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Forum Central Press Release

Men's Health Unlocked

New city-wide network to tackle men's health inequalities begins in Leeds.

Launch to take place on International Men's Day.

Free laptops to get isolated men online, shopkeepers giving health advice to their male customers, and a new Leeds-based men's magazine, are just some of the aspects of an exciting city-wide men's health project starting this month in Leeds, coordinated by Forum Central.

"Men's Health Unlocked", funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, promises to keep Leeds at the forefront of Men's health nationwide by uniting the different strands of men's work and creating a city-wide network for men's health.

In Leeds, men are more likely to get the severe form of Covid-19 and to die from the virus than women, are five times more likely than women to take their own lives, die on average three years younger, and are more likely to die prematurely from nearly every major disease that are common to all genders. (See Editor Notes)

Professor Alan White, patron of the national Men's Health Forum and who has helped to develop the project, states *"We know that there are many men across Leeds who have significant health and social care needs. Leeds has been at the forefront of developing community outreach services, but demand is now critical. This funding will provide targeted support and guidance to men of all ages at this unprecedented and challenging time."*

To meet the challenge of getting advice, guidance and support to these men, key figures in men's health will now be able to link up, share ideas, learn about Covid and other health challenges specific to men, to make their work even more powerful and far-reaching, and explore ways to take a more gendered approach to men's health at all levels.

"Men's Health Unlocked will be a central meeting point for men, and anyone looking to support men, in the city. A place where they can get up-to-the-minute information on men's health and activities, a place where they can volunteer to play a role in supporting other men, and a place where their voice can be heard and represented to decision-makers at the highest level.", says Damian Dawtry, Project Coordinator.

Not only will Men's Health Unlocked finally bring together this ground-breaking work, it will also be running its own three exciting sub-projects over the course of the next few months, designed to address the immediate needs of men in the light of the pandemic, in particular targeting those men who may be experiencing isolation. These will be delivered by three leading charities with extensive experience in supporting men's health and wellbeing, and coordinated by Forum Central.

This includes:

“Unlock Online”

Barca-Leeds will be providing isolated men with internet-enabled tablets, giving them free online access to help them connect with other people and services. They will be able to access vital connections such as men's clubs, or services covering a wide range of areas such as mental health, addiction and money worries.

“Unlock Offline”

Touchstone will be providing activities for isolated men, with a particular focus on reaching men who are from ethnic minorities.

Manbassador Project

The Orion Partnership will be expanding their much-acclaimed Manbassador Project, working with local businesses to point their regular male customers towards services and activities that might help them with their health and wellbeing.

Unlocked Magazine

As part of the Manbassador Project, Orion will be producing “Unlocked”, a regular magazine giving information, advice and entertainment specifically aimed at men who are isolated, as well as important updates on staying safe during the pandemic. This will be shared across the city, both online and offline, via food banks, Neighbourhood Networks and of course the Manbassadors themselves.

Other Key Partners

For many years, Leeds has been at the forefront of gendered health, with the landmark State of Men's Health in Leeds and State of Women's Health in Leeds reports, as well as the Leeds Suicide Audit (see Bibliography, below), which is held up as the gold standard in suicide analysis nationwide.

Some of the key players in these developments – Professor Alan White, the author of the men’s and women’s health reports and the first ever Professor of men’s health, as well as the Council Public Health team, are partners on this project. Their resources and experience, along with the incredibly effective work being done by organisations big and small out there “on the ground”, promise to make this the next big step up in supporting men’s health in the city, and keep Leeds at the forefront of men’s health nationwide.

Rachel Cooper, a Director at Forum Central, says, “Engaging and supporting men is a major concern for the charity sector in Leeds and we’ve striven to learn what works best. So, for example, we know peer support amongst men is really effective in improving mental health and that activities where men are ‘shoulder to shoulder’ are more comfortable environments for forming new friendships.

This project is about continuing to knit together and build on what’s already out there, share new learning and support men particularly during Covid where they face a whole raft of additional challenges. We are founding this project with a small number of partner organisations who have a strong track record of men’s work and want to quickly expand, bringing more and more partners on board.

We are especially pleased that Damian Dawtry has joined us at Forum Central to lead the project. Damian has long been a strong advocate for men’s health in the city and beyond and was instrumental in the success of the pioneering Manbassador scheme.”

Damian Dawtry, Men’s Health Unlocked Project Coordinator, says, *“There is already some really great gendered work involving men across the city, from the classic “Men in Sheds”-type groups, to courses in self-awareness and community work, through to the more strategic things like the standard-bearing Leeds Suicide Audit.*

“Everyone has a part to play in supporting men’s health. Our approach aims to bring everyone on board, whatever their gender, background or belief, so that we can address this together.

“The door is always open to anyone who wants to be a part of this network. If for some reason we haven’t called you and you think you should be involved, please DO call us.”

To mark the launch, we will be posting content throughout the day on our Twitter feed:



@menshealthunlocked

#imdleeds

International Men's Day, Thursday 19th November 2020, from 9am.

The great and the good of Leeds' pioneering men's health work are joining us for a social media launch event throughout the day. They will be contributing with a series of videos relating to the new network, men's health in the city, and International Men's Day.

This includes men from men's groups, project leaders (Leeds Dads, Andy's Man Club, Humans Being etc etc), funders, and key figures in public health.

**For more enquiries please contact Damian Dawtry,
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Notes for Editor:

Men's Health

Some of the causes for men's health issues (Covid or otherwise) are factors such as where you live and working in Covid-susceptible jobs, or patterns of behaviour that have been adopted from an early age. There are also many men of all ages that are living socially isolated and lonely lives as a result of relationship breakdown, redundancy, and through loss of contact with old friends and colleagues.

Forum Central

Forum Central is a network of health and social care third sector organisations in Leeds. It is delivered by the partnership of Leeds Older People's Forum and Volition (the Mental Health, Physical and Sensory Impairment and Learning Disabilities Forum).

Our mission is to be a collective voice for the health and care third sector. Our combined membership stands at almost 300 third sector organisations working across Leeds – large and small with membership open to all third sector organisations working in health and care in Leeds.

Rachel Cooper, Chief Executive

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Follow us on Twitter: @LeedsOPF | @MyForumCentral

Follow us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/lopforum/

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Barca-Leeds

Barca-Leeds is a community-based charity, that delivers transformational projects for adults, children, young people and families in Leeds, connecting them with services that respond to the needs of each individual. They support people struggling with housing issues, finances, physical and mental health problems, and have been running a wide range of men's groups and activities, including the West Leeds Men's Network.

<https://www.barca-leeds.org/our-services>

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The Orion Partnership

The Orion Partnership is a consortium of four like-minded organisations: Feel Good Factor, Zest-Health for Life, Space2 and Shantona Women's Centre based and working within East North East Leeds, sharing common values and organisational cultures with over 40 years direct experience in our communities. Their Well Man Programme has been providing health and wellbeing activities for men since 2014.
<http://www.fgfleeds.org/partners-partnerships/>

Contact Corrina Lawrence (Feel Good Factor)
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Touchstone

Touchstone provides mental health and wellbeing services to over 2000 people a year, whilst also working across communities to grow their confidence and capacity to demand the services and positive experiences they are entitled to.
<https://touchstonesupport.org.uk/about-us/>

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Professor Alan White

Alan was the Founder and Co-director of the Centre for Men's Health at Leeds Beckett University, he is now Emeritus Professor of Men's Health at the University having retired from his University post in 2017. He was a co-founder of the Men's Health Forum Charity (www.menshealthforum.org.uk) and was the Chair of the Board of Trustees for 12 years, he is now its Patron. Alan is a Board member of the International Society for Men's Health.
<https://www.alanwhitemenshealth.co.uk>

National Lottery Community Fund

The National Lottery Community Fund distributes over £600m a year to communities across the UK, raised by players of The National Lottery. They are currently prioritising

funding projects and organisations supporting communities through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Bibliography

State of Men's Health in Leeds Report (2016)

Professor Alan White, Leeds Beckett University, Dr. Amanda Seims, Leeds Beckett University; Robert Newton, Leeds Beckett University and Leeds City Council

<http://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/2735/>

<http://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/2737/>

Leeds Suicide Audit 2019

This is the most recent report, and covers the period 2014-2016.

Jack Lewis, Registrar in Public Health; Victoria Eaton, Deputy Director of Public Health; Catherine Ward, Health Improvement Principal; Vineeta Sehmbi, Health Improvement Specialist; Myrte Elbersm, Advanced Health Improvement Specialist; Richard Dixon Senior InformationAnalyst. (All Leeds City Council.)

<https://observatory.leeds.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Leeds-Suicide-Audit-2014-2016-Executive-Summary.pdf>

State of Women's Health in Leeds Report (2019)

White A., Erskine S., and Seims A (2019), Leeds City Council.

<https://www.womenslivesleeds.org.uk/womenshealth/>