



Men's Health & Wellbeing Project East Sussex

Quarterly Report 1- Year 2: April-June 2026

Introduction

Following the success of the Mr Hastings & St Leonards community-led approach to men's health and wellbeing, East Sussex County Council Public Health has commissioned a three-year expansion of this work across East Sussex, beginning in Rother.

This expansion builds on everything learned in Hastings and St Leonards: the power of lived experience, the strength of community assets, and the belief that men thrive when they are at the heart of decision-making, connected to each other, and rooted in strong, supportive communities.



The Vision

Men across East Sussex **thrive and experience happier, healthier and longer lives**, if their voices are shaping the decisions that affect them. Everything we do is designed to build towards this vision in a way that is sustainable, rooted in lived experience and led by the men who are part of it.

Guiding principles

- **Collaboration:** Bringing people and partners together to make things happen.
- **Co-production:** Creating things *with* people, not *for* them.
- **Lived experience:** Real stories and insight shape the direction of the work.
- **Community assets:** We look for what's strong in people and places, not what's wrong.
- **Trusted connections:** Shared learning and strong relationships ensure that community-led change is embedded and sustainable.

Hastings Voluntary Action is hosting the project and working collaboratively with Rother Voluntary Action, Men's Room CIC, local men, organisations and community groups to shape the direction of the programme going forward.



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This Chapter

This quarter has focused on being present in the places where men already gather, such as pubs, community events and informal spaces. We have reached men through conversation, networking, workshops, pre-existing relationships, recommendations and drop ins.



This engagement has paved the way for co-produced activities that reflect what local men say hold a strong sense of purpose and usefulness.

Men are interested and motivated to share their skills and take the next steps with the project to explore realistically how and what they can offer and co-design.

Appreciative Enquiry

From your perspective, what would make a men's health and wellbeing project meaningful , engaging and effective ?

A selection of responses from local men :

" When we come together over a shared purpose we are energised and focused and have a shared goal "

"It starts with the men"

"To have support without judgement and to be open to challenging our selves"

"I would like there to be greater collaboration between all the many organisations helping men with their mental health"

" Fight the stigma of men asking for help "





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Ripple mapping

We brought together community partners and local men for a Ripple Mapping workshop to explore:

- The strengths and skills that already exist within these communities
- What matters for men in their everyday lives
- Reflection on what is already happening
- Joining the dots between the connections and ripples
- Sharing knowledge and insight
- Think about who was missing from the conversation so far

The workshop created space for reflection and collective sense making of the themes and insights gathered so far.

Wider engagement work,

Feedback has included that the movement and the ABCD approach to men's health and wellbeing is:

"inspiring" and "refreshing"

This feedback has encouraged **creative and reimagined thinking** about what men's health and wellbeing means to those with lived experience, and the approach directly build's **confidence in men sharing what they can offer.**

Interests and Strengths

Some of the ideas that men and community organisations are keen to explore:

- Developing a skills network where men can trade skills.
- Exploring team building activities and learning around healthy ways of living.
- Learning alongside the work to support and grow existing peer groups.
- How projects and ideas can intersect and create more collaboration.
- Ensuring that existing projects that support specific male needs are included and supported.
- Working in a collaborative way that enables growth and new ideas to be explored within existing projects.





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Shared challenges and collective strengths

*Build experience, grow confidence
with lived and learned experience*



Stories related to suicide awareness, employment and relationships emerged **naturally**, greatly inspired by the work of Men's Room CIC. Many men who attended the screening of 'Men Do Not Talk' at the Old Town House expressed a **strong desire or curiosity to contribute and shape something meaningful**. Conversations also highlighted the importance of meeting men where they are in their communities. Most had originally come to the venue to watch the football and were honest that they would not necessarily have attended otherwise.

This reinforced the significance of the **ongoing legacy of Mr Hastings and St Leonards**, and the energy created when men are given opportunities to respond to the movement in their own way. **The momentum generated through this approach continues to help us identify new connectors, new opportunities and new ways of working across East Sussex.**



What key insights and learning are emerging from the conversation?

The insights gathered during the Hands of Hope event, held during Mental Health Awareness Week, offered an important reminder about the wider landscape of **men's health and wellbeing**. Men told us they value what is available locally and appreciate the range of initiatives on offer, but they also shared that **support can sometimes feel limited by place-based thinking**. Their experiences and challenges often stretch far beyond the boundaries of a single neighbourhood, service or organisation, and many questioned **why things do not feel more joined up**.

Learning from men across neighbourhoods becomes the bridge that helps us understand these differences and nuances. It enables us to **connect the work across areas** in a way that feels coherent rather than fragmented. It helps us see what is unique to each place, while also recognising the **shared patterns that link men across Hastings, St Leonards, Bexhill, Sidley and the wider county**.

These reflections also encouraged us to think about how we communicate and the language we use when talking about the work so far. We recognised that **certain terms can unintentionally feed into competition** or limit what men feel able to do if the work is framed too narrowly around specific places rather than the wider picture of



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East Sussex. In response, we aim to **champion all the strands, networks and community led efforts** supporting men's health and wellbeing. We hope this also helps reflect the **diversity of experiences, backgrounds and organisational structures** across the county, ensuring that everyone can find a place within the movement. By holding the work in this way, we aim to **strengthen collaboration, reduce boundary lines**, and create **joined up thinking** across East Sussex.

Key Developments Taking Shape

Emerging Local Leaders

We have connected with men in the community who are stepping forward with ideas they would like to see realised. These **emerging local leaders** bring **energy, lived experience and practical insight**, and their contributions are **helping shape what the movement could look like in their community**. By **creating space for their voices**, we are strengthening the foundations for **locally owned action** and building a **shared purpose across the county**.



Strengthening Partnerships

We continued to **build relationships** with community organisations, **innovative ways**, with the flexibility to **adapt relationships** so they add value for everyone involved.

Stewardship Group Formation

Ripple Mapping and ongoing conversations have helped **reframe our approach to the stewardship group**. By offering an **open invitation** to those already connected with us, we plan to run a series of **co design workshops and drop-ins** to shape the model and identify the first members of a new stewardship group.

Increased Presence in Bexhill & Sidley

Natural gathering spaces such as pubs and **everyday community spaces**, where **highly effective for connecting with men who may not attend formal activities**. This has **broadened our reach across ages, backgrounds and experiences**, strengthening our **community connections**.

Preparation for Wider East Sussex Expansion



Cross area learning continues to highlight **differences, shared themes and new opportunities** for building a **more connected county-wide movement**.



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Examples of Activity this Quarter

Discovery Conversations

Ongoing conversations with men in **community spaces**, **workplaces** and **informal settings** continue to **shape our understanding of what matters most** and bring forward **emerging local leaders**. This has attracted a **wide range of men**, including **skilled labourers**, **volunteers**, **unemployed men**, **fathers**, **young adults** and **older adults**.

Film Screenings

Screenings of 'Men Don't Talk' took place across two venues.

The screenings **sparked conversations** about **suicide awareness**, **emotional expression**, **family**, **employment** and **relationships**, creating space for **honest community dialogue**. We also saw **strong interest in learning more and getting involved**, with men **signing up to take part** in future activities.

Many thanks to **the Pelham** and **the Old Town House**. With special thanks to **Mr Hastings** and **St Leonards** for **supporting us with the screenings**, and to **RVA** for **attending and contributing** to the work.

Quote from local man

"Us men bottle it up, let's try and open the bottle"





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Mr Hastings and St Leonards - Hands of Hope Event



The Men's Health and Wellbeing project was invited to attend the Hands of Hope event, which was organised by **Mr Hastings and St Leonards**, this was a recognition in a shift in ownership of the project from HVA towards a real community led event.

This was an event bringing together lots of mens groups and other interested organisations to **celebrate, share, and learn** from each other.

The emphasis was on **collaborating and a shared sense of purpose and belonging**, there was a varied and wide selection of activities and information sessions that would appeal to different men.

The community development workers from **HVA and RVA** attended and held a stand at the event, encouraging connection and relationship building, including some context about how Mr Hastings and St Leonards had arrived at the point of **where they are**.

We talked about the expansion of the project across a wider remit in East Sussex including conversations with:

- Andys man club
- Hastings Direct
- Men's cookery project
- Take action man
- A Band of Brothers
- Local men



Link to report in Hastings Independent press article – Men Behaving Wisley

<https://www.hastingsindependentpress.co.uk/articles/community/men-behaving-wisely/>

Cross place-based interaction:

- A recognition that there is a lot already happening and a definite desire to collaborate and share what is happening.
- Keen sense of collaboration and co-existence which speaks directly to the shape of the next phase of the project for East Sussex.



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- An excitement that ESCC have funded further work for mens health and wellbeing and a sense of pride that the mens groups have contributed towards this.
- The event inspired men to feel part of something bigger than individual groups and felt valued and therefore keen to be a part of a bigger movement going forward.

Reflective Learning:

- Going forward connecting and engaging with local men with a clear focus on new ideas whilst also incorporating and reflecting the linkage to Mr Hastings and St Leonards will inspire and foster the possibility of ownership for new men groups and organisations.
- Recognising that men seeing themselves reflected in events and activities is a valuable way of engaging new interest excitement in the project.
- A very clear response that men would like things more joined up and collaborative.

Bexhill Men's Shed Talk

The community development worker was invited to deliver a shed talk on 17th June for the Bexhill Men's shed community. 16 people attended and took part in conversations about men's health and wellbeing.

- Of importance was the **belonging and comradeship** they found at the mens shed and how this was an **antidote for isolation and loneliness**, especially in times of **change and transition**.
- We explored the need to have **welcoming and inquisitive conversations** around men's health and wellbeing.
- Discussion around having **brave and courageous conversations** and checking in with each other.
- **Humour and a sense of fun** is a fundamental way of communicating with each other in the shed.
- A **sense of purpose and sharing experiences** was a key reason for coming back to the shed.





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Going Forward with Bexhill Mens Shed



- A couple of men asked for the CDW to pop in from time to time as this could be a valuable support for them.
- A few men asked for a follow up one-to-one cuppa and a chat.
- A request was made for a simple signposting sheet for local practical and mental health support services that could support them with their meaningful conversations going forward.
- A great relationship is developing with the members of the mens shed and future opportunities and collaboration are growing.

Workshops

Ripple Mapping workshop 1

We held our initial Ripple mapping workshop in May with invited partners from RVA we held this at Mens shed Bexhill to reinforce our valuable emerging relationship with Bexhill Mens Shed.

We uncovered a significant amount of relational work already underway, and new insights emerged that lay strong foundations for the next workshop with wider community partners and local men. This includes emerging links and opportunities in rural Rother.

Ripple mapping Workshop 2

We had the privilege of holding a **Ripple Effect Mapping** workshop with community partners, organisations and local men. This helped **surface new themes, creative and innovative ways to connect with men**, and identify **who was missing from the conversation**. We have invited attendees to join our **community call-out for stewardship co-design workshops**, where we will work together to **shape the model** and explore **how this could come to life**.

Reflective Learning:

Assets

- **The skills-based network concept** seems like an excellent fit for the area, where men are already highly engaged in practical skills, creative pursuits, and surprising activities such as open-mic nights.
- **Existing community groups** in Bexhill and Sidley are active or emerging, even if not yet well-connected or visible.
- **Local men** have expressed willingness to connect, share skills, and participate when opportunities feel relevant, informal, and community-led.



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Barriers

- Limited accessible mental health support beyond GP surgeries and time-restricted wellbeing centres.
- No A&E at Bexhill Hospital, meaning men in crisis must travel to Hastings or Eastbourne.
- Many men only seek help at the point of crisis due to stigma, lack of early-stage support, or uncertainty about where to go.
- Community assets are **not clearly mapped or connected**, making it hard for residents to know what's available.

What We Can Build On

- Strong appetite for **peer-led spaces**, shared activities, and informal support.
- Skill-sharing naturally creates **intergenerational links**, confidence, and belonging.
- Creative and practical activities offer **non-clinical entry points** into wellbeing conversations.
- Connecting existing groups, venues, and community leaders (connecting the connectors) can create more visible, joined-up support.

What's Possible Next

- **Co-host a beach BBQ** where local men can shape the work by identifying the skills they want to teach, learn, and share.
- **Follow the energy** by collaborating with RVA, rural Rother networks, farming communities, and intergenerational groups to widen participation and insights.
- **Facilitate a follow up conversation** for the stewardship group to share learning, clarify roles, and co-develop a clear sense of purpose and functionality.
- **Map community assets and share** across Bexhill and Sidley so residents can easily navigate what's available, where to go, and what to expect.
- **Support local men and champions of men's health** to co-design the next phase of work, shaping and building upon activities such as cab-talk conversations, open-mic sessions, and potential access to equine-assisted support.

Themes Emerging



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Conversations with men, organisations and community partners have surfaced the following emerging themes:

- **A drive to feel useful:** Men talked about wanting to offer their skills, experience, and energy in ways that matter to their community.
- **Fathers wanting to support sons:** A deep commitment to family, guidance, and being present for the next generation.
- **The power of positive male role models:** Men highlighted how much they value seeing others lead with kindness, resilience, and authenticity.
- **Grassroots learning and healthy practices:** A strong appetite for practical, accessible knowledge that helps men look after themselves and each other.
- **Younger men seeking connection:** A desire to build friendships, find belonging, and share interests in safe, welcoming spaces.
- **Gym culture, body image, and identity:** Beneath the pressures, men expressed a commitment to self-improvement, wellbeing, and finding confidence in who they are.

Engagement and Participation

Engagement at screenings and events has been steady, attracting participation across ages and experiences.



What is working?

- Men engaging more deeply when activities feel informal.
- Curiosity about co-produced activities.
- Interest in skills-based and practical opportunities.
- A desire for positive male role models and representation across generations.

The project team is committed to **inclusivity** and to **co-creating a sense of belonging** in every aspect of the work. We have recently taken part in, and continue to engage with, training and other opportunities that help us connect with and listen to men from a wide range of **backgrounds, experiences, and identities**.

Community Feedback and Stories



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Men spoke with real passion about what matters to them. They value the informal support that exists locally, and their reflections came from a place of **wanting things to work better, wanting to contribute, and wanting to feel connected.**

Their stories pointed strongly toward a desire for **more joined-up working, clearer pathways, and meaningful roles** in shaping what comes next.

Dan shares his experience of sharing his idea with the project:

“Bexhill Men’s Skill Share is a community-led idea that aims to bring men together through shared skills, interests, and experiences. The concept is simple: every person has something they can teach and something they can learn. By creating opportunities for men to connect, share knowledge, and take part in practical activities, the project aims to build friendships, reduce isolation, and strengthen wellbeing.

The idea is important to me because I’ve seen how many men have valuable skills, experience, and knowledge but often lack opportunities to share them or connect with others in meaningful ways. Too often, communities focus on what people need rather than what they can contribute. I believe that by recognising and building on the strengths that already exist within our community, we can create a stronger sense of purpose, belonging, and connection.

The Asset-Based Community Development approach feels like a natural fit because it focuses on people’s abilities rather than their problems, helping individuals become active participants in building a stronger and more resilient community.”

Relationships, Networks & Social Connection

Relationships with organisations, connectors and community groups continue to grow. We are also seeking to make new connections with services.

This quarter we connected with:

- Rother Rural PCN Teams
- Youth groups
- Young men
- SCDA



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- Male fertility organisation
- Warming Up the Homeless volunteers
- Veterans and personal trainers
- Local pubs and community venues
- Local volunteers
- Cab drivers

Although organisations vary in what they offer, the strengths, relationships and commitment they bring to their communities demonstrate that joined-up support is already emerging through our work with RVA, and we can build on these assets to go even further.

Men's Health & Wellbeing - Insights

What men are saying about identity, purpose, stigma, connection and support:



- **Men hold a strong desire to contribute**, offer skills, and play an active role in their communities.



- **Many carry hidden pressures**: often linked to responsibility, care for others, and wanting to 'hold things together' for family, friends or community.



- **Social-media influencers and political climate**: men spoke about wanting trustworthy, grounded information rather than being targeted when they're struggling.



- **Stigma around emotional expression remains strong**: willingness to talk about this shows growing courage and a desire for moving away from traditional views of masculinity.



- **Peer support is highly valued**: men consistently highlighted the power of shared experience, mutual encouragement, and "people who get it."



- **Belonging is a protective factor**: connection, community, and shared identity help men feel grounded, confident, and less isolated.



- **Men want to contribute, not just receive**: a clear message that men want to shape solutions, not be passive recipients of services.

What Matters to Men?

A summary of what men told us really matters to them:

- **Having someone to talk to and feel listened to**: A trusted person or group, a relaxed chat, and a non-judgemental space.



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- **Innovative ways to take part:** Not just talking but having activities where they can feel included.
- **Places where they feel they belong:** Welcoming spaces where they can show up as themselves.
- **Connecting across ages and backgrounds:** Learning from each other, sharing stories, and finding common ground.
- **Clear, straightforward communication:** No jargon, just information that's easy to understand.

Stewardship Group Update



We have identified a familiar and welcoming space that supports open conversation and shared ownership. We hosted a series of ripple-effect mapping workshops with people we identified as having an interest in the stewardship group. These are early stages, and membership is not closed. We are sharing this poster widely and actively encouraging more voices to get involved.

Learning and Adaptation

What has our learning told us

- Language matters, it can open doors or create barriers.
- Men want cross-area connection, not competition.



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- Boundaries and expectations need to be clear.
- Co-production takes time, trust and consistency.
- New emerging leaders need to go at their own pace, and support is needed from the project.

This has changed how we communicate, show up, and approach co-design activities.

Opportunities, Challenges & Conditions

Opportunities

- People who naturally hold relationships in their neighbourhoods are beginning to link with one another, helping local networks become stronger and more visible.
- Services and social prescribers are showing increasing curiosity about community-led approaches, opening the door to lived experience informing professional support.
- More men are stepping forward with ideas, energy and lived experience. This creates opportunities to nurture leadership that is rooted in community and shaped by lived realities.
- There is momentum for men to share skills, learn together and co-produce activities that feel purposeful and grounded in local strengths.

Challenges

- The movement encourages open, honest dialogue about men's health and wellbeing. This often leads to powerful, authentic storytelling, which benefits from sensitive, steady facilitation.
- When community spaces are shared with services, local men or other sectors, different approaches to wellbeing, safeguarding or communication can sometimes create confusion.
- Services and organisations often work with sensitive themes and communities in different ways. Respecting these differences, while staying true to the project's ethos, calls for ongoing communication and clarity.

These challenges reflect the complexity of working relationally across communities, services and lived experience. At the same time, they open possibilities for overcoming obstacles together and shaping a more joined-up, compassionate way of working with men.

Conditions

For this movement to continue to grow in a way that feels rooted and led by men themselves, a few things need to be in place:



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- Men are keen to get involved, but confidence and leadership take time to grow. We're committed to moving at a pace that feels safe and steady for everyone.
- Connecting in familiar, everyday spaces continues to be one of the strongest ways to build relationships.
- Collaboration between communities, services and organisations is essential for supporting meaningful change.
- Beginning with men's skills, energy and lived experience keeps the work grounded, hopeful and rooted in what already exists locally.
- Remaining reflective and open to learning helps us connect the dots across East Sussex and respond to what men are telling us.
- We're committed to shaping a stewardship group *with* the community, giving the work a shared anchor and ensuring it stays led by lived experience.

Ways to Get Involved.

If you'd like to hear more about what's happening or are interested in joining the stewardship group, you can:

Contact the Project Team

Lindsey Scotcher, Project Manager

- lindsey@hastingsvoluntaryaction.org.uk

Jacy Kilvert, Community Development Worker

- jacy@hastingsvoluntaryaction.org.uk

Keep an eye on the HVA website for screening dates and launch details:
<https://hastingsvoluntaryaction.org.uk/>

Learn more about the Mr Hastings and St Leonards project:

- Read reports and explore opportunities on the HVA project webpage:
<https://tinyurl.com/hvamenshealth>
- Visit the Men's Room Hastings and St Leonards CIC website:
<https://mensroom.community/>