
Second Meeting of the Men's Health Week (MHW) 2021 Planning Group

Date: Friday 29th January 2021
Time: 10.30am - 12.30pm
Mode: 'Zoom' Video Conference
Minute Taker: Colin Fowler

Present:

Julie Aiken - Samaritans Ireland
Lise Alford - 3Ts
Kathrina Bentley - Men's Aid Ireland
Lorcan Brennan - Men's Development Network (MDN)
Annie Clarke - Southern Health and Social Care Trust (SHSCT)
Jim Curran - Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU)
Marese Damery - Irish Heart Foundation (IHF)
Alison Doake - South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT)
Ann-Marie Flanagan - Clanrye Group
Helen Forristal - Marie Keating Foundation
Colin Fowler - Men's Health Forum in Ireland (MHFI)
Frances Haughey - Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
Jason King - Get Ireland Walking
Michael Lynch - Men's Action Network
Lianne McAree Murphy - Irish Men's Sheds Association (IMSA)
Michael McKenna - YouthAction NI Work with Young Men Team
Seamus McKenna - Community Sports Network
Eunan McKinney - Alcohol Action Ireland
Barry Murphy - Bodywhys
Finian Murray - Health Service Executive (HSE) Health Promotion and Improvement
Linda Murray - Technological University Dublin (TUD)
Kevin O'Hagan - Irish Cancer Society (ICS)
Andy O'Hara - Traveller Health Unit
Tadhg O'Leary - Sport Ireland
Gerry O'Rourke - Toghermore Training Centre
Kerrie Simms - Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council
Gary Tobin - Union of Students in Ireland [Border, Midlands and Western Region]
Bill Vaughan - Mental Health Ireland (MHI)

Apologies:

Paul Anderson - Forever Fathers
Clare Austick - Union of Students in Ireland [Welfare]
Carmen Bryce - Mental Health Ireland
Anne Corcoran - Samaritans Ireland
Carrie Davenport - Shoot Positive
Paula Devine - ARK
Anne Farrell - CIE Group
Karen Galway - School of Nursing, QUB
Garry Glennon - Letterkenny Youth and Family Service
Robert Glusek - Sure Start South Armagh
Paddy Hannigan - Donegal Education and Training Board

Lisa Harold - National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)
Marita Hennessy - INFANT Centre, University College Cork
Caroline Hughes - Action Cancer
Peter Jones - Waterford Sports Partnership
Emma McCrudden - Northern Ireland Chest, Heart and Stroke (NICHHS)
Michael McKeon - Dublin City University (DCU) School of Nursing
Bróna Mooney - School of Nursing, NUI Galway
Shauna O'Connor - See Change / Green Ribbon
Michael O'Donnell - Gay Project
Shane O'Donnell - Marie Curie Early Years Researcher
Roisin O'Hara - National Screening Service
Paul O'Kane - Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT)
Pdraig O'Neill - Pieta House
Tracey Powell - Southern Health and Social Care Trust (SHSCT)
Gillian Prue - Queen's University Belfast (QUB) School of Nursing
William Purcell - Primal Paddy
Colin Regan - Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA)
Pamela Smyth - South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust Carers Support
Nigel Tate - Flowerhill Counselling and Psychotherapy Services
Hannah Williamson - NICHHS

AGENDA ITEMS ...

1. Welcome and Overview

Lorcan welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave a brief overview of the practicalities of the session.

Apologies had been tendered from a broad range of organisations who were unable to make today's date, and these are listed earlier in the minutes.

Lorcan highlighted that the purpose of today's meeting was to:

- discuss and refine the theme / call to action;
- look at the imagery for promotional / resource materials;
- map out a social media strategy;
- begin to think about how we can publicise the week.

2. Round of Introductions

Given the number of 'new faces', Finian invited everyone to introduce themselves - by way of helping to get to know each other and to understand the work that each person is involved in. Individuals were asked to:

- Give their name.
- Say which organisation they represent and what it does.
- Briefly outline their interest in men's work.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on Friday 8th January 2021, were agreed as an accurate reflection of that gathering, and there were no additional matters arising from them.

4. Theme and Call to Action

At the first all-island Men's Health Week Planning Group meeting in early January, there was consensus that we should focus upon the idea of ...

- *Make the Connections* (as the overall theme)
- *Check In. Check Up. Check It Out.* (as the call to action)

It was felt that these messages are broad enough to be relevant to a wide range of stakeholders, and to attract maximum buy-in from them - as re-building connections is crucially important to everyone at the moment.

At the earlier meeting, it was suggested that the call to action could, for example, relate to:

- Check in with yourself to see how you are coping / feeling, and to identify any health worries that you might have.
- Check up on your family, friends, neighbours, colleagues to see how they're doing and offer support.
- If you notice anything worrying or which needs attention, check it out and seek information / help / support / treatment.

Colin thanked Lise Alford, from 3Ts, for tendering this concept to the group. There was acknowledgement that it was a marvellous suggestion. A discussion ensued as to why it is relevant and how it might pan out. Comments included ...

- Everyone (individuals, service providers, policy makers) has been left feeling disconnected in the wake of the COVID pandemic.
- Fatigue has started to set in for many of us. At best, we have 'lost our way' and our sense of routine and purpose. At worst, some people have become increasingly isolated, lonely and at risk - both physically and mentally.
- Pharmacies are reporting a sharp increase in the use of anti-depressive medications. However, this will only temporarily mask the issues relating to a breakdown in social contact and cohesion, and there is a need for social prescribing measures as well.
- This is a crucial time for us to show our active support for everyone's wellbeing, and for men specifically - as they are often the group least likely to be solidly connected into wider networks. Indeed, there is an argument that many men lived in isolation / self-isolated long before the COVID situation arose.
- The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA) webinar on Thursday 28th January 2021 (titled 'Altered Lives in a Time of Crisis: Results from the TILDA COVID-19 Study') described the experiences of 4,000 older adults since the start of the pandemic. This, along with the RTE series on men living alone, clearly highlighted the issue of male loneliness and lack of social connections. This situation has been accentuated by COVID.
- Even those men who tried, in the pre-COVID period, to actively maintain their relationships, can no longer meet their friends for a cup of tea, or at the pub, or to go to a match, or gather outside the church, or hang out in their garden etc.
- The increased use of online interactions has helped, to some extent, to meet the need for connection to family, friends, neighbours and support services. However, it is not a viable long-term replacement for real world face-to-face contact. Indeed, many men

have found themselves excluded from this virtual world due to lack of IT hardware, broadband availability, technical expertise, the cost involved, or no interest in this mode of communication. This has, therefore, added to their sense of living a separate and insular life.

- There is an urgent need to re-engage with this population of men, and to ensure that they can find a road map to move beyond the COVID lock-downs. This needs to focus upon signposting which can help them to connect with the sources of help, advice and support which are available.
- Organisations, such as those represented on this Planning Group, are in an ideal position to target particular groups of men during Men's Health Week (MHW) 2021.
- During MHW 2021, there is a need to promote:
 - check-in / up time;
 - where to find help and support;
 - opportunities to be together (in whatever ways possible during June);
 - a sense of celebration (to lift everyone's spirits);
 - re-connection with the world of nature;
 - increased physical activity;
 - positive messages of hope ...
- Reference was also made to some of the practical actions - suggested at the first Planning Group meeting - that could be undertaken, for example:
 - give men / service providers 'a voice' via 'Soap Box' events (wherein they are asked to say why they feel making the connections and checking in, checking up and checking it out is important to them);
 - running Connect Cafés / Social Cafés (face-to-face if possible, online if not);
 - challenge everyone to contact five men and 'Check In. Check Up. Check It Out'.
 - run an online comedy session (which takes a humorous look at COVID);
 - recruit 'Ambassadors' and 'Champions' for the week, and ask them to make videos on their personal experiences of re-connecting ...
- New suggestions could include, for example:
 - organising a week-long template / programme of activities that offer men ideas for action;
 - recording and sharing positive actions (such as go for a walk / run and take photos to share on social media);
 - develop a men's health app (possibly in partnership with the HSE Digital Transformation Project in the longer-term);
 - target and highlight 'hidden' men's health issues, such as eating disorders ...

5. Imagery for Promotional / Resource Materials

Colin invited everyone to consider how we could visually represent the theme / call to action for MHW 2021. The following suggestions were offered ...

- a) **Opening Doors** [i.e. as one door opens, it leads on to another one in the distance, and then another one - showing that it's time to start moving out of our 'fortress home'].
- b) **Someone knocking on a door** [i.e. an invitation for the resident to come out and/or representing checking-in on relations / neighbours / friends - showing that it's time to re-engage with the world].

- c) **A man opening his front door - from inside the house** - and looking out towards an expansive view of nature or a beach or a mountain view etc. [i.e. while COVID closed our world down and limited our movements, it's time to reconnect with nature / the world - and June is an ideal month to do it].
- d) **Child-like join-the-dots-by-numbers (Puzzle 1)** - which creates a shape such as a gingerbread man [i.e. play with the idea of making the connections, and give people an activity to do at the same time].
- e) **Pathway to the great outdoors: join-the-dots-by-numbers (Puzzle 2)** [i.e. complete the puzzle to see the route map for the way ahead - one step leads to another].
- f) **'Trail Map'** (similar to ones that you'd find in a forest park) - which illustrates the three paths / routes that you could take to reconnecting [i.e. check in, check up, check it out] and the time required / level of difficulty attached to each].
- g) **Collage of images** - focusing upon ways to reconnect [e.g. phone, Zoom, letter, knock on door, walking, cup of tea, taking the dog out etc.]
- h) **Invitation card** - similar to a party invitation, which invites men (possibly in a humorous way) to get connected and check in / up / it out.
- i) **Tree** - with branches leading to different sources of help, support, advice, services etc.
- j) **Spider's Web 1** - stylised images of different types of men (all ages, races, shapes, looks, classes, disabilities, sexual orientations etc.) connected via inter-linking lines (like a molecule diagram). This could, possibly, be imposed over an outline map of Ireland.
- k) **Spider's Web 2** - stylised image of a man with a 'web' above his head comprised of inter-connecting icons representing phone, email, web, letter, TV, radio, house, GP, nature, world, family, eye, ear etc.
- l) **Jigsaw** - a jigsaw puzzle with the pieces made up of pictures of a diverse range of men [i.e. reconnecting with each other and building the bigger picture].

Two important points were noted:

- i. The image selected has to be simple, eye-catching, engaging and self-explanatory. It has the modest purpose of grabbing the viewer's attention and whetting their appetite to find out more. Very complex and sophisticated images don't work well in small spaces.
- ii. While we all hope that, by June, social distancing measures will have been reduced or removed, we also need to be prepared for them to still be in place. Thus, it was suggested the decision on which graphics route to go down should take all possible scenarios into consideration.

It was agreed that Colin should circulate this list of suggestions to members of the Planning Group for a vote / feedback to narrow down the possibilities.

6. Social Media Themes / Messages for MHW 2021

Finian reminded the group that during MHW 2020, the Planning Group agreed to draw attention to a specific theme on each day during the week, as well as on the days leading up to it. The themes decided upon for last year were ...

- What you need to know about Men's Health Week
- Relationships and staying connected
- Food
- Mental fitness
- Heart health
- Cancer
- Smoking
- Alcohol
- Physical activity
- Fathers

Based upon these themes, a ready-made pool of social media messages was then created - and made available online - to help those people who would like to support MHW by using their own social media channels, but who didn't have the time, energy or knowledge to develop their own messages. Therefore, on each day of the week, there was a range of suggested Posts and Tweets (and, often, graphics / videos) that they could simply cut-and-paste from (see: www.mhfi.org/Tweets2020.pdf).

It was agreed that it would be useful to allocate particular days to specific themes again this year. However, after a long discussion, it was decided that we should depart from the previous pattern of focusing upon a discrete issue each day, and move towards a broader topic. Thus, 2021 could look like ...

- Friday 11th June: **What you need to know about Men's Health Week**
- Saturday 12th June: **Healthy relationships / staying connected / loneliness**
- Sunday 13th June: **Volunteering your time and experience**
- Monday 14th June: **Physical health**
- Tuesday 15th June: **Mental health / fitness**
- Wednesday 16th June: **Improving lifestyle (including overcoming addictions)**
- Thursday 17th June: **Make the move / keeping active**
- Friday 18th June: **Early detection / Health MOTs and NCTs**
- Saturday 19th June: **Commitment / resolution / pledge for action day**
- Sunday 20th June: **Fathers, fatherhood and males in caring roles**

It was agreed that all of the messages should have a positive and inspirational tone, and should promote what we can do rather than what we haven't been doing. They should also challenge stigma and promote resilience. It might also be worth using at least some of the ten challenges in last year's 'Challenges and Choices' Man Manual (see: www.mhfi.org/challenges2020.pdf) as practical goals to aim for.

It was proposed that members of the Planning Group with experience and knowledge in specific areas could spearhead the development of the pool of messages. However, for this 'pool' to be useful, it needs to be clear, succinct and very carefully thought out.

Eunan pointed out that focusing solely upon a clear single issue can have real benefits. For example, in 2020, Alcohol Action Ireland spearheaded the day titled '*rethink what you drink*', and their campaign reached 960,000 people and had a media value of €7,350. This impact might be harder to achieve when working with much broader topics.

The new approach proposed may, therefore, need some more thought. Colin will invite further feedback from the wider membership of the Planning Group.

7. Promoting Activities and Events

Lorcan reminded everyone about the importance of recording and publicising the details of as many MHW events and activities as possible - as each year there are hundreds of activities which take place throughout Ireland that go unnoticed and unrecognised.

The Men's Health Forum in Ireland (MHFI) coordinates the collation and publication process, and there are three methods for registering events and activities: (i) online form; (ii) email attachment; and (iii) snail mail. All of these mechanisms are available on MHFI's dedicated web page for MHW each year. The MaleHealth.ie website also promotes the things that happen during the week. However, without the actual submission of the details, these outlets are useless. Everyone is asked to promote this listing process to their networks, and to submit the details of their own events as early as possible.

Jason suggested that we should consider contacting the team from 'Nationwide' to request coverage of the week as one of their features. He will follow this up with Colin.

Anyone who has used a cheap and reliable PR company to promote their work is asked to send the contact details to Colin. He will then see if it is possible to negotiate a feasible rate with them for their input to highlighting MHW 2021.

8. Ideas for Events / Activities / Happenings

Michael (Lynch) invited everyone to think about what events, activities and happenings could take place this year. Sharing these ideas with other Planning Group members might help to spark their imagination.

Jason spoke about the need to get people outside and reconnected to nature (e.g. <https://ot.rte.ie/connect-with-nature>). Indeed, even if COVID restrictions are still in place, we could promote digital nature tours to improve everyone's health and wellbeing (see: www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZCVkjoEX20&feature=youtu.be). He also suggested that comedian Jason Byrne might be asked to be a MHW Ambassador.

Another possible Ambassador for the week was suggested by Barry. Cormac Ryan is a physiotherapist who has spoken out about his own mental health issues. He is planning a high profile cycle ride across the USA as a fundraiser for Bodywhys and Pieta House (see: www.thecollegeview.com/2021/01/27/dcu-graduates-prepare-to-cycle-across-america).

Eunan suggested the use of podcasts to raise awareness of issues. 'The Alcohol File' series, which he hosts, can be found online at: <https://alcoholireland.ie/about/the-alcohol-file>

9. Any Other Business

Young men have been hit hard by the COVID lock-down. It would be worth considering doing something which specifically targets them / their needs, and makes the week relevant to them. USI, NYCI and YouthAction NI would be ideally placed to lead on this initiative.

10. Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Planning Group will be held via Zoom on Thursday 25th February 2021. It will begin at 2.30pm.