

BMS WELLBEING CIC

Understanding You

MEN'S PEER SUPPORT GROUP

Pilot Project Evaluation Report

August 2023 to August 2024

National Lottery Awards for All Grant Reference: 20304989

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Funder	National Lottery Awards for All
Organisation	BMS Wellbeing CIC
Delivery Partner	Directions 4 Men
Venue Partner	St Mary's Magdalene, Sale West Community Urban Trust
Location	Sale, Trafford
Pilot Period	August 2023 to August 2024
Target Participants	20 men
Actual Participants	25 men

1. Executive Summary

BMS Wellbeing CIC delivered a Men's Peer Support Group pilot project across the twelve-month period from August 2023 to August 2024, in partnership with Directions 4 Men and St Mary's Magdalene Church in Sale, Trafford. The group provided a weekly drop-in space for men in the community to connect, share experiences, and support one another in a non-clinical, non-judgemental environment.

The pilot set out to reach 20 men. It reached 25. Across every measurable outcome the programme met or significantly exceeded its targets. Every participant reported feeling less isolated and more connected with community. Improvements in self-esteem, resilience, anxiety, and overall mood were recorded across the group. The qualitative feedback gathered from the focus group is among the most powerful evidence of impact that BMS Wellbeing CIC has collected, with men describing changes to their lives that go far beyond what the numerical data alone can capture.

This report sets out the programme context, the outcomes achieved against targets, and the voices of the men who attended.

2. Programme Overview

The Men's Peer Support Group was developed in response to a clear and evidenced need for accessible, community-based mental health support for men in Sale and the wider Trafford area. Men face well-documented barriers to seeking and engaging with formal mental health support, including stigma, the expectation of self-sufficiency, and a lack of provision designed specifically around how men communicate and connect.

The group model was designed to remove as many of these barriers as possible. Attendance was voluntary and drop-in. There was no requirement to disclose, no formal assessment, and no clinical framing. Men could come and listen without speaking. They could share as much or as little as they chose. The environment was deliberately warm, social, and at times humorous alongside the more serious conversations that naturally arose.

Sessions were held weekly at St Mary's Magdalene Church in Sale, a trusted community venue with strong links to the Sale West area. Directions 4 Men provided trained facilitation, with a second trained facilitator joining during the pilot year to share the workload and ensure continuity of cover. BMS Wellbeing CIC provided overall coordination, oversight, and partnership leadership throughout the pilot period.

3. Outcomes Against Targets

The following table sets out the targets committed to at the start of the pilot alongside the actual outcomes achieved.

We said we would	What we achieved
See 20 men in year one	25 men attended across the pilot year
90% would report reduced isolation and increased connection with community	100% said they felt less isolated and more connected with community
75% would report improved self-esteem	75% indicated an improvement in self-esteem. Average improvement was 18.5%
25% would see improved resilience	87.5% saw improved resilience. Average improvement was 25.2%

Across all four outcome areas, the programme met or exceeded its stated targets. The resilience outcome is particularly striking, with the actual result of 87.5% exceeding the target of 25% by more than three times. This reflects both the depth of need within the group and the quality of the environment created by the facilitation team and venue partnership.

4. Additional Findings

Participants were asked a number of additional questions beyond the four headline outcome measures. The results further demonstrate the breadth and depth of the programme's impact.

- 100% of participants said they had made friends through the group.
- 86% said they felt the group had helped them with anxiety.
- 100% said they felt less low and more positive as a result of attending.

The finding that every single participant made friends through the group is particularly significant. Loneliness and social isolation among men is a well-evidenced public health concern. A programme that delivers friendship as an outcome alongside measurable improvements in mental health and resilience is addressing need at a fundamental level.

The anxiety finding is equally important. 86 percent of men reporting that the group had helped with their anxiety reflects the power of shared experience and community in addressing what is often experienced as a deeply personal and isolating condition.

5. Focus Group Feedback

A focus group was conducted with members of the Men's Peer Support Group to gather qualitative feedback on the impact of the programme. All members of the focus group considered that the group had made a massive positive impact on them. The following is a selection of their accounts, used with consent and anonymised where appropriate.

The themes that emerge across the focus group are consistent and significant. Men describe the group as having opened up their world, reduced their anxiety, restored their confidence, and in some cases provided a reason to keep going at their most difficult moments. The testimonies below speak for themselves.

I used to feel dizzy in Tesco's, and I didn't realise what it was. I didn't realise that's anxiety. It's only by listening to others and realising. I don't get dizzy in Tesco's anymore.

When I first came here, I parked on the car park four times before I came in. I just could not physically get out my car. I came in with Joel, never looked back. This place has been my saviour, because if I didn't have this on a Monday, I couldn't structure my week.

I was in the armed forces for 22 years. I'm struggling with PTSD. I wanted to know are other people experiencing the same feelings as me and how do they deal with their feelings. That's why I come. It's done me the world of good.

I was suffering with social anxiety. My anxiety just grew and grew and grew to the point where I just had a small group of friends, didn't go anywhere, didn't do anything. I wouldn't say it's disappeared, it's always going to be there, but I can quite easily now go into a room full of people and be like my former self. Within a couple of weeks my wife and other people were noticing it. My best friend suddenly went: you seem more like your old self, you seem more confident.

I come along to share what I'm going through, with my wife being very ill at the moment. It's good to come and listen to other people's experiences. I've not rung the Samaritans since I've been coming. It's been really good to talk.

Without the Men's Group I think I'd be taking medication without a doubt. By coming here, so far I've managed to resist.

If I didn't have my kids, I was ready for lynching myself, because I was that messed up in my head. This really has been a lifesaver for me. Even though it's only one day a week, it sets you up for the week.

Having worked all my life and had 6 redundancies I needed to get out and start socialising. Because that's what you miss about working. You get a group like this and we take the mickey. It's good, and I was missing that side of working life.

It works. They say the best medicine is laughter. I think that's the one thing. It's the people in the group that definitely make it.

It's helped me get my life back and I'm enjoying what I do in the wider community.

It's definitely made a huge difference to me in such a short time. That's the real surprise to me, just how quickly I've fitted in, and what it's actually done for me.

So the way it works at the moment, it really, really does work. There's a serious side, but there's a social and a fun side as well. For me, it's difficult to improve on that.

I go home and I'm happy.

6. What the Evidence Tells Us

The Men's Peer Support Group pilot has demonstrated that a well-designed, community-based peer support model can deliver significant and meaningful outcomes for men who would otherwise be unlikely to access formal mental health support.

The men who attended were carrying a wide range of challenges including anxiety, PTSD, bereavement, social isolation, redundancy, and family stress. Many had not previously accessed support. Several described the group as the first place they had felt able to be honest about what they were experiencing. The non-clinical, social, and voluntary nature of the model was central to making engagement possible for this group.

The outcomes achieved across isolation, self-esteem, resilience, anxiety, and mood are not minor adjustments. For many of the men involved, the changes described are life-altering. The testimony of men who moved from being unable to leave their car to being able to walk into a room full of people, from calling the Samaritans in the early hours to no longer needing to, and from describing themselves as ready to give up to saying the group has been a lifesaver, speaks to impact at the most profound level.

Peer support works for men when the environment is right. This pilot has demonstrated that BMS Wellbeing CIC, in partnership with Directions 4 Men and St Mary's Magdalene, can create that environment and sustain it over time.

7. Partnership

The success of the Men's Peer Support Group pilot is a partnership achievement. BMS Wellbeing CIC provided overall programme leadership, coordination, and the community wellbeing expertise that shaped the group's design and approach. Directions 4 Men provided trained, experienced facilitation, bringing specialist knowledge of men's peer support alongside a genuine commitment to the men they work with. St Mary's Magdalene and the Sale West Community Urban Trust provided a welcoming, trusted, and accessible community venue that was already known and respected in the local area.

Each element of this partnership was necessary. The venue gave men a reason and a location to come to. The facilitation gave the group safety, consistency, and depth. The organisational coordination gave it structure and accountability. Together they created something that none could have delivered alone.

8. Future Development

Based on the evidence gathered across this pilot year, BMS Wellbeing CIC is committed to continuing and building upon the Men's Peer Support Group. The demand is clear, the model is proven, and the impact is evidenced. The group will continue to run in partnership with St Mary's Magdalene and Directions 4 Men, with the addition of a second trained facilitator providing improved resilience and continuity of delivery.

Future development will focus on sustaining the weekly group, exploring opportunities to extend reach to additional venues and communities across Trafford and East Manchester, and building the connection between the peer support offer and the wider BMS Wellbeing CIC programme of wellbeing workshops and the Rewired for Men programme. Together these three strands of provision address different dimensions of men's wellbeing and together they form a coherent, community-based offer for men across the region.

9. Acknowledgements

BMS Wellbeing CIC would like to thank the following partners whose commitment made this pilot possible.

Directions 4 Men

Directions 4 Men provided the trained facilitation at the heart of this programme. Their expertise, consistency, and genuine care for the men in the group was evident throughout the pilot year. The second facilitator who volunteered during the year to share the workload demonstrated the depth of commitment within the organisation and ensured that no man ever arrived to find the group without support. We are grateful for everything Directions 4 Men brought to this work.

St Mary's Magdalene and Sale West Community Urban Trust

St Mary's Magdalene provided the community home for the Men's Peer Support Group throughout the pilot year. The warmth, accessibility, and trust associated with this venue was a genuine asset to the programme, making it possible for men to walk through the door for the first time. We are grateful to St Mary's Magdalene and the Sale West Community Urban Trust for their generosity and their commitment to the community they serve.

The Men's Peer Support Group would not exist without these partnerships. Everything in this report is a shared achievement.