



Mr Hastings & St Leonards Learning and Legacy

A celebration of the journey so far

August 2025

Summary Report

This report is a celebration of the openness, passion, creativity, joy and bravery of all that have been part of the journey so far and are leading the way forward.

The full report includes reflections from :

- Men from Hastings and St Leonards.
- Hastings Voluntary Action team members.
- Apteligen our learning and evaluation partners.
- Funders and supporters.
- Partners from across the system and the wider community.

This summary report has been compiled by the Hastings Voluntary Action (HVA) team. The full report can be viewed on the HVA website along with Apteligen's Evaluation and Learning Report and Stories of Significant Change.

We hope this 'taster' of the full report will encourage you to find out more about Mr Hastings & St Leonards, our Asset Based Community Development approach and continue the conversation around mens health and wellbeing.

Funded by East Sussex County Council Public Health.

Hosted by Hastings Voluntary Action.

Led by local Men

Forward

*The Mr Hastings & St Leonards Project stands as a powerful testament to what can be achieved when **communities come together with purpose, compassion and a shared vision for change.***

*At its heart lies a simple but urgent truth, the **life expectancy of men in Hastings and St Leonards remain unacceptably low.** This is not just a statistic it is a call to action.*

*Using an Asset Based Community Development Approach, the project has **created a platform for men to connect, share and lead.** What makes this project truly special is its commitment to listening.*

I am immensely proud** of the project and everyone who has contributed to its success. From the dedicated project team at Hastings Voluntary Action to the men who have stepped forward to lead, share and support one another, **you have created something truly special.

***As you look ahead,** let us carry forward the spirit of this project, let us continue to challenge the inequalities that hold people back and build a future where every man in Hastings and St Leonards has the opportunity to live long, healthy, and fulfilling lives.*



Darrell Gale FFPH
Director of Public Health,
East Sussex County Council

Where it All Began

This project has been developed because:

- Many initiatives have been delivered across the borough with the intention of improving health outcomes for those most in need.
- Individually these have made a big difference to people who have had first-hand experience of them. However, this has not led to improved health across the wider population.
- This suggests no single action, or organisation, can solve this complex issue on its own.

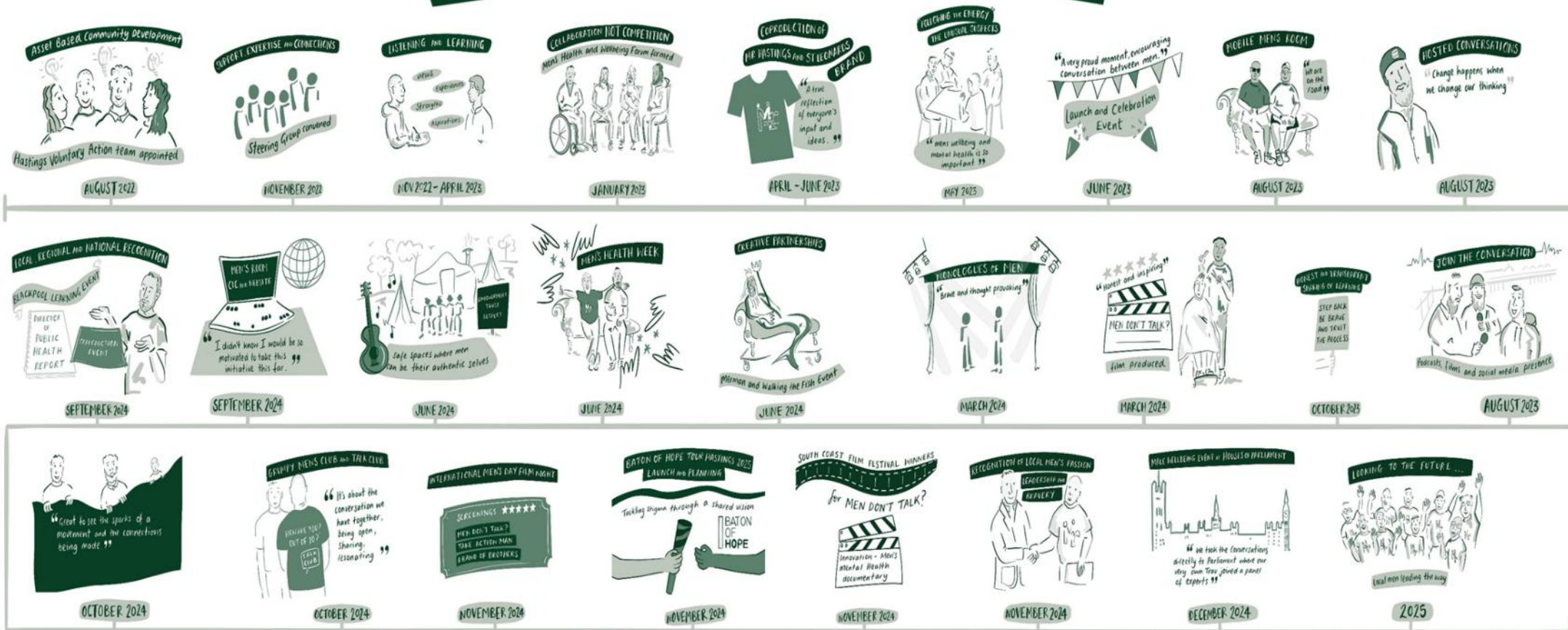
A new approach was needed for sustainable impact beyond the life of the project.



The Project Team. Jacy Kilvert (Community Development Worker) and Teresa Flower (Project Manager) were appointed in autumn 2022 to mobilise and encourage collaboration between local men and services and community groups across the system.

Jacy and Teresa are experienced Assist Based Community Development (ABCD) practitioners, and it is this approach that has been consistently, and authentically, implemented within the community and across the system

MR HASTINGS AND ST LEONARDS TIMELINE



Funded by East Sussex County Council - Hosted by Hastings Voluntary Action - Led by local men

Mr Hastings and St Leonards 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.

This timeline was designed and animated by [Esther Springett](#)

The animated timeline can be viewed here [Mr Hastings & St Leonards Timeline](#)

Follow the Energy

The Principles of Asset Based Community Development include recognising that:

- **Everyone has gifts.**
- **Relationships build a community.**
- **Citizens should be in the centre.**
- **People have passions and interests and are motivated by the things they care about,**
- **Listening conversations are key.**

**Adapted from Nurture
Development website:**

www.nurtureddevelopment.org/

In practice this approach has meant we have:

- Prioritised building strong, respectful and trusting relationships with all stakeholders.
- Acknowledging this takes time and requires a consistent, flexible, visible and accessible approach.
- Listened and learned alongside men with lived experience.
- Ensured all developments are owned and led by local men Promoted an inclusive call to action, 'Join the Conversation'.
- Shared learning at every opportunity
- Developed creative and engaging methods of monitoring and evaluation that are accessible to all.
- Understood that there isn't a 'one size fits all' response to addressing mens health and wellbeing.



“Although the men themselves may not recognise the approach used as an ABCD approach they respond with enthusiasm and motivation. The project approaches men as curators of their own destinies, which has been a refreshing and novel experience for some men.”

This has been made possible through:

- A host agency (HVA), Commissioner (East Sussex County Council) and Evaluators (Apteligen) committed to the ABCD approach.
- A willingness from everyone to “step back, be brave and trust the process.”
- Flexibility in monitoring of delivery with no formal Key performance Indicators identified.
- Collaboration and connection between stakeholders and their networks.
- The strong working relationships built on trust and located within a learning environment.

"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."

Step Back, be Brave and Trust the Process



Collaboration not Competition

A commitment to collaborative partnership working and building trusting and respectful relationships with local groups organisations and services is central to our approach.

- Mr Hastings & St Leonards Steering Group have come together to explore learning, ask questions, share ideas and offer support.
- The Hastings & St Leonards Mens health and wellbeing forum was formed to provide an opportunity for local group leaders and service providers together.
- Membership of local, regional and national networks and partnership groups enabled us to build relationships, made connections and shared learning.
- Collaborative events such as annual learning and celebration events. Let's Talk Mens Health (in collaboration with East Sussex Library Service) and the Men's Film Night (in collaboration with [Take Action Man](#) and [A Band of Brothers](#)) brought local men together with wider stakeholders.



Creativity and Passion

Mr Hastings & St Leonards has evolved with a strong creative focus, following local mens energy, passion and commitment.

This enabled men to share their own powerful stories in creative and authentic ways, exploring masculinity, breaking down barriers, and tackling the stigma around men and mental health.

The film Men Don't Talk?, Monologues of Men performance, Podcasts, Branding co-design, Mobile Mens Room Sofa and Boards, Mr Hastings & St Leonards Merman and Mens Wellness Through Music are just some examples.

The creativity of Mr Hastings & St Leonards has been widely recognised and was showcased in the Director of Public Health East Sussex Annual Report 2023 -24 Creativity for Healthier Lives. It has featured on BBC TV and radio and Men Don't Talk? won two awards at the South East Coast Film Festival.



"Through live performances, community events, and shared storytelling, we create opportunities for men to open up, support one another, and challenge outdated stigma."

"Many men, including myself, find it difficult to socialise and make friends; these inhibitions can melt away when working collaboratively and creatively."

Listen, Learn, Respond.

We Listened:

During the first year of delivery, we undertook:

- Extensive community, and system wide engagement with 600 stakeholders.
- An online survey completed by 134 men.
- External researcher conversations with 18 men.
- Celebration event attended by over 150 men.
- In depth conversations with 13 men from the Branding Team and Unusual Suspects.
- Hosted conversations and systems thinking workshops with 85 participants.
- Project Steering group discussions with 38 cross sector members.
- Hastings and St Leonards Men's Health and Wellbeing Forum discussions with 67 members.

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.

We Respond:

- We continued to listen and share our learning
- We stayed true to an **authentic Asset Based Community Development** approach.
- We followed the energy and passion of the men who had been so open, honest and brave.
- We built on the relationships and trust within the community and across the system.
- We submitted evidence and contributed to local, regional and national events, inquiries and publications.
- We produced and widely circulated reports.
- We hosted free and accessible events.
- We engaged in ongoing conversations within the community and across the system.

All reports referred to in this Summary Learning and Legacy Report, including [Apteligen's Evaluation and Learning](#) full and summary reports and **Stories of Significant Change (July 2025)** can be read on the HVA website.



Apteligen were commissioned in September 2023 to undertake an independent evaluation of Mr Hastings & St Leonards.

Their evaluation was designed to understand:

- How, where and why the initiative has contributed towards changing how the system operates around the health and wellbeing needs of local men.
- How the movement has contributed towards creating a positive shift in mens help seeking behaviours.
- The contribution that this type of Asset Based Community Development approach has made towards influencing and achieving the changes identified.

Apteligen undertook interviews, hosted conversations, ripple mapping workshops, an online survey and collected in-depth perspectives on the 'most significant change' stakeholders had experienced.

Apteligen's Overarching Theory of Change captures Mr Hastings & St Leonards ABCD approach, the impact it has had, and what could influence future success.

Spotlights

Mr Hastings & St Leonards Asset Based Community Development approach supports actions identified, designed and led by local men. It promotes collaboration between groups and services. It aims to ensure the legacy and sustainability of what works for local men continues beyond the life of this project.

Branding Co-design

In May 2023 the HVA team instigated a series of codesign workshops with local men and graphic designer Dean Hodges. The 'Branding Team' was created. They codesigned a brand, and identity, for the Mens Health and Wellbeing Project that spoke to local men which is now widely recognised.

The Unusual Suspects.

In the spring of 2023, eight men, of diverse age and life experience, joined the project team to explore what a mens champion role might look like, how they might want to be involved and what support they would need to achieve their ambitions. The 'Unusual Suspects' used their connections, experiences, passions and knowledge to open doors, bringing men together through shared experience, values or interests, building trust and mutual respect.

Join the Conversation

'Join the conversation' has been adopted as the mens call to action prominent on their website, promotional materials, podcasts and social media. They actively engage with local community groups and businesses. The 'Mobile Mens room' is now a talking point within the community. The men have trained as volunteer 'captains' to bring a national initiative 'Talk Club' to Hastings and collaborated with Barry from the Grumpy Cook Café to set up 'The Grumpy Mens Club'.



Men Don't Talk?

19 men took part in the film that was premiered in March 2024 at the Kino Teatr in St Leonards followed by further screenings, an online launch and coverage on BBC South East News. Conceived, and made, by local men it explores the importance of conversations around men's mental health and wellbeing.

Monologues of Men?

Following Men Don't Talk?, eight creative writing and performance workshops were facilitated. This led to the 'Monologues of Men' performance at the Stables Theatre. The mens monologues explored their experiences of childhood, grief, loss, and trauma, focussing on 'the light at the end of the tunnel'.

Mens Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC

In autumn of 2024, a core group of local men Mazin Al-Jumaili, Travis Mains-Marten and David McMurdo formed Mens Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC (15977181). Their aim is to **"...create a movement where men feel empowered to take charge of their mental health while giving back to their community,"**



Baton of Hope

In June 2024 the Mr Hastings & St Leonards made a successful application to bring the Baton of Hope to Hastings on 23 September 2025, one of only 20 locations across the UK to host the tour. Co-production has ensured that those with lived experience have had a meaningful voice through planning, decision making and implementation.



Creating Conditions for Wider Change Across the System.

Looking to the Future.

Mr Hastings and St Leonards aims to create conditions for wider change.

Through constantly modelling an authentic ABCD approach we can see significant shifts beginning to happen.

In their final evaluation Report Apteligen refer to the Six Core Foundations and 'Six Shifts' from the [Collaborate CIC Guide](#). They state that progress has been made in relation to all six shifts.

Progress has been made in:

- 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.



"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'!"

Over the next three years HVA has been asked to:

- **Continue** the conversation in Hastings and St Leonards.
- **Reach out** to neighbouring communities.
- **Enable** Mens Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC **share their** experience and connections.
- **Build on** HVA teams learning and relationships.
- **Work closely** with current and new stakeholders.
- **Together** review governance, communication and engagement.

Introducing the "Six Shifts"



"We couldn't have done things in this way if we hadn't had a commissioner who was open to looking at things differently, doing things differently and who trusted us.

We have had an amazing opportunity, and it was clear at the last coproduction event that we attended that this isn't everyone's experience across the region.

Not everyone has this open, honest and trusting, relationship with their commissioners."

"East Sussex Public Health are eager to see how the approach of 'following the energy' can work in other areas of the county whilst ensuring the legacy of the success seen in Hastings and St Leonards... we are excited to see what happens next."

To find out more or to continue the conversation:



Hastings and St Leonards have truly embraced this important message around mens health and wellbeing.

There are so many amazing individuals, groups and communities who have been part of the journey.

We hope you recognise yourselves in these presentations and reports.

We thank you all.

Visit the HVA website: <https://hastingsvoluntaryaction.org.uk/>

Read reports, find out more about next steps in Hastings, St Leonards and surrounding areas, and contact the HVA Team

Visit Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards website and social media:

www.mensroom.community

Connect with the men leading Mr Hastings and St Leonards.



"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."

Tell your friends, family and colleagues about the Mr Hastings & St Leonards approach.

Encourage conversations around mens health and wellbeing at home, in the community, and at work.

Share your skills, knowledge, experience, and connections to make difference to mens health and wellbeing in East Sussex.

Our continued commitment to collaborate not compete, and deliver authentic Asset Based Community Development, will underpin our next steps.