participants are now actively leading walks
- 2 participants became involved with volunteering at the park after our first events and have since done a lot of great practical work there improving their confidence and social skills with others.
- 1 participant started cycling again for the first time in 15 years which he has really enjoyed.
- 1 participant became a co-facilitator of the online group and developed his facilitation skills.
- The Men's Network have secured funding to continue the project for another 12 months.

### **Evaluation Data (11 completed forms)**

**Ages:** 37 – 71 (the majority in their 40s)

**Location:** Hollington, Gensing, Conquest, Castle, West St Leonards, St Helens

**Employed:** 6 employed, 2 self-employed, 2 unemployed, 1 retired

**Parent:** 6 Non-parent, 5 Parent

**Relationship status:** 5 single and 6 married/ in a relationship

### **Contact**

<https://www.hastingsmensnetwork.org/>  
chris@chrisrichards.me

## **Project Rewild** **Take Action Man**

### **Overview:**

**Project Rewild** delivered a their 'Take Action Man' project that got 25 local men outside and enjoying the benefits of time outside in nature and its effects on their mental health and wellbeing. They had **25 men** take part over the **3 activity days**, they learnt new skills including **Fishing, Bushcraft, woodcraft, conservation, foraging, hiking and navigation**. They supported men to talk openly about their mental health in safe and secure environment and created spaces for local men to spend time together and create new relationships and support networks. The project has since received funding from Making it Happen and continued to grow. Additionally, an individual from the group was supported by the community development fund to create a sea swimming group as part of the Take Action Man Programme.

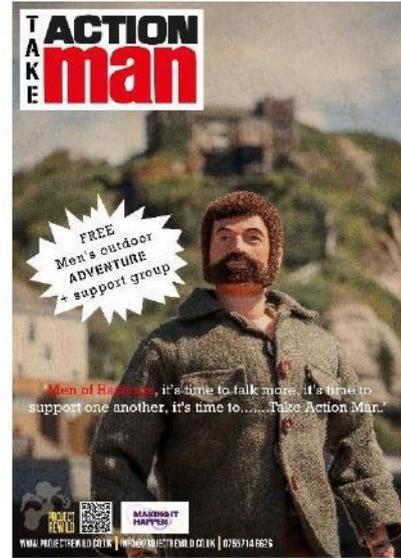
### **Feedback:**

*"I've recently been signed off from work with stress so I thought it was a great opportunity to do something different and meet men who were likely to have similar experiences to me. The activity was really good for using a different part of my brain and having a bit of headspace and it allowed me to engage one-to-one with a few people where we talked about why we were there and some of the challenges we had been facing which was really great. At the end of the day I was exhausted physically but was really energised by doing something new and meeting such a nice bunch of people. The activity really provided an environment where mental health did not feel front and centre, yet this allowed for conversations to happen and no pressure environment to open up about experiences."* – **Sea Fishing Day personal testimony**

*"The actual walk was GREAT and unusually for me I found it easy to chat with different people on the walk. No beer, football or other rubbish came into the conversations! Everyone seemed approachable and open. I can't fault the organisation of the event, route, destination, games played or the timescale (not too short or long). Afterwards I was on cloud nine, on a real high. I can't express strongly enough what atonic and ray of sunshine it was. Soaked to the skin but with a huge internal grin and a song in my heart. I'll take from the day that I can have fun still and meeting up with other men of differing backgrounds is not something to be feared but is actually a really good thing"* – **Hastings Expedition Day Personal Testimony**

*"I normally work in an office environment in a male dominated industry and have been surrounded by men my working life. During lockdown I began working from home and have become socially isolated. Although I still speak to most of my team on the phone or via videocalls, it isn't the same as being in the same space as them. I hadn't realised how much I would miss the social contact, I think there is something special about a group of people (men especially) working towards a common goal. The day I was on managed to recreate that feeling. It was nice to see a complete group of strangers get together, try something new and all pitch in to help each other out."* – **Bushcraft and Survival Day Personal Testimony**





**Contact:**

For website inc. full report and trailer: <https://www.projectrewild.co.uk/takeactionman>

[Info@projectrewild.co.uk](mailto:Info@projectrewild.co.uk)

## The Sanctuary

### Surf n Turf

#### **Overview:**

The 'Surf and Turf' initiative aimed to establish three men's groups—two on land and one on water—focusing on creating a safe environment that encouraged curiosity and enjoyment. Participants, primarily local residents in economically deprived areas of Hastings, engaged in activities such as gardening, football, and fishing. The gardening group quickly became a standout success, allowing men to witness the transformative results of their collective efforts. The project's success was propelled by word-of-mouth, fostering a sense of community and prompting new referrals. The inclusion of a buddying system for football activities further contributed to the participants' confidence-building and mutual encouragement. Overall, 'Surf and Turf' effectively met its goals, blending recreational pursuits with informal support discussions and creating a positive impact on the lives of men in Hastings.

#### **Feedback:**

*“The gardening club is brilliant, it’s brought me out of my shell and I’ve met some lovely people who I can now call my friends”*

*“I love football but never felt confident enough to go alone, it has been great to have someone with me and enjoy what I like too. I feel a lot better in myself now”*

*“It’s been fantastic being out in the fresh air, learning all about fishing and seeing how rewarding it is when you catch a fish no matter how big or small”*

*“Sometimes I stay in bed all day when I am feeling low, this has given me the motivation I needed”*

*“Some days I haven’t felt like going in, but once there I have enjoyed it so much and people always check up on me if I’m running late which is so thoughtful”*

*“I can honestly say the groups (I attended two different ones) have saved my life”*

#### **Contact**

<https://www.turning-point.co.uk/find-a-local-service>

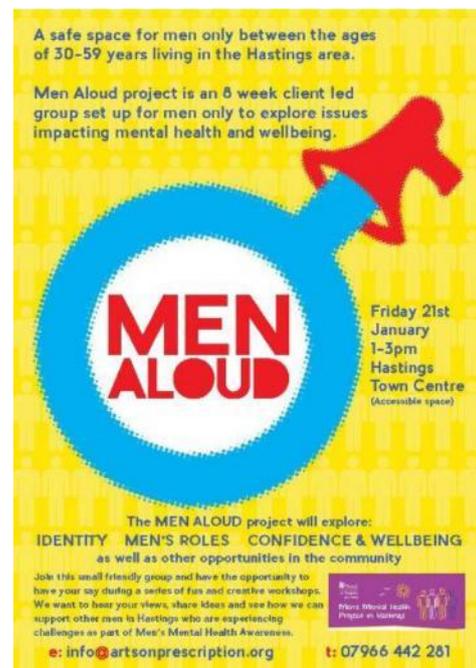
[mel.tapp@turning-point.co.uk](mailto:mel.tapp@turning-point.co.uk)

## Arts on Prescription

### Men Aloud 1 & 2

**Art on Prescription** delivered an 8-week client-led group called 'Men Aloud' where men were able to explore issues impacting their mental health and wellbeing through **creative workshops**. They engaged with **16 different local men** from various postcodes in Hastings including St-Leonards, Hastings and Ore. They had a group of 8 men who regularly attended all sessions, this size group worked well as men were able to build trust and open up with each other addressing sensitive issues and support one another.

They used a variety of creative activities as a conduit for opening up difficult conversation, this included **writing, drawing, painting** and **photography**. Each participant created a journal documenting their personal journey through the workshops. They explored identity, issues they find challenging, men's role, how to build confidence and enhance wellbeing and other opportunities in the community. The group's work was compiled into a **magazine** to celebrate their achievements and to inspire and support other men in the community. Participants have forged new bonds with members of the group and have also been linked to the Men's Network where they are finding new opportunities to link with men in their communities.



**Case Study:** A local man was referred into the MiBH Breathing Space Project which supports Orbit residents in Hastings with their wellbeing and mental health. The Breathing Space project supported him to attend the Men Aloud project, which supports men to have discussions and connect with one another through creativity. Through the group he explored his passion for photography and photographed the men of the group, following this the breathing space project supported him to apply for funding through the Making it Happen Project to create and exhibit the photographs. The funding was approved and he showcased his work at the Men's Wellbeing Festival. *"Overall the projects and various services have helped me overcome my social anxiety, and I have grown in confidence. I have stuff to do and places to go, and this takes the focus away from my personal issues and I am re-connecting with society."*

#### **Feedback:**

*"The Men Aloud project has helped me connect with other men in the group, and they showed an interest in my photography which inspired me to pick up my camera again and take some pictures of the men in the group"*

*"I can honestly say art on prescription has brought me inner peace and calm. I can also go as far to say that it is highly likely it has saved my life."*

*"I'm find this time very difficult as I'm worried about my future and the effects my poor health is having on my family. Art has been my way of switching off to the world and it's many stresses".*

*"Learning new skills and mixing with strangers."*

*"I have improved my self-esteem. I have gained a non-judgemental acceptance by others. I have felt less lonely and isolated. I have managed to divert my attention, from my addictive nature."*

*"It really helps me get started on my own work. The encouragement the tutors give helps me improve my lethargy level."*

*'It has helped with loneliness.'*



### **Men Aloud 2 overview:**

Arts on Prescription were funded for a second Men Aloud **8-week Programme**. The project engaged **15 men** who were experiencing issues impacting on their mental health. The project used art as a conduit for opening up difficult conversations that would not necessarily be raised in a more formal environment. Arts on Prescription provided a safe and confidential space and support the men the build resilience and friendships. In the sessions they explored various themes including identity, challenges, men's roles/ masculinity, confidence, wellbeing and opportunities in the community. As a group they discussed the themes and how they impacted their wellbeing, they explored how they could improve their wellbeing and positive behaviour change was encouraged through peer support and signposting to other services. Over the series of workshops that included clay work, creative writing, drawing, painting and photography the participants created a journal documenting their personal journey through the workshops. A collection of the participants best work was compiled into a Zine which has been circulated around the town and online.

### **Feedback:**

*"I've really enjoyed being part of the group and the different artistic techniques I have learned. It's really helped me."*

*"I felt that I had really lost my 'mojo', but meeting up each week and being creative has been amazing for my mental health."*

*"I had struggled for a long time with social situations, but being part of this group has had a very positive effect on my confidence."*

*"It's been great meeting up with these lads each week. Talking and making art has made a huge difference to my mental wellbeing."*

*"This group has had a very positive effect both on me, my mental health and my outlook on life in general."*

*“The support and friendship I’ve experienced being part of this group has helped me more than I could have imagined. And I never realised I could actually make art that looks good!”*



### **Key Successes**

- Arts on prescription are supporting some of the men in the group to apply for our smaller grants.
- The group members have continued to meet beyond the end of the programme.

### **Evaluation Data:**

All men were between the ages of 30-59 years living in deprived wards including Baird, Tressell, Castle, Central St Leonards. The majority of the attendees were unemployed.

### **Contact**

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

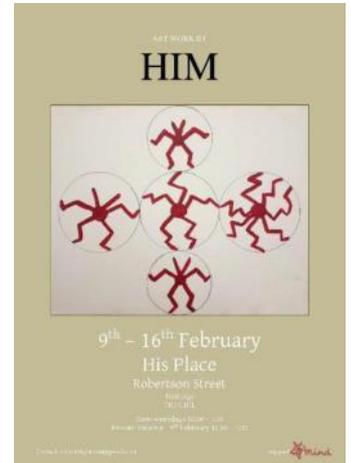
[tara.reddy@artsonprescription.org](mailto:tara.reddy@artsonprescription.org)

## Creativity on Sea

### Beauty from Destruction

#### Overview:

The project saw **12 men** take part, with 8 men attending regularly over the **12-week programme**. The sessions were based around the concept of beauty from destruction which was explored in the first session. The men selective themes to work with each week and explored the through self-portraits, acrylic painting, water colour, clay modelling, sculpture making, fabric painting and mixed media. The men also worked collaboratively to build a large installation piece which encompassed the beauty from destruction theme. Between the sessions the men were encouraged to keep a creative journal to develop their thoughts and ideas from the sessions. The goals were for the men to learn new skills, express themselves and connect with others. At the end of the project, they were all invited to choose pieces of their work to include in an exhibition that they chose to call HIM.



#### Feedback:

*"I had barely left the house for years before starting to come to these sessions and had not been able, or wanted, to do any art at all. From the very first session I had ideas for a new body of art for the first time in years. I haven't stopped and am developing my work. I am an artist again."*

*"It gives me somewhere to come. It makes me feel human. Thank you. You keep all my art, it's for you. It's a gift for you."*

*"I'm so happy I saw it on Facebook. Look where I am now! I'm so excited."*

*"I can't believe the difference in how I feel and in my life. It's only been three months. It's*



#### Key Successes:

*incredible isn't it."*

- They have received a grant from the Benefact Trust to develop Creative Therapy at His Place Hastings
- One of the men is now a co-director as they launch 'Creativity on Sea Community Arts' and is training as a creative therapist.
- One of the men is now completing a course to develop his skills in helping group facilitation.

- Six of the men joined in with other art projects run by Creativity on Sea during the project and continue to attend regularly.
- The men are continuing to collaborate as 'HIM' and are planning more exhibitions and installations together.

As part of the project all the men assessed their wellbeing at the start and end of the 12-week programme, this included scoring their feelings of anxiety and depression out of 5. All scores increased throughout the duration of the course.

**Evaluation Data:**

They were all aged between 36 and 59. 11 of the men live in Hastings, in Castle, Tressell and Baird. One lives in St Leonards. Two of the men who took part are homeless and live on the streets in Hastings. One of the men has children but does not live with them. All the men have lived experience of mental health challenges, two have a chronic diagnosis requiring lifetime medication. Five of them are in recovery from

**Contact**

<https://www.facebook.com/CreativityonSea>

[milnesarah@me.com](mailto:milnesarah@me.com)

## Hastings Kickboxing Association

### **Men's Wellbeing Kickboxing group**

#### **Overview:**

Hastings kickboxing Association ran a **12-week programme** for men only to work towards grading for their first belt with focus on building confidence, fitness and building strong support networks for wellbeing. There were **20 local men** that participated and joined the WhatsApp group to encourage the formation of a support network and to build new friendships. Many of the men who attended had not even stepped foot inside a gym before and were all able to complete their red belt grading. The men gained confidence over the programme and formed an encouraging community network with many individuals meeting up outside the sessions.

#### **Hastings Kickboxing Association – Men's Wellbeing Sessions**

*"To be sincere, huge thanks to X and the whole crew... the difference the last 12 weeks have made to my wellbeing has been incredible, and the knock-on effect of taking on something so rewarding and so far out my comfort zone has given me the confidence to try a few other things in life that have been proper helpful"*

*"Before I started I was a right mess. Wrangling about with a PTSD and anxiety diagnosis, waking up all through the night in a panic attack, crippling low self-esteem and self-loathing. The course we all did has profoundly helped with that. I'm happier with myself and enjoying life more, and it's snowballing!"*

*"It's a long journey, and I know 12 weeks of kickboxing doesn't magically cure it all! But wow... it's helped tremendously, and set me on the path to do much better."*

*"If I could have taken before and after photos of my brain, you'd see it's right beefed up!"*

*"Before and After, once again thanks, still long way to go, but this journey is only just beginning."*

*"First of all, big up X and X and the team for running the last 12 weeks it's been a massive help getting me through life personally I feel a 1000 times fitter and stronger than I ever have. Second well done everyone for grading tonight you all smashed it and should be proud of yourselves for what you've achieved these last 3 months it's been a pleasure training with you all.!"*

*"I really needed tonight session, thanks X, for another great session"*

*"And another shout out to X for another great class. Great work!"*

*"Today feels like it's going to be a good day woken up to a email saying I've passed my enhanced dbs and that I can now take my tele at to become a taxi driver"*

*"For the 1st time in a long time, went to bed at 12:30am and woke up without alarms at 6am ready for work and out of the door at 6.45. Felt so alive."*

*"Well done tonight lads another wicked session also well-done X for taking the class tonight loved it"*

*"Wicked class tonight learnt a lot pushed myself further then I have for a long time see you Tuesday"*

*"Great class... definitely feeling the positive improvement on my brain... and even on the ol' podgy body! Even cycled all the way up the hill home without my lungs exploding last night!"*

*“Great one last night. Really enjoyed it. Left feeling much better than when I arrived - had been a bit of a day!”*

*“Thanks X and X... I so appreciated all the help. Turns out I’m really falling for this kickboxing thing!”*

**Evaluation Data Winter Walk and Talk Participants (15 completed forms)**

**Ages:** 31 – 50 (majority in 40s)

**Location:** West St Leonards, Conquest, Tressell, Gensing, Ore, Hollington

**Employed:** 14 employed 1 unemployed

**Parent:** 13 parent, 1 non-parent, 1 carer

**Relationship status:** 12 married/ in a relationship, 3 single

**Key Successes:**

- All the men achieved their red belt (first kickboxing belt).
- Hastings Kickboxing Association have added a Men’s Only Wellbeing Class to their regular timetable.



Hastings Kickboxing Association have been funded to re-run this programme and recruit a new group of men.

**Contact**

<https://www.hastingskickboxing.co.uk/>  
[hastingskickboxingsales@gmail.com](mailto:hastingskickboxingsales@gmail.com)

## Craig's Cabin

### Men's Night Walk

#### Overview:

Craig's Cabin found that men often felt most in need and alone in the evenings and weekends. As such, they set up a weekly night wellbeing walk for men in Alexandra Park on Sunday evenings. The project provided a peer support service where men can talk about their worries and share their experiences. Attendance varied from **2 to 5 men** attending each week, making the experience much more intimate and open. They advertised the walk as a safe environment that is judgement free which enabled men to open up with several men attending the walks as and when they needed for their emotional wellbeing.

#### Feedback:

"Thank you I feel so much weight lifted both physical and emotional"

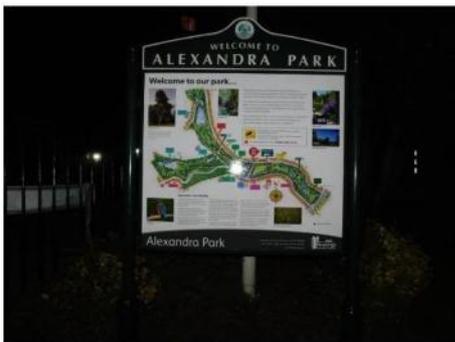
"It's nice to just talk about things with other guys that just get it"

"I joined to be a positive presence in the park at night but found I got so much more out of it"

"it's different doing something like this at night but worth it"

#### Key Successes:

- One attendee has now become one of Craig's Community Volunteers and has involved litter picking and building / tidying up community spaces.



#### Contact

<https://www.craigscabin.org.uk/>  
[contactus@craigscabin.org.uk](mailto:contactus@craigscabin.org.uk)

## Active Hastings & Believe in You

### Men: Mind & Muscles

#### Overview:

The project offered a free **8-week programme** to Men in the Hastings area, combining early intervention Mental Health education and support alongside fitness sessions. Each week had a different focus in terms of Mental Health, covering topics such as Anxiety, Depression and Low Mood, Self-Worth, Anger, Recovering from Trauma and Relaxation and Meditation. Men were encouraged to share their own experiences in a safe space and provided men with both coping tools and information to access further support. The fitness aspect of the course encouraged feelings of confidence, strength and self-worth. Each course had a maximum of 12 spaces, and both were fully booked with a waiting list of over 50 people. To ease the waiting list, they ran an additional daytime course for a further 10 people, enabling them to offer **34 spaces** in total.

The course is still continuing to run programmes through further funding from Active Hastings. **Feedback:**

*"This course has provided me with some tools and coping strategies that I will try to use from now on. Physical activity is an important factor in boosting my mood and self-esteem."*

*"I had the opportunity to meet fantastic people who also struggle with different difficult situations in life or mental health problems. We were able to share some personal stories and support each other."*

*"The talking elements normalised a lot of things and increased awareness of my own feelings. The exercise elements were fun and challenging, and I left on a high."*

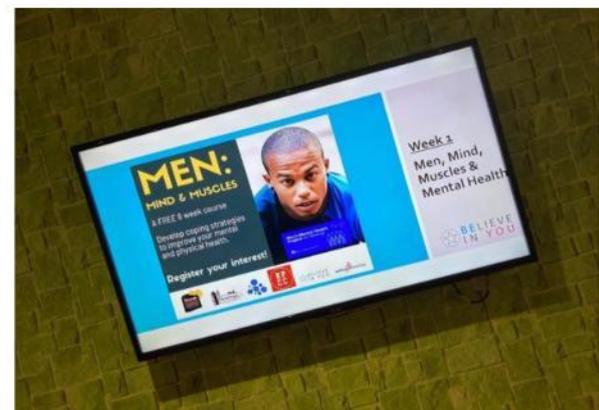
*"I really enjoyed the course and found it very helpful. I've used a number of the techniques we discussed and found them helpful."*

*"Nat and Rich were very friendly, approachable, knowledgeable and professional. A big thank you! I'm very happy and grateful for being able to participate."*

*"I feel more positive and grounded"*

*"My outlook on life is more positive"*

*"I feel more able to cope and share my feelings rather than bury my head'."*



### **Key Successes:**

- One of the most successful elements of the project was the session offered in Week 6, focused on trauma and recovery. The fitness provider, Rich, who co-ran sessions shared his own very personal story and experience of the loss of his son. Rich discussed his own struggles that he had including managing his emotions, negative relationship with alcohol, issues with debt and managing his grief. The impact of this session was very powerful and provided a key message of hope and recovery, inspiring the men who attended.
- Another key success included the improvement the men reported when having conversations about their mental health. The men opened up to their partners, friend and family about how they are feeling. Giving them the confidence to be vulnerable and ask for help, and knowing it's ok to not always be ok.

One man who suffered with such bad social anxiety he disclosed that he had sat in the car park outside the venue on week 1 for an hour before the session building up the courage to attend. He did, and attended nearly every one of the sessions beyond

### **Evaluation Data:**

Participants ranged from ages 30-69. They had a variety of backgrounds, from a Police Officer who was signed off work with stress a Builder who had suffered with his Mental Health for years, a Physiotherapist who suspected he was Bipolar, an Electrician with really low self-confidence, another Builder who was struggling after the breakdown of his relationship.

### **Contact Information:**

#### **Website:**

[https://www.hastings.gov.uk/sport\\_play/getactive/activehastings\\_listings/menmindmuscles-2a/](https://www.hastings.gov.uk/sport_play/getactive/activehastings_listings/menmindmuscles-2a/)

<https://www.believeinyouteens.co.uk/bhfc-partnership>

#### **Email:**

[believeinyouteens@gmail.com](mailto:believeinyouteens@gmail.com)

[activehastings@hastings.gov.uk](mailto:activehastings@hastings.gov.uk)

## Paramount Housing

### Games Table

#### Overview:

Paramount Housing deliver temporary accommodation for medium need/risk clients in a mixed gender scheme (although predominantly males). They found that a high number of male clients were spending late evenings in town drinking alcohol and using drugs which negatively impacted both their physical and mental health. Following discussions with the men they stated that they had “nothing else to do”. As such, Paramount housing utilised the community development fund to provide a games table in the shared area to promote better choices, encourage men to stay indoors more often and building an internal community away from the streets. The games table created a safe space within the building where individuals could socialise and openly talk about how they are feeling while playing games.

#### Staff feedback

*“It is a great way for the clients to socialise. The clients can have a friendly competitive game in a location where they feel safe from other influences.”*

#### Client feedback

*“The pool table is great; we play every day. It helps as a distraction when I am feeling down”.*

*“The table helps bring clients together when we have nothing else to do in our spare time, rather than spending it in our rooms on our own”.*



#### Key Successes:

- Male clients staying away from the town centre of an evening and therefore making safer choices.
- Building relationships with other residents which has promoted wellbeing.
- Not going out and spending money of an evening, improving their financial wellbeing.
- Reduction in substance misuse

#### Evaluation Data:

All residents within the scheme (both male and female) have been using the games table during the day and evening. Clients are all vulnerable of low-medium need/risk and aged between 25 and 65 years and have been placed here by Hastings Borough Council due to homelessness.

## East Sussex Recovery Alliance

### Mindful Bakers

#### Overview:

The Mindful Bakers courses run for 6 weeks. A number of ESRA clients expressed that they would really like to do some sort of baking but don't always feel confident doing this alongside women. Together with their Recovery hub Chef, they followed a 'bake off' style programme including breads from around the world, Halloween bakes and sausage rolls!

Interacting with other people and taking time to get to know others in an informal practical safe session was really good for socialisation, breaking barriers around stigma and helped with isolation. Also, committing to something on a weekly basis ensured men came into the hub, having a structure in early recovery.

#### Feedback:

"By attending Mindful Bakers every week, it gave me the confidence and strength and something to look forward to every week and a new social group that I could related to"

"The Mindful bakers gave more confidence and self-belief and made me realise that there is more to life than alcohol!"

"With ESRA's invaluable support and suggested tools to aid and sustain my recovery. The activities e.g. mindfulness, baking, creative writing together with weekly the support groups have all proved to be an integral part of sustaining my sobriety."



#### Contact Information:

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

[info@esrauk.org](mailto:info@esrauk.org)

## Greener Futures

### Men's Gardening Group

#### Overview:

Greener Futures is a volunteer-led initiative in Hastings that utilises gardening and horticulture sessions to support the wellbeing of individuals from underrepresented groups, including those facing mental health issues, homelessness, substance misuse, physical disabilities, and learning difficulties. The project promotes the 5 ways to wellbeing by fostering connections, encouraging outdoor activities, facilitating skill development, promoting giving back to the community, and emphasising appreciation for nature. The green space volunteering not only engages isolated individuals but also enhances community connections and provides a pathway to employment. Activities involve planting beds, shrubs, and trees, along with general park maintenance and learning gardening and food growing skills. Initially centred on green-based activities, the project has evolved into a health and well-being initiative, offering a natural progression for participants seeking to reengage with employment. The predominantly unemployed male participants, aged 20-60, often living alone or in supported accommodation, share a history of mental health struggles, substance misuse, and learning needs.

#### Key Successes:

The introduction of a WhatsApp group has allowed for a supportive community of peers. The group has strengthened over time, navigating challenges such as recent bereavement, re-entering employment, and accessing new support systems.

“To be honest mate since dad died the conservation area has helped a lot”

“Nature is good for the mind and to be able to get the stress out bit by bit”

“We all need a small project in nature to keep busy and have a system reboot to get some stress out of us”

“Love this group, look forward to each session, some weeks are hard to get motivated, but once I'm there, everything is fine, and leave recharged. Magical place and people.”



#### Contact

<https://www.facebook.com/CHART.GreenerFutures/>

[greenerfutures@groundwork.org.uk](mailto:greenerfutures@groundwork.org.uk)

## Wave Arts

### Chess n Chat

#### **Overview:**

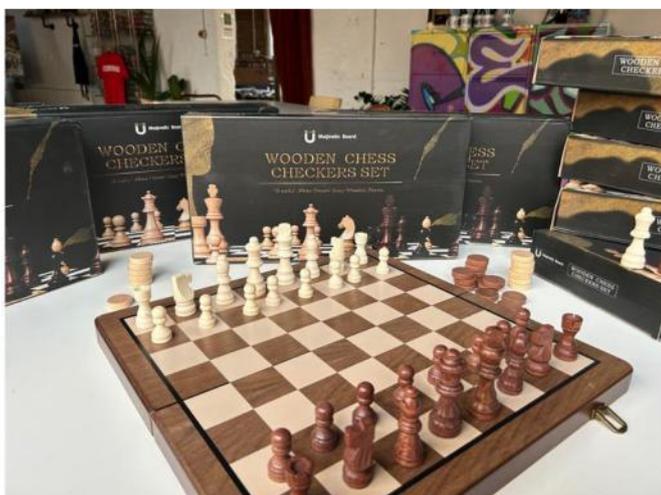
The Chess 'n Chat group has successfully cultivated a safe and welcoming environment where men gather to engage in friendly conversations while enjoying a game of chess. This unique combination offers a platform for peer support and connection, allowing participants to share experiences and build meaningful connections. The group has experienced growth, reflecting the positive impact it has had on the participants. In recognition of this success, they have exciting plans to expand their sessions and enhance the experience by inviting guest speakers. These initiatives aim to further enrich the group dynamic, providing valuable insights and fostering an even stronger sense of community among its members.



#### **Feedback:**

“This is a great initiative, I’ve always wanted to join a chess group but felt the other groups were more for professionals, this has a more intimate approach where you can make friends with no judgment of how good of a chess player you are”

“It’s nice to just have a social club just for men – with no expectations of being an intermediate player”



#### **Contact:**

<https://www.facebook.com/WaveArtsBexhill/>

[waveartsbexhill@gmail.com](mailto:waveartsbexhill@gmail.com)

## Dark Circles Record Shop

### Beat Connections

#### Overview:

Beats Connections offers a connection through music, to men, aged between 30 -59, over 6 consecutive weekly sessions. The sessions were held at Dark Circles Record shop along Hastings Seafront. The aim of the initiative was to assist men from Hastings and St. Leonards area who are experiencing issues with confidence, low self-esteem, mental health struggles, stress and anxiety by offering a platform to connect in a safe space with like-minded music fans, and learn a new skill – to DJ - that can be taken on after the project's conclusion.



#### Key Successes:

- Those who attended have built new friendships and socialised outside of the group.
- They utilised a WhatsApp group allowing everyone to communicate between sessions and all attendees participated in sharing music beyond the sessions.
- 2 attendees have started to DJ as a result of these sessions and intend to play at an event in 2024 alongside the DJ who ran the sessions.



#### Contact:

[darkcircles.stl@gmail.com](mailto:darkcircles.stl@gmail.com)

## **Key Challenges reported by projects**

### **Attendance & Engagement**

Attendance to the groups occasionally suffered due to a number of challenges faced by the men involved. The struggle with poor mental health and low motivation was a prevalent factor, as these individuals contended with internal battles that often left them not attending or lacking the energy to engage meaningfully. Additionally, initial anxieties and worries about attending these groups created a barrier for attendance and a hesitancy to participate in an environment that required vulnerability and openness. Some men also led chaotic lifestyles stemming from homelessness or addiction problems, making it challenging to routinely attend the wellbeing groups every week. Many of the groups recognised and addressed these complex interplays to foster a more supportive and understanding atmosphere within the group setting, ensuring that those in need could access the help they required in a manner conducive to their unique circumstances. A successful initiative employed by some organisations was the implementation of a buddy system, which involved meeting with men on a one-on-one basis prior to their first session, aiming to effectively alleviate anxieties and nervousness about attending.

Poor weather conditions impacted attendance for outdoor projects, however in many cases it fostered a stronger sense of camaraderie among those who did attend. Overcoming challenges posed by the weather and seasonal conditions, projects adapted to include elements such as maintaining a fire or erecting shelters. Surprisingly, the adversity encountered contributed to an increased sense of achievement among participants.

Attendance from working men was a notable concern for organisations conducting sessions during working hours; however, those offering sessions on weekends or evenings found greater participation from working men, addressing the scheduling challenge and broadening the inclusivity of the initiatives.

### **Lack of Suicide Prevention training**

Another significant challenge arose as group facilitators faced limitations in addressing suicidal thoughts during sessions related to mental health. The complexity of the issue became evident when one group encountered a distressed client contemplating suicide. While the organisations had safeguard procedures and general mental health training in place to handle such situations efficiently, it became apparent that specific suicide prevention training would be invaluable. The facilitators agreed that enhanced training would not only increase their confidence in supporting individuals dealing with suicidal thoughts but also enable them to better engage in honest and open conversations about this critical aspect of mental health.

### **Promotion**

Some projects faced challenges in effectively promoting their sessions to reach their target group of men. These hurdles included limitations in branding effectiveness, time constraints for promotional activities, and a relatively small number of network connections. However, several groups managed to overcome these obstacles by strategically leveraging links with GPs, their network of social prescribers, and collaborations with other organisations. In addition, these successful initiatives invested in strong branding that specifically appealed to men, enhancing their outreach and engagement efforts within the target demographic.

## Summary of challenges and useful recommendations

Challenge	What worked well
Poor mental health and low motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WhatsApp group / online group for peer support</li> <li>• Follow up and check in with individuals</li> <li>• Setting personal goals to achieve</li> <li>• Positive reflections on personal growth</li> <li>• Informal and low-pressure sessions</li> </ul>
Attendance Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offering a buddy service and meet with men 1:1 prior to the session</li> <li>• Speaking to men on the telephone prior to session</li> <li>• Clear session information of times and locations</li> <li>• Share common FAQs with answers on Website / group page</li> <li>• Share activity feedback and photos to manage expectations</li> <li>• Invite potential attendees to join community online group / WhatsApp group to establish connections prior to attending</li> </ul>
Chaotic Lifestyle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular sessions to encourage routine</li> <li>• Additional drop-in sessions to allow for flexibility</li> <li>• Accessible locations</li> <li>• Peer-support initiatives</li> <li>• Regular follow-ups and feedback to improve service</li> </ul>
Poor weather	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid cancellation (where possible) and encourage attendance and promote camaraderie and achievement</li> <li>• Encourage team working to achieve a goal</li> </ul>
Attracting working men	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessible session times (evenings and weekends)</li> <li>• Work with employers to advertise to male dominated workforces</li> </ul>
Suicide Prevention Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure a facilitator is confident in suicide prevention and having discussion about suicide</li> <li>• Attend a Suicide Prevention Training course</li> </ul>
Promotion & reaching target group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong branding that attracts target audience</li> <li>• Marketing strategy that utilises strong community network</li> <li>• Use of informal language in promotion that is not centred around mental health</li> <li>• Utilising videos and photos to promote sessions that show men what to expect</li> <li>• Utilising feedback from men that promotes a narrative of supporting wellbeing, building friendships and trying something new.</li> <li>• Working with GPs to refer men seeking support for their mental health</li> </ul>

## **Appendix 1**

### **Men's Mental Health Project in Hastings Community Development Fund 2021-3**

(pages 1-36)

#### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Community Development Fund has proven instrumental in creating a multitude of opportunities for local men to enhance their wellbeing, overcome isolation, build communities and learn new skills. The reported successes from various projects highlight the profound positive impact on the mental health of many individuals. Additionally, the fund has facilitated the establishment of a network of community projects, that has encouraged collaboration and information-sharing among the various initiatives. Despite initially relying on a limited funding pool, many of these projects have evolved into sustainable endeavours that will continue their growth even beyond the project's conclusion.

Looking forward, the projects have received guidance on securing future funding and support, addressing a common concern among groups that often find themselves dependent on grant cycles. Emphasising the importance of sustainability, education on grant application processes, and investments in community initiatives can significantly amplify the positive impacts these groups bring. By equipping them with the knowledge and resources for long-term success and sustainability, we can ensure that these projects continue to be powerful catalysts for positive change, fostering wellbeing, connection, and personal development within our community.

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