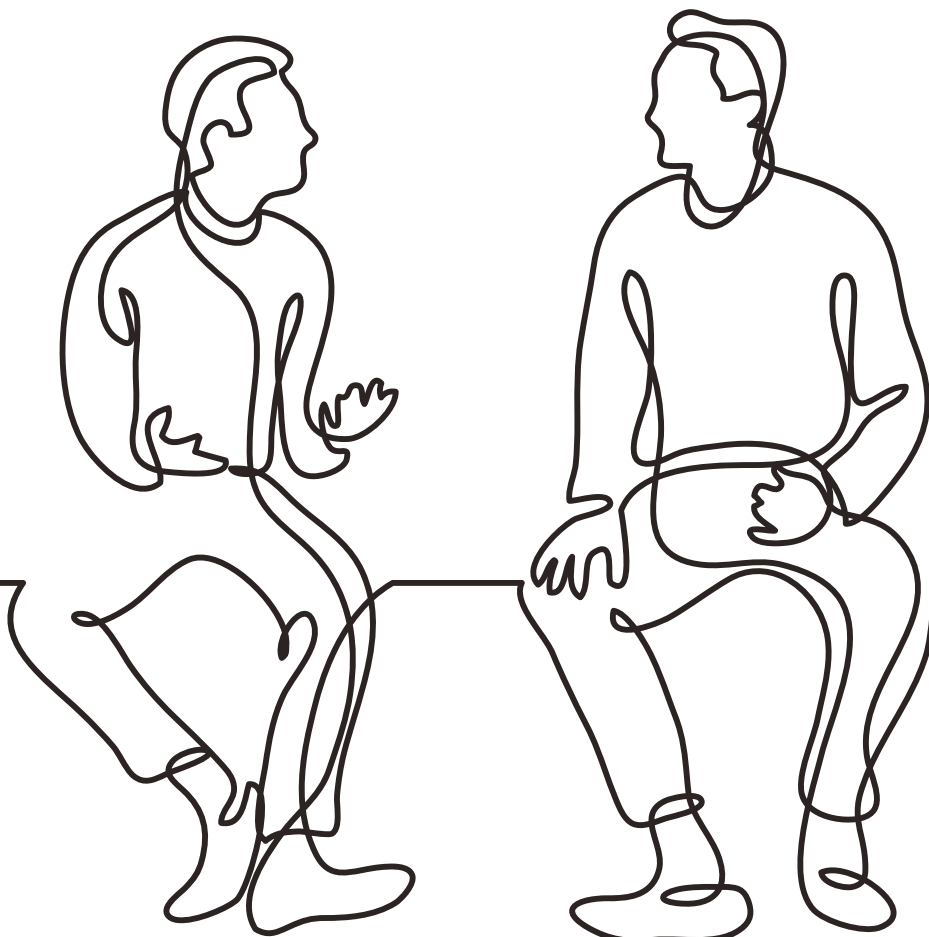


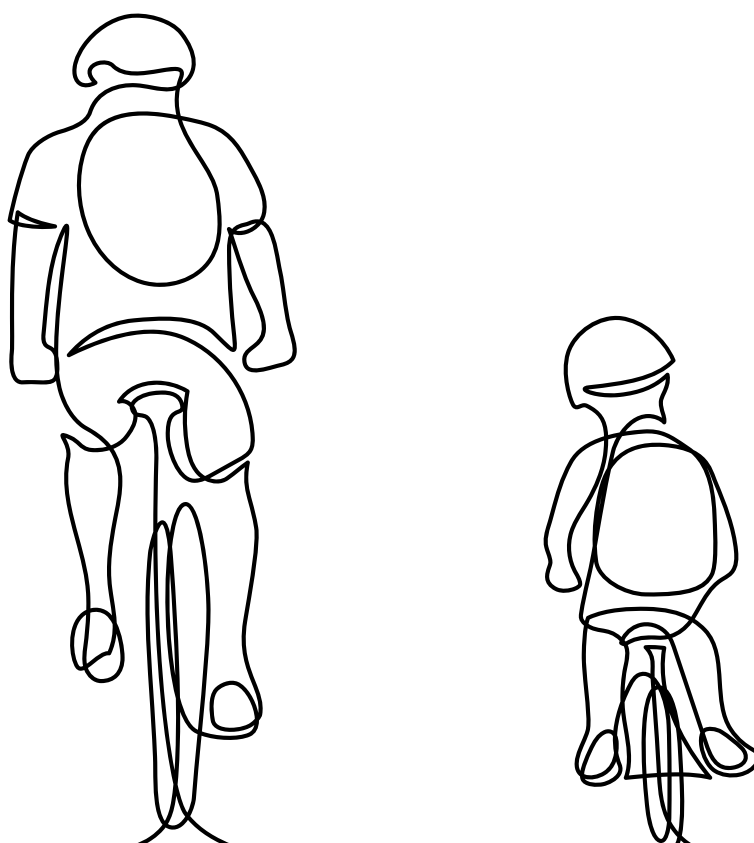
# Making services more meaningful for men

A toolkit for organisations delivering  
community-based services or activities

July 2024



## 2 Making services more meaningful for men



## About this toolkit

This toolkit has been developed to provide organisations delivering community-based services or activities with some tips and tools to support their engagement with men. It has been developed based on a review of existing information from across the UK and the responses that have been received from local organisations and residents to the research carried out by Stand and Sunderland City Council.

Though the primary focus is on men, the role of families and friends in supporting men is referenced within the toolkit.

## Why think about men's needs?

Information from health promotion and community-based initiatives in Sunderland shows that men are engaging at a lower rate than women – a trend that is not unique to Sunderland.

This toolkit sets out some of the ways that could help to make services more meaningful to men. It presents some general ideas and approaches that you may find useful, as well as some sources of further information and support that will help you explore this further.

# What we know from our research

## 1 Develop health literacy

Health literacy is about a person's ability to understand and use information to make decisions about their health. Research shows that in general compared to women, men are considered to have a narrower view of health and limited awareness of what helps.

## 2 Design of services

Services tailored towards men's preferences are more likely to be used by men. Men often face specific barriers such as societal expectations and stigma around seeking help. Services that consider and tailor to men's needs can help make it easier for them to seek help and build trust, encouraging them to continue to use services.

## 3 Be flexible and go where men are

Research shows that men find competing work and family priorities to be a barrier to accessing services, and are less likely to take time off work for fear of loss of earnings. Going where men are, in an environment where they feel more comfortable will make services more accessible, drive awareness and take away the reluctance to make the first contact.

## **4 Provide a positive first experience and foster meaningful relationships over time**

Men are more likely to recommend the service to others and engage with it consistently if their first interaction is a good one. This will foster a supportive community and encourage broader participation.

Insight shows that men need more face-to-face interaction with men to encourage engagement. Developing physical or practical activities can be a good way to facilitate or encourage men to verbalising their feelings.

## **5 Embed diversity and inclusion**

Research shows that different groups of men face different challenges and that demonstrating a commitment to diversity and inclusion can help build trust and encourage more men to engage with local services.

## **6 Foster a sense of achievement and developing advocates, volunteers or facilitators**

Research demonstrates that generally for men, achieving a sense of accomplishment is crucial for building confidence in their abilities and sharing their skills with others. Reflecting on their progress and setting future goals can significantly enhance their physical and mental health in the long term. This approach also helps reduce the stigma many men experience around seeking support.

Additionally, research shows that commitment levels increase when former beneficiaries of a service become advocates or volunteers and are given roles of ownership or responsibility within the service.

# Practical checklists

## – what you can do

### 1 Health literacy – a checklist

It is important that health information is written in a way that can be understood so men can make informed choices. Read more about how you can make information easier to digest:

- ✓ Regional Health Literacy Team | North East and North Cumbria NHS ([northeastnorthcumbria.nhs.uk](http://northeastnorthcumbria.nhs.uk)) - read about the work the Integrated Care Board are doing.
- ✓ <https://hemingwayapp.com/> helps simplify complex sentences.
- ✓ Simplify forms, make them easy to fill out and provide support for those who need it.
- ✓ Produce easy-to-understand, male-oriented resources (videos, leaflets, online content) highlighting prevention, early intervention and the benefits of support using relatable stories and testimonies. Use positive messaging which focuses on strength, resilience, and normalising asking for help and support.
- ✓ Showcase real Sunderland male role models who can share their own mental health and health journeys to legitimise the experiences.
- ✓ Involve families in health campaigns to normalise discussions about men's health issues, for example develop information for friends or family members on how they can start a conversation with their loved one if they are concerned about their health.

## 2 Design of services – a checklist

- ✓ Focus on practical benefits to the individual, such as improved relationships, work performance, physical fitness, and quality of life

### Good practice example

**Name:** The Proper Blokes Club

**Website:** <https://theproperblokesclub.co.uk/>

This example shows how men are encouraged to get involved in walking. Walking and talking side-by-side rather than face-to-face can make conversations feel less confrontational, encouraging more relaxed conversations.

The founder of this growing organisation started the group by reaching out to other people on Facebook to join him on a walk to help them understand that they are not alone and that there are people out there that are willing to help and support anyone who is struggling.

The main aim is to break the stigma of men's mental health and start talking openly about it. Exercise is a proven way to help people with any sort of mental health issues by releasing endorphins that make them feel good about themselves. Walking is free and gets people out in the fresh air.

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- ✓ Encourage staff and volunteers to have healthy conversations, utilising the Making every Contact Count approaches. (MECC training can be sourced via SCC, on [HealthChampions@sunderland.gov.uk](mailto:HealthChampions@sunderland.gov.uk))

### Good practice example

**Name:** Mind UK

**Website:** <https://www.mind.org.uk/>

This example shows that whilst many services target both men and women, some tailor their messaging and services to engage more men.

Many services aim to reach men and women. Mind supports everyone but does a good job at tailoring their service to men. They've set up 'Side by Side' to explore the power of peer support where it's safe to have conversations with other people to discuss common issues, difficulties or anything they want. It helps connect people and reassure people that they are not alone and help them feel more hopeful for the future. This example shows how men and women are equally targeted through peer support.

- ✓ Tailor campaigns to specific age groups as they have unique preferences, behaviours and needs. This will make campaigns more impactful.
- ✓ Incorporate tested, light-hearted humour to make services more approachable.
- ✓ Make sessions interactive with quizzes or fact-checking to keep men engaged.



- ✓ For men who enjoy giving back to their communities or making things, incorporate physical and practical activities that appeal to men, like mentoring, community clean-up initiatives, or volunteering.

### Good practice example

**Name:** Men's Sheds

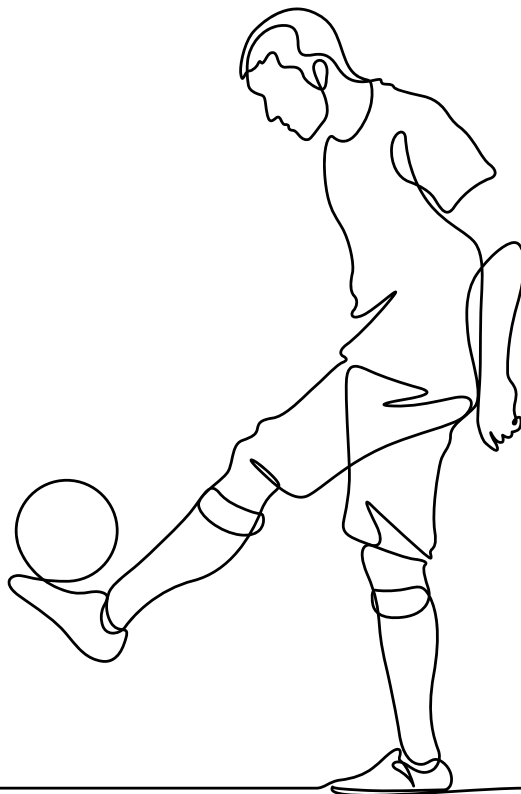
**Website:** <https://menssheds.org.uk/>

This example shows men who come together to make or mend things. A shared activity can promote a natural setting for a conversation and focussing on a task can help allow for relaxed and open communication.

Sheds are physical places where men come together to pursue interests and to practise skills and enjoy making and mending things. Men's Sheds are about social connections and friendship building, sharing skills and knowledge, and laughter. This means that the men benefit from improving their wellbeing, reduce loneliness and combat social isolation.

### 3 Be flexible and go where men are – a checklist

- ✓ Be flexible when possible to accommodate different working schedules. If the service has an appointment system, allow people to pick their own time, date, and location to increase attendance. Offer drop-in or walk-in appointments on certain days, and ensure support services are available during evenings and weekends.
- ✓ Choose centrally located, informal places that are easy and comfortable for men to visit.
- ✓ Partner with other services and attend local events like sports events to increase visibility and awareness.
- ✓ Collaborate with sports clubs, social clubs and workplaces to promote health and wellbeing education and hold group sessions in familiar, non-threatening environments.



## **4 Provide a positive first experience and foster meaningful relationships – a checklist**

- ✓ Provide practical joining advice for newcomers, for example offer details on parking, bus stops, the room set-up, who will be there and what to expect.
- ✓ Clearly outline help available, how it works, frequency, timings, location, and cost.
- ✓ Offer taster sessions. Invite potential users to ‘give it a go’ with no skill requirements or expectations.
- ✓ Check in with newcomers, follow up after the first session and provide ongoing support.
- ✓ Consider a meet-and-greet or buddy system for newcomers with a more experienced group member. Facilitate introductions, encourage people to get to know each other to build connections through icebreakers and shared interests.
- ✓ Promote male staff visibility for male service users and where possible maintain staff continuity which helps build trust.
- ✓ Try to ensure consistent staff and regular group schedules for familiarity and continuity.
- ✓ Establish ground rules with the group for mutual respect, active listening and confidentiality, and review them regularly.
- ✓ Create comfortable spaces and ensure there are quiet areas for private conversations during group sessions.
- ✓ Encourage social interactions and camaraderie outside of group sessions where appropriate.

### Good practice example

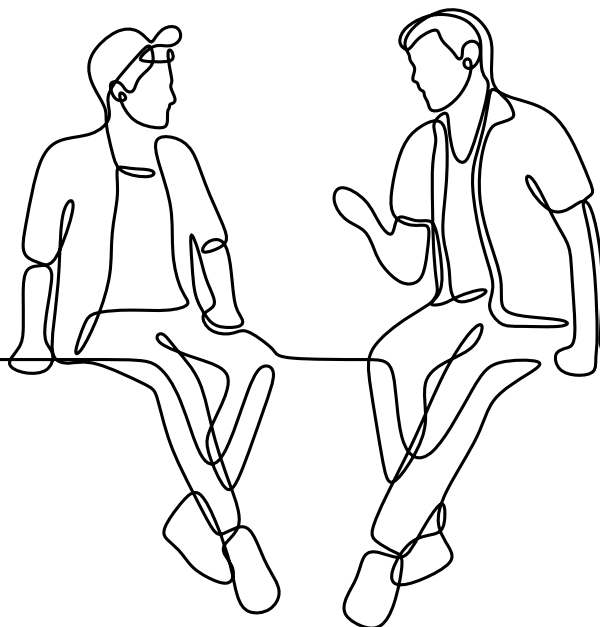
**Name:** Directions For Men

**Website:** <https://www.directionsformen.org.uk/>

This example shows how welcoming words and humour can help to reassure men when they are considering using a service.

The group introduces humour by saying that men won't stop and ask for directions even if they are lost. This organisation provides the opportunity for men to come and talk about whatever it is that is affecting their mental health. It wants to get men doing things they enjoy so they also get activities and events off the ground for other men to attend and participate in and meet a new bunch of mates.

*“When you arrive to see us you will be greeted with a smile and a handshake and the offer of a brew to help settle any nerves or anxiety you have, we don't shine spotlights on people and you are free to talk as much or as little as you want.”*



## 5 Embed diversity and inclusion – a checklist

- ✓ Review who is using your services and adapt approaches for different groups, tailor support and opportunities for different age groups and backgrounds.
- ✓ Target diverse populations by providing health information in different languages to reach all groups, promoting in a variety of locations.
- ✓ Review diversity and inclusion training needs for your workforce and your volunteers.
- ✓ Use inclusive imagery that is reflective of the men accessing your services to help them understand that your service is for them.

### Good practice example

**Name:** Man Health

**Website:** <https://www.manhealth.org.uk/raising-awareness/>

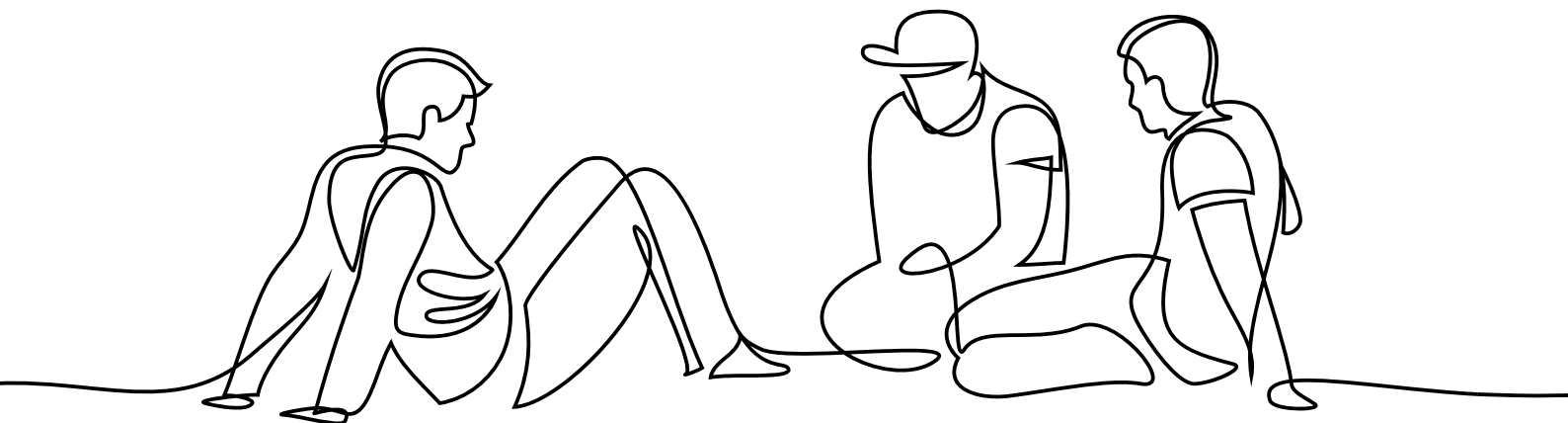
Man Health shows diverse men in its poster and uses the word 'brotherhood'. Using words like this can help men feel like they belong.

An organisation based in the North East which supports men through difficulties in their mental and physical ill health, ultimately to prevent suicide.

Their promotion shows only images of men.

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- ✓ Respect non-binary identities, use correct pronouns and approach conversations with sensitivity.
- ✓ Enquire about individuals' needs in accessing services and provide support if necessary.
- ✓ Make service information easy to find and understand, using multiple contact options: email, phone, WhatsApp, social media, website, in person.
- ✓ Support the digitally excluded by offering a direct phone number for assistance and hard copies of important information.
- ✓ Ensure clear signage and disability-friendly venues. AccessAble provides accessibility information for a number of venues across Sunderland so that users have the information they need in advance.



## **6 Foster a sense of achievement and developing advocates, volunteers or facilitators – a checklist**

- ✓ Regularly acknowledge and celebrate progress to boost motivation and commitment.
  - ✓ Provide recognition for key goals, such as certificates, badges, or social media shout-outs.
  - ✓ Highlight stories of men who have set and achieved goals, discussing their methods and lessons learned.
  - ✓ Engage volunteers with clearly defined roles and ensure they are recognised and rewarded for their support.
  - ✓ Share testimonials from group members about their initial reasons for joining and the positive changes they've experienced.
  - ✓ Encourage referrals from current users, offer incentives. Examples of these could be free family photo shoots, days out or gym discounts.
  - ✓ Highlight benefits experienced by current users and members to create a positive perception for new users.
  - ✓ Gather feedback from the men using your service on an ongoing basis to understand where service improvements can be made.
  - ✓ Build in evaluation measures and share learning, successes and challenges with teams.
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# Thank you

Thank you for taking the time to read this toolkit.

We hope it is useful and has provided you with some guidance on how your organisation can make some adjustments to ensure a focus on increasing the number of men who access health promotion and community services in Sunderland.

## Useful links

### **Links for Life**

<https://www.linksforlifesunderland.co.uk/>

### **e-learning programmes through 'Making Every Contact Count'**

[https://www.e-lfh.org.uk/programmes/?order\\_by\\_cat=public-health](https://www.e-lfh.org.uk/programmes/?order_by_cat=public-health)

### **Better Health At Work Award**

<https://www.betterhealthatworkaward.org.uk/>

### **Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance**

<https://www.sunderlandvsa.co.uk/>

### **AccessAble**

<https://www.accessable.co.uk/>



# Contact details

To find out more about the research report, for a copy of the report and the toolkit please contact: [linksforlife@sunderland.gov.uk](mailto:linksforlife@sunderland.gov.uk)

