

T A K E **ACTION** **man**

**Making it Happen
Grow Grant Review.**

**Take Action Man
Men's mental health project**

By Project Rewild CIC

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**MAKING IT
HAPPEN**

Take Action Man

Men's mental health project in Hastings

This report has been created to review and assess the outcomes of the year long Take Action Man project funded by 'Making it Happen'. We received funding of £13,438 to deliver this work.

Take Action Man offers local men the opportunity to get outside in the town's wonderful natural spaces, get active, learn new skills and spend time together talking, supporting and helping one another. We want to help improve the mental health and wellbeing of local men by making this work accessible and enjoyable.

The project aims to deliver a community based approach to supporting men's mental health by working closely with services who support men and engaging with men in the community to identify their needs and empower them to shape the delivery of an ongoing outdoor activity men's group.

All quotes and testimonies in this report are directly from men who attended the project over the last year.



Why?

We chose to run this mens group in Hastings because middle aged men have the highest rates of suicide than any age or gender group, with men reporting feelings of isolation, embarrassment, shame and a sense of burden on others.

The Samaritans recently published a [report](#) explaining why less-well off middle-aged men do not get the support they need. They identified that a lack of meaningful social connections, restricted help-seeking behaviour and a lack of purposeful activity were key risk factors that contributed to poor mental health.

Hastings has high levels of social deprivation and poverty. The mental health of men in this town has been highlighted by the charity MIND as a priority area.

We aimed to create a project that would be exciting and engaging for men. That would take place outside in nature and help to support our local men.

We also wanted to do this because we are local men who live and work here. We, like many other men, have suffered from depression, anxiety, and mental health issues. We are fathers, husbands, lovers, brothers and friends. We need and want this work for all of us.



How?

It is important to proactively engage men with a community based approach providing accessibility, inclusivity, peer support, shared experiences and a sense of achievement. Take Action Man is an exciting new project for the town where men can get involved in positive outdoor activities and gain support and tools to improve their mental health.

Take Action Man.

We initially delivered 3 trial days last winter in Hastings which were hugely successful. With the help of 'Making it Happen' we were able to continue and expand this work over the next year, with the aim of empowering local men to expand this important work.

We have tried to offer men an exciting, fun and adventurous project. We have thought about what men want, and how we can involve them in deeper support work in a more accessible way. We have even used the nostalgia of 70/80's toys as a marketing campaign to help engage the target age range of men.

The groups are informal and inclusive for all men. We aim to have fun, learn, play, heal and grow together.

It's time for men to support one another, it's time to talk more, It's time to Take Action Man.



What we did.

ADVENTURE DAYS:

Every month throughout the year we have led outdoor adventure days where men can take time out to learn new skills, have fun and connect with other men for the day. A chance to look after ourselves and spend some time outside in good company.

Our groups provided so much more than enjoyable activities. They are an amalgamation of multi-skilled based teachings, which can be taken home and used to manage mental-health and wellbeing outside of the group, independently. Our groups provide men the opportunity to work towards self-sufficiency by recognising lowering mood, depression, anxiety and a rising, overworked nervous system. Our work is gentle, fun and informal. It gives men permission to slow down and take time away from their busy lives and overworked heads. Which is invaluable!

All our practical skill activities engage participants in meditative and physical activity simultaneously. These types of processes allow people space away from rumination and unhealthy thought patterns which in turn makes headspace for joy and connection. Meditative activities have always been a part of human existence and they are a source of personal enrichment that give men a sense of accomplishment.

When men spend time with others doing things that satisfy them, giving them a sense of joy and achievement, this can naturally improve their mental health. The sense of satisfaction and camaraderie helps grow new meaningful connections within their lives.



Woodland Bushcraft and Survival days:

Enjoying time in one of the town's many incredible woodland spaces. These days give men the opportunity to spend time together outside round a campfire learning a range of bushcraft skills such as primitive fire lighting, foraging and whittling. Also plenty of time for sharing food and stories around the fire, **reconnecting with our own true wild nature**. We also engage in yoga, breathwork, meditation, team building exercises and wider wellbeing work in nature.



"it seems obvious that men do better if they get out of their heads regularly, otherwise we give our noisy brains too much credence. I am very glad that you are out there creating a loving group where men can connect and learn cool shit and hang out in a gentler space".

Hastings Walk. Talk and play:

Getting outside, walking and talking together, improving both physical and mental health. During these informal and fun days we walk around and explore some of the town's magnificent outdoor spaces such as the Country Park and Fire Hills, Combe Valley nature reserve, Alexandra Park, Old Roar Gill and many more.

These walks empower men to gradually build confidence through forming meaningful relationships and potential friendships. Participants are given the opportunity to offload anything they want to share whilst walking, and in group circles. Furthermore there are plenty of **opportunities provided for grown men to play**. Games give men the permission to have fun and be competitive in a friendly and safe environment, and above all to just be themselves.



"I pretty much loved every aspect of it and would hope that this venture continues for us all to build on the camaraderie and experience."

Sea Fishing days:

Sea Fishing in a relaxed and friendly environment. Fishing is a great way to relax while staying active. Connecting with our coastal landscapes which we're so lucky to have here in Hastings. Our experienced instructors help men to learn everything they need to get fishing.

GPs, nurses, and other health care professionals can now prescribe angling instead of antidepressants in many parts of the UK.

It is becoming more widely recognised that the time with nature, quiet reflection, meeting new people and learning a new skill can help people battling anything from addiction to anxiety. In a recent MIND survey fishing was recognised as one of the most popular activities men would like to engage in to improve mental health. These groups have been very popular.

"I have lived in Hastings all my life and never learned to fish on the beach. I am so grateful for the opportunity to learn in great company, what a great initiative for local men"



Fire Circles:

In addition to the full adventure days, we have offered an evening outdoor men's group. We sit around a fire in the woods with a hot drink once a month. A time for local men to talk, connect, and support one another. We have added meditation, breathwork, singing and drumming to these circles over the year with the influence of the men involved.

This space has been particularly powerful and important in **creating a supportive environment for men to feel safe and open up.**

These circles have been held by experienced and skilled mens circle practitioners.



"Through the circle, Luke, Mark, and Dean have created an amazing space, which has offered me friends, a space to feel supported, and a beautiful monthly opportunity to reconnect with nature. It's a staple in my self-care routine, and I know I'm not alone when I say it's a highlight of my month."

Sea (Cold Water) Swimming:

Not only is open water swimming exciting and enjoyable, but there are significant health benefits attached to submerging yourself in ice-cold water.

Working intentionally with cold water is an incredible practice. It not only burns a great number of calories, strengthens the immune system and reduces inflammation, but it is also an amazing way to release emotion, whilst developing resilience to stress. In these workshops we work with men to understand and work through these feelings.

The skills and knowledge we cover in this workshop can be life-changing, and can act as a powerful foundation to transform your relationships with your physical well-being, your mental well-being, and your relationships with others.

"I can't believe I swam in the sea in Januaray! I feel amazing. I hope I can take the skills I have learned today into my every day life. I definitely want to do it again"



ONLINE SUPPORT

All of our in person work takes place outside in nature but we have also set up an online support network for local men. This offers a space to continue our connections with one another away from the groups. We share external support networks, answer any questions, offer advice and share photos, information and stories with one another.

TRAINING & SUSTAINABILITY

Our aim is to empower local men to expand the meetups beyond Project Rewild. We offer support for any men who want to be part of offering outdoor groups going forward.

We have been able to train men and offer coaching qualifications to help them advance their skills. We now have 6 men who regularly work and volunteer with the wider Project Rewild work after joining Take Action Man. We have many more who are interested in volunteering with us in the future.

Many outdoor meetups have been happening independently between the men since the group started.

"I have already hosted my first cold-water workshop, and Luke's given me the contacts, confidence and emotional support to get me doing what I really want to do in my life."



TAKE ACTION man

FREE
Men's outdoor
ADVENTURE
+ support group

'Men of Hastings, it's time to talk more, it's time to support one another, it's time to.....Take Action Man.'



WWW.PROJECTREWILD.CO.UK | INFO@PROJECTREWILD.CO.UK | 0755714 6626

Promotional poster for the local campaign.



What were the successes?

- **Engagement:** Take Action Man has successfully *engaged over 80 local men directly in positive outdoor activities*. Including fishing, hiking, bushcraft, foraging, sea swimming, outdoor cooking, whittling, Thai Chi, team games, and talking fire circles. With many more on the group list to join future events.
- **We are becoming increasingly recognised and utilised as a valuable service for men in our town.** We have received referrals and recommendations from many local health care and support organisations such as Seaview project, Change Grow Live, NHS Social Prescription workers, ESRA, Hastings Primary Care Network, Doctors surgeries, Optivo, Family key workers, recovery workers, Eggtooth, and many more.



"Take action man is a great way to help with mental health in a holistic way providing free activities that are genuinely worth doing like bushcraft or foraging. It's helped me and I'm certain it's helping other men."

- **Mental Health & Wellbeing:** We have created environments which *allow men to speak openly and support one another*. We have seen many of the men benefit greatly from this work improving confidence and wellbeing, getting outside more, socialising and making friends.
- The Male only aspect of the group has *allowed men to speak about things they do not usually have the opportunity to share*. For example, marriage, fatherhood, physical and mental health problems, relationships, masculinity, sexuality and pressures they feel being a man.
- **It has all been free and accessible.** We have been able to support lots of men during a crippling cost of living crisis. We know from our feedback that this has been the difference in many men being able to attend. Comparative work of this quality is usually very expensive.
- Our fire circles have been very successful in allowing men to open up and support one another. They have become an *important part of many men's support systems*.

"The Men's Circle is a beautiful space, where I feel held and able to share with other men in an intimate setting and with a sense of safety and vulnerability I don't get to enjoy in daily life".



- **Many men have enjoyed learning new skills** from our expert instructors. We know from our feedback that *lots of the men have taken up new hobbies* such as fishing after attending our sessions.

"Take Action Man has had a profound impact on me. It has highlighted that we are not alone as Men".

- **Many new friendships have been made.** We know that lots of men have met up away from our sessions and made new connections. *Isolation and loneliness has been talked about a lot by men in the group.* Spending positive time with other men in this way has been one of the greatest successes of the group.



"I remember feeling very isolated and disconnected from my community - Project Rewild has played a central role in helping me find my feet and find my people."

- **Empowerment:** We have been able to support men attending to *volunteer and lead their own sessions* including a regular sea swimming group, fishing and walking meetups between the men.
- One participant is now leading fishing groups for Project Rewild. We have been able to offer training and a *level 2 angling qualification*. Two men from the group are now volunteering on fishing sessions for adults and children and arranging fishing meetups with other men.
- One participant has now arranged and *applied for funding for his own sea swimming group and sea lifeguard training* with the support of Project Rewild. He has started regular sea swim meet ups.

"I'm deeply grateful for the support I've received from Luke. His deep, embodied and practical passion for what he does has been an inspiration to me, and he's not only encouraged me but actively supported me in sharing my passions, skills and joy with the community".

- A participant is now arranging regular walks for men around the town since attending the group.
- One man is now sharing his passion for drumming with the men. Another is arranging frisbee golf meetups and offering these to the men
- Another man is *now cooking food for children on our HAF days* after attending our mens sessions and sharing his passion for cooking.
- *Many of the men have offered to contribute their skills* to future sessions, including, life coaching, counselling and deeper philosophy sessions.

"WITH OUT 'OVER EGGING THE PUDDING' I'D SAY THIS WAS A LIFE CHANGING EVENT"



Questions to participants?

- Have you enjoyed attending the Take Action Man groups? **100% of men said YES**
- Have you made any new friends or connections? **70% of men said YES**
- Have you learned new skills? **100% of men said YES**
- Has the project helped your wellbeing and mental health? **90% of men said YES**
- Would you like to attend more sessions? **100% of men said YES**

We now have a *network of nearly 100 local men connected by this project*, many of them regularly attending our groups. Interest is growing all of the time. As the project is talked about more, the momentum builds. We have created something that is genuinely making a difference to local men's lives. The potential to reach more men is huge.

"There are many things in life which stir our bad memories. However, this is one of the rare things, actually the best among the rare things, which act as triggers for happy memories instead."

What were the challenges?

Initially one of the challenges was getting men from our more socially deprived communities involved. We wanted to particularly target Greater Hollington but also any of the recognised areas of deprivation in Hastings and St Leonards. Getting our message to these men and the professionals involved in working with them was a challenge initially.

This has improved a lot over time, by creating links with local health care workers, keyworks, charities, social prescription workers and housing associations in the community. Also, time and word of mouth has really helped in this regard. *We now have referrals from many local health care support organisations.* This is where having more time really helps.

One other challenge is just the general engagement of men. It is not unfair to say that men tend to be less able to commit to meetups and events until they feel very comfortable.

Communication can be a struggle with men. But again, with time this has gotten easier. The men are feeling far more comfortable and open to engaging regularly. *Our online group is now very active with men communicating.*

Any unexpected outcomes?

I think we knew we had the potential for great outcomes from this project but the level of interest from men locally has exceeded even our expectations.

Men organising their own groups was always the aim but it has been great to see this happen in areas we did not expect. We have been able to include many new ideas and skills to the groups thanks to the participants involved sharing their skills with us. We now have some fantastic participants volunteering to expand Take Action Man, and with the wider Project Rewild.

We have received a lot of interest from the media with three articles being published in the local newspapers and an article in 'The Times' national newspaper about the work we are doing with men.

"I feel safe sitting around the fire with these men. I don't know them well but it gives me an opportunity to talk about things I would never usually open up about, I can talk honestly and openly and I feel I am heard and supported without judgement".

Any feedback from participants or people involved in the Grow Grant?

Feedback from participant Mike

"Taking part in one of Project Rewild's Take Action Man *has had a profound impact on me*. It has highlighted that we are not alone as Men. The activities have given me a sense of achievement but more than that I have found connection. Due to the fact they were offered for free I was able to get a real sense of what my local community looks like. What's important to me is the continuation of events as it helps me build healthier habits. I have had good one-off events in the past; however, the continuation has really had a profound impact on me.

Feedback from participant James

I'm a 28-year-old man who has lived his entire life in Hastings, I did the traditional route of studying A-Levels which I then took to university in a city far away. Friendships made at Uni for me would slowly disappear as I saw less of them due to proximity issues & the industry I worked in for the next five years had essentially zero opportunities for building relationships with anyone my age. If you are a young man outside of education, the market for meeting new people in a non-alcoholic context is like walking in an apocalyptic wasteland.

Project Rewild has been life changing for me, in the meetings I have attended I've made new friends I would never otherwise have found a reason to approach anywhere else. I've got nothing but gratitude for the hard work of those who develop this group's activities, and I've been impressed that all of their secretarial duties of communication with each attendee has been polite, quick and earnestly helpful.

Feedback from participant Stephen

I joined up with Take Action Man after coming across a local press news feed. And I'm very glad I did.

The events that I've attended so far have included bushcraft, sea angling, walks with games and the fire circle. Each event has been professionally and skilfully delivered.

It's been a wonderful opportunity to meet with local men and share in the activities. Have met some really lovely others.

A wonderful opportunity to meet on a level playing field. It really works. I would love the venture to continue.

I particularly enjoy the walks and loving the fire circle where *I have experienced a truly unique sense of authenticity and togetherness with other men*.

Feedback from participant Danny

I am writing this to express my gratitude and appreciation for the excursion today. It was really exciting and calming. I must say the trips we have with you are one of rare experiences a person can have *in today's fast paced life which makes them feel like: "I wish time could stop".*

There are many things in life which stir our bad memories. However, this is one of the rare things, *actually the best among the rare things, which act as triggers for happy memories instead.*

Honestly, it was like being in an adventure movie. It reminded me of all the most wonderful movies I've seen in my life, such as Divergent and Indiana Jones.

Thanks so much for the wonderful experience and hope to keep meeting you for many more. Still in a fairy-tale trance. Danny

Feedback from participant Andy

"I've recently been signed off from work with stress, so I thought it was a great opportunity to do something different and meet men who were likely to have similar experiences to me.

The activity was really good for using a different part of my brain and having a bit of headspace and it allowed me to engage one-to-one with a few people where we talked about why we were there and some of the challenges we had been facing which was really great. At the end of the day, I was exhausted physically but was really energised by doing something new and meeting such a nice bunch of people.

The activity really provided an environment where *mental health did not feel front and centre, yet this allowed for conversations to happen and a no pressure environment to open up about experiences."*

Feedback from participant Al

I am single and have left my family and friends behind in London and I soon felt a bit isolated and low.

I found your group online after a quick search and have now been to 3 of the events.

They are unlike anything I've attended in the UK before. They feel centred on the men who attend, I love that we are encouraged to slow our minds and land in the spot we are in with breathing and meditation. And also, to get childlike and physical with games to encourage us to move around and to learn new skills, from that place of wonder. I've always lived in the city, so I didn't know about fire lighting and witting and foraging before I went on these days out. Now I want to go camping for the first time! If nothing else, I know now what to take with me and have a half decent idea of how to use it.

I have really appreciated the closeness that you and your team create and how quickly I can drop whatever I come into the group worried about. Here's to many more adventures!



More feedback:

"I think there is something special about a group of people (men especially) working towards a common goal. The day I was on managed to recreate that feeling. It was nice to see a complete group of strangers get together, try something new and all pitch in to help each other out"

"Going forward I can only sincerely hope that more events are organised in the future to build on this great event. It would be such a shame if continuation didn't happen"

"What a fantastically run event it was and how positive I feel it has been for my own mental health"

"I hope that the group can continue to grow and have new experiences. I am not the sort of person that makes friends that easily or even tries to so it has been a great and fun experience and really hope we can continue to have more adventures together as a group"

"It was a brilliant day not only learning new skills but men coming together away from the hectic world with all the stresses that go with it"



Conclusion.

Take Action Man has been able to engage lots of local men from all backgrounds, it is accessible in so many ways.

We are creating environments that excite and intrigue men, that make them want to get out and be involved. Engaging men is key, and that is what we have been able to do.

The 'Making it Happen' funding has allowed us to offer very high quality mens work and support for free in our local communities, at a time when it is so desperately needed.

I am very proud of what we have been able to create together as a community of local men

As mentioned at the start of this report the groups have provided so much more than enjoyable activities. The work provides men with a tool kit, empowering them to improve their mental-health and wellbeing outside of the group.

Our groups provide men an opportunity to work towards self-sufficiency by recognising lowering mood, depression, anxiety and a rising, overworked nervous system. Our work is gentle, fun and informal. It gives men permission to slow down and take time away from their busy lives and overworked heads. We offer a safe space for men to talk openly without judgment. A space they can feel supported and held.

From the overwhelming amount of positive feedback we have received we know this works and we know we have created something very special in the town.

Going forward we want to maintain support for the men involved. We also want to reach even more of the men who need this support most in our communities. We would like to achieve funding to continue creating these potentially life changing environments for men to grow. We must find a way to continue what we have started.

It's time to talk more, it's time to support one another, it's time to TAKE ACTION MAN.

