



Mr Hastings & St Leonards was funded in 2022 for three years by East Sussex County Council Public Health. It has been hosted by Hastings Voluntary Action (HVA) and led throughout by local men.

Its approach is based on the belief that men in Hastings and St Leonards will live happier, healthier, and longer lives if they are at the heart of decision making and live in strong, supportive, and well-connected communities, where they can fulfil their potential.

The HVA team have implemented an authentic **Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)** approach throughout. You can read full, and summary, reports of Mr Hastings & St Leonards journey so far on the HVA website. In this short report you will find some of the key learning points we would like to share.

Mens Health and Wellbeing in Hastings and St Leonards.

We learned:

Men and masculinity: Men tell us that traditional views of men, and what it means to be a man, still prevail both consciously and unconsciously (the notion that men need to be strong, in charge, the provider and protector).

This impacts on their engagement in conversations about their health and wellbeing. It can be a barrier to asking for help or giving away control to someone else to 'sort things out'.

Men often feel they should be the ones to 'fix things' for others. Men can feel dispensable in a world where gender roles have changed. With social media surrounding us all, the impact of this is a particular issue for young men looking for role models in their day-to-day life.

Community connections, social life, and relationships: Men need, and want, diverse opportunities, not just those traditionally considered 'men friendly'.

Men, mental health, and wellbeing:

Men say that mental health is the biggest taboo, and that alternative language needs to be found to promote services, support, and encourage men to engage.

Many men have become more isolated since the pandemic with relationship breakdown, loss of employment and/or secure housing and community connections impacting on their mental health. Drug and alcohol use is often a coping mechanism to deal with wider issues that are impacting on men's lives.

Building on community strengths and what works for local men:

Men are best placed to know what approaches are needed to reach other local men. Mechanisms are needed that enable men's voices to be heard and to encourage service providers to see the benefits of what local men say.

Men respond positively to the project's strength-based, Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach.

They want to share their experiences and collaborate on things that matter to them.

Men and seeking help: Statements like 'men don't seek help' and 'men don't talk' are simplifying a complex issue and need exploration.

Given the right environment (space, time, and respect) men do talk. Men tell us that when they ask for help, they feel like they have been beaten by the issue. It takes a long time for a man to admit some help/support might be needed.

When help is sought the response needs to be positive and timely. Men sometimes feel they are not heard and so give up.

Local environmental, arts based and therapeutic activities, in non-clinical settings, are popular and beneficial.

Service delivery and collaboration

across the system: Local men, service providers and decision makers all see the need for a more joined up and collaborative approach to improving men's health and wellbeing and increasing access to preventative services and community activity. The key is information sharing across the system.

"Everyone involved in Mr Hastings & St Leonards has been brave, often stepping outside of their comfort zone in their personal or professional lives. This isn't easy and should never be taken for granted or forgotten."

There isn't a 'one size fits all' response to addressing mens health and wellbeing and there is no single action, or organisation, that can solve this complex issue on its own. It is essential that **mens views, experiences and aspirations are central** to decision making and actions, that they are leading the way.

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) in Practice.

Mr Hastings & St Leonards has reinforced the importance of prioritising:

- Building strong, respectful and trusting relationships with all stakeholders.
- Collaboration rather than competition, and modelling this in all we do.
- Acknowledging this takes time and requires a consistent, flexible, visible and accessible approach.
- Listening and learning alongside men with lived experience and ensuring all developments are owned and led by local men. Following the energy and passion.

"In a nutshell, the most significant change I have experienced personally as a commissioner has been to 'step back, be brave and trust the process!'"

- Promoting an inclusive call to action, 'Join the Conversation', encouraging men, their friends, families, communities and representatives for the systems that surround them to all join in.
- Sharing learning at every opportunity.
- Developing creative and engaging methods of monitoring and evaluation that are accessible to all.

Authentic Asset Based Community Development is underpinned by trust, transparency and respect.

Conditions we needed to enable this to be achieved.

Our authentic Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach was made possible by:

- A host agency (Hastings Voluntary Action) Commissioner (East Sussex County Council) and Evaluators (Apteligen) committed to the ABCD approach.
- The strong working relationships built on trust and located within a learning environment.
- Flexibility in monitoring of delivery with no formal Key Performance Indicators identified.
- A willingness from everyone to 'step back, be brave and trust the process'.
- Working closely with colleagues across the county also delivering ABCD and co- production.

Creating conditions for wider change across the system.

Through consistently modelling an authentic Asset Based Community Development approach we can see the beginning of some significant shifts.

In the full report we have shared examples of where Mr Hastings & St Leonards has:

- Raised the profile of mens health and wellbeing across the system.
- Shared learning from the projects approach.
- Built relationships and connections to support future activity.
- Encouraged collaboration between local groups and across the system.



[Apteligen](#), Mr Hastings & St Leonards Evaluation and Learning Partner, refer to the Six Core Foundations and 'Six Shifts' from the [Collaborate CIC Guide](#) in their Evaluation and learning – Mr Hastings and St Leonards Final Report July 2025 (available on the [Hastings Voluntary Action](#) website). They state that progress has been made in relation to all six shifts.

- Building healthy and trusted relationships.
- Having a shared vision and purpose.
- Demonstrating collaborative behaviours.
- Sharing learning and insight.
- Early work on building a collaborative infrastructure with key players who can influence mens health and wellbeing across the system.

To find out more visit the HVA website where you will find all reports to referred to here and can contact the HVA Team: <https://hastingsvoluntaryaction.org.uk/> To connect with the men leading Mr Hastings & St Leonards forward visit Mens Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC website: <https://mensroom.community/>

Our continued commitment to collaborate and not compete, will underpin our next steps.