



Evaluation and learning – Mr Hastings and St Leonards

FINAL REPORT

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1 About this report

This report sets out the findings of an independent process and impact evaluation of the Hastings and St Leonards Men's Health and Wellbeing Project (referred throughout this report as 'Mr Hastings and St Leonards' or the Mr Hastings and St Leonards 'movement'). The report is in four parts:

- Part 1 sets out the aims and delivery model of Mr Hastings and St Leonards, and how we have gone about evaluating and learning from the work being undertaken
- Part 2 sets out our findings in relation to setting up and building the movement throughout the current funding period
- Part 3 provides the evidence gathered in relation to the impact of the work to date, and
- Part 4 discusses the implications of our findings for future sustainability and further development and action.

2 About Mr Hastings and St Leonards

Mr Hastings and St Leonards is a three-year initiative funded by East Sussex County Council, hosted by Hastings Voluntary Action and led by local men. Mr Hastings and St Leonards has its origins in a desire to take a more co-ordinated, system-wide approach to tackling the issue of falling male life expectancy in Hastings.

Life expectancy for men in Hastings and St Leonards is significantly lower than the national average (Figure 1). It has also fallen or remained steady in recent years (Figure 2), with the gap between life expectancy for men in Hastings compared to the England average also greater now than it was 20 years ago (Figure 3). This is the result of many different factors, such as high rates of suicide, homelessness and drug and alcohol use, and the prevalence of mental ill health in the local community.

Many different initiatives have been delivered in Hastings over recent years with the intention of improving health outcomes for those most in need. Individually, initiatives have demonstrated positive impacts on people accessing them. However, life expectancy data suggests that their combined impact has not led to improved health at a population level and no single action or organisation on its own can solve such a complex, multi-faceted health and wellbeing issue. This means that a whole system approach is needed, with care and support organisations, community groups, and local services working collaboratively together and in true partnership with those with lived experience.

Indicator	Period	Hastings		England		
		Count	Value	Value	Worst	Range
Life expectancy at birth (Male, 1 year range)	2023	-	77.2	79.3	73.4	
Life expectancy at birth (Male, 3 year range)	2021 - 23	-	76.7	79.1	73.1	

Figure 1: Life expectancy at birth for men in Hastings 2021 – 2023. Source: Department of Health and Social Care.

Life expectancy at birth (Male, 3 year range)

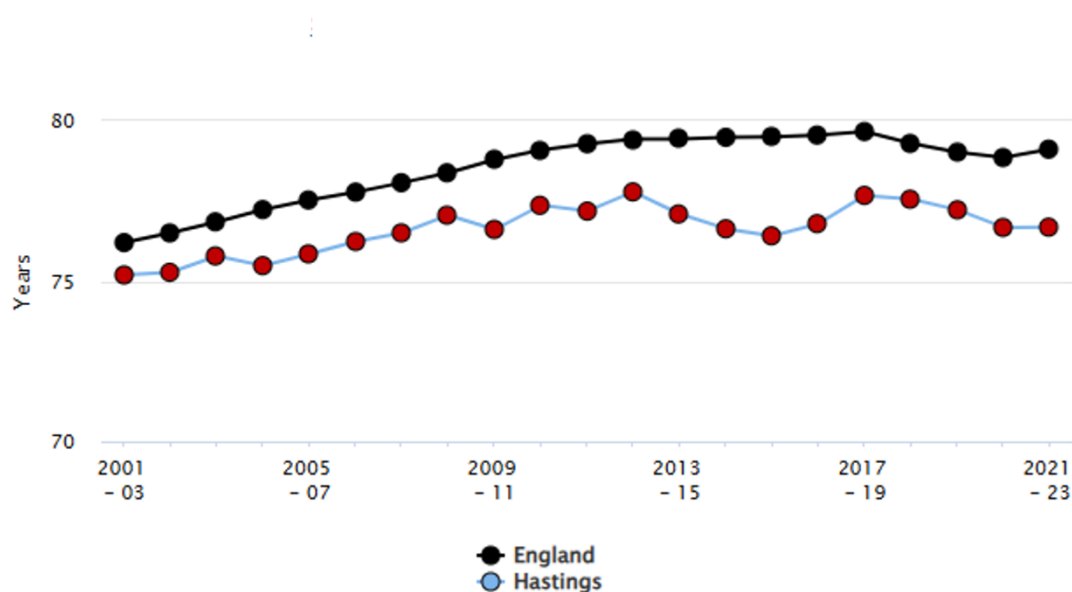


Figure 2: Life expectancy at birth (Male, 3 year range) in Hastings versus England average – trend over time. Source: Department of Health and Social Care.

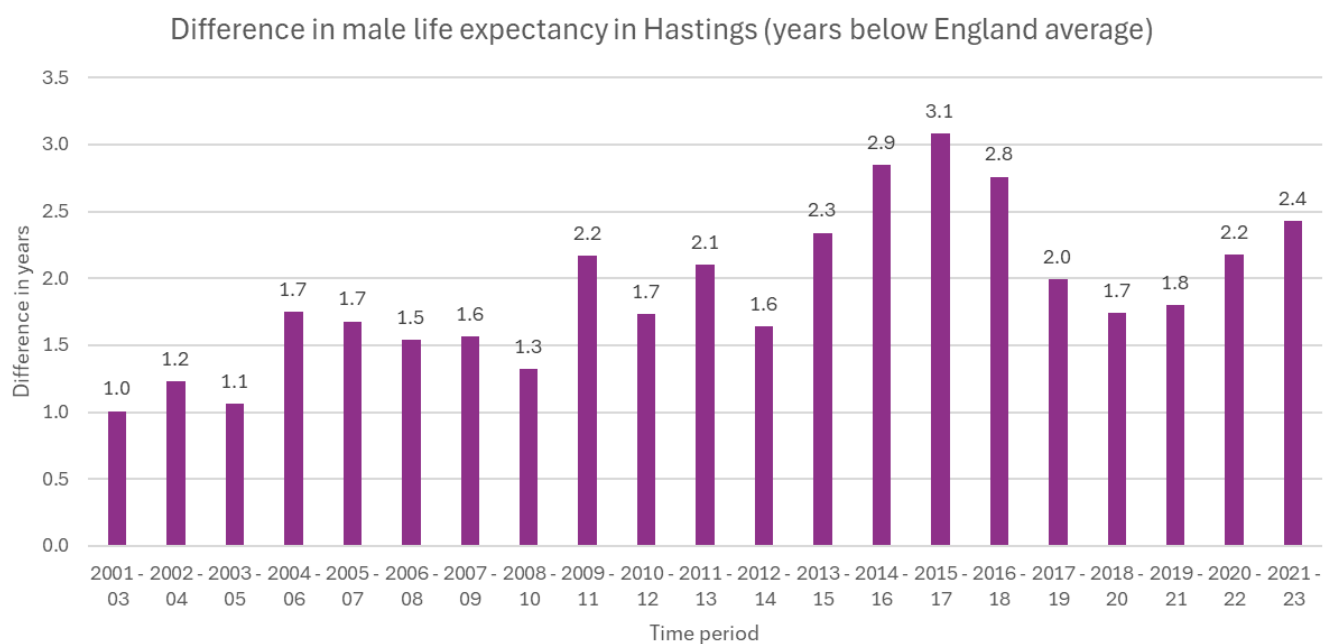


Figure 3: Difference in male life expectancy at birth – Hastings compared to the England average (number of years below the England average). Source: Department of Health and Social Care.

The long-term vision is that men living in Hastings and St Leonards are at the heart of decision making about their lives, are living happier, healthier, and longer lives, and thrive in strong, supportive, and well-connected communities where they can fulfil their potential. The project has set out to do this by establishing a self-defining and self-sustaining 'social movement' for men's health and wellbeing in Hastings and St Leonards, based on the principles of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)¹, and which mobilises and encourages collaborative action between:

- Male residents who have lived experience of needing and / or accessing support around their health and wellbeing and wider determinants of their health, and want to be involved in improving outcomes for men in their communities; and
- Services and community groups which either seek to support men around their health and wellbeing and wider determinants of their health, or have responsibility for other health assets (physical and environmental) that impact on health and wellbeing for men.

3 The Theory of Change for Mr Hastings and St Leonards

While the ultimate longer term aim of Mr Hastings and St Leonards is for the whole population of men living in Hastings and St Leonards to experience happier, healthier and longer lives, this will require many years of co-ordinated and sustained action at scale across the system. For this to happen, this current initiative focused on four main areas, each of which could evolve in response to learning throughout the duration of the current funding period and build the necessary foundation for longer term change:

- Building a **robust evidence base** in relation to what needs to change to improve men's health and wellbeing, and how, informed by the lived experience of local men and the input of a wide cross-section of those working across the care and support system
- Establishing a **men's social 'movement'**, to find ways to make better use of assets (knowledge, skills, ambitions and resources) in the community and to promote wide engagement, using a compelling narrative and championed by local men
- Understanding and creating the **conditions for change to happen**, including to facilitate connections and conversations, share learning and build a shared understanding of the health and wellbeing issues facing men in Hastings and St Leonards, and
- Building **sustainable infrastructure** for improving men's health and wellbeing over the longer term.

More information about the activities that were undertaken under each of these four areas is set out in Figure 4 below.

The above areas of activity were intended to generate a number of short to medium term outcomes, for men more closely involved in the movement, for the wider population of men (and those others in their lives), and for groups and services working to support men's health and wellbeing in Hastings and St Leonards. In particular:

¹ See for example: <https://sustainingcommunity.wordpress.com/2013/08/15/what-is-abcd/> or <https://www.nurtureddevelopment.org/about-abcd/>.

- Men involved in the movement experience improved mental health and wellbeing, build their confidence, and feel supported to tackle their own challenges and / or to support others
- Men involved in the movement have opportunities to influence services and groups (both formally and informally) in relation to supporting men's health and wellbeing
- Men outside of the movement start to recognise the importance of the movement and what it is trying to achieve, and feel motivated to engage with it and contribute to the wider aims
- Services and groups that support men's health and wellbeing feel better equipped to change how they engage with and support men in the local area and begin to identify new partnerships and collaboration opportunities to better support men in their local communities.

The extent to which the initiative can achieve these outcomes depended on a number of different factors, including:

- The capacity, number and diversity of local men who engage in the movement
- The knowledge and resources available to coproduce activities that are attractive for local men to engage with
- The extent to which wider system stakeholders are able and willing to engage in the movement
- The extent to which other concurrent interventions or projects around men's health can align with this initiative
- The complexity of factors that influence men's health in the local area and the complexity of the wider support system
- The ongoing commissioner-provider relationship for Mr Hastings and St Leonards, and
- The availability of future funding sources that could support more sustainable action at scale.

A key objective of the work undertaken over the past three years was to also learn about what worked (and what could work in the future) in the Hastings and St Leonards local context, so that progress can continue to be made towards the longer term aims after the end of the current funding period, and irrespective of the availability of further funding.

With this in mind, Figure 4 provides a summary of what difference we believe this project made (based on the evidence gathered through this evaluation), and what needs to happen in order for it to be successful in the future.

Overarching Theory of Change – Mr Hastings and St Leonards



Why are we doing this?

Mr Hastings and St Leonards (the 'movement') was developed in response to life expectancy for men in Hastings and St Leonards being significantly lower than the national average.

The long-term vision is that men living in Hastings and St Leonards are consistently at the heart of decision making about their lives, are living happier, healthier, and longer lives, and thrive in strong, supportive, and well-connected communities, where they can fulfil their potential and respond better to any challenges they may face.

What could influence how successful this is going forward?

- The capacity and diversity of local men who engage in the movement
- The knowledge and resources available to coproduce activities that are attractive for local men to engage with
- The extent to which wider system stakeholders are able and willing to engage in the project, and the availability of dedicated resources (supported by trusting and flexible funding models) to lead on driving and embedding further changes and alliances across the system
- The complexity of factors that influence men's health in the local area and the complexity of the wider support system

What are we doing? Over 3 years the movement has involved...

- 1. Designing an approach** that builds on existing evidence and learning, and the lived experience of local men:
 - Community and system wide engagement
 - Establishment of a project steering group
 - Establishment of the Hastings and St Leonards Men's Health and Wellbeing Forum
- 2. Establishing a men's 'movement'** in Hastings & St Leonards, based on the principles of Asset Based Community Development
 - A compelling narrative and recognisable brand and identity
 - Local men as champions of the movement
 - Co-produced creative activities and opportunities to bring people together to promote new connections and open up conversations
- 3. Creating the conditions** for wider change
 - New connections and conversations with and between those across the system, including sharing learning and insights
 - Learning more about how effective asset based community engagement and involvement can lead to positive change
- 4. Building a sustainable infrastructure** for improving men's health in Hastings & St Leonards
 - Establishing the Mr Hastings and St Leonards CIC
 - Exploring the potential for longer term funding opportunities
 - Building the knowledge and skills necessary to continue the work of the movement beyond the current funding period

What difference has it made?

The men involved in establishing and promoting the movement have...

- Been able to use their (lived) experience, knowledge, skills and interests to lead and support the work of the movement
- Experienced improved mental health and wellbeing
- Built their confidence to tackle their own challenges and / or to support or advocate for others through difficult times
- Had opportunities to begin to influence services and groups in relation to supporting men's health and wellbeing across the system

The wider community across Hastings and St Leonards has...

- Begun to increasingly recognise the movement, its importance for the community, what it is doing and trying to achieve, and how to get involved
- Started to engage with and contribute to the movement in new ways
- Begun to identify and get involved in opportunities to influence services and groups in relation to men's health and wellbeing

Groups and services supporting men's health & wellbeing have...

- Identified new partnerships, referral pathways and collaboration opportunities
- Increasingly recognised the value of Asset Based Community Development approaches and what this looks like in practice
- Started to change how they engage with and support men in the local area in order to codesign / coproduce support so that it better reflects the needs of local men

Figure 4: An overarching Theory of Change for Mr Hastings and St Leonards, based on the evidence from this evaluation

4 Evaluation scope and methodology

4.1 Evaluation aims

Apteligen was commissioned in September 2023 to undertake evaluation and learning work for Mr Hastings and St Leonards. Our role was to:

- Understand the approach being taken and build an evidence based 'Theory of Change' which demonstrates what can be achieved, given the time and resources available (this is described in Section 3 of this report)
- Gather feedback and evidence about 'what works' and what doesn't and capture learning about why things have or haven't worked as expected
- Work closely with HVA, other community organisations and groups, and local men to understand what impact the project has had and opportunities for longer term change
- Demonstrate the difference that the movement has made for men in Hastings and St Leonards in this current funding round
- Provide regular updates and reports so that the learning can be used to inform the work of the movement, during the current funding period and beyond.

Within this, the 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, and the wider determinants of their health and wellbeing
- How the movement has contributed towards creating a positive shift in men's help seeking behaviours, and
- The contribution that this type of Asset Based Community Development / strengths based approach has made towards influencing and achieving the changes identified.

In order to do this, we captured evidence and learning in relation to a number of topic areas and themes. These are set out in the table below.

Topic area	Key evaluation and learning themes
Project delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How local men have led this movement and have driven their agenda forward• How the project has been delivered, its scale of delivery, success factors and challenges• Local men's strengths and assets, and how these have been utilised to support the aims of the movement• The activities delivered as part of the movement and the characteristics of those involved• The change processes, including what works, for whom, how and why, to inform ongoing learning and adaptation• The impact of the local strategic context, within which the movement, is operating on delivery / potential outcomes• What is required to enable sustainability, and to achieve a legacy of outcomes

Topic area	Key evaluation and learning themes
External awareness and engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local men's awareness of the movement, why it is needed, its' aims and identity Local men's perceptions of the impact of the movement within the local community Organisation / service awareness of the movement, why it is needed, its' aims and identity Organisational buy-in for the approach and the methods adopted
Outcomes for local men	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact of the movement on the men leading it, their knowledge, skills, and confidence Impact of the movement on local men's help-seeking attitudes and behaviours Impact of the movement on local men's knowledge, skills, and confidence to engage in decision making and be active members of their local communities Impact of the movement on local men's self-management of their health and wellbeing, and the wider determinants of their health and wellbeing Local men's needs and how these needs could be better met The impact of training, learning, and development opportunities on local men and the wider workforce
Outcomes across the support system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The extent to which the movement has (or has the potential to) challenge the status quo and influence and inform relevant policy, strategy and practice across organisations and sectors (to include funding streams driven by input from this project) The impact of the movement on organisations, services, and groups which either seek to support men around the wider determinants of their health or have responsibility for other health assets that impact on health and wellbeing for men The sense of trust and shared responsibility for men's health and wellbeing between residents, local voluntary and community groups and those working in health and other public services.

Table 1: Key evaluation and learning themes

4.2 Evaluation and learning work undertaken

With the above aims and priority learning areas in mind, we undertook the following activities during this evaluation:

- Around 20 1:1 interviews and informal discussions with men involved in the movement at a number of different points in the evaluation
- Reflective 'diaries' with two of the men more closely involved in leading the movement

- 15 1:1 semi-structured interviews with a range of external stakeholders working across the system at different points in the evaluation²
- Attendance at Mr Hastings and St Leonards activities, including the annual learning event, and annual celebration event, and film screening (which all included a number of 1:1 conversations with other attendees)
- A hosted conversation with system stakeholders
- Regular learning sessions with the core team and steering group
- An initial workshop to map out and understand the 'ripple effects' of the work being undertaken
- A follow-up workshop in the final six months to synthesise ripple effects learning
- An online survey aimed at the men involved in Mr Hastings and St Leonards, and the wider community, which received 25 responses
- In-depth perspectives on the 'most significant change' experienced by different people involved in the work^{3,4}
- A final stakeholder workshop to explore reported change, sustainability and legacy.

This was supplemented with data and information being collected directly by the project team as well as information contained in the quarterly project reports.

Figure 5 below sets out the overall timescales for this evaluation and the associated data collection activities.

² This is in addition to many other ad-hoc / less structured conversations with system stakeholders at other events and workshops during the period of the evaluation.

³ The Most Significant Change (MSC) approach (in the context of evaluating social change interventions) involves generating and analysing personal accounts of change and deciding which is the most significant – and why. For more information about Most Significant Change as an evaluation methodology see: <https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/approaches/most-significant-change>

⁴ A booklet containing all of the Most Significant Change stories is available [here](#).

Evaluation timeline: Mr Hastings and St Leonards									
Evaluation phase	Month Quarter and year Activity	August - September Q3 2023	October - December Q4 2023	January - March Q1 2024	April - June Q2 2024	July - September Q3 2024	October - December Q4 2024	January - March Q1 2025	April - June Q2 2025
Evaluation inception and design	Project inception and design of evaluation framework								
	Research governance approval								
	Launch of data collection activities								
Year 1 data collection and fieldwork	Stakeholder interviews								
	Interviews and reflective diaries with men involved								
	Attendance at learning and project events								
	Interim report								
Year 2 data collection and fieldwork	Ripple mapping and sustainability								
	Additional stakeholder interviews								
	Most Significant Change Stories - collection and synthesis								
	Survey of local men								
Final report and dissemination	Analysis and synthesis of all data								
	Final learning event								
	Production of final outputs								

Figure 5: Evaluation and data collection timeline – Evaluation of Mr Hastings & St Leonards

5 Commissioning and governance

The commissioning landscape can have a major impact on the extent to which project outcomes can be achieved. Mr Hastings & St Leonards was conceived as an Asset Based Community Development project that required cross-sector partnerships, guided by the experiences of local men, to build a sustainable movement for men's health. The original commissioner placed emphasis on defining Mr Hastings & St Leonards as a contrast to time-limited, project-funded, work that would typically end with the cessation of funding. In order to differentiate Mr Hastings & St Leonards from the project-based initiatives that run parallel to and precede it, there were early and frequent attempts to articulate its aims as a health improvement and early intervention movement, informed and led by a broad alliance of local men, with emphasis on sustainability and legacy building from the outset.

'It needs to be self-sustaining and needs to be driven by a community of men, rather than individuals. Individual men and volunteer circumstances change and the long-term goal and energy can get lost. The community of men needs to be equally motivated to drive its strong focus on health improvement. Men are capable of driving this work, and they are dying too early for avoidable reasons.' [Original Commissioner, Public Health Directorate, East Sussex County Council]

The development of a multi-stakeholder, cross-sector, steering group was essential to the effective governance of Mr Hastings & St Leonards. Health improvement and effective early intervention approaches do typically require the proactive engagement of system influencers and decision-makers, with recognition that other organisations and agencies are an important part of the solution to prevent early and avoidable deaths. This whole-systems approach was essential to support this project with largely undefined KPIs, but it is also a vitally important consideration in moving the project forward beyond the current funding, as any volunteer-led legacy initiative will not easily maintain a connection with systems stakeholders unless it is resourced and supported effectively to maintain access to and influence key decision-makers.

This includes consideration of how future work can benefit from opportunities to be represented on and report into higher level / more strategic working groups and / or cross sector partnerships. While the original intention was that Mr Hastings & St Leonards would ultimately report into and be accountable to the East Sussex County Council Population Health, Prevention and Health Inequalities Working Group, and link into the Hastings Local Strategic Partnership, this didn't come to fruition (for various reasons) and may have impacted on the ability of this initiative to influence the wider system more widely than it has been able to achieve to date, and subsequently provide a more sustainable platform for local men to gain access to power and decision makers.

'It was designed not to be another project-based initiative. The process was, and is, what is important – the process of developing it, not the 'brand' – which is useful in so far as it might keep the agenda visible. What I mean by this is: a. men's health must continue to be a priority focus b. system partners must recognise that early death of men is avoidable. The ongoing connection of this work with the system – leading with trust (and men's opinions) is paramount.' [Original Commissioner, Public Health Directorate, East Sussex County Council]

A core group of men involved over the past two years have worked within the project framework to develop a community interest company (Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC) to sustain the energy and interest of local men.⁵ To an extent, Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC is viewed by the commissioner and the Host Organisation as the mechanism for sustaining the legacy of the project. It is important to recognise that the current governance structure of Mr Hastings & St Leonards provides direct access to the system through professional, paid, staff and that there is a risk of disengagement if these system access links aren't maintained beyond the current funded period.

'The men have got that stability in terms of the network around them, right now. Obviously, in certain services, people might feel that as they're not professionals, there might be that lack of, you know, follow up from an organisation. I think if there's an opportunity of handover, and that continuing networking support, that will be useful.' [System stakeholder, Hastings Borough Council]

The capacity of men to engage, and their touchpoints with the system as the current funding comes to an end, is a concern shared by the core group of men currently driving Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC, and is recognised by the current Host Organisation as a challenge that might be best informed by a continuation of the current Mr Hastings & St Leonards Steering Group.

'The men involved and the men driving it are passionate, and can be swamped too: fundraising, awareness-raising, merchandising, broadcasting, and now the Baton of Hope – we're passionate but there are life challenges too, and this is all voluntary. More and more people are needed to drive growth and engagement.' [Co-Director, Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC]

Both Hastings Voluntary Action as the Host Organisation and the Public Health Directorate at East Sussex County Council as the commissioner had prior experience of asset based working and commissioning at this scale, such as through the recent Making It Happen programme.⁶ There was shared recognition that the ambition of Mr Hastings & St Leonards required the skills, assets and experiences of the participating men to be met with patience, time and trust in the process from a commissioner perspective. Risk was accepted as essential to project progress, and challenging conversations between the Host Organisation and the commissioner were seen as productive and an opportunity for learning – with participating men playing an active role in decision-making, transparent governance and project oversight:

'[The Commissioner] asked all sorts of questions, and she got an honest answer to them. They weren't always comfortable responses ... we responded to the commissioner's needs, but we did it in a way that didn't compromise the approach. We recognised the challenges that were there, and we responded to them.' [Community Development Worker, Hastings Voluntary Action - Host Organisation]

⁵ From Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC: 'Through live performances, community events, and shared storytelling, we create opportunities for men to open up, support one another, and challenge outdated stigmas. [Retrieved from. <https://mensroom.community/about-mrhl/> Last checked: 27th May 2025].

⁶ See <https://making-it-happen.org.uk/> for more information.

'Negotiation, communication, and building trust were key. There was one body of information which went to our commissioners, went to the guys who were taking part. It wasn't like, here's the monetary information, which is for the commissioners, and here's something entirely different, which goes to the participants. Everyone read the same stuff. I just think that's quite unique.' [Project Manager, Hastings Voluntary Action - Host Organisation]

Transparency and honesty are frequently cited by the Commissioner, Host Organisation and the core group of participating men as conditions that enabled the project to be confidently described as delivering an Asset Based Community Development approach, creating safe and productive spaces to share challenges and successes. From a commissioning perspective, the visibility of the project and the different ways it found to convey its message is reported to have strengthened the understanding within Public Health and East Sussex County Council of the potential for asset based commissioning – a practical example of where meaningful change happens from within and alongside, and not to, communities.

'I think the reputation of the men's work has opened a bit of a pathway to embracing a more long-term outcome rather than output culture and the adoption by East Sussex County Council of more of an asset based perspective. I also think that some partners found the events quite revelatory and powerful as a way of looking at concepts like community resilience and activism.' [Commissioner, Public Health Directorate, East Sussex County Council]

'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, measuring things differently and who trusted us. We have had an amazing opportunity, and it was clear at the last co-production 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.' [Project Manager, Hastings Voluntary Action - Host Organisation]

6 Establishing and building the 'movement'

Strong progress has been made to establish and promote Mr Hastings and St Leonards as a men's health movement. There is consensus across stakeholders that the Mr Hastings & St Leonards brand provides a strong visual identity that enables productive conversations about men's health to be initiated by peers and across local systems.

The outcomes of these conversations about men's health are often unexpected, with individual men reporting profound changes in their health and wellbeing, and their connection to the community and to each other. Community activity has a purposeful focus on action, and a recognition that men can bring their (lived) experience, knowledge, skills and interests to make a tangible difference.

'It's always positive and upbeat. The work we do leaves a positive lasting impact.' (Respondent, Mr Hastings & St Leonards 2025 survey).

At scale, this increased sense of connection and purpose would support the further growth of this movement. Where local men are aware of Mr Hastings & St Leonards, but are yet to get involved, there are multiple and complex reasons to be explored that might diversify the experience of those men involved. When asked how Mr Hastings & St Leonards might better involve more men as it continues to develop beyond the current funding period, one survey respondent stated that:

'It may need to better understand the particular dynamics impacting men in the local community. Currently this input is being provided by those willing to be part of the group. A better understanding may be needed of the reasons why more men are not actively doing things about their health and wellbeing in this particular community.' [Respondent, Mr Hastings & St Leonards 2025 survey]

There are already indications of how Mr Hastings & St Leonards, and Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC, could broaden their reach and continue to highlight the importance of growing men's health as a social movement, with both the core group of men driving the Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC and survey respondents encouraging more active collaboration and involvement with younger cohorts, men aged 65+, LGBTQ+ men, sports and activity clubs and 'family men with children'.⁷

'Ensure they are consistently using inclusive and welcoming language, so that all men feel seen and welcomed - including those aged 65+, trans men and refugees. Offer a range of times / days for people to get involved - including in decision-making activity about the direction and future of the work.' [Respondent, Mr Hastings & St Leonards 2025 survey]

The consensus from survey respondents is that Mr Hastings & St Leonards is a visible and welcome initiative with potential for positive change.

'Continue what they're doing and make it even bigger and stronger! The community needs them more than ever and I've seen first-hand the improvements they're bringing to men's lives in the community.'
[Respondent, Mr Hastings & St Leonards 2025 survey]

The successes of this phase of Mr Hastings & St Leonards gives a strong indication of how men's health as a social movement might spread, building on the new connections and relationships that the movement has been able to facilitate across some of the existing men's groups and other services in the local community. In order to build on the strength of the initiative beyond this, there is a recognition that wider involvement and collaboration, with and between groups, will be needed along with some dedicated resource to build capacity and maintain connections with services and networks once the current funding has ended.

⁷ This is based on the views of those who have been involved in, or who know about, Mr Hastings & St Leonards, given that we were not able to collect (through this evaluation) any meaningful data about the reach of the movement across the community and the demographic profile of those who engaged with it in some way.

'It's very community-based and conversational, but we do also know that GP practices have also referred people, STARS rehab support, the NHS or others such as that.' [Co-Director, Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC]

Although there is much evidence to suggest that Mr Hastings & St Leonards has influenced the approach to commissioning and supported the design of initiatives and activities in the community and voluntary sector, there is less evidence of impact on influencing services that support men's health and wellbeing at this time beyond platform events or referral. There is a risk that once the current resource and support behind the project ends, that the ability to access and influence services will be diminished.

'The contact point within the system is vitally important – and the timing. For example, right now this work could be connecting with and informing the suicide prevention strategy, alcohol dependency initiatives. A dedicated male social prescriber would be important – if there is evidence this speaks to men's preferences. There's a real need to consider carefully how men receive support. Less men access social prescribing currently in the community, and they are more likely to access informal or community peer support.' [System Stakeholder and Steering Group Member, Ripple Mapping Session, February 2025.]

There were frequent references to the creation of safe and productive spaces that welcome vulnerability as part of the success of the initiative. This was referenced by the men involved, the Host Organisation and system stakeholders. This signature approach of Mr Hastings & St Leonards has significant impact for the individuals involved, and whilst aiming to grow as a movement, it would be valuable to preserve this quality in the approach while being mindful of the power dynamic between paid staff and volunteers. There is recognition from the Host Organisation that this is already happening, where men involved in Mr Hastings & St Leonards have modelled an approach to group activities that brings the ethos of Asset Based Community Development through, without controlling the evolution of an idea and the connections being made towards a shared aim.

'Although the approach is fully flexible that doesn't mean that people just step back and witness it happening. Sometimes there's almost like a theatre director role - if you really want people to improvise and explore together, you have to create the safety for that to happen... To keep that space equitable and safe, it requires quite a lot of reinforcement conversations to be ongoing. Where does the power reside?' [Director, Hastings Voluntary Action - Host Organisation]

The evidence from this evaluation has also identified a number of common barriers to improving mental health among men that need to be addressed in activities and conversations going forward, including:

- The **traditional views** about what it means to be a man still prevail in our society today (being strong, the provider and the protector) which impacts directly on men's engagement in conversations about health and wellbeing

- Mental health remains **one of the biggest taboo topics** among men and alternative language is needed to promote services and to encourage men to engage
- Judgements around men not seeking help **simplify a complex issue** and fail to recognise the potential factors (such as the environment, context and timeliness) which can promote engagement in wellbeing support
- Perception that health service **gatekeepers / triage processes present a barrier** to easy access to support
- Men need and want **diverse opportunities** to build connections, have an active social life, and to strengthen relationships with others, not just those traditionally considered 'men friendly'
- Men want to **share their experiences** in empowering ways with others, and to **collaborate on things that matter** to them. This means that those offering health and wellbeing support for men must develop mechanisms for men's voices to be heard and acted upon, and be encouraged to see the benefits of working in this way.

These themes have been central to the ongoing work undertaken by the project. We have seen a considerable amount of engagement activity undertaken, through:

- Collaboration with established local groups and service providers
- Participating in a wide range of community events and activities
- Developing and delivering a number of events and activities to showcase the movement and the work being undertaken / key outputs
- Being active members of a number of local networks, partnership groups and discussion forums, and
- Delivering presentations and workshops in a range of settings across the system.
- Active participation in learning and evaluation events focussed on the sustainability and legacy of Mr Hastings & St Leonards.

Some examples, illustrating the breadth of engagement under each of these areas, are shown in Table 2 below.

Type of activity	Key examples
Mr Hastings and St Leonards has embedded itself in the local community through collaborating with established local groups, and service providers, and participating in a wide range of community events and activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hastings Pride • Walking the Fish Festival • Head on Board Skate Jam • Hastings Heart Christmas Fayre • East Sussex Wellbeing at Work Gold Awards Event • Let's Talk Men's Health event hosted by the East Sussex Library Service. • Salvation Army Employability and Community Fair, • Mental Health Awareness Week Musical extravaganza • St Michaels Hospice Bereavement Event • East Sussex Recovery Alliance (ESRA) Celebration • 2025 'Baton of Hope' bid development and planning
Mr Hastings and St Leonards has developed and delivered a number of its own events and activities (in collaboration with others across the local community).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The premiere of Men Don't Talk? A film made by men involved in the movement who hosted the filming and shared their stories. • Mr Hastings and St Leonards Awareness Day. • Monologues of Men. Monologues written by local men and then performed at the Stables Theatre. • Mr Hastings and St Leonards Celebration event in June 2024 planned to align with Men's Health Week. • 'Mobile Men's Room' on tour. • The Grumpy Men's Club drop-in (twice a month), initiated by and in partnership with The Grumpy Cook Café in Hastings. • Hastings and St Leonards Men's Health and Wellbeing Forum (quarterly) bringing together groups and services from across Hastings and St Leonards to promote and encourage local collaboration. • Talk Club (twice a month).
Mr Hastings and St Leonards (through a combination of HVA staff and local men) are also active members of a number of local networks, partnership groups and discussion forums.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Active Hastings Partnership • Hastings Community Network • VCSE Mental Health Network • Hastings Youth Partnership • Mental Health Action Group • Men's Mental Health Community of Interest • Coastal Communities and Creative Health Discussion Forum

Type of activity	Key examples
Mr Hastings and St Leonards (through a combination of HVA staff and local men) has delivered presentations and workshops in a range of settings across the system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Safer Hastings Joint Action Group, East Sussex Communications and Engagement Steering Group, East Sussex County Council Public Health Lunch and learn, East Sussex Wellbeing at Work Webinar, East Sussex County Council Adult Social Care Team, Coproducing Coproduction event. • The team also presented at a Coastal Communities knowledge Exchange event in Blackpool. • Houses of Parliament panel on mental health
The Mr Hastings and St Leonards steering group membership and support network has representation from across the system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • East Sussex County Council Adult Social Care, Public Health Commissioners and Officers from Drug and Alcohol Services, Mental Health, ESTAR, External Funding. • Hastings Borough Council Community Safety, Housing and Active Hastings Teams. • East Sussex Integrated Health Care • St Micheals Hospice • A Band of Brothers • Project Rewild • Veterans Hub • Possability People • Seaview • Men's Network • Change, Grow, Live (CGL) • Hastings and Rother Rainbow Alliance • Roots of Return • Changing Futures • Only Men (AOP) Progress Network • The Bike Project • Head on Board • Craig's Cabin • Men's Wellness Through Music •

Table 2: Examples of the different types of activity undertaken by Mr Hastings and St Leonards to reach out into the community and across the system

Alongside this, there has been a growing online presence through a number of social media channels (including Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and LinkedIn), which showcases the work of Mr Hastings and St Leonards, the positive engagement with the community, and the importance of opening up conversations about male mental wellbeing.⁸

⁸ See: <https://linktr.ee/mrhsl>

In terms of reach into the community through these channels:

- The Facebook page currently has 365 followers. In the three months leading up to the publication of this report, Facebook posts had received 17,462 views, an increase of 55% from the previous three months. One post (about promoting the local 'Talk Club' sessions) received 3,090 views alone. Nearly 70% of all Facebook views are from non-followers, suggesting a wider reach than from those who are more actively engaged or interested in this channel.
- The LinkedIn profile currently has 418 connections.
- The YouTube channel has 59 subscribers and holds 24 videos, which have 4,972 views.

The Mr Hastings and St Leonards 'mobile sofa' (or 'Mobile Men's Room') has toured the local community, both raising awareness of the movement and providing opportunities for men (and others) to engage in informal conversations about health and wellbeing. Mobile screens were designed and built in collaboration with a local artist in order to stimulate conversation in public spaces.

A core group of local men have been actively engaged in the movement, effectively championing the cause and, alongside the HVA project team, coproducing a range of engaging and creative activities to raise awareness and engage with other men in the local community. Many others have been involved to a lesser extent and / or become aware of the Mr Hastings and St Leonards community.

Co-production, requiring shared power and responsibility between local men and professionals, has led to key activities that have been identified, designed and led by local men:

- The production and launch of the Men Don't Talk? film, a collection of conversations between men set in a Hastings barber shop. The film was launched at the Kino Theatre in St Leonards on Sea and then again at Central Hall in Hastings. Men involved in the film also hosted a question and answer session after the screening at the Kino Theatre.
- The Men's Room (Mr) Hastings and St Leonards podcast, which features interviews and conversations with local men and is hosted by two of the core group involved in the movement.
- The Monologues of Men, performed at the Stables Theatre. This powerful production involved a small number of men who were supported to write and perform their own life stories and experiences.
- Successful bid to bring the 'Baton of Hope' to Hastings in late 2025, raising awareness of mental health and suicide and identifying opportunities for community involvement.

The initiative has also gained prominence through coverage on [local BBC TV](#), as a [case example in a Local Government Association publication](#) (engaging local groups and people to address men's mental health and wellbeing), and in the [2024 Annual Report of the Director of Public Health in East Sussex – Creativity for Healthier Lives](#), as a positive example of building meaningful connections with others to promote healthier lives.

The group has also been responsible for building and maintaining a growing social media presence across multiple channels, with content being curated to showcase the work of the movement, make connections, encourage others to 'join the conversation', and to promote collaboration with other groups and services across the local community.

While the number of men actively involved in designing and leading activities remains relatively small, many others have been involved in other ways, and others will have been touched in some way through the movement's increasing prominence and wider reach across the Hastings and St Leonards community. Feedback from some of the men involved, and those working to support men across the system, suggests that despite the small core group, Mr Hastings and St Leonards is seen very much as a growing 'community' of support and action through both its physical and online presence.

'I have been really encouraged to see the level of interest and engagement around men's mental health that has been generated by the Mr Hastings and St Leonard's work. From a commissioning perspective it is really fascinating to see this project develop from the voices and stories of local men, without a pre-set agenda of how they need to conduct themselves and what they will deliver. The project team have generated an approach that gives the support the men involved need, whilst also encouraging them to develop ideas that they think could make a difference to them around their health and wellbeing.' [Head of Public Mental Health, East Sussex County Council]

A challenge faced by the movement, which some people we have spoken with have described, has been the somewhat '*intangible*' nature of the movement. There is no single place from which the movement operates and there isn't a regular session or forum for men to come along to. This is intentional, and reflects the asset based and participant led approach being taken. Indeed, other forums (such as a men's group at St Michael's Hospice) have come about as a direct result of Mr Hastings and St Leonards. However, without a clear 'thing to come along to' some local men may have found it hard to take that first step towards engaging in this initiative.

The establishment of a regular (fortnightly) men's group at the Grumpy Cook café in central Hastings (which came about as a direct result of promoting the movement), has created a point of contact for local men to meet, talk, and engage with the movement in a tangible way. It has also provided a place of support for some of those men and may, over time, build connections and new ideas which could be taken forward. These regular conversations therefore complement the work being done elsewhere in the community.

'And at that point, I was absolutely smitten with it, quite honestly, because it was the best time that I'd seen a project properly designed, created, you know, grown from the people that were going to be leading the project and kind of, you know, having people with lived experience and the people that were most important, right at the heart of that decision making from the word go.' [System Stakeholder]

Perspectives: An Asset Based Community Development approach Community Development Worker, Hastings Voluntary Action - Host Organisation

This initiative has been given the time and energy from all involved to evolve key human abilities and see a more hopeful future.

As the Community Development worker for the initiative, I was enabled to use the Asset Based Community Development approach authentically and meaningfully. This is not always the case as often project delivery targets involve competing outcome, and delivery needs which opposes the ABCD approach.

Using a strength-based approach appealed to the men I engaged with and opened up honest and open conversations without the men feeling dismantled, and they talked about issues relating to being a 'man', masculinity and their mental health - nothing was off the table. Although the men themselves may not recognise the approach used is an 'ABCD approach' they respond with enthusiasm and motivation, the project approaches men as the curators of their own destinies, which has been a refreshing and novel experience for some men. The men took the project's focus to men's mental health really early on and we have followed that energy as this was a recurring theme that came up again and again. This was a significant shift in understanding as the traditional view that 'Men Don't Talk' about their mental health and feelings was reimagined via the men's trajectory over the project.

Something incredible happens when you are given the space and time to truly be in charge of your own outcomes and I see this in the men I have worked alongside for nearly three years. This doesn't happen a lot as services, employers and authorities usually do it for us, but we lose our authenticity and our belief in our own ability to change ourselves and look to others to fix things.

7 Reach into the wider community

New and existing community and voluntary sector organisations have indicated that local networks have benefited from the project, and that unexpected connections and ideas have been generated through this more flexible approach to commissioning.

Mr Hastings & St Leonards depends on the active collaboration between local men, services and community groups around their wider health and wellbeing. Leading with an Asset Based Community Development approach has enabled connections between stakeholders to happen in creative and unexpected ways, with emphasis on the leadership of - and benefit to - local men in aspiring to long-term collaboration and positive change.

‘Immediately there was a responsibility that these guys had, a seriousness around trying to solve something that was not just short term, and actually was something that everyone was very passionate about. They formed the structure within the project quite quickly, and we agreed quite quickly on what the process should be.’ [Community Development Worker, Hastings Voluntary Action - Host Organisation]

Early and frequent opportunities to facilitate new and trusted conversations with and between those across the system has enabled the identification of opportunities for men, services and community groups to collaborate and work differently to involve and support local men. There is strong evidence of ripple effects from the movement strengthening new and existing connections, to the benefit of local men – with access to support and services accelerated by the time and energy of men involved, and the access points to services being informed by the project.

‘Maz, from Mr Hastings & St Leonards – a fellow Men’s Champion - heard about what we were exploring and we started a conversation, sharing links and ideas. It started a ripple effect that led to the Hospice initiating a bereavement group for men that we launched midway through 2024, and then later an LGBTQI+ bereavement group. We might have arrived at these men’s bereavement group ideas at some point ourselves, but it would have taken more time potentially - it was through linking in with Mr. Hastings and St Leonards that brought them about more quickly and to an extent in the form they currently take where people can self-refer into them.’ [Steering Group Member & Community Volunteering Coordinator, St Michael’s Hospice]

Initiatives like this demonstrate what is achievable when there is a willingness from community and voluntary sector partners to collaborate with Mr Hastings & St Leonards, and where staff in these organisations are able to build on their connection with Mr Hastings & St Leonards as part of their paid role – making links across the overarching aims of the movement with the development objectives of their own organisation.

Community and voluntary stakeholders frequently cited shifts in perception and self-perception of men as being an unanticipated outcome of the collaborations with Mr Hastings & St Leonards. Stigma and self-stigma have been explored through activities and initiatives where it has been safe and productive for men to be vulnerable in their self-expression – with creative engagement, led by men, facilitating further participation in men's health-focused discussions.

'One of the most striking elements of the project has been its creative and community-driven approach. Initiatives such as the Merman Project have challenged traditional perceptions of masculinity, allowing men to express themselves in new and meaningful ways. By engaging in artistic endeavours, participants have not only found joy and fulfilment but have also contributed to breaking down societal stigmas surrounding men's emotional expression. This creative outreach has served as a powerful tool for engagement, bringing together individuals who might not have otherwise participated in health-focused discussions.' [Steering Group Member & East Sussex Lived Experience Facilitator, Possability People]

Connection points with Mr Hastings & St Leonards might be incidental or transactional initially, but they 'start the conversation' around men's health. The flexibility of the Asset Based Community Development approach enabled men to move with the interests of local men, some of whom would go on to connect with related development initiatives to support men's health. The inter-relation of initiatives like Making it Happen⁹ and Mr Hastings & St Leonards highlight the potential for growing men's health as a movement in the long-term, with men more likely to get involved after an initial connection with the work, and more motivated to share their skills, assets and experience if the true principles of Asset Based Community Development exist.

'The project that I work on 'Making it Happen' (MiH) has seen significant ripples from the emergence of activity developed by and with men. Individuals and groups that I have supported through MiH have connected with Mr Hastings & St Leonards, and in turn individuals from Mr Hastings & St Leonards have helped me with MiH. The ability of the project to connect men with each other either through projects or via individual skills, experience and assets has been truly organic. Friendships have blossomed and the self-confidence of individuals who feel a part of something significant has been apparent with those men stepping forward offering their time and skills for ongoing activities.' [Community Development Worker, Hastings Voluntary Action]

The first connection with the project has often been a public activity or event that welcomed conversations about men's mental health, with the core group of men leading with their own lived experience of managing their mental health – signalling that vulnerability and honesty is both welcomed and encouraged. Many of the ongoing activities that have been created through collaboration in the wider community have elements of peer-to-peer support or talking therapy. There is some evidence to support the impact of these activities in supporting conversations about masculinity and self-perception within safe spaces, and that this has empowered men to better advocate on behalf of themselves and others in accessing services.

⁹ See: <https://making-it-happen.org.uk/>

'The men involved with MrH&SL are all discovering different skills and knowledge about themselves, understanding themselves better and how they and the project could help to change 'unhelpful' male behaviour in relation to women, misogyny and societal power imbalance. The men I have contact with in the project are very thoughtful about their impact on their families and in their relationships. The project has acted as a 'safe space' to be a masculine man and all that may be. I have also heard conversations about the experience of men in relation to the NHS and GP/primary care etc. I feel that those men feel more knowledgeable and empowered to see their GP if they have an issue now.' [Community Development Worker, Hastings Voluntary Action]

'You know the way you can see a change in someone, in the way they hold themselves and interact with the world? Through a small number of interactions, you could see he'd made a profound change in his life. He'd felt there was no hope, no support or prospect of anything and then found himself in a place where he was actively discussing and embracing things he'd never thought he'd be able to talk about.' [Co-Director, Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC]

Participating men, and stakeholders in the community and voluntary sector, have reported that the connections made within meetings, support group settings or creative engagement opportunities have also nudged attitudinal shifts that have benefitted individuals and the local community.

'These networks extend beyond formal meetings, as friendships formed within the project often continue outside of structured sessions, reinforcing the benefits of peer support. One of the most striking elements of the project has been its creative and community-driven approach. Initiatives such as the Merman Project have challenged traditional perceptions of masculinity, allowing men to express themselves in new and meaningful ways. By engaging in artistic endeavours, participants have not only found joy and fulfilment but have also contributed to breaking down societal stigmas surrounding men's emotional expression. This creative outreach has served as a powerful tool for engagement, bringing together individuals who might not have otherwise participated in health-focused discussions.' [Steering Group Member & Lived Experience Facilitator, Possability People]

Statutory services stakeholders who have been directly involved in at least one hosted conversation or learning event have also made links with the aims of Mr Hastings & St Leonards and there have been direct opportunities for collaboration as a result. Members of the Steering Group have also indicated that there are '*in-roads being made to clinical services*' that could be explored as the work moves forward. However, there is a note of caution that the linkage between the system stakeholders in statutory services and the men driving the movement is dependent on capacity and future resources. There also needs to be a continued willingness to share power and decision-making responsibility with men if the initiative is to evolve as a movement for men's health.

'The ongoing connection of this work with the system – leading with trust and men's opinions - is paramount.' [System Stakeholder, East Sussex County Council]

Engaging systems stakeholders might require a shift in focus going forward, with defined KPIs that help to state a case for partnership and connection, while building on the legacy of this current phase of Mr Hastings & St Leonards:

'The key objective was to improve the life expectancy of men in Hastings and St Leonards. So in terms of the quantitative and qualitative data on that - whilst we perhaps might want to steer away from some of that, within this project - it might be useful to understand a direct impact in the future.'
[System Stakeholder, Hastings Borough Council]

While recognising the increasing reach and influence that Mr Hastings and St Leonards has grown in the community, there is also an opportunity to build a more strategic alliance across other men-led initiatives in Hastings & St Leonards, working towards shared aims. This will support the evolution of Mr Hastings & St Leonards and its long-term aim to grow men's health as a social movement. An appetite for this alliance building has been expressed by some of the current Steering Group members, and through responses to the Mr Hastings & St Leonards survey. This might also mitigate the risks around capacity and volunteer burnout involved with a shift in funding and resource beyond June 2025.

Perspectives: Increased partnership working leading to new possibilities

Community Volunteering Coordinator, St Michael's Hospice

Increased partnership working would be the most significant change I've directly experienced. Both with Hasting Voluntary Action (HVA) and Mr Hastings & St Leonards, with a clear point of contact at each organisation.

I think through the course of the project's development and the various things that have sprung out of it – the relationship between the Hospice and HVA is probably a little bit more rounded now. I wouldn't say it's a whole Hospice link-up with Mr Hastings & Saint Leonards - we're not quite there - but definitely the relationship building has meant that more people within our organisation are aware of what's going on, both with Mr. Hastings and St Leonards and with HVA generally. I have steered new staff – for example, our inclusion lead, in the direction of HVA due to the strength of this work and our connection.

We had a piece of internal Hospice work that linked well with the themes being explored in the men's champions activities around men's views on why the health and life expectancy of men in the town would be significantly less than other parts of the country. I approached our senior leadership team and asked to do some exploratory research work on behalf of Mr. Hastings and St Leonards to 'start the conversation'. The leadership team supported this - they were aware through previous forums and research that men are underrepresented in the hospice in terms of the demographic – staff, volunteers and residents (an 80/20 split). I started having conversations with men at our events and groups, and with staff members, to get their views.

Maz, from Mr Hastings & St Leonards – a fellow Men's Champion - heard about what we were exploring and we started a conversation, sharing links and ideas. It started a ripple effect that led to the Hospice initiating a bereavement group for men that we launched midway through 2024, and then later an LGBTQI+ bereavement group. We might have arrived at these men's bereavement group ideas at some point ourselves, but it would have taken more time potentially - it was through linking in with Mr. Hastings and St Leonards that brought them about more quickly and to an extent in the form they currently take where people can self-refer into them.

As a side note – another ripple was that our conversations got Mr Hastings & St Leonards thinking about other talk groups and that's led to those men forming a Thursday talk club. Today, what we've got is an external group that we can promote to our community, and we can promote our Hospice groups through Mr. Hastings and St Leonards. Overall, our Hospice team have improved awareness about how men can access community support.

Mr Hastings & St Leonards has seeded work to happen in the community, but it's also raised awareness within the hospice – staff, volunteers and the men who connect with us. Men have either actively, or in a supported way, sought other opportunities in the community.

It's early days still for it, but it's a beginning of something.

8 Creating the conditions for wider change

Through the leadership and work of the Host Organisation, Mr Hastings and St Leonards has facilitated connections and conversations with a wide range of local organisations and system players, including those who have a real opportunity to influence change in relation to some key health determinants for men. Some of these connections and conversations have led to tangible action and new initiatives beyond the direct work of HVA and the core group of men, consistent with the overall aims of the project.

Through the work outlined above in Table 2, along with many other examples of meetings, presentations and events attended and delivered by the HVA team (and increasingly alongside men from the core group), there is some promising evidence that new connections and conversations about men's mental health are taking place across the system. Our interviews with a range of people working in different roles across the care and support system in Hastings and St Leonards have consistently shown that:

- People are supportive of the need to improve collaboration and to open up conversations about men's health and wellbeing
- There is a recognition that the current system of care and support often fails to address men's needs
- The central narrative connected with the Mr Hastings and St Leonards movement does provide a promising platform from which to generate new ideas and promote positive action, and
- There are examples of follow-up collaboration and action starting to take place in order to better reach and engage with men who would benefit from health and wellbeing support, including taking part in meaningful and engaging activities and building new connections.

A number of connections have also been made specifically with groups and services focused on tackling some of the most important health determinants for men, including those working in:

- Mental health and wellbeing
- Housing and homelessness
- Drug and alcohol misuse
- Physical activity
- Social isolation and loneliness, and
- Health and Social care

These have provided opportunities to share learning from the project to date (and in particular the factors that influence positive engagement among men of different backgrounds) and to consider how best to make use of the connections being made through Mr Hastings and St Leonards. Understanding how best to share learning across the community, and across sectors is vitally important moving forward to support the development of men's health as a movement in Hastings & St Leonards:

'This kind of conversation is important for the future – we've come together today across the community to focus on the connections in this work – but if we don't meet up, we don't know about what's out there.' [Co-Director, Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC]

However, the wider system of care and support is complex, and it is likely that a continued focus on broadening reach, supported by more targeted (deeper) engagement and follow-up with those best placed to influence system-wide change, will be needed. This could include reviewing and updating the system mapping work that was undertaken earlier in the project.

It is important to note that many local external stakeholders have been involved in Mr Hastings and St Leonards right from the very beginning. This has been key to gaining buy-in, notably as they could see a clear demonstration of the Asset Based Community Development values and approaches being used. While there is some evidence of a lack of clarity over the movement's longer term aims (more so earlier on in the project), and its ability to describe itself in a way that people and organisations understand (in part due to its distinction from more traditional services / support groups), this buy-in to the work of the movement has continued to build and is an important condition for generating longer term change at scale.

'Overall, the Mr Hastings and St Leonards project has achieved a remarkable transformation in the local community. By fostering open conversations, strengthening support networks, and encouraging creative expression, it has created a lasting impact on the lives of many men. As participation continues to grow and the initiative gains wider acknowledgment, the project stands as a testament to the power of community-driven solutions in tackling complex health and well-being challenges.' [Steering Group Member & Lived Experience Facilitator, Possability People]

Mr Hastings and St Leonards' focus on lived experience and 'co-leadership' is engaging men in a more meaningful way than other initiatives may have done in the past. Key to this is the 'authenticity' and 'relatability' of the men involved in the movement and their willingness to share personal experiences, which should provide useful learning for others to consider.

An important feature of an Asset Based Community Development approach is to understand and build on the strengths and assets within a community. Feedback to date from stakeholders, and some of those men more directly involved in leading this work, has shown that by allowing the initiative to 'follow' (and build on) the interests and ambitions of the men involved, it has created opportunities for men to feel confident to tell their stories in a safe and creative way. This has built an element of authenticity and relatability which others have connected strongly with. The central (and simple) narrative around opening up conversations has also supported this.

'The hardest part of all this is how difficult it is to pinpoint success. I won't know what impact my conversation will have unless they tell me there and then, or if I ever get any feedback. The overarching message is hope. I do know that it offers hope to people. Hope, connection, engagement, community, resonance. If Men's Room achieves one legacy, the increased conversation and enhanced sense of community spirit and understanding is it.' [Co-Director, Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC]

Perspectives: Men engaging in conversations about mental health

Local man, now a co-Director of Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC

For me, the single most significant change has been in the way men in the community have been engaging with the conversation around men's mental health - and mental health in general.

The longer the Men's Room has been going, people have started to say: '*Oh yes, I've heard of that*', or '*Oh yeah, so-and-so said something about that*' and so people have started to actively get help for themselves – or to make suggestions about what we can do, or ask for advice on how to get someone else to get help. It's very community-based and conversational, but we do also know that GP practices have also referred people, STARS rehab support, the NHS or others such as that.

An example of the 'ripples' working would be through The Grumpy Cook café sessions, for example – the Grumpy Men's Club. There was one guy who came down to that and you know the way you can see a change in someone, in the way they hold themselves and interact with the world? Through a small number of interactions, you could see he'd made a profound change in his life. He'd felt there was no hope, no support or prospect of anything and then found himself in a place where he was actively discussing and embracing things he'd never thought he'd be able to talk about. He embraced the methodology and shared it with other people. That's the ripple right there – we caught him, he's catching other people, and they are connecting with others. It's movement at a local level: we've captured people on an individual level, others have become aware of what we're doing and are more comfortable talking with other people about it.

In the barbers a couple of months ago I'd started a chat with a random guy there. He said that what we were doing was incredible – that people were now supported to share about their challenges. The very fact that this all exists as a concept – let alone a CIC now – gives a message of hope to people. It gives them the opportunity to know that 'It's okay to not be okay'. That's the message that we're propagating. People are running with it – and you can see that when you think about what is being collectively achieved: 'Baton of Hope', 'Project Rewild', 'Take Action Man', and guys who have secured funding for their arts initiatives through the Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC to grow their work. We're about creating communities to support communities – it's something beautiful, a machine of hope in an otherwise hopeless world.

We're giving men – and people in general – a strong message that it's okay to talk about it. If you're feeling crap today – it's okay. It moves us away from the stiff upper lip, male machismo, 'men don't cry', 'men don't talk' aspect – it's allowed us to push forward and make movement to show that's a bogus way of thinking, and that there's a lot of strength in that perceived weakness.

I always say that if I can help one person by sharing my personal history of trauma, of addiction, that makes everything that I lived through worthwhile, but what I'm seeing is more than that. This work is about more than that. It's engaging and creating a sense of empathy and understanding within the community where people are less likely to look down on those who are struggling and more likely to look down with an outstretched hand and say '*Here, can I help you?*'

9 Building sustainable infrastructure for improving men's health

Members of the core group of men involved in the movement undertook work during the final year of the project, with support from HVA, to explore the potential for the Mr Hastings and St Leonards movement to be formalised as an independent entity which could continue the work of the movement beyond the current funding period. This has resulted in the formation of a Community Interest Company (CIC) which will operate independently of HVA and attract funding from a range of potential sources to carry on the work that has begun under Mr Hastings and St Leonards.

This may also open up new opportunities to attract new men to the community, to broaden its reach, to build new partnerships, and to continue to promote the central message of opening up conversations about men's mental health and wellbeing. And while we have found evidence of a clear commitment among the core group for this course of action, although with some reservations about the capacity currently available to build a new organisation, there remains uncertainty about the extent to which this new entity can continue the wider system influencing work that will be necessary to support longer term sustainable change in attitudes and practice.

There is an opportunity to explore alliance-building across men's health projects in Hastings & St Leonards in order to ensure a broad range of experiences and to avoid volunteer burnout as the movement grows. There is also a need to recognise that successes to date have largely been facilitated by leading with the men's trust and expertise, and that this must form the approach going forward.

'Leave the future up to the men because they know what it needs and will come up with the solutions. It is so important to always expand and bring in new voices and perspectives to remain motivated and outward-looking, stay well-intentioned and diverse. The system is diverse – this will draw this out of the movement.' [Original Commissioner, Public Health Directorate, East Sussex County Council]

An immediate legacy of the Mr Hastings & St Leonards work is the recent award for Hastings to be included in the 2025 Baton of Hope tour (Stand Up To Suicide).¹⁰ Involvement in this UK-wide initiative reflects both the importance of addressing the high rate of suicide in the local community, and the community infrastructure that the Mr Hastings and St Leonards movement has been able to create in partnership with many others across the system.

The Baton of Hope is the UK's largest suicide prevention initiative and Hastings' inclusion in the 2025 tour reflects both the need to better support mental ill health in the local community (especially among men), and the foundations that are being built through Mr Hastings and St Leonards to:

- Gather and share evidence about why men do not always get the support they need in a timely way

¹⁰ For more information about the Baton of Hope see: <https://batonofhopeuk.org/>

- Effectively engage with a wide cross section of the local community, and
- Provide new opportunities to open up conversations about men's mental health and wellbeing, and what needs to change in order to break down the known barriers to improving the lives of those men facing particular challenges.

The emphasis on the Baton of Hope as the next immediate focus of the Mr Hastings & St Leonards community prompts questions about the future direction and emphasis of the work, and it's connections with the wider health system. The future of Mr Hastings & St Leonards, and the focus of any future movement will be influenced by the connection points with that wider system.

If early intervention is to play a key role in future work – as opposed to a primary prevention focus, or supporting men in crisis – then this presents opportunities to explore strategic and commissioning links with the appropriate parts of the health system – defining its aims and work towards measurable long-term outcomes through linkage with the appropriate part of the system.

In addition to supporting the movement to have a clearer focus and to articulate how it is making a meaningful impact, this might also direct the type of activities that the movement prioritises, including for example peer-to-peer support, or a focus on reducing stigma, including self-stigma, and social isolation.

10 Outcomes for local men leading and delivering the movement

'We've stayed the course. And what we want to do is build for the next stage of it, and use the ABCD approach, again. It could have been very prescriptive. It could have been very sort of 'tick box'-like in its approach. And it wasn't.' [Co-Director, Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC]

The positive outcomes for individual men involved in Mr Hastings & St Leonards continued to be frequently and powerfully reported by community and voluntary sector stakeholders and the men themselves. All intended outcomes for men involved have been met to some extent, with particular strength around men supporting other men, and having opportunities to use their (lived) experience, skills and assets to establish and promote the movement. There is also a strong indication that the men involved value the principles of the Asset Based Community Development approach taken, and will continue to apply this to any future evolution of the movement.

Men involved in the movement know why it exists, what it is trying to change and have the resources to adapt the mechanism of delivery in response to emerging needs

There is strong evidence that the project has led to profound outcomes for individual men who played an active role in engaging with Mr Hastings & St Leonards. The men involved frequently cite the freedom, flexibility and the fidelity to the Asset Based Community Development approach as a significant driver in supporting their experience of the work, building their confidence to engage and to advocate on behalf of other men, and to proactively use their skills, assets and experiences in playing an active and equal role in developing Mr Hastings & St Leonards. This supported the core group's ability to influence the direction of the work, and to respond quickly and effectively to emergent needs and opportunities, with frequent reference to and support for the Asset Based Community Development approach. The two main legacy activities of this work, the Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC and the successful bid for Baton of Hope, are a direct result of the resource and capacity linked to Mr Hastings & St Leonards building for the future and responding to emergent and allied opportunities.

Men involved in the movement are able to use their (lived) experience, knowledge, skills and interests to support the work of the movement

The core group of men involved led with their (lived) experience, knowledge, skills and interests to support the work of the movement and to create tangible outputs that centred their stories and acted as a call to action to have conversations about men's mental health, and mental health in general. There is evidence from both system stakeholders and from the core men involved, that more honest, productive and supportive conversations are being supported through the work of the movement, with powerful and open conversations about stigma, self-stigma, masculinity and male stereotypes being challenged through supportive and creative spaces and activities that have been initiated and led by local men.

A signature of this work is how creative expression has supported conversations about men's health that are proactively aimed at reaching wider audiences: the 'mobile sofa', documentary film, podcast and rehearsed readings (monologues) all drew on the skills, assets and lived experience of the participating men and attempted to connect more men in support of the movement for men's health. There is acknowledgement that Mr Hastings & St Leonards is part of a complex system of allied initiatives that are interconnected, and that supporting a

movement for men's health recognises the power of collective action and intersecting connection points. This offers 'hope' to men who might be struggling in the community.

'People are running with it – and you can see that when you think about what is being collectively achieved: 'Baton of Hope', 'Project Rewild', 'Take Action Man', and guys who have secured funding for their arts initiatives through the Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC to grow their work. We're about creating communities to support communities – it's something beautiful, a machine of hope in an otherwise hopeless world.' [Co-Director, Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC]

Men involved in the movement experience improved mental health and wellbeing

There is both direct testimony and reported evidence to suggest that men have experienced improved mental health and wellbeing through their involvement in the movement, with mental health being a significant focus of Mr Hastings & St Leonards soon after project activity commenced. Stakeholders have placed strong emphasis on the variety of opportunities for men to come together as being a driver behind a reduction in isolation and improvements in mental health and wellbeing.

'The formation of groups such as the Grumpy Men's Club has provided a non-judgmental environment where men can connect, share their thoughts, and find camaraderie. These groups have played a vital role in reducing isolation, which is a major contributor to poor mental health. Events such as the Men's Health Week Celebration have further strengthened this sense of community, drawing attention to important issues and encouraging more men to take an active role in their well-being.' [Steering Group Member & Lived Experience Coordinator, Possability People]

For the Host Organisation, the willingness of men to embrace conversations about mental health was an unexpected outcome that is attributed to taking an asset based approach and being consistent in stating that no conversation was 'off the table' from a commissioner perspective. Consistency in how peer-to-peer sessions have been available and delivered is also vitally important, with the core group of men indicating that in 'prescribed but trusting spaces', like peer-led talk groups, there is a necessity and expectation that the session is consistently experienced by participating men. This is because some men will not actively participate initially while crossing the threshold from isolation into peer support until they feel it is a consistent environment to open up and connect in.

Men involved in the movement build their confidence to tackle their own challenges and / or to support others

There was also much evidence to support men feeling more confident to act for themselves or others. This manifested as individual men or their loved ones signposting someone to Mr Hastings & St Leonards, or initiatives within the movement, as a first step to connection and community. It also extended to reports of men feeling more proactive and empowered in their conversations with their employer or with services, such as accessing their GP.

This expression of self-confidence and mutual support has been most tangibly represented in the peer support groups that have been initiated or co-designed by men involved with the project, and by the emergence of men within these groups who have developed the confidence to speak about men's health and wellbeing locally (through community outreach or live events) and nationally (through active participation at Parliamentary awareness raising).

Men involved in the movement have opportunities to influence services and groups in relation to supporting men's health and wellbeing, including through developing allied initiatives

While there is strong evidence from this evaluation which shows that men have influenced other services and groups, there is less evidence to suggest a significant shift in influencing service provision at this stage. For now, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest an awareness of and confidence in signposting men to Mr Hastings & St Leonards, but no clear evidence that services themselves have evolved as a result. It is possible that this will require more time, and deeper engagement with existing groups and services, to support change in those other settings. And while there is a willingness of the core group of men to connect across sectors and to ensure men are better supported locally, there is also an acknowledgement of the challenge they face (in relation to staying connected with the 'system') when their participation is voluntary. An Asset Based Community Development approach will support men to strive to nudge change, but it requires access and a willingness of statutory services to flex systems and processes and make time available, outside of traditional working hours, to support meaningful partnership working with local men.

An unexpected outcome that might support a more flexible and engaged involvement from statutory services going forward has been the impact that Mr Hastings & St Leonards has on commissioner attitudes within East Sussex County Council. There is evidence to suggest attitudinal shifts and more expansive conversations around commissioning as a result of Mr Hastings & St Leonards. This may be the opportunity to influence service (re)design going forward, dependent on the lasting involvement of senior decision-makers with commissioning responsibilities.

'I think the reputation of the men's work has opened a bit of a pathway to embracing a more long-term outcome rather than output culture and the adoption by East Sussex County Council of more of an asset based perspective. I also think that some partners found the events quite revelatory and powerful as a way of looking at concepts like community resilience and activism. In terms of wider systems change I think the visibility of the project and the different ways it has found to convey its message has strengthened the understanding within public health and East Sussex County Council of the potential for asset based working. This has been seen not just within the management of the Mr Hastings and St Leonards contract but on other areas too.' [Director, Hastings Voluntary Action - Host Organisation]

Perspectives: Resilience and purpose leading to wider community connections

Local man, now co-Director of Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC

When I first engaged with this project I saw that the passion from the whole lived experience and professional community was very high. The challenges of putting into practice as a new team with common goal was and still is the main driver for collaboration.

This project has led me (and us as a team, which includes the Host Organisation - Hastings Voluntary Action) to accelerate our ideas of engagement with supporting men of all ages with their mental struggles.

In the two years of engagement, I have found a renewed vigour in life which has helped with home life and work stresses. Also, I have become more resilient and have discovered more about myself as a man, father, husband and human being. This project has provided me with a life purpose. As it has for other men and women involved. We are seeing the results in each project we deliver. 'Talk Club' has just completed its fourth session. We started with four men on Week One and now have seven men attending. With new additions each week. It's very brave to step into a meeting to bare all when you don't know anyone there. We have also stretched our message overseas. With a regular podcast subscriber in Germany! 2024 culminated in Mr Hastings representatives speaking at the Houses of Parliament on a panel with national mental health figures and MPs supporting this cause. We have also migrated this project to support its longevity by starting a CIC to continue this support long term.

11 Outcomes for men in the wider community

In the final six months of the Mr Hastings & St Leonards project, we ran a survey designed to explore the perspectives of both men who had been involved, and those men in the wider community who might not yet have direct experience of the work. The survey achieved 25 responses. This relatively small response rate (despite wide promotion through the many Mr Hastings and St Leonards communications and social media channels) might reflect the challenges the movement will face in the way it works going forward – raising valuable questions for those taking the legacy forward of how to build sustained engagement with a wider group of men as they build a broad movement for men's health and wellbeing.

The survey was intended to provide a snapshot of perceptions and outcomes for men in the wider community, and to offer some insight to Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC as they develop the movement beyond the current funding period. The results show that survey respondents:

- Rated their mental health, their physical health, and their current financial situation as the areas in their life that they were least happy with (Figure 6)

- Much prefer to receive face to face support, rather than online or telephone support, and / or through reading written information (Figure 7)
- Believe that the biggest barriers for men looking for help are not knowing where to go and not wanting to ask for help (Figure 8)

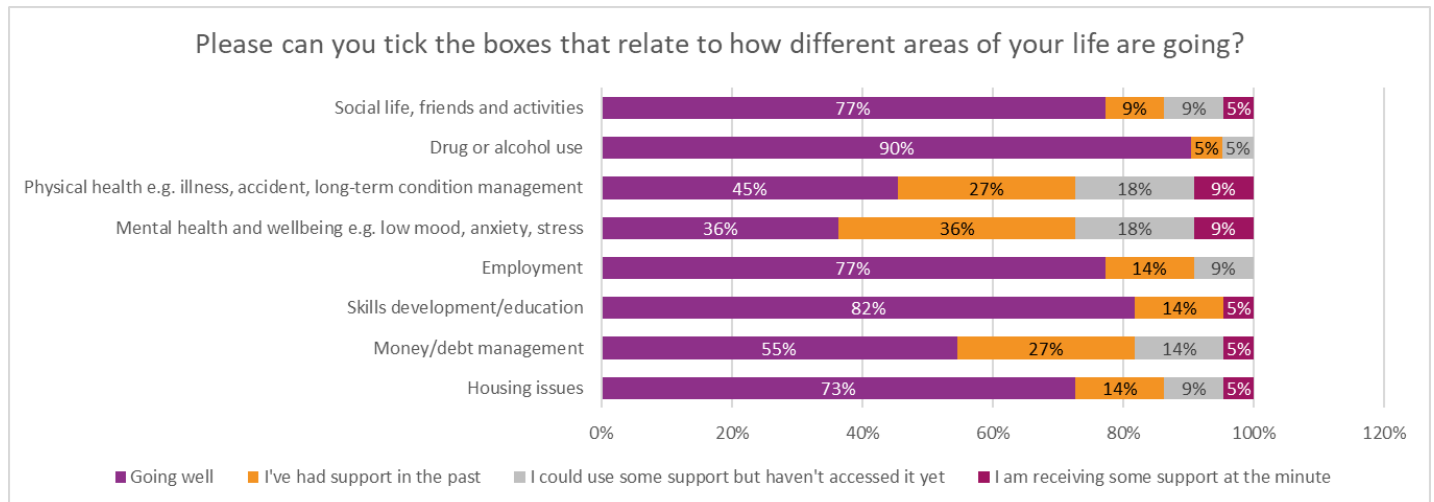


Figure 6: Survey respondent views on different aspects of their lives

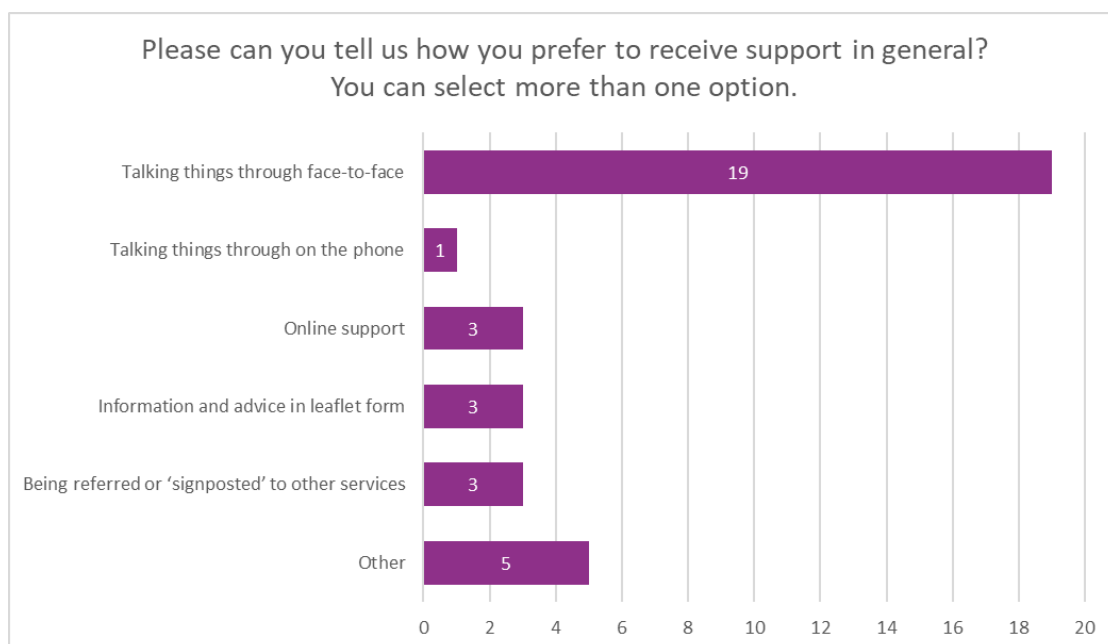


Figure 7: Survey respondent views on how they prefer to receive support

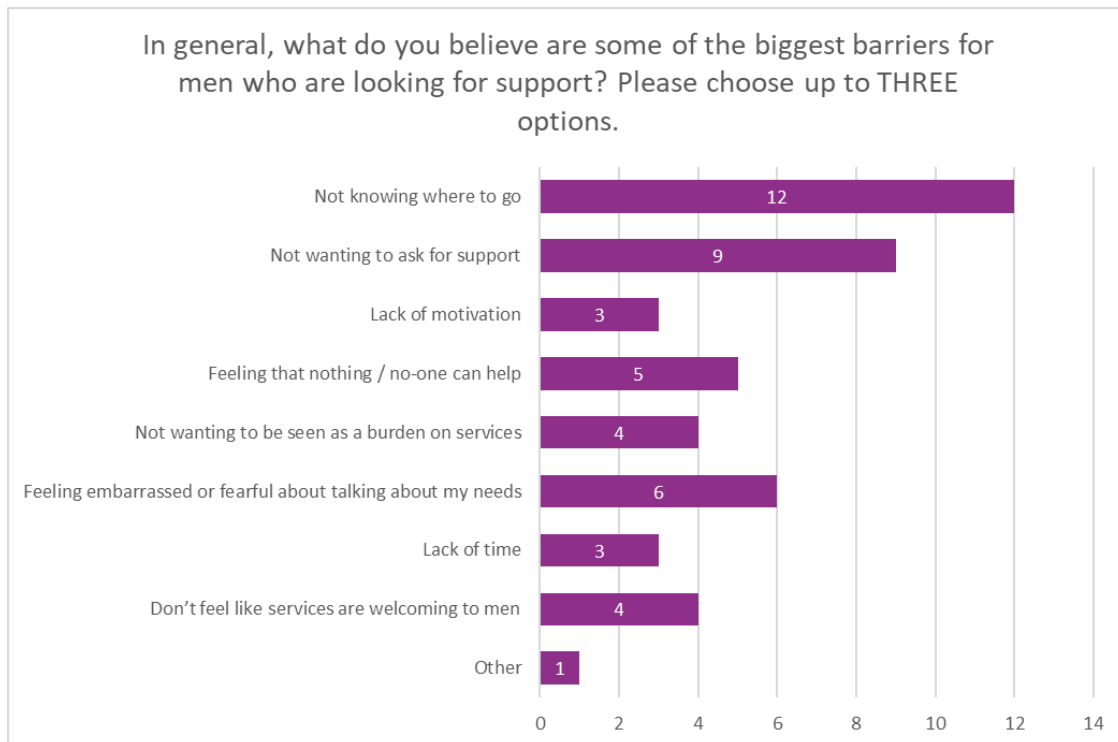


Figure 8: Barriers that survey respondents feel are most likely to be experienced by men

Alongside other evidence from this evaluation we have also found that men outside of the movement have started to recognise the importance of the movement and what it is trying to achieve, and to feel motivated to engage with and contribute to the movement.

The core group of men have proactively sought opportunities to reach wide audiences, engaging with men's health and peer-led initiatives outside of the immediate Hastings & St Leonards catchment area, and successfully bringing their stories and experiences to national audiences (for example, being invited to speak at a Parliamentary event with a mental health focus, and successfully bidding to bring the Baton of Hope to Hastings in 2025). These opportunities offer a recognition of the importance of the movement and what it is trying to achieve, and make a clear connection between this work in Hastings and national objectives around men's health and wellbeing.

It is also important to note that just as men might experience the benefits of Asset Based Community Development without using this language, they might also be connected to or engage with Mr Hastings & St Leonards without necessarily knowing this. Part of growing the movement is initiating the conversation around men's health, particularly men's health and wellbeing, and this may be readily shared without always linking it back to Mr Hastings & St Leonards, or to any other named initiative that has benefited from this support and resource. Very often, the connection with the work is on a one-to-one basis – supporting identification with a culture rather than with a named project.

'I always say that if I can help one person by sharing my personal history of trauma, of addiction, that makes everything that I lived through worthwhile, but what I'm seeing is more than that. This work is about more than that. It's engaging and creating a sense of empathy and understanding within the community where people are less likely to look down on those who are struggling and more likely to look down with an outstretched hand and say 'Here, can I help you?' [Co-Director, Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC]

Where men have not yet (knowingly) engaged there is certainly an appetite for this type of community development initiative, and there were many suggestions of how Mr Hastings & St Leonards can engage new audiences locally – diversifying the reach to include a younger cohort, men aged 65+, refugee communities, LGBTQ+ and family men with children who might experience isolation.

At this stage of Mr Hastings & St Leonards, there is not currently enough evidence to support that men who have not been directly involved in the movement are finding opportunities to influence services and groups in relation to supporting men's health and wellbeing, and therefore it would also be difficult to understand if they are more likely to get involved in decision-making about their lives. However, it is important to note that the men who have been driving the movement have been committed to it across the 2+ years of their involvement and they have embraced the uncertainty of the project, rather than expecting to get involved in a project with a clear project plan and a prescriptive set of activities and outputs. It might be fair to assume that the men involved in this movement are at ease with embracing this approach, and that other men might equally feel more comfortable with a more prescriptive approach or one-off activities or involvement, particular to their interests.

'By enabling the programme to be authentic in its ABCD approach and to be truly led by the assets, needs and aspirations of local men, this has seen a group of core men remain actively engaged in the project for 2+ years and be proactive in establishing a mechanism to support sustainability (e.g. becoming a CIC and seeking funding). This is unlikely to have been achieved if through commissioning/contract management arrangements we had been more prescriptive in terms of core activities and outcomes.'
[Project Manager, Hastings Voluntary Action - Host Organisation]

This may need to be considered further as part of any future work.

12 Outcomes across the care & support system for men's wellbeing

There is consensus across stakeholders that the co-designed Mr Hastings & St Leonards brand provides a strong visual identity that has enabled productive conversations about men's health to be initiated by peers and across local systems. In order to build on the strength of the initiative beyond the brand, there is a recognition that wider involvement and dedicated resource is needed to build capacity and maintain connections with services and networks once the current funding has ended.

At the time of compiling this final evaluation report (May 2025), future resourcing for a continuation or next phase of Mr Hastings & St Leonards is not confirmed, and discussion of sustainability and legacy focuses primarily on the continuing work to grow men's health as a social movement through the newly formed Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC – the partnership of the core group of men involved continuing their voluntary commitment to the work, with the support of a voluntary board who will be recruited fully over Summer 2025.

The next allied high-profile initiative supported by the Host Organisation HVA, in partnership with local men, is the Baton of Hope. Much energy and focus has already been directed towards the Baton of Hope preparations since confirmation in Winter 2024.

Men's time, skill and energy is vital to the ongoing growth of this movement and any related / allied initiatives. In order to effectively collaborate with system stakeholders there is a need to recognise and value their input, trust the direction(s) they propose to go in, and to flex existing systems and processes so that volunteers are able to engage equitably and outside of traditional working hours. Commissioners within East Sussex County Council have explicitly stated their recognition of the value of the Asset Based Community Development approach that was a strong feature of this project, and have indicated that the perceived success of Mr Hastings & St Leonards in mobilising local men and partnership building (to the benefit of men's health and wellbeing) has influenced their internal advocacy for similar funded public health inventions. They have also acknowledged that *'this work takes time. A lot of time to get going'*.

Local stakeholders within Hastings Borough Council, though not direct funders of this phase of the work have also recognised the strength of the approach and frame the conditions for change and success indicators slightly differently.

'I think it's about improving engagement with the community. Right, you know, we will see that people who have had histories of homelessness and rough sleeping typically become isolated, perhaps sometimes when they even move into accommodation. And obviously, you know, again, the stigma attached with it, they don't know who to reach out to, but also, some people have a fear and distrust of services in general. So, enabling it to be driven by the community and local people - - to have that level of peer support was also something that I found interesting in the project and something I see that has been a sort of benefit.' [System stakeholder, Hastings Borough Council]

The Host Organisation, HVA, also suggest that there may be early and unanticipated ways to measure the impact of this phase of Mr Hastings & St Leonards – focusing on inward investment to the town as a direct result and (to an extent) modelled on this asset based approach.

‘As an organisation, I can point to almost £400,000 worth of investments that we have attracted to Hastings as a result of being able to point to ways in which this way of working is having an impact. It’s enabling HVA to roll out leadership training in Hastings, to get Macmillan - who stepped out of their comfort zone, looked at the film, saw some of the work that HVA was doing, and say we’re going to make Hastings a place to invest in the council space, to develop some of this way of working. There are a number of ways in which we can kind of almost quantify things. [The HVA / Mr Hastings & St Leonards Team] were in on some of the very early conversations with Macmillan, because we wanted to say, “Well, we can tell you how we work”. They said, “Here’s the investment - and of course, we must have a discovery phase.”’ [Director, Hastings Voluntary Action - Host Organisation]

The variety of perspectives of senior decision-makers and system stakeholders suggests a strong need for a continuation in some form of a steering group function, with a more tightly defined and proactive role for Steering Group members in ensuring direct and meaningful contact with the wider system – in areas that will achieve the greatest and most sustainable longer term impact. There is a desire from within the existing steering group – from both local men and professionals – that the next phase of work requires a clearly defined vision, supported by an action plan and a move towards measuring the long-term objectives of growing men’s health as a movement through early intervention and prevention activities. Individual men within the Steering Group have also stated that their personal lives, connections and family dynamic have been influenced through their professional involvement with Mr Hastings & St Leonards as an invited member of the project Steering Group.

Continuing to build this movement will also require strategic alliance building and broadening the reach and interests of men involved so that diverse communities of men with a wide range of skills and assets are able to grow and sustain the movement, in partnership with system stakeholders and informed by the learning generated to date.

Perspectives: A flexible approach to commissioning to support potential change

Head of Public Mental Health, East Sussex County Council

As men's mental health is a priority within Public Health we previously commissioned a community development project in Hastings that offered small funding pots for the development of activities that gave opportunities for men to connect together and offer mutual support. As that project was ending Mr Hastings and St Leonards was emerging as a project or a movement that those local men in Hastings could connect with and generate more ways to offer mutual support and connection.

As a co-chair of a newly formed Men's Mental Health Community of Interest Group, that initially was only East Sussex and is now Pan-Sussex, I have been really encouraged to see the level of interest and engagement around men's mental health that has been generated by the Mr Hastings and St Leonard's work.

The project team have had the freedom to, as they describe it, "go where the energy has taken us" and that is quite unusual for a project with the level of funding that Mr Hastings and St Leonard's has had. Usually there would be a set of KPIs to deliver.

From a commissioning perspective it is really fascinating to see this project develop from the voices and stories of local men, without a pre-set agenda of how they need to conduct themselves and what they will deliver. The project team have generated an approach that gives the support the men involved need, whilst also encouraging them to develop ideas that they think could make a difference to them around their health and wellbeing.

13 Key shifts in attitude and action

The findings presented in this report show that strong progress has been made to establish and promote the Mr Hastings and St Leonards men's movement. Those men involved most closely in project activities have, in many cases, experienced quite profound impacts on their own lives, including their mental health and wellbeing, and they have actively engaged more widely with others across the local community.

Mr Hastings and St Leonards has also facilitated connections and conversations with a wide range of local organisations and system players, including those who have a real opportunity to influence change in relation to some key health determinants for men. Some of these have led to tangible action and new initiatives beyond the direct work of the Host Organisation and the core group of men, consistent with the overall aims of the project. The core narrative of the movement (opening up conversations about men's health and wellbeing) has landed well with, and is supported by, many others across the local community. This is supported by a growing body of evidence about the barriers men face in relation to seeking and accessing care and support services, which has provided a solid platform from which to raise awareness, shift attitudes, and build greater collaboration across the system, all of which we are starting to see happen to a greater or lesser extent. Much of this has been facilitated by creating (and following) authentic and trusting relationships.

This approach, and the experience of Mr Hastings and St Leonards to date, aligns well with the evidence around system-wide action that is emerging elsewhere, which suggests that 'six shifts' need to happen if sustainable positive change is to happen at scale.¹¹

Introducing the "Six Shifts"



Figure 9: The 'six shifts' for system change developed by Collaborate CIC as part of their work on community development in other similar contexts

¹¹ The Six Core Foundations and the "Six shifts", Collaborate CIC Guide.

The insights we have gathered to date in relation to Mr Hastings and St Leonards show that progress has been made in relation to all of these six shifts, in particular:

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

However, it is likely that action will be needed over a much longer period (that is, beyond the end of the current funding period) if we are to see impact at a population level, and that future action may need to include more targeted work in different parts of the system.

14 Considerations for future action

As a result of the learning from Mr Hastings and St Leonards over the past three years, there is a shared recognition across the Host Organisation, among steering group members, and among the core group of men who have been involved to date, that connections with the wider system need to be identified and consolidated in order to further develop this social movement and to influence the way the wider system works to address men's health and wellbeing across Hastings and St Leonards.

Now that Mr Hastings & St Leonards has been established, leading with the passions and interests of the men, in order to keep spaces equitable and productive moving forward there does need to be some oversight to reinforce the conversations, connections and learning.

'We don't want this project to end – what happens next is not the conclusion of a project, we should be thinking of a visual representation as a spidergram rather than a timeline: what happens next as a branching out rather than an endpoint.' [Community Sector Stakeholder & Steering Group Member]

With this in mind, we would encourage all relevant stakeholders to give consideration to the following recommended actions with the aim of continuing to build momentum across the local community and with a view to generating impact beyond what has been achieved over the past three years.

For a strategic alliance of local people and professionals working together for improved men's health outcomes:

- Develop a new strategy for deeper engagement across the system, especially with statutory services but also building on the many different conversations and relationships that have been established to date across the community and voluntary sector – focusing on where the biggest impact could be for longer term sustainable change. This could include revisiting some of the system mapping work that was undertaken earlier in the project and identifying any gaps that exist in relation to the achievements of Mr Hastings and St Leonards to date.

- Better understand the data that may be available (or which could be collected) to track changes at a population level, and across the care and support system, that may provide evidence of improved men's health and wellbeing and more timely access to informal and formal support mechanisms among men in the local community. This should include consideration of how existing data can be accessed and used, and what needs to be put in place to respond to what that data is saying.

For growing the Mr Hastings & St Leonards movement:

- Make use of the updated Theory of Change for the men's movement based on the findings from this evaluation, to generate short, medium and long-term plans and outcomes linked to relevant local and county-wide strategies.
- Identify opportunities for building sustained linkages with the wider public health system and related initiatives (such as through one or more stakeholder 'roundtables'), led by Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC but with support from Hasting Voluntary Action as the local infrastructure body and key statutory services.
- Bring interested members of the current project Steering Group through into the next phase of this work, with an emphasis on clearly defined and proactive roles that link grassroots, volunteer-led, work of local men to systems stakeholders and decision-makers.
- Explore and identify how best to leverage off the upcoming Baton of Hope tour to further consolidate the membership and strategic development of Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC, centring the men's work and using this national opportunity as a platform to speak about the evolution of Mr Hastings & St Leonards as a movement.
- Transfer all materials, reports, digital content, contact lists and other tools developed during the work to date over to Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC (with consent from individuals concerned where necessary) so that these can be used to inform future activity plans.

For future funding and commissioning by East Sussex County Council and / or other system partners:

- Consider what potential there is to commission a small piece of community-led / action research that could establish a new 'baseline' position around men's health and wellbeing in Hastings and St Leonards, and which could be used to inform future priorities for this movement.
- Offer free or subsidised access to mental health first aid training for all Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC members, with scope for peer-to-peer coaching on an ongoing basis through East Sussex County Council – currently available to council staff only.

For Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC:

- Recruit to the Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC board based on the specific mix of skills and systems linkages that might be required in the future, with an emphasis on influencing those parts of the system that will lead to the greatest longer term impacts.

- Hold one or more listening sessions with local allied groups to develop a clear (and shared) vision for local men's health and wellbeing, leading to a clearly defined vision statement for subsequent work that others can actively take forward in their own organisations / groups.
- Develop a future strategy and action plan, with indicative milestones for key activities over a three to five year period, informed by the learning from this evaluation and which specifically aims to further influence system change while increasing the reach and diversity of men involved in the movement. This should give specific consideration to the partnerships that need to be developed to leverage the existing knowledge, reach and influence of others across the system, and how online (including social media) channels can be used to further raise awareness and seek engagement in the initiative. Any future action plan should also give consideration of how best to balance both online and in-person activities in order to potentially engage with new people in different ways.
- Continue to work collaboratively with HVA to ensure that the leadership role that Men's Room Hastings & St Leonards CIC members will be taking on in the future is represented in different spaces going forward, in order to maximise the benefit of the investment / resources dedicated to the project to date.

WELCOME TO OUR SURVEY

About Mr Hastings & St Leonards

Mr Hastings & St Leonards is a three-year programme funded through East Sussex Public Health, hosted by Hastings Voluntary Action and led by local men.

It aims to encourage and support men living in Hastings and St Leonards to live happier, healthier, and longer lives. This phase of the programme is drawing to a close, and we would like men from Hastings & St Leonards to share their experiences through this short survey - whether you have been involved in this programme or not.

The survey is managed by Apteligen, the evaluation partner for the programme.

Your survey responses will be anonymised, and we value your honest reflections.

What we are trying to do

Mr Hastings & St Leonards' activities over the past three years have encouraged local men to share their experiences and insights about what matters to them. Some local men have created new projects, groups and activities. Other men will have attended or contributed to these sessions. More and more local men are hearing about Mr Hastings & St Leonards and Men's Room CIC for the first time.

What we want to know

We want to ensure that the experiences of local men - including men that have been involved in Mr Hastings & St Leonards and Men's Room CIC - are heard by services and decision makers in their town.

Your feedback will also support Mr Hastings & St Leonards and Men's Room CIC to understand what's important to you.

Who we want to hear from

We want to hear from you if you are an adult male, aged 18+, and live in Hastings and St Leonards.

How to take part

You can complete the following survey which will take around 8 minutes to complete. Please only answer the questions you feel happy about answering. You have the option to leave questions blank and move on to the next question. Please answer as honestly and frankly as you can. By taking part in this survey you will be giving consent for your responses to be used anonymously. Please ensure that any comments you have made do not include any of your own or other people's personal details.

You can find out more about how this data will be stored and processed by Apteligen [here](#).

ABOUT YOU

It would be great to find out about your experience of living in Hastings and St Leonards.

1. How long have you lived in Hastings or St Leonards?

- Less than 2 years
- 2-5 years
- 6-19 years
- 20 years or more

2. Please can you tell us the first part of your postcode? *For example, TN31*

DIFFERENT AREAS OF YOUR LIFE

We would like to know a little about different areas of your life.

3. Please can you tick the boxes that relate to how different areas of your life are going?

	Going well	I've had support in the past	I could use some support but haven't accessed it yet	I am receiving some support at the minute
Housing issues				
Money/debt management				
Skills development/education				
Employment				
Mental health and wellbeing e.g. low mood, anxiety, stress				
Physical health e.g. illness, accident, long term condition management				
Drug or alcohol use				
Social life, friends and activities				

4. Have you accessed any support for your health and wellbeing in the past two years?

- Yes
- No

It would be really helpful for us to understand a little more about your experience of accessing support at the present time, or in the past two years.

5. Where did you receive / access this support?

- Group of peers or other men in-person
- Group of peers or other men online
- Government website
- Social media
- Health professional
- Place of worship
- Local service (online or in-person)
- Other (please specify)

6. Overall, how useful was the support for your situation?

- Extremely useful
- Very useful
- Somewhat useful
- Not so useful
- Not at all useful

7. If you received support from a service or group and are happy to tell us more, please can you tell us the name of the service or group and a little about your experience.

YOUR SUPPORT PREFERENCES

8. Please can you tell us how you prefer to receive support in general? *You can select more than one option.*

- Talking things through face-to-face
- Talking things through on the phone
- Online support
- Information and advice in leaflet form
- Being referred or 'signposted' to other services
- Other (please specify)

ABOUT BARRIERS TO SUPPORT

9. **In general, what do you believe are some of the biggest barriers for men who are looking for support?** *Please choose up to THREE options.*

- Not knowing where to go
- Not wanting to ask for support
- Lack of motivation
- Feeling that nothing / no-one can help
- Not wanting to be seen as a burden on services
- Feeling embarrassed or fearful about talking about my needs
- Lack of time
- Don't feel like services are welcoming to men
- Other (please tell us more)

ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE OF MR HASTINGS & ST LEONARDS

It would be really helpful for us to understand a little more about your experience of activities and events supported by or linked to Mr Hastings & St Leonards.

10. How would you describe your connection to Mr Hastings & St Leonards?

[Select one that best describes your situation currently]

- I've heard of it, but haven't been involved yet
- I've heard of it, but don't feel the need to be involved myself right now
- I've attended at least one public event that I believe to be 'Mr Hastings & St Leonards' e.g. a film screening or information event
- I've recommended it to someone who might be interested
- I've attended a support group or activity that is connected to or supported by Mr Hastings & St Leonards e.g. talk session, peer support group
- I've created a new project or activity because of Mr Hastings & St Leonards
- I'm actively involved in the work of Men's Room CIC
- None of the above

11. Choose ALL of the statements that feel true to you. As a result of connecting with Mr Hastings & St Leonards...

- I have been able to use my experience, knowledge, skills and interests to support local men
- I have experienced an improvement in my mental health and wellbeing
- I am more confident in acting on behalf of myself, to make sure my support needs are understood and met
- I am more confident in supporting other men to get the support they need
- I have been able to influence services and groups designed to support men's health and wellbeing
- I feel motivated to engage with and contribute to local activities to support men's health and wellbeing

12. How would you describe your experience of attending or creating the event, activity or group?

13. Choose ALL of the statements that feel true to you. Now that I know about Mr Hastings & St Leonards / Men's Room CIC...

- I can see the importance of this local movement for improved men's health and wellbeing, and what it is trying to achieve
- I would like to influence services and groups designed to support men's health and wellbeing
- I feel more motivated to engage with local activities to support men's health and wellbeing

14. What do you think Mr Hastings & St Leonards and Men's Room CIC should take into account when thinking about the future of men's health and wellbeing in Hastings and St Leonards?

A BIT ABOUT YOU

Please only answer the questions you feel happy about answering. *You have the option to leave questions blank and to save and exit your previous responses at the bottom of the page.*

15. Please can you tell us your age?

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+

16. How would you describe your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say

17. Is your gender different to that assigned at birth?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

18. What is your ethnic group? (*Choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background*)

- Asian / Asian British
- Black / African / Caribbean / Black British
- Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups
- Other ethnic group
- White

19. Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last twelve months or more?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

20. Do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?

- Yes, a lot
- Yes, a little
- Not at all
- Prefer not to say

21. Please can you tell us which of the following best describes your current situation?

- Employed part-time
- Employed full-time
- Employed - zero-hours contract
- Unemployed
- Self-employed
- Volunteer
- In education or training
- Looking after someone who cannot cope without my support
- Retired
- Currently serving, or have previously served, in the armed forces
- None of the above

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY

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