

Mr Hastings and St Leonards Learning Report Summary (September 2023)



This document is a summary of the Mr Hastings and St Leonards Year 1 Learning Report available soon on the project's webpage.

Background to Mr Hastings and St Leonards.

- **Life expectancy** for men in Hastings and St Leonards is significantly lower than the national average.
- **There are three main contributory factors** leading to the gap in life expectancy for men: heart disease; accidental poisoning (drug-related); cirrhosis and liver disease.
- **Many initiatives** have been delivered across the borough with the intention of improving health outcomes for those most in need. Individually, these have made a big difference to people who have had first-hand experience of them. This has not led to improved health across the wider population.
- **This suggests that no single action**, or organisation, can solve this complex issue on its own. **A new approach is needed.**
- In the **the autumn of 2022** the Project Team (Jacy and Teresa) were appointed to encourage collaboration between local men and the services and community groups that support them and impact on their health and wellbeing.
- The project uses an **Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) Approach to influence Systems Change.**
- Hosted by Hastings Voluntary Action (HVA) and funded by East Sussex County Council, its vision is:

Men living in the most deprived communities in Hastings and St Leonards are living happier, healthier, and longer lives. They are at the heart of decision making about their lives and thrive in strong, supportive, and well-connected communities, where they can fulfil their potential.

For more information contact the project team:

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Insight Gathering.

During this first year of delivery the project revisited insight gathered at the project development stage through:

- **Extensive community, and system wide, engagement** through local events, networks and partnership groups, team meetings, and one to one conversations (engaging 400 - 600 stakeholders).
- An **online survey** completed by 134 men and **researcher conversations** with 18 men .
- **Celebration Event** attended by over 150 men, their friends, and families.
- **In depth conversations** with 13 men who codesigned the project brand or formed a core group of men's champions.
- **Hosted Conversations and Systems Thinking Workshops** with decision makers, service providers and men with lived experience (85 participants).
- **Project Steering Group** held quarterly with 38 cross sector members.
- **Hastings and St Leonards Men's Health and Wellbeing Forum** (67 members with meetings held quarterly).

Cross Cutting Themes.

- **Men and Masculinity:** Men tell us that **traditional views of men**, and what it means to be a man, **still prevail** both consciously and unconsciously (the notion that men need to be strong, in charge, the provider and protector). This narrative around men's roles and masculinity impacts directly on their engagement in conversations about their health and wellbeing. It can be a barrier to asking for help or giving away control to someone else to 'sort things out'. More often **men feel they should be the ones to 'fix things'** for others. **Men can feel dispensable** in a world where gender roles have changed. With social media surrounding us all, the impact of this is a particular issue for **young men looking for role models in their day-to-day life**. They need support from an early age to find their place in the world.
- **Men, Mental Health, and Wellbeing:** Men say that **mental health is the biggest taboo**, and that alternative language needs to be found to promote services, support, and encourage men to engage. Many men have become more **isolated since the pandemic** with relationship breakdown, loss of employment and/or secure housing and community connections impacting on their mental health. **Drug and alcohol use** is often a coping mechanism to deal with wider issues that are impacting on men's lives.
- **Men and Seeking Help:** Statements like 'men don't seek help' and 'men don't talk' are **simplifying a complex issue, are judgemental and need exploration**. Given the right environment (space, time, and respect) men do talk. Men tell us that when they ask for help, they feel like they have been beaten by the issue. It takes a long time for a man to admit some help/ support might be needed. When help is sought the response needs to be positive and timely. Men sometimes feel they are not heard and so give up.

- **Community Connections, Social Life, and Relationships: Men need, and want, diverse opportunities**, not just those traditionally considered ‘men friendly’ (e.g. competitive activity, traditional male sports). Local environmental, arts based and more therapeutic activities, in non-clinical settings are popular and very beneficial for men locally.
- **Building on Community Strengths and What Works for Local Men:** Men are best placed to know what approaches are needed to reach other local men. Mechanisms are needed that enable mens voices to be heard and service providers encouraged to see the benefits of hearing and acting on what they say. Men are keen to be involved in this project and are proud to be leading the way. They respond positively to the project’s strength-based, Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach. They want to share their experiences and collaborate on things that matter to them. Local green spaces, and access to the coast, are often mentioned as key assets of the town.
- **Service Delivery and Collaboration Across the System.** Local men, service providers and decision makers alike, all recognise the need for a more joined up collaborative approach to improving men’s health and wellbeing and increasing their access to preventative services and community activity. Key to this is information sharing across the system and men only having to tell their story once.

The table below summarises which sources of insight highlighted these themes.

Key themes from insight gathered.	Source				
	Online Survey (134)	Researcher Conversations (18)	Project Champions, Branding/Communications Team (13)	Community Engagement (400+)	Engagement across the System (200+)
Men and Masculinity.		✓	✓	✓	✓
Men and Mental Health and Wellbeing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Men and Seeking Help.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Community Connections, Social and Life and Relationships	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Building on Community Strengths/What Works for Local Men		✓	✓	✓	✓
Service Provision and Collaboration Across the system	✓		✓	✓	✓
<p>The diversity of local men, their cultures, lifestyles, needs, wants, experiences, and expectations must be recognised, explored, respected, and valued. This cuts across all the insight gathered.</p>					

Next Steps.

A year 2 delivery plan has been drafted considering:

- This insight from local men and the system's that surround them.
- Our learning around an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach to engaging men, and working across the system, in Hastings and St Leonards.
- The power of conversation.
- Recognition of 'ripple effect' already being seen.



The plan is underpinned by the key themes discussed above and will include actions around:

Development of Mens Movement (Mr Hastings and St Leonards):

1. Community engagement and awareness raising
1. Actions and collaborations identified, designed, and led by local men .
2. Legacy and Sustainability of 'what works' that can be continued beyond the life of this project.



Influencing Systems Change :

1. Stakeholder engagement, and awareness raising across the system.
2. Embedding collaboration across voluntary, community and public sectors to improve mens health and wellbeing.
3. Encouraging conversations, and mens champions, within organisations
4. Enable sharing of learning between local men and the system that impacts on their lives.



Enhancing Project Impact and Learning :

1. Oversight and Governance
2. Communication (with local men and across the system)
3. Evaluation and Learning (insight)



The actions identified will led by:

- Local men (Mr Hastings and St Leonards)
- Project Team (Community Development Worker and Project Manager)
- Wider stakeholders/partners (Learning Partners, Steering Group etc.)

Deficits to Strengths. Central to Local. Isolation to Collaboration. Assuming and Prescribing to Learning and Responding.