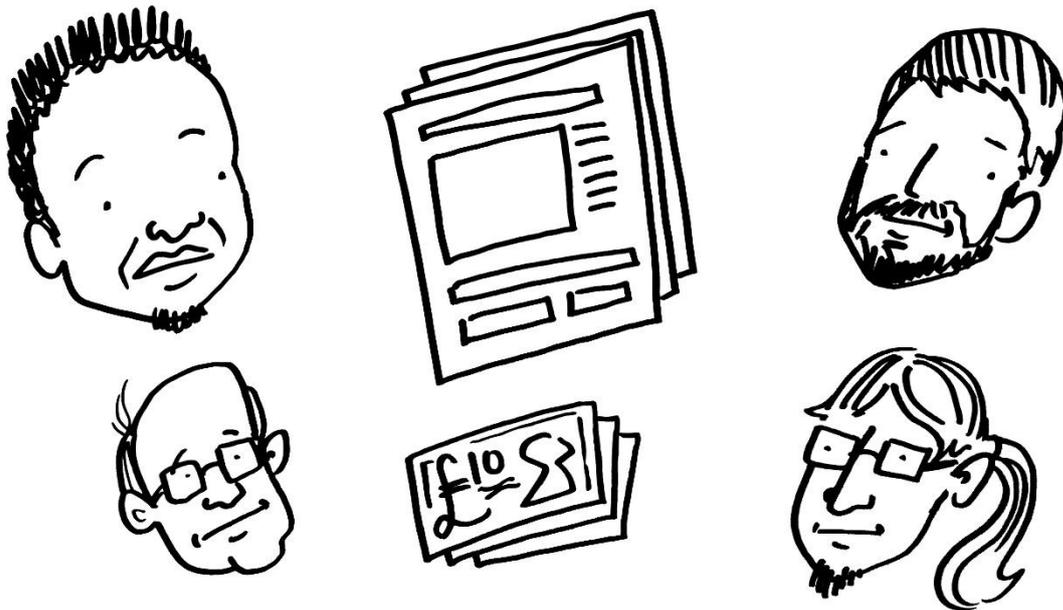


# MEN'S SUICIDE PREVENTION GRANTS



**Handbook for working with men in Leeds**

Men's Suicide Prevention Grants Programme 2018-20

# Introduction

Suicide prevention is a key public mental health priority in Leeds. The Leeds Suicide Audit (2014-16), nationally recognised as best practice, has highlighted that men in Leeds are almost five times more likely to end their own life than women, which is higher than the national average.

Public Health, Leeds City Council and Leeds Community Foundation have worked in partnership to set up the Leeds Men's Suicide Prevention Grants Programme that funds Third Sector organisations in order to, for the first time, work directly with men who are the highest at-risk group for suicides in Leeds.

Recurrent funding for men at risk of suicide was prioritised by Councillor Judith Blake, Leader of Leeds City Council, and the grants programme is funded to deliver work prioritised in the citywide [Suicide Prevention Action Plan](#). The Leeds Men's Suicide Prevention Grants Programme was launched in 2018 on World Suicide Prevention Day.

The grants programme consists of:

- Large grants of between £10,000 and £25,000 for projects over a 12 month period.
- Small grants up to £10,000 for 12 months activity to fund pilot projects, support smaller groups, and help with capacity building.

The grants programme criteria is aligned to evidence from the [Leeds Suicide Audit](#), with a focus on men and geographical areas with higher numbers of suicides.



## How can this handbook be used?

This handbook reflects the learning of the organisations involved in the Men's Suicide Prevention Programme.

It is hoped that this resource will be relevant and useful for a wide range of organisations and workers with a remit around community development, working with and alongside men, and suicide prevention.

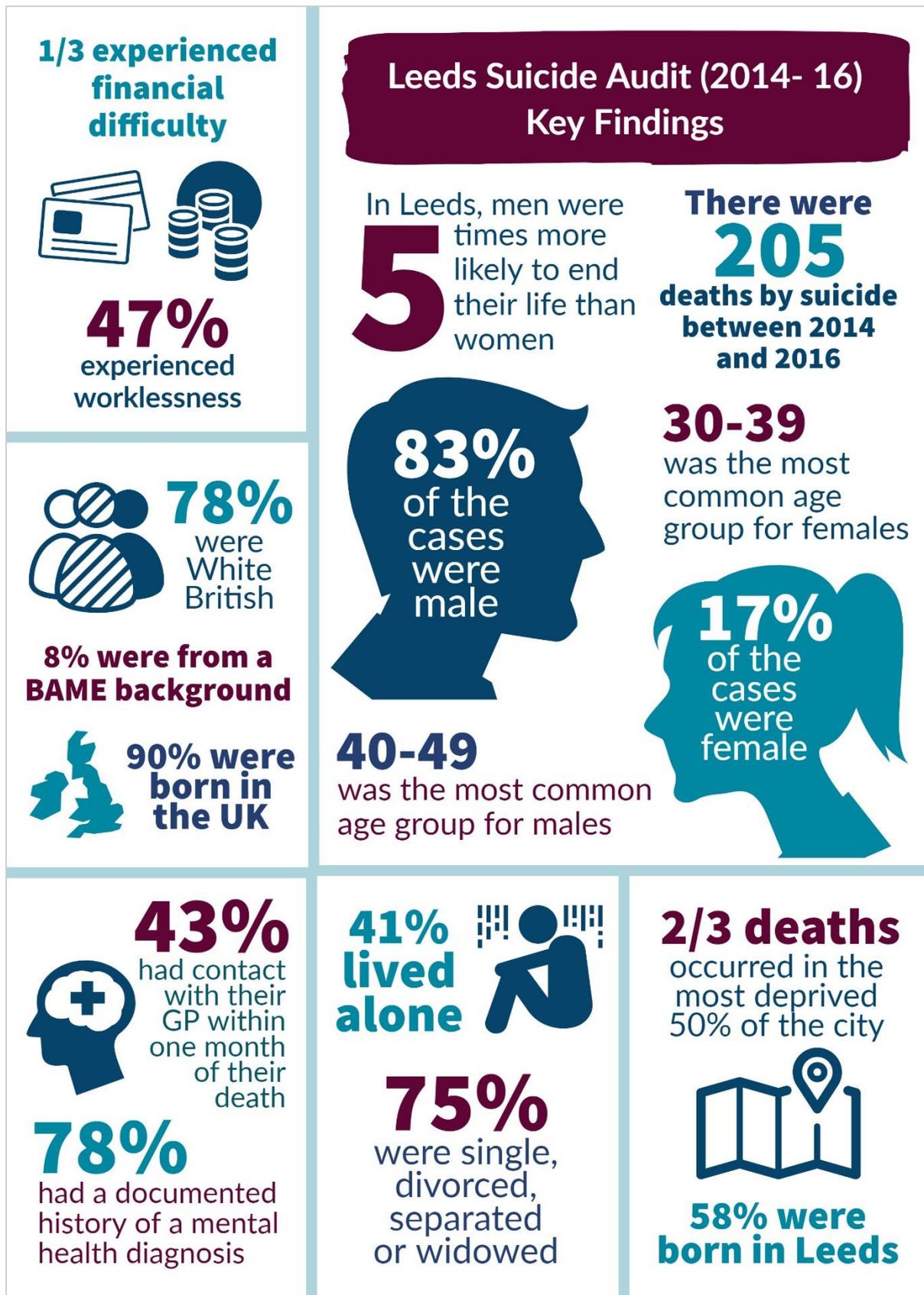
These include organisations planning, developing, and commissioning programmes that focus on suicide prevention and/ or reducing social isolation within this at-risk population.

## Why do we need it?

The Leeds Suicide Audit (2014-16) found the proportion of male to female suicides to be higher than the national average. Those most at risk of suicide in Leeds were found to be socially isolated men, aged between 30-50 years old, living in socio-economically deprived communities in the city. The audit found that around 40% of those who took their own life lived alone, while 75% were single, divorced, separated or widowed. Relationship breakdown also emerged as a key theme, suggesting that many of those who had died by suicide in Leeds were experiencing isolation and/ or loneliness.

In response to these local findings, Public Health, Leeds City Council and Leeds Community Foundation have worked together to develop a small and large grants programme that focuses on reducing social isolation in men within targeted communities. The aim was to build on existing local community initiatives with Third Sector partners, such as local men's projects determined by local men themselves, as well as extending this provision to areas of need with no current activities available for socially isolated men. Decisions to fund projects as part of this grants programme have been made in consensus through the convening of grants panels that include representation from partners including Third Sector organisations and local statutory providers, all with experience of delivering suicide prevention work in Leeds.

Figure 1 – Key finding from the Leeds Suicide Audit (2014-16), published in 2019



# What has been achieved so far?

As of October 2019, two rounds of grants have been delivered resulting in nine local Third Sector organisations being awarded a total of £133,915. A third round is scheduled to run in spring 2020.

Figure 2 shows the nine projects mapped on to Leeds postcode districts with counts of suicides; the grants programme is being targeted across the city to areas most affected by suicide.

## Round 1

Three large grants were awarded to:

- **Feel Good Factor** (12 month project) – Recruiting a network of men's health advocates, known as 'Manbassadors', among businesses and organisations in LS9. Together, they have developed ways to effectively connect with isolated men and support them to engage in activities that help improve health and wellbeing, and address the risk factors associated with suicide.
- **Leeds Mind** (12 month project) – Reaching out to more men residing in communities that are at higher risk of suicide and who are least likely to engage with existing support. Through their 'Men'd' programme of outreach in Horsforth, their project worker works with men on a 1:1 basis, supporting them to develop opportunities for mutual support and linking them in with local activities.
- **Barca Leeds** (12 month project, part-funded thanks to an additional grant from Jimbo's Fund) – Working with communities in LS12 and LS13 enabling isolated men to access and develop group activities, build social networks, friendships, and increase confidence.

## Round 2

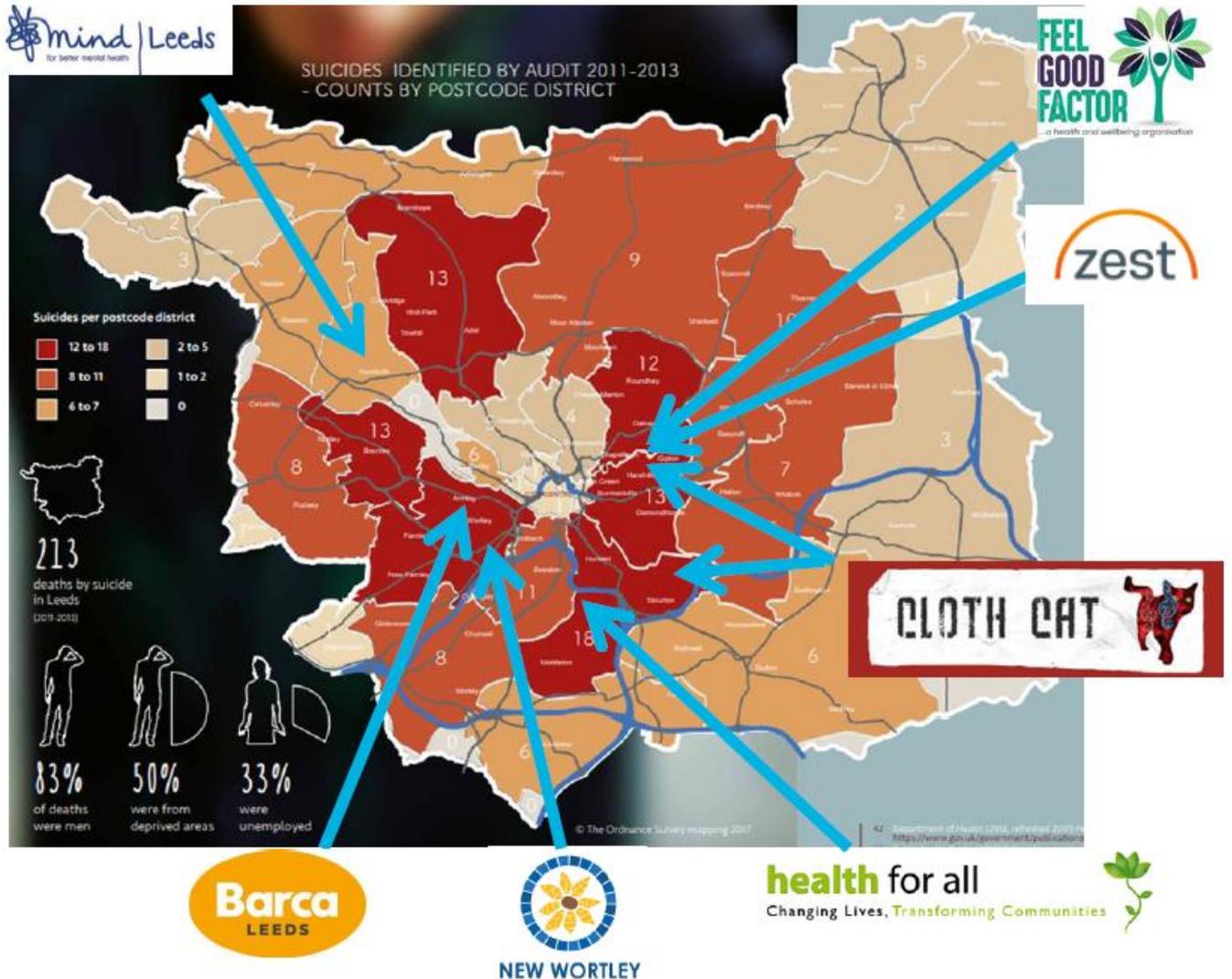
One large grant and five small grants were awarded to:

- **Health for All** (12 month project) – Engaging isolated men living in Beeston, Holbeck, Belle Isle and Middleton, offering them activities that will help to broaden their horizons, increase their confidence, sense of self-worth, and hope for the future. Transport has been provided alongside 1:1 support and encouragement so men have

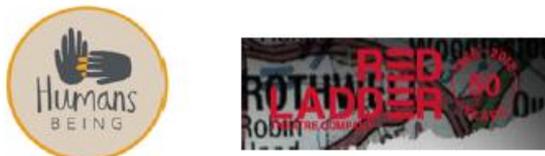
been able to try a range of existing and new activities, including gardening, DIY, and cooking.

- **New Wortley Community Association** (12 month project) – Set up a weekly walking group for socially isolated men living in and around New Wortley to come together, make friends, eat together as a group, talk about issues they may be facing and actively look to get involved with local campaigns such as litter-picking, canal-side clean-ups in order to boost confidence and self-esteem by giving back to the local community.
- **Red Ladder Theatre Company** (12 month project) – Used live theatre to create a space for isolated men in Leeds to come together and bring the subject of mental health into the open. Performances of ‘The Parting Glass’ were given in targeted areas and delivered in ‘non-theatre’ venues such as pubs, sports venues and working men’s clubs. The after-show sessions were facilitated by a men’s mental health specialist to stimulate audience discussion, address stigma, and encourage mutual support among men.
- **Cloth Cat Studios** (12 month project) – The ‘Man About Town’ project has delivered group activities chosen and scheduled by men, including live and computer-based music, photography, film, VR, and animation. The aim of the group has been to reduce social isolation, initiate friendships and reignite a spark for music and digital arts. The group meets across Leeds, including Inner South, Inner West and Inner East Leeds.
- **Humans Being** – (12 month project) Café Connections delivered a series of training courses to equip volunteers in local community cafes across Leeds as ‘men’s wellbeing ambassadors’. Following the courses, volunteers are able to use their skills and own life experiences to informally support vulnerable men who use the cafes, and form a network of peer support.
- **Zest Health for Life** (12 month project) – Running an IMPACT group for men in LS9, who want to learn new skills, get involved in activities, and play an active role in the delivery of peer support work through becoming men’s group champions. This work has strengthened other Orion partners’ Wellman offer in East and North East Leeds.

Figure 2 – Men’s Suicide Prevention Grants Programme Projects  
 (Source: Leeds Community Foundation)



Projects supporting men in several locations across the city:



# Findings from the learning event

*“It’s hard for guys to talk about these issues. We’re not there to ‘rescue’ each other but we do have each other’s backs. Help each other and make that difference. **We’re all tools in a toolbox to help somebody.**”*

A learning event was held in February 2020 in central Leeds for all the funded projects to share their learning, expertise and good practice around supporting men who experience social isolation, relationship breakdown, and loneliness.

The learning event provided a space for workers from all nine organisations, along with some of the project participants, to share their learning and experiences about delivering projects as part of the Men’s Suicide Prevention Grants Programme. A worker from Mentally Healthy Leeds also attended the event. This service is commissioned by Public Health and aims to reduce mental health inequalities across the city.

With support from the projects, Public Health, Leeds City Council and Leeds Community Foundation agreed to develop a good practice handbook for men’s work in Leeds based on the findings from the event.

The conversations were structured around three key questions:

- What worked best in your project and is this translatable elsewhere? If so, how and if not, why?
- Did you come across social isolation, loneliness, and/ or relationship breakdown in the men you supported and, if so, what was your experience?
- Do you have any feedback about the grants programme for Leeds Community Foundation and Public Health?

The discussions were captured through live illustrations by local illustrator Tom Bailey and note-takers from Leeds City Council and Leeds Community Foundation. These notes were then themed into five key findings, which are set out as follows.

# 1. Skills, learning and approach of the workers

**“Not rescuing, but empowering.”**

The Men’s Suicide Prevention projects are effectively co-ordinated and facilitated by workers with a broad range of skills and experiences, who are all passionate about supporting and empowering the men they work alongside. The roles and responsibilities of workers are fundamental in the running of projects and supporting men to contribute and shape the activities they spend time doing.

Humans Being and their volunteers learned that ‘listening and not solving’ was an effective way to support men who may be feeling isolated; Leeds Mind also recommended ‘signposting and not rescuing’ in a similar approach. Empowering men to take action, rather than rescuing them from their circumstances, was found to contribute to a sustainable way of working.

*We use the Five Ways to Wellbeing as a basis for self-care volunteer training. This came out of learning about volunteer burnout and the struggle to balance work role and private life. – Humans Being*

The project workers also found that time, perseverance, and energy was required to reach isolated men and then build trusting relationships.



*You need to give energy as a volunteer or staff member to build relationships. People come to rely on you and want to be your friend. You have to engage in this way to build trust. – Health For All*

Workers from the New Wortley Community Association described how when it was a struggle to get the men engaged, it helped to set achievable targets for them; for example, some men would come to the centre just for a cup of tea but then after a while they built the confidence to join the group for their weekly walk.

*You can't tell people what to do but you can help them to achieve what they want to do. What makes them tick? What gives them strength? Then build on that. Encourage people to believe in themselves. People are receptive to learning new ideas and doing new things. – Red Ladder Theatre Company*

Workers from Health For All's project found that whilst they were introducing men to new things in their weekly groups, many of the participants did not offer their own ideas. It takes time to gain confidence for men to be able to take this next step.

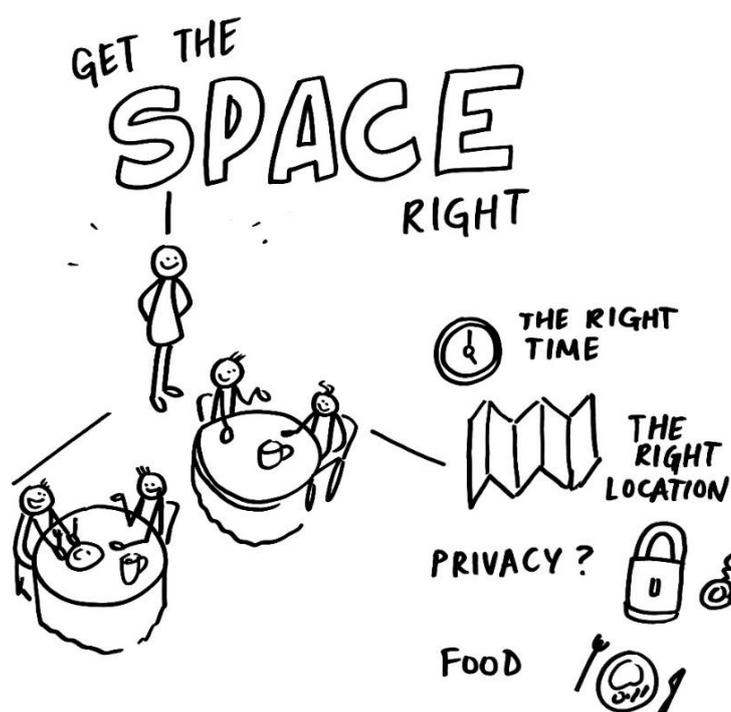
*We had made the assumption that the worker had to be a man. – Leeds Mind*

Lived experience is also a key strength for many workers, which helps to build rapport with the men. Leeds Mind's Men'd project received feedback from their beneficiaries that they had never specifically asked for a male worker; it was more important that they were being supported by someone with lived experience. All Leeds Mind staff have lived experience of mental health problems.

## 2. The space

Getting the space right was viewed by many workers to be important in ensuring that men could meet, socialise and make connections, as well as be supported in an appropriate environment and safe space.

*We're lucky to have lots of things that draw people into the Centre. Things that work include GP referrals and a 'cup of tea' approach – this leads to a conversation with a support worker and then signposting. It's a unique model as people tend to be in, and stay in, New Wortley.*  
– New Wortley Community Association



Spaces should be kept open and welcoming, particularly for men that were attending groups for the first time to avoid a 'clique-y' or exclusive atmosphere. Some venues were also viewed to be inappropriate for many men to participate in group work, for example clubs and pubs. For Feel Good Factor's Manbassador project, consideration of these 'unsafe'/ less appropriate spaces was important in identifying potential champions. For example, a person working behind a bar wouldn't be able to have a sensitive conversation with someone feeling isolated, as there might be others waiting to be served. It was also more challenging to engage businesses with a lot of staff because workers couldn't build regular contact with the Manbassadors. On the other hand, Red Ladder Theatre Company viewed working men's clubs and community venues to be effective settings for their performances as they encouraged participation from local residents.

*Gipton Working Men's Club have a great space but they don't use it. It's good to go somewhere like that where people gather and communicate. It takes some of the risk away by doing it somewhere they are comfortable. – Red Ladder Theatre Company*

Often getting the space right was enabled through including food and refreshments, as well as light-hearted activities where everyone could have a laugh together. This allowed the space to feel safe.

*Another guy thought it would be really depressing, but we told him it would be good fun with lots of laughing. – Cloth Cat Studios*

HOW MUCH DO WE ADVERTISE  
OUR PROJECTS AS  
"SUICIDE PREVENTION" ?



HOW FAR DO WE  
PUSH... ?



It was also important for the workers to promote the projects and activities in a way that was welcoming and focused on the social aspects, rather than using the term 'suicide prevention', as this was seen to be stigmatising and a potential barrier to men who wanted to attend.

*Social things are easier to attend than something labelled 'suicide prevention'. – Humans Being*

### 3. Creating connections

***“You don’t need to be single, live alone, or be retired to feel lonely. Many men with families also feel lonely.”***

Workers described the importance of planning local activities to reflect the needs of local people. This included understanding what the right ‘hooks’ were to encourage men’s involvement and participation. This is highlighted in the diversity of the projects involved in the Men’s Suicide Prevention Programme, which includes live theatre, creative digital arts sessions, and walking groups. A social focus, where connections and relationships could emerge, was viewed to be an invaluable ‘hook’, such promoting communal meals or music-making opportunities. In their project, Cloth Cat Studios have seen how therapeutic it is for men to write songs together.

*Music is one thing binding everyone together. – Cloth Cat Studios*

Many projects planned activities to ‘frame the weekend’, because they found men to experience a greater sense of loneliness on Saturdays and Sundays when groups were not running. Sitting and eating together has been found to spark real conversations between the men attending New Wortley Community Association’s weekly walking group.



*Most of the men that attend our group are made up of single men who live alone, no longer work due to physical or other health related issues, or are retired. Our members live in similar circumstances, they relate and*

*recognise others' need for 'getting out' and 'joining in' – our experience is they value and understand the need for interaction and that's why they want to give back – they've made friends and enjoy what they are doing!*  
– Zest Health for Life

Creating connections with other services and organisations has also added value to the projects. Through their production of 'The Parting Glass', Red Ladder Theatre Company made connections with health services in and around Leeds, which has led to introductions to other health services around the country. New relationships were developed for health organisations to provide facilitators for the post-show discussions, which proved effective and allowed a safe space for discussions between members of the audience to take place.

Partnerships with local businesses have also been fundamental for the Manbassador project to thrive. These have included local chip shops, gyms and pharmacies, all places where 1:1 chats happen between customers and staff. Local events, such as the Leeds Suicide Audit workshop in September 2019, also provided a way for the different project workers to meet and create connections.

*Connections between audience members are really powerful – similar to group mentality, bouncing off conversations, people feel safe and settled. We never film any of the post-show discussions. – Red Ladder Theatre Company*

Barca Leeds, part of the West Leeds Men's Network, do a personal and restorative exercise with men that includes writing a letter of bereavement to someone they have lost or on an unresolved problem. The men were then able to do what they wanted with the letter: destroy it, send it, or lock it away. Some of the group shared their letters with others, which was their choice, and this sparked conversations and realisations that some of them had shared similar experiences.

## 4. Exploring identity

Some projects, such as the Café Connections training delivered by Humans Being, directly address themes such as masculinity, 'toxic masculinity', and gender in their training to explore the impact of identity on mental health. It was found to be useful to talk to men about what masculinity means to them.

*Not all men are the same. Some are not your 'typical' men – they might be introverted or creative. It's important to pitch services towards **all** men. – Humans Being*

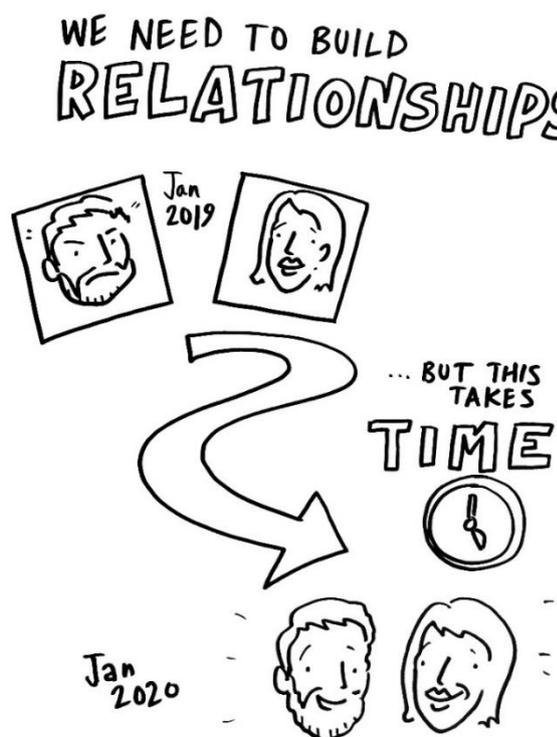


Ensuring that groups and activities avoided male stereotypes was important in delivering projects that gave men permission to share their experiences and feel emotions. Often, vulnerable men didn't want to, or simply couldn't, identify as being at-risk of suicide. Promoting a shift in attitude was felt to be effective across the projects, since for many men the stigma associated with mental health is embedded at a young age.

*Men are open to sharing, they just need to get to that place and trust each other. – Feel Good Factor*

The workers from Red Ladder Theatre Company found that it can be challenging for men to define their feelings, and that directly confronting this as a focus in their play enabled the audience to explore men's mental health in a new way. The video they created about the performance and response to 'The Parting Glass' included Leeds Rhinos player Stevie Ward, whose acceptance and championing of men's mental health was described by many of the other projects as being inspiring and a role model for men to look up to.

## 5. Sustainable approaches



Sustainability emerged as a key theme across the discussions during the learning event; this related to both in terms of feeding back experiences of the grant process as well as what this meant in practice for supporting men.

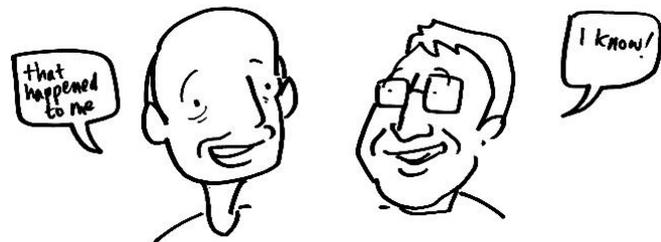
*Partnerships with businesses are successful and transferrable. We will expand into LS8 in the next year but this is a different demographic. The Manbassadors approach could work across the city. – Feel Good Factor*

Some of the projects aimed to build in aspects of sustainability into their work, for example through incorporating training. The Humans Being Café Connections project, training local coffee shop volunteers, focused on themes such as self-care and the Five Ways to Wellbeing in their training. Training is also accessed by many men through Zest's Impact group, which aims to support upskilling and development so that men can continue the group after the funding from the Men's Suicide Prevention Grants Programme has ceased.

*We have a core group of men who have benefitted and wanted to offer back. This gives some semblance of sustainability as men are now running the activities themselves, which they can do into the future no matter what happens. – Zest Health For Life*

Many of the workers from the project described how building meaningful relationships took time and the projects would benefit from longer-term funding. For example, setting 3 to 5 year goals would allow a more sustainable approach to developing meaningful and effective community development work with men, especially to encourage men to take greater ownership of their groups and activities.

## PEER RELATIONSHIPS



ARE REALLY EFFECTIVE!

Likewise, some workers described how one activity per week was not enough to support men who are experiencing loneliness and social isolation; they require more regular contact to build trust and sustain relationships. Many projects described how the continuity of current projects often relies on a core group of men who regularly attended.

*The men from the Wortley Walking group have built excellent relationships and meet outside of the group as well which is really positive. – New Wortley Community Association*

Workers also identified risks to a sustainable approach, which included the potential for men to become 'dependent' on these projects. A consistent approach was agreed as being helpful to grow and attract men to the activities while also encouraging men to 'move on' when they feel ready to start their own groups or have formed positive friendships.

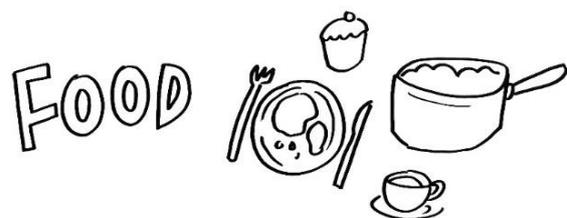
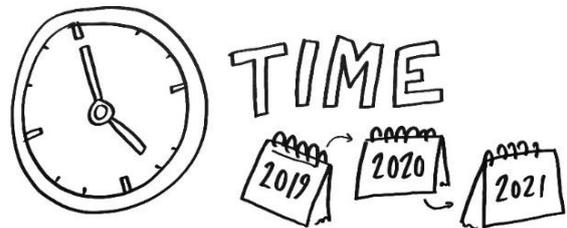
# Good practice

The workers and project participants shared learning and good practice across their projects working with men experiencing social isolation and loneliness. The following 'top tips' summarise key considerations important for working with men.

## Top tips

- Ensuring that workers have a lived experience of mental health problems, loneliness, and/ or suicide (including suicidal feelings, suicide bereavement, and the risk factors for suicide) to enable an effective peer-led approach.
- Facilitating a sense of openness and friendliness.

- Planning projects and activities where the assets already are, for example community venues.
- Balancing the needs of a diverse group of men, while encouraging them to be free to communicate their experiences, emotions, and needs.



- Working together so local organisations hold strong partnerships and connections.
- Simple and effective ideas: fun, a cup of tea, and food.



# Funder reflections

This grants programme has enabled key partners to focus on an important issue for Leeds: suicide prevention in men and combine a range of expertise and experience across different sectors while gathering valuable learning in the process.

Third Sector organisations are extremely well placed to deliver local, targeted, impactful solutions and this programme is providing yet more evidence of this. It highlights their commitment to work with, support and empower men in creative, holistic and timely ways that are aimed – to quote Humans Being - ‘towards all men’.

Third Sector organisations often go above and beyond and Leeds City Council, Public Health and Leeds Community are very grateful for the generosity of project workers and participants. They have given their time and shared their learning about what works and, equally importantly, what doesn't, in open, honest and constructive ways through facilitating project visits, providing comprehensive reports and, most of all, being part of this additional learning event. Every single project was represented which is a testament to their commitment.

The learning is being used to inform future grants rounds and will be shared widely across other local and regional Public Health focused platforms and with other funders. Longer term funding is acknowledged as being essential to sustaining impactful men-focused work in order to maintain safe spaces, build and maintain relationships with isolated men, co-produce creative solutions which are not ‘one size fits all’ and retain Third Sector Organisation staff expertise.

Our sincere thanks to Tom Bailey for capturing key messages from the multitude of conversations in this 3 hour event in such a creative way.

**Leeds City Council**



**Leeds Community Foundation**



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