



# MEN'S HEALTH

u n l o c k e d

## Men's Health Unlocked

### Six Months Report.

Damian Dawtry, Men's Health Unlocked Coordinator, Forum Central



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## Executive Summary

In 2020, inspired by the breadth of best practice in men's health and wellbeing work in Leeds and its growth in taking a gendered approach to health inequalities, four Leeds-based Third Sector organisations – Barca-Leeds, Forum Central, Orion and Touchstone – united to set up “Men's Health Unlocked” (MHU) - a city-wide network to “improve and save the lives of men who live and/or work in Leeds.”

It would provide a combination of all the traditional elements of network support, such as information sharing and advocacy, alongside three distinct delivery projects, in the form of tablets and ICT support for digitally excluded men, men's social groups and an expansion of the Orion Manbassador project. The latter involved recruiting businesses to share health messages, and co-producing a fun, informative magazine to be distributed amongst the Manbassadors and an array of city-wide distribution partners.

It would be bolstered by the involvement of key strategic partners such as the Leeds City Council Public Health Team, and the presence of Professor Alan White on our Steering Group. Professor White is the Emeritus Professor of Men's Health at Leeds Beckett University and is Patron of the national Men's Health Forum.

With health needs at their most challenging in living memory, the support and need for MHU has been outstanding. Some examples include:

- Within a week of starting our project, 70 organisations linked up with us.
- 50 organisations attended our first networking meeting.
- 900 hits on our What's On directory within the first two months of launch.
- Over 70% of men who received tablets felt less isolated as a result.
- Manbassadors signposted at least 50% more men than anticipated, yet with many Manbassadors functioning at reduced capacity and some closed altogether.
- We formed partnerships with over 70 organisations to help with delivery of the Manbassadors and Digital Inclusion projects.

We gathered important learning, such as:

- A clear link between long term health conditions and digital exclusion



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- The value of text-based support as a new way of engaging men and enabling an additional first step towards support.
- A high number of fathers facing child contact issues.

Despite the extended lockdown, the time constraints placed upon the project (six months' delivery in just four months), and the consequent need to adapt projects (such as Touchstone's introduction of a men's helpline), the MHU partners far exceeded targets. For example, half of Barca's tablets reached men from ethnic minorities – typically, those who were hit hardest by Covid-19.

We reached out in many ways. Two appearances on BBC Leeds, one in the Yorkshire Evening Post. International Men's Day UK praised our event that took place on that day. Our picture portraits of Manbassadors adorned lampposts in the deprived neighbourhoods where the Manbassadors worked.

We have quickly found a place strategically, being invited to chair the West Yorkshire and Harrogate Health and Care Partnership Suicide Prevention Peer Support Group, linking into the Health and Wellbeing Board, a regular attendee at several multi-agency strategic meetings, and making important allyships with Women's Lives Leeds.

We continue to seek funding to continue this project and are grateful to the Lottery for enabling us to kick start this project, and to Harnessing the Power of Communities for enabling us to continue beyond the period that this report covers.

MHU has quickly become a relevant and important part of the cross-sectoral landscape, from strategic bodies requesting our gendered focus and knowledge to enhance their work, through to us providing vital services to isolated and vulnerable men, and the organisations that support them, throughout lockdown. We hope that this first six months is a springboard to providing unique and long-term support to the health and wellbeing needs of men from all backgrounds, in order to complement, promote and develop a gendered approach to health inequalities across the city and beyond.

## Introduction

In recent years, Leeds has been at the forefront of taking a gendered approach to health inequalities. Leeds is proud to have produced two landmark reports – The State of Men's Health in Leeds (2016) and The State of Women's Health in Leeds (2019), as well as the Leeds Suicide





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Audit, which is hailed as the national gold standard in this field. These reports have been instrumental in informing key progressions in men's and women's health and wellbeing in the city, such as the Women's Lives Leeds network, the burgeoning number of men's groups across the city, and the expansion of programmes and organisations specifically targeting men, such as Barca-Leeds' West Leeds Men's Network, Orion's Well Man Programme, Humans Being, Leeds Dads and Circles of Life Voices of Men.

Typically, the health inequalities that are specific to men include men having on average three and half years' shorter life expectancy than women, and a male-female suicide rate in Leeds which is 5:1 and higher than the national average.

Covid has had an impact, with men nearly twice as likely to die from the illness. This increases four-fold amongst some ethnic minorities. The wider effects of Covid upon men include them working in Covid-susceptible industries such as construction and transport. We have also seen an increase in feelings of isolation and loneliness, and an increase in domestic abuse for both male perpetrators and victims, with the national men's Domestic Abuse charity extending its opening hours by 50%.

These issues are compounded by the low number of gender-specific services to address these gender-specific needs. Alongside this, some men having coping mechanisms that are, at best, unhelpful and, at worst, both unhelpful and unhealthy for them and for others.

### **A Men's Network for Leeds and surrounds.**

Up until 2020, the various organisations supporting men had been operating largely in silo. Whilst many had created truly co-productive collaborations, their approach had not been part of a wider city-wide strategy. Recently, there have been many other organisations taking their first steps in this area and seeking support. Typical challenges for then included how to encourage to make an initial engagement with a service, where to find collaboration, and understanding the health issues relating to men.

In October 2020, four Leeds-based Third Sector organisations / partnerships – Barca-Leeds, Forum Central, the Orion Partnership and Touchstone – united to set up "Men's Health Unlocked" (MHU) - a city-wide network to "improve and save the lives of men who live and/or work in Leeds."





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Men's Health Unlocked sought to provide an infrastructure to maximise collaboration, built on solid principles of open communication, evidence gathering and sharing of best practice, combined with establishing key strategic influence, advocacy and representation at all levels, and support for men from all backgrounds. It would advocate the needs of men, and celebrate their achievements. It sought a cross-sectoral and inter-organisational approach, linking in Statutory agencies, Third Sector organisations, business, academia and, of course men. It would be multi-directional, so that it was not just about linking men to other stakeholders, but helping those stakeholders to link with the men themselves.

We chose three action areas to convey this approach:

- Connect and Liaise
- Involve and Develop
- Promote and Celebrate

### A city-wide passion

Across the city, from volunteers running gardening groups on rough patches of land in housing estates, to businesses running regular men's mental health social groups, the dedication and passion for supporting men's health and wellbeing is truly inspiring, and on a daily basis. MHU sought to harness this enthusiasm, together with the dedicated support and resources of the organisations behind them, in order to deliver an ambitious programme to push Leeds even further forward in the field of gendered health inequalities.

### National Lottery Funding

In October 2020, Forum Central, as the lead partner and accountable body, were awarded £97,000 by the Coronavirus Community Support Fund, distributed by The National Lottery Community Fund. The partnership promised to:





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- Coordinate this citywide approach and strategic platform for men's health matters.
- Provide groups where men feel comfortable, useful and engage in socially distanced environments.
- Deliver mental health support.
- Provide the tools and technology to address the digital divide for the most vulnerable men.
- Co-produce, with men, tailored communications of Covid-19 prevention, test and tracing messages.
- Respond to changing lockdown measures.

The initial phase would take place over a six-month period October 2020 – March 2021.

### Inter-connecting activities

Our partnership had four key strands:

- Men's Health Unlocked: partnership coordination (delivery and wider partners), information sharing, research and mapping, outreach and advocacy.
- Unlock Online: distribution and gifting of 100 internet enabled tablets loaded with health and wellbeing apps, targeting digitally excluded and isolated men.
- Unlock Offline: Covid-compliant outreach and group support activities (with focus on suicide prevention and BAME men), peer support groups co-produced by men.
- Manbassadors and "Unlocked Magazine": Recruiting and supporting local businesses to share health messages, utilising their unique peer-support potential to engage unreached men; Co-producing a magazine to share these messages and promote city-wide men's engagement activities, including raising awareness of Covid-19 health guidelines.

### Collaboration





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We were keen to take full advantage of the resources and the 30+ years of experience in men's health and wellbeing that these major Leeds agencies collectively provided. Our project strands were designed to interconnect, for example with Manbassadors operating and signposting across all partners' areas, and the tablets being set up to signpost men to a wide range of activities and services.

Whilst the Lottery funding went solely to these four charities, the network itself sought to be truly inclusive, seeking out all stakeholders' involvement. We were conscious not to limit our referrals and signposting to the four lead agencies. Instead, we sought a far wider pool of expertise, with the central coordinating role being in an ideal position to identify support that would be much more finely tuned to individual need. We would enable collaboration rather than duplication.

We ensured consistency across delivery partners with ongoing communication and by sharing each other's successes on social media, alongside holding bi-monthly Delivery Group meetings and bi-monthly Steering Group meetings.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

As this was a short-length project, we sought to create connections and gather principally quantitative data ahead of attempting to achieve a large amount of measurable impact. The drop-in nature of the Staying Social and other online groups meant that in-depth monitoring was not possible for these service users.



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**MANBASSADOR**  
**JAYNE**  
 Local  
 Pharmacy  
 Assistant

**It's tough for men, especially the young.  
 That pressure to be strong –  
*man up, hold your own.***

**But there's other kinds of strength;  
 the strength to reach for another's hand  
 and let them in.**

**I'm at the counter  
 and it's close to home with me.  
 I see them come in, stressed and unhappy.**

**No more *man up.*  
 No more *hold your own.***

**Be kind, treat everyone equally.  
 A smile goes so much further in the world  
 than an uncaring word  
 and takes far less energy.**



**MANBASSADOR**  
**STEVE**  
 Local Fryer

**Like to get in early, prep myself ready.  
 Lunchtime, it's sausage deals.  
 Later, for the kids, it's chips.  
 For the older people, always fish and chips.  
 Traditional.**

**Some are afraid of talking, not just the men.  
 They've been alone that long  
 or have lost someone.**

**One good thing: before, they'd crowd inside,  
 just get their meal and go.**

**But since they've had to queue outside,  
 they talk, pass the time of day. They chat.  
 I like to see that.**



**MANBASSADOR**  
**RICHARD**  
 Local Barber

**Never mind the ebbs and flows of fashion.  
 I see lives change.**

**Boy in the chair, now he's a teenager,  
 then you're at his wedding.  
 Holy crap, he's a dad, small boy sitting there.  
 Happens so fast, like high speed dubbing  
 on a 90's ghetto blaster.**

**The quiet conversation that happens in the chair;  
 you can talk a guy through his divorce  
 and never know his name.**

**Guys are brutal. No whingeing!  
 Pain? Run it under the cold tap, don't ask for help.  
 But it takes its toll; go home, have a drink.  
 Lockdown's been hard. Maybe I'm just as  
 dependent on my customers as they are on me.**

**Suffer in silence? Sign me up, coach,  
 for openness and honesty.**



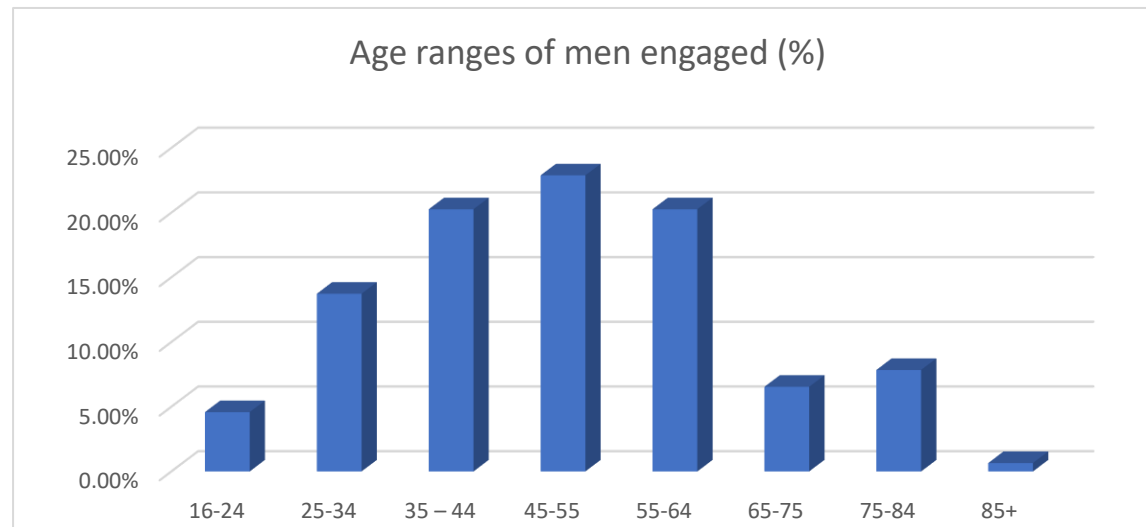
*A selection of Poem-Portraits co-created by local Manbassadors, poet Peter Spafford and photographer Lizzie Coombes, which were erected in the areas in which the Manbassador businesses operated.*

## Project Outputs

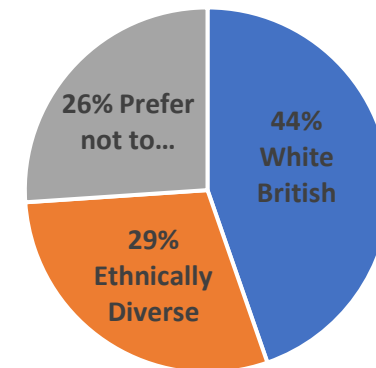
Despite six months' delivery being packed into just four months, and in much more restrictive circumstances than that anticipated in the original project proposal, the partnership exceeded expectations in almost every area.

### Delivery Projects

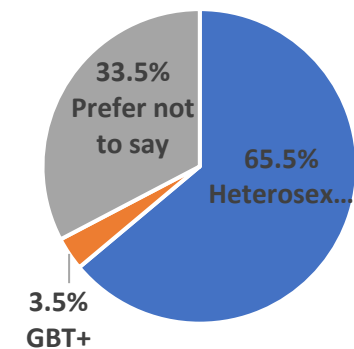
- Number of men engaged: 410 (including Manbassador conversations) (Target: 210)
- Volunteers used: 44 (Target: 90+)
- Indirect Beneficiaries: 168+ (Target: 150+)



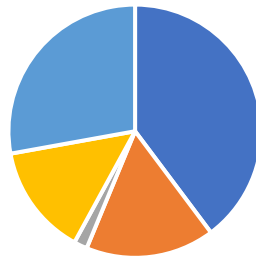
### Ethnicity of service users



### Sexual Orientation



### Marital Status



- Single (never married)
- Married or living with a partner
- Widowed
- Divorced or Separated
- Prefer not to say / unknown

- 52% of service users lived in a deprived / high output area.
- Only 20% of men were married or living with a partner.
- 21% working full-time.
- 18% working part-time.
- 26% permanently sick/disabled.
- Just 2 men made redundant in the last 12 months.
- 6 out of 36 men reported issues regarding amount / frequency of contact with their children.

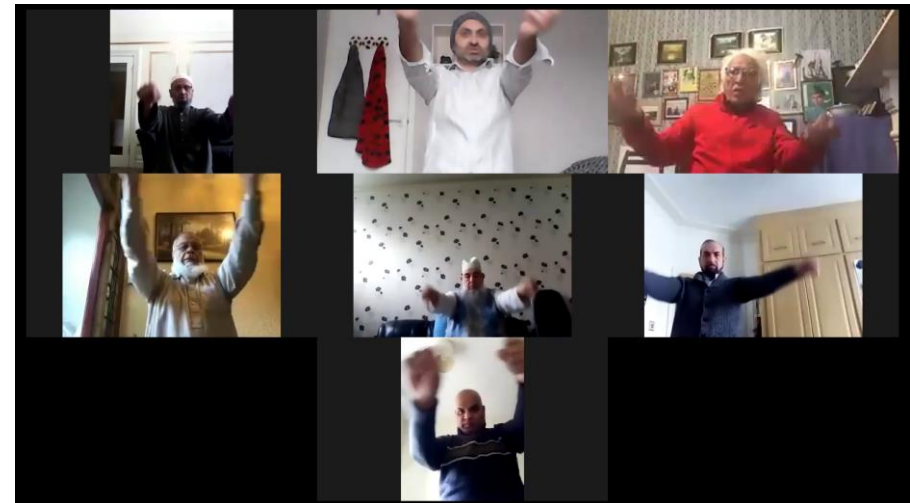
<b>LS9</b>	13%
<b>LS11</b>	11%
<b>LS12</b>	11%
<b>LS8</b>	7%
<b>LS14</b>	7%
<b>LS7</b>	6%
<b>LS16</b>	5%

### Location of service users.

Service users came from 22 different postcode areas. The top six postcodes all contain areas that lie within the top 20% most deprived LSOA's in the country.

## Unlock Online Digital Inclusion Project

- We distributed 76 of the 100 tablets to men living in areas of high deprivation (top 20% deprived areas of England). 29 of the men lived in areas identified as within the top 3% of most deprived areas in England.
- The tablets were used for a variety of uses including social contact, yoga, groups, studying English, shopping, housing, job search, food and diet apps and religious ceremonies.
- We created a network of 43 partner organisations to help support the men with their tablets, including Housing Associations, statutory services such as Job Centre Plus, and small grass roots community self-help groups.
- 50% of tablet recipients belonged to a minority ethnic community.
- We gave tablets to men with a wide range of support needs, from homeless (Simon on the Street) to deaf people (Leeds Society for Deaf and Blind People). There was a remarkable geographical spread across the city too, with a fairly even distribution of men from North, East, South and West Leeds.
- 88% of recipients said that they felt lonely some or a lot of the time.
- 60 of the men identified themselves as having long term medical conditions lasting 12 months or longer.
- 38 out of 58 men replying accessed medical services at least monthly, with 6 saying they did so weekly.
- Over 50% of men reported a negative score with their emotional wellbeing.
- A similar number reported dissatisfaction with their current employment status.
- Nearly two-thirds put a low score against the status of their relationships.



*Unlock Online created or strengthened links with 43 organisations. This online men's fitness group, run by Hamara, was made possible by this scheme.*



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- 13 volunteers used as opposed to the target of 50.
- Learning from our Digital Inclusion Project made a significant contribution to the “Digital Inclusion for Older People” event, attended by over 100 organisations.

### **Unlock Offline**

(This aspect of the project took place entirely online due to Lockdown restrictions.)

- 74 men engaged.
- 15 fathers supported by peer-led social support group, in partnership with Leeds Dads.
- Over 50% of the initial enquires made by men via the Facebook social group led on to further activity.
- 69 calls from 44 men to Helpline.
- 43% of surveyed men had long-term health conditions.

### **Manbassadors and Unlocked Magazine**

- Men signposted by Manbassadors to activities: 234 (Target: 150)
- Manbassadors Recruited: 29 (Target: 40)
- Copies of Unlocked Magazine distributed per edition: 4,700 average (Target: 5,000)
- Unlocked Magazine developed a city-wide network of 64 agencies including Food Hubs, Neighbourhood Networks and businesses.
- 7 Manbassadors produced poem-portraits that were erected on lampposts in areas in which the Manbassadors worked.
- Manbassadors became good sources of community intelligence, as they made us aware of an increased amount of discussions with customers revolving around money worries and health.





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## Network Support and Coordination

- We directly supported 41 organisations, for example best practice guidance, providing relevant research, or enabling collaboration.
- A further 107 organisations and businesses received support for their men in the form of tablets or Unlocked magazine.
- We have indirectly supported at least 700 men outside of the funded partners, but the actual figure is likely to be far higher than that.
- At least three specific projects formed as a direct result of our coordinating role.
- We held two Networking and Skill Share meetings which involved sharing intelligence on health and wellbeing issues for men, as well as Skills Shares where leaders in their field were asked to lead a discussion. Topics covered ranged from “Great group activities for men” through to a university Doctor of Psychology sharing his health and wellbeing thesis.
- 80 people attended the networking meetings. This included workers and volunteers representing Council, Third Sector, Healthcare, Academia and Business have attended.

<p>Leeds Dads / Leeds Dads / LS8 1SA / Errol Murray / +447562646603 / leedsdads@gmail.com  <a href="http://leedsdads.org">leedsdads.org</a>  <a href="https://facebook.com/leedsdads">@leedsdads</a></p>	<p>Group: Leeds Dads. It's an hour where Dads can openly discuss challenging, difficult or sensitive topics with a trained counsellor, and without judgement.            Sunday Night Quiz            Active WhatsApp Group offering dads Peer Support</p>	<p>No / Dads of pre school children</p>	<p>Citywide</p>
<p>Leeds Irish Health and Homes / Men's cancer awareness / LS53BT / Peter Rollings / +447592725243 / peter.rollings@lihh.org  <a href="http://www.lihh.org">www.lihh.org</a></p>	<p><b>Online</b> - We are currently running an online men's group. This is quite new but this wee have a guest speaker talking about the early warnings signs of cancer in men. The facts and the myths, Every Friday at 3-4pm Contact Peter on 07739212735</p>	<p>Yes, No / We are focusing on Irish/heritage men</p>	<p>West Leeds</p>
<p>Men's Health Unlocked Touchstone / LS9 7ST / Matt Davis / 07909 254 607 / mattd@touchstonesupport.org.uk</p>	<p><b>Online</b> - Staying Social Facebook group (Online Facebook peer support group).   <b>Phone</b> - Helpline for referrals/signposting available</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>City-wide</p>

- We produced a bi-monthly newsletter and occasional group emails which contain the latest information, research and events. We set up “Let’s Unlock” directory of activities for men. 900 hits in its first two months. This was complemented by the regular Unlocked Magazine, which provided a non-digital alternative of this information.
- We set up and maintained a webpage with network updates, up-to-date information, research and best practice about men’s health and wellbeing.
- MHU supported the Funding Panel for Covid-19 Small Grants in January.



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*Presentations on working with men were popular with the Local Care Partnerships.*

### Co-Production:

Our goal is to fully include men in our governance. In a period of lockdown and setting up the network, this was a challenge at network level However we did manage some notable achievements in this area:

- The Leeds Dads group was peer-led, with a volunteer coordinating the group.
- 13 service users contributed to Unlocked Magazine, for example writing a “Tale from Lockdown” slot or contributing artwork.
- 2 service users attended the networking meetings.
- 2 Focus Groups held with service users.
- Our ongoing IT support for the tablets meant that we were able to provide the apps that men requested.
- Two service users and a Manbassador attended the MHU Networking meetings.



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## Inter-partner Collaboration

Whilst the network reached far beyond the funded partners, we ensured that the delivery strands of the funding were complementary, for example signposting Leeds Dads to Touchstone following their involvement in the wider network activities, or the “Unlock Offline” group attendees being supported by the Digital Inclusion project.

We were also able to utilise the expertise of our Steering Group, for example the Public Health team keeping us up-to-date on Covid-19 strategy and commissioning, or Professor White offering latest research on Covid-19 and men’s health.

*Great to hear one of our service users taking me through, kick by kick, their team's footie match last week. They live alone and don't have a TV or internet and the tablet loaned through [@mhuleeds](#) [@BARCALeeds](#) has been, in their words 'Brilliant, fantastic - thank you'. – Tweet from partner organisation.*

## Challenges and changes to the original proposal.

The extended lockdowns led to some changes in how we ran the projects. Due to recruitment processes, we began the project in late November, giving us just over four months to deliver a six-month project. Partners adapted their plans accordingly as follows.

### Manbassadors and Unlocked Magazine

- The extended run of lockdowns curtailed our recruitment of Manbassadors both numerically and geographically, but we still managed to recruit in both West Leeds and East Leeds, all in deprived areas of the city, often solely by phone, and to far exceed our signposting target. Some Manbassadors’ businesses closed during this time.



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- Due to the largely phone-based nature of our support, it was hard to keep track of how many conversations had been held. It was harder to speak to the key contact using this method, and one was sometimes unsure of whether it was a good time to call. We estimate that the actual number of conversations, if taking a monthly average, would have been over 300 across the 29 Manbassadors.
- We produced fewer editions of Unlocked magazine but compensated by providing two bumper issues and putting extra work into distributing it to as many communities as possible, teaming up with 35 organisations city-wide.

### Art Project

- We had originally planned some in-person get-togethers with Manbassadors. The Art Project went some way to addressing our need to create a sense of community amongst the participating businesses.

### Manbassador Vouchers

- This idea was not Covid-safe and it would have been very difficult to recruit businesses that would be willing to participate.

### Unlock Online

Unlock Online had procurement issues with the tablets that were compounded by the winter lockdown and the Christmas holiday period. It was also delayed by the extended time that it was currently taking to process volunteers' DBS's.

Barca-Leeds, who were delivering this aspect of the project, responded quickly:

- They adapted their project and decided to recruit partner agencies to identify men to receive the tablets. This was a greatly beneficial move, providing both partnership and stakeholder benefits. The network now has over 40 more organisations with much closer ties to MHU and who will benefit from the added value that we can bring to their work with men.
- Tablets were acquired and sent out to 100 men in less than 40 days, with staff physically delivering the equipment on their days off, over weekends and throughout Leeds.

- We did not take a start and end measure of the impact upon men's social contact regarding the tablets, as they men only had the tablets for 2-3 months within the duration of the project.

*"Tablets definitely helped. We spend at least half an hour a week doing exercise. It made a difference because we can see each other."*



### Unlock Offline

- "Unlock Offline" became something of a misnomer as we were unable to run any of their groups in-person. Instead, we set up online text-based support groups and a men's advice and support phonenumber.
- The nature of their drop-in online social media groups meant that it was very difficult to gather monitoring on some of these participants, unless they chose to become more engaged beyond the initial point of entry.
- The phonenumber was key in linking men to vital services, with six being referred to more intensive mental health support. Over 50% of men who made contact with this service went on to participate in some way, for example attending a text-based support group or sending a message to the Facebook account.

*"It wouldn't have been possible without you, you gave me access to all the help I needed. I Was locked out before. But now I am in contact with all the services" (1-1 helpline)*





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## Our Impact

### Unlock Online Digital Inclusion Project

- 89% reported improved digital skills since acquiring a tablet.
- 71% said they felt less isolated as a result.
- Over two-thirds said that other people around them had benefited from their use of the tablet.
- The tablets were used for a wide variety of things. Alongside social and entertainment sites, this included training, job search, watching Mass, research, helping with a child's homework and sorting out housing issues.
- It was difficult to give the men IT support over the phone. Many men received support from Partner Agencies, friends or family members which enabled us to provide support for a short period before they were confident to develop their digital skills without our volunteers' input.
- Since the end of the programme, we have received a large number of enquiries from the whole of the neighbourhood network (36 agencies), Leeds City Council Housing Department and 100% digital service, and 6 other VCS agencies interested in learning from our project. We have advised and supported three agencies who in turn have bought tablets themselves for their clients.

### Unlock Online

- 100% of men attending the Leeds Dads group said that they benefited from and enjoyed this group, and would consider similar projects in the future.

### Unlocked Magazine

The impact of Unlocked Magazine relied on feedback from partner organisations, which was overwhelmingly positive. For example, an older people's charity said the zines had helped their group activities: *"We have opened up a chatting room, where any of our community can come in and get something off their chest. I go through the zines with them, they like knowing of things men can do; one of them was in touch with a*





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walking group, others like the games.” A Council Officer reported its popularity on a deprived estate, saying that two men “enjoyed the last edition, easy to read and interesting and lastly one of them was going to contact one of the groups about doing some walking.” Another said how the week planner had proved so popular that people had come back for more copies so that they could continue to use one.

### Network Support and Coordination

We asked members to say what they had gained, and what they hoped to gain, from being a member of the network. We also asked them to evaluate the skill share model for the meetings. There was close alignment between what people wanted the network to deliver, and what it currently delivered.

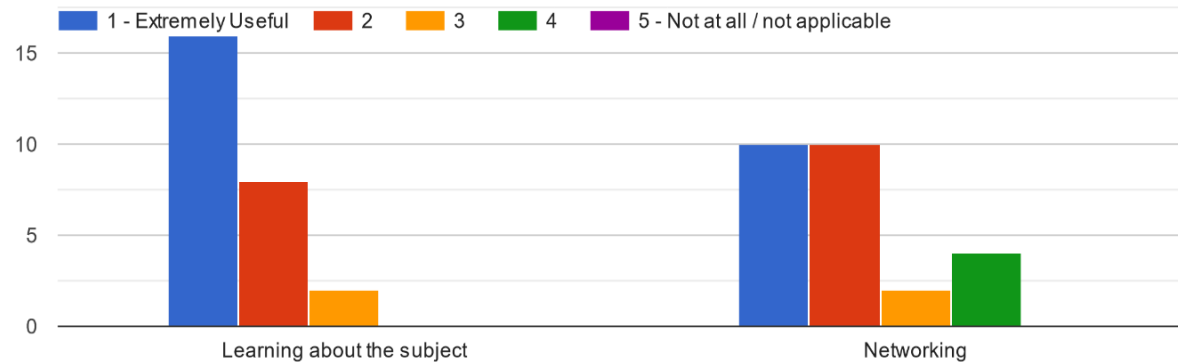
#### What is MHU to you?



#### What do you want MHU to be?



### How useful were the workshops that took place at the March 2021 Networking meeting?



The workshops proved to be very popular. The networking was also good, but indicated that we needed to adapt the structure to allow more conversation to take place beyond the subject of the workshop.

*“Really interesting to hear what was going on and how you are trying to bring things together in co-ordinated way.” – Dr Mike Jestico, University of Leeds.*

*“Once again thank you for having me and making me feel most welcome! The workshops were a brilliant addition and I really enjoyed the one I attended; it gave a lot of food for thought.” - Hayley Duffy, volunteer.*

*“I thought at first that I did not have time for this. I was annoyed as I thought no-one would be there and it would be “chat, chat chat” and I would not want to be there. I was very happily proved incorrect. It was a really informative session , I had a great time, met some really interesting people, [whom] I will be catching up with at another time. I’m really glad to have been there. Congratulations, you pulled it off and you deserve to give yourself a pat on the back.” – Errol Murray, Chair, Leeds Dads.*

## Awareness Raising and Advocacy

*"I work in the community and I was in need of some advice to set up and facilitate an inter-cultural men's group. I was signposted to Damian, who thoughtfully spent a lot of time sharing his great knowledge on the subject of support for men across the city. Damian was also able to broaden my network of workers in the nearby area. Since acting on these contacts, I have been able to gain some key insights into some mental/physical health challenges that affect men in the city. Damian has also invited me to an incredible useful network meeting. I am confident this will support me in raising my profile in the area and will lead to strong relationships in the area." – Kirsty Jamieson, Project*

*"Thank you so much for a brilliant presentation at Wetherby – there was a lot of interest from everyone there." - Alison Fenton, Development Manager, Local Care Partnerships Development Programme*

*"What a fantastic #internationalmensday event and thank you to @profAlanwhite @mhuleeds @TNLComFund – it is vital that we have strategies like this – and hopefully more will come in other cities!" – Tweet from International Men's Day UK.*



## Directory of Men's Activities

*"The database is brilliant. Our team covers the whole city so it gives us an idea of what's out there." - Grace Feeney, Project Worker, Leeds City Council*

## Other Monitoring: Parenting and Redundancy

Across the project we gathered other monitoring to inform our work.

- Of 32 parents asked, 6 said that they were having issues accessing their children. Leeds Dads and other organisations have reported that this has been exacerbated by the impact of Covid.
- Leeds Dads have also reported an increase in men being domestically abused. In some cases this has been from children, perhaps as a result of increased pressures brought about by the lockdown of families together.
- We recorded only a limited number of men who had been made redundant and predict that this wider impact of Covid-19 is yet to be felt.

## Co-production

We saw these first six months as a way to set up and try things out, with an aim to becoming fully co-productive in the medium term. We have been talking to our allies at Women's Lives Leeds, Time to Shine and others, in order to inform a truly co-productive model to help to develop our aims, goals and to steer this network.

At one Focus Group with Leeds Dads, we asked if they would be interested in being involved in its governance. One man said "It's nice to talk - if someone hears you". This was a timely reminder that, no matter what channels we set up to gather information to inform our work, we need to ensure that the communication works both ways and that we keep men informed of the outcomes of these conversations.

## Budget

There was a small underspend which has been returned to the Lottery. Some adjustments were made to meet the changed nature of some of the project in the light of the Covid restrictions, for example increased use of advertising on Social Media and increased distribution costs.

## Our Learning

- Forum Central's and partners' positions in the Third Sector has helped us to develop our strategic links, for example with the Health and Wellbeing Board, WYHHCP and Leeds City Council Public Health.
- Our alliance with Women's Lives Leeds is a vital part of developing a gender-based approach to health inequalities.
- The emergence of this network appears timely, as many existing and new projects are looking to develop their engagement with men. For example, the most popular skill share was "Great Group Activities for Men".
- The different partners, and the Network Coordinator, had worked in the field of men's health and wellbeing for several years. MHU benefited from their links to key stakeholders in men's health locally, regionally and nationally.
- Our different strands interacted well with existing provision as well as augmenting it. For example, the tablets, helpline and Manbassadors provided a conduit into other services. Unlocked Magazines listed a wide variety of opportunities, from older men's quiz clubs to peer support groups for young black men, with the "Let's Unlock" directory providing a digital alternative.
- The spirit of collective learning appears to be popular, given the success of the Skill Share meetings.
- There is a clear link between isolation, digital exclusion and poor health.
- Digital inclusion has a significant positive benefit upon isolation.
- The number and range of organisations that signed up to the Digital Inclusion project provides further evidence of the rate of digital exclusion in the city.
- There is a significant number of men facing child contact issues.
- Our high level of engagement with men from diverse backgrounds was helped by the wide range of network members and supporting organisations, for example with the Tablet and Unlocked magazine distribution. It was also helped by the breadth and depth of resources of the immediate partners.
- The breadth of our network and engagement with diversity of men means that we are in a strong position to monitor health and wellbeing needs and to respond to them in a timely way, for example canvassing men regarding access to health services, parenting, or redundancy.

- The reduced volunteer pool for the Digital Inclusion project had little or no effect on delivery, with men receiving extra support from our partners or their friends and family.
- The drop-in nature of the online social groups suits the way that some men like to engage. Engagement targets via this method far exceeded those set out for the in-person groups that were originally proposed.
- In-depth monitoring of these social groups, and of the beneficiaries of the Manbassadors project and Unlocked Magazine, remains difficult.
- We found that the use of a text-based support group suited some men as it was less pressured than face-to-face or Zoom groups, and enabled them to open up more freely. Men had a choice of phone, text, emails and Zoom groups so that they could access support in their preferred method.
- MHU was formed and developed in the age of Zoom. This has meant that our delivery model has developed with online technology very much in mind. This has helped to create some useful engagement tools such as the tablets or the online skill shares. Conversely, this means that we now need to ensure that we develop our non-digital offer as lockdown eases.
- Facebook was very effective in engaging new male service users.
- Not only did Manbassadors enable us to reach men who are not accessing traditional services, they also offered an excellent source of community intelligence.
- There was potential confusion from naming activities and email addresses as “Men’s Health Unlocked”, rather than naming their activity as being within the MHU programme. This meant that, when that nominally “Men’s Health Unlocked” project or email came to an end, people may have been led to believe that the whole network had ceased to exist.
- The use of tablets, social media groups and Unlocked Magazine gave us invaluable access directly into the homes of men, at a time when people are reluctant to leave their homes, and when this is something that is expected to continue after lockdown is lifted.



## Legacy

- We are delighted that Harnessing Power of Communities has pledged six months' funding, in order to continue the project whilst new funding is sought. Forum Central will continue with the Coordination role whilst long term funding can be found. In the meantime, the networking meetings, skills share, information hub and the directory of activities will continue.
- MHU has quickly become a relevant and important part of the cross-sectoral landscape, for example having secured its place as a partner to the Health and Wellbeing Board, a regular attendee at the Domestic Abuse Forum, holding presentations such as at Local Care Partnerships and events, and having provided vital services to isolated and vulnerable men, and the organisations that support them, throughout lockdown. Our gendered approach means that we hold a unique support position that can be drawn on any individual or agency seeking to address health inequalities.
- Touchstone have continued the Staying Social Group.
- This project has enabled Forum Central to further its reputation as a neutral Third Sector support organisation.
- Many Manbassadors have expressed disappointment that the funding has come to an end. Despite that, some have said that they now feel equipped to continue to signpost men. One chemist which we had not been able to get through to for many months, had been continuing with the project and had actively been cascading the information across their whole team in our absence.
- Barca-Leeds have learnt a lot from their tablet roll-out and have offered to share their learning with others, which they have already done with the Neighbourhood Networks. Their resources have even been used by 100% Digital, a city-wide service which lends out laptops to individuals to help them access activities.

## Case Studies

### Case Study 1: Hayley Duffy - Manbassador at “thegym”.



Hayley Duffy is a talented yet frustrated Manbassador. Talented because she has all the makings of a perfect Manbassador – enthusiastic, caring, embodies a healthy lifestyle, and even has a mental health qualification to her name. Frustrated, because for large chunks of her time with the project, she has been furloughed.

Hayley is a Personal Trainer (PT) at “thegym”, a national chain of gyms which has been hugely supportive of the Manbassador project. Such is their enthusiasm that, when they discovered Hayley had an interest in supporting mental health alongside physical health, it was they who directed Hayley to us.

“It was the perfect match”, says Hayley. “With fitness, mental health is often not on the agenda and that’s something I’m really interested in.”

Hayley had some men at the gym with whom she had regular contact, and, using our signposting resources, was encouraging them to get further support.

“I had quite a few clients who just wanted a chat and I thought I could really work with. We were also setting up a referral system where any men directed to the gym by Orion would be allocated me as their PT. Then Covid happened.”

Hayley was furloughed. She remained in contact and, as soon as the opportunity arose and the gym reopened, she could be seen running from West Leeds to the pick-up point in East Leeds, to pick up some “Unlocked” magazines to share around the gym and support more men.

“I had one guy who I did an induction with who was really struggling. His life and confidence had spiralled - he was trying to push himself. I chatted to him about other coping mechanisms and helping him to find out about services and what help was out there in Leeds.



**I won't tell a lie. Lockdown,  
 this third one's been tough.  
 Can't teach self-belief  
 if you've lost it yourself.**

**A sprint or big heavy weights!  
 I'm physical, me.  
 Exercise is my medicine,  
 my therapy.**

**Ten years hairdressing,  
 then full-time at the gym.  
 Love it, seeing their confidence grow,  
 the transformation.**

**Exercise makes people happy,  
 like the gents who come in -  
 tension flows out when the pores open,  
 then they're talking.**

**Small thing really, the listening,  
 showing you care.  
 Taking the time to be with someone,  
 just being there.**

Poem by Peter Spafford / Photo by Lizzie Coombes



**LOCAL BUSINESSES  
 LOOKING OUT FOR LOCAL MEN**



Unfortunately, we went back into lockdown before we made much more headway, but I've seen him a couple of time since and I think the chat has helped.

“There is another guy who is there every day. Either there or at work. So the gym is where we talk and I help provide that outlet for him.”

When Lockdown eases, Hayley will be “the central contact for anyone going to the gym who is struggling.” When she does resume her duties, she will now have an extra qualification to her name, which she completed whilst in lockdown. Her qualification in “Mental Health and Wellbeing Awareness” sits proudly alongside her Level 3 in Personal Training and her Level 4 in Nutrition qualifications.

Thanks to the Manbassador Project, Hayley has also developed her skills in suicide awareness. “The Suicide Prevention Course [Zero Suicide Alliance] has been ridiculously helpful. I sadly had to use it personally, but I am glad that I did. If I hadn't been in contact with the Manbassador Project then I wouldn't have known what to do. I highly recommend it.”

Since joining in with the project, Hayley has contributed to the launch of the city-wide network for men's health, as well as attending its inaugural networking meeting alongside 53 other attendees. “I felt included and not out of my depth. I did not realise how many different representations there were in the city!” She also contributed to the Manbassador Poem Portraits project.

For the future, beyond continuing her work at the gym, Hayley would like to put on some regular community-based classes and discussions, for people who go to the gym but would also like some mental health support. “I want to support little adjustments to lifestyle other than just fitness coaching”, she says.

We're very grateful to both Hayley and the gym for their fantastic support of this project and we very much look forward to working with them in the future.

## Case Study 2: The Value of Text-Based Support

James first had contact with Men's Health Unlocked when he was referred through for the "Staying Social" text-based online support group. James had engaged once or twice in the group but wasn't the most vocal/active member of the group.

Then one afternoon, James made a post on the group wall saying the word "help". Immediately this was picked up with support from other members of the group, who began offering support and asking James how they could help.

The post was initially identified by an admin when James submitted the post to be authorized, and an admin immediately directly messaged James with the Men's Health Unlocked Helpline number. James then had a very open discussion around many mental health challenges that he was experiencing, including self-harm and suicide. He was very open with the fact that he felt these challenging mental health experiences were all caused largely by his perceived body image and how that tied with his sense of masculinity.

When James had expressed a lot of his emotional concern and had lifted a lot of that weight off his shoulders, we began discussing support options. We signposted him to Andy's Man Club and the Wellbean Café for more support around suicide prevention, and we referred him through to Live Well Leeds for further ongoing support on a 1-1 basis.

This showed the power of minimizing barriers to asking for help via text-based support. Rather than having to get his phone, call a support service, and talk in depth about what support he wants, James instead just needed to write the word 'Help' and support was almost immediately in place when needed.

*James' name was changed for this piece, to keep is anonymity.*

## Case Study 3: Helplines and Tablets

When Issah was first referred through to the Men's Health Unlocked helpline, he was struggling a lot with isolation. Before lockdown, he was taking active steps to work on his mental health, including enrolling with Leeds Recovery College and engaging with mental health support services. However, since lockdown restrictions were implemented, Issah found himself unable to access his sessions at the college, maintain contact with his support worker, and maintain social connections with his friends and family. This was because Issah was digitally excluded.

When we gained a thorough understanding of Issah's situation and the impact it was having on his mental and emotional wellbeing through the helpline, and we made a referral through to Men's Health Unlocked Online to help him gain access to a tablet that was pre-loaded with data so that Issah could use it from home and would not need to travel to access Wi-fi.

Now that Issah has the tablet set up and running, the impact it has had in multiple areas of his daily life is notably positive:

"The tablet has kept me sane. I wish I had it before but all in all it has been a great good friend. I used to do much but since the pandemic I have felt so isolated. At times I do feel suicidal and I feel scared. But the tablet has allowed me to connect back to the world and I can talk to my friends or the social workers through zoom. I am so so so appreciative. Since I got the tablet, I have been so engaged with my college and I ain't lonely any more. I am so grateful."

"The tablet and the data has allowed me to talk to the People who can help me. At times I couldn't call nor reply to an email unless I walk near the city to get free wi-fi. But your project has helped me to feel better, and you have helped me. Though all is good, I found a friend on the tablet."

## For More information

To discuss any aspect of this report, or Men's Health Unlocked in general, please contact Forum Central.

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