
First Meeting of the Men's Health Week (MHW) 2019 Planning Group

Date: Friday 9th November 2018
Time: 11.00am - 1.45pm (including lunch)
Venue: Armagh Diocesan Pastoral Centre, Dundalk, Co. Louth
Minute Taker: Colin Fowler

Present:

Julie Aiken - Samaritans Ireland
Lorcan Brennan - Men's Development Network (MDN)
Morgan Brannigan - Newry and Mourne Community Development Team (SHSCT)
Anne Corcoran - Samaritans Ireland
Jim Curran - Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU)
Marese Damery - Irish Heart Foundation (IHF)
Cólleen Devine - Sport Ireland
Alison Doake - South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT)
Jordan Fitzgerald - NUI Maynooth
Colin Fowler - Men's Health Forum in Ireland (MHFI)
Frances Haughey - Closing the Gap Project: Health Inequalities
Debbie Hutchinson - Migraine Association of Ireland
Michael McKenna - YouthAction NI Work with Young Men Team
Finian Murray - Health Service Executive (HSE) Dublin North East
Shane O'Donnell - Marie Curie Early Stage Researcher, QUB
Andy O'Hara - Pavee Point Traveller Men's Health Project
Paul O'Kane - Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT)
Deirdre Ryan - National Screening Service

Apologies:

Lise Alford - 3Ts
Jonathan Boyd - Focus: The Identity Trust
Edel Byrne - Irish Men's Sheds Association (IMSA)
Enda Campbell - Irish Heart Foundation (IHF)
Carrie Davenport - Shoot Positive
Paula Devine - ARK
Helen Forristal - Marie Keating Foundation
Brien Frazer - Ulster Hospital Dundonald
Sandra Gordon - Cancer Focus NI
Elaine Hardy - South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust
Marita Hennessy - Researcher, NUI Galway
Caroline Hughes - Action Cancer
Sinéad Hughes - Southern Health and Social Care Trust (SHSCT)
Peter Jones - Waterford Sports Partnership
David Keane - National Screening Service
Brian Laughlin - Belfast Men's Health Week Action Group
Michael Lynch - Men's Action Network
Emma McCrudden - Northern Ireland Chest, Heart & Stroke (NICHs)
Niamh McDaid - Bowel Cancer UK
Patrick Monteague - Focus: The Identity Trust
Clare O'Brien - 3Ts
Shauna O'Connor - Green Ribbon / See Change
Kevin O'Hagan - Irish Cancer Society (ICS)

Bernadette Rooney - Health Service Executive (HSE) Dublin
Sandra Semple - Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHSCT)
Peter Shaw - Belfast Community Sports Development Network
Brian Staunton - Sport Ireland
Rachael Treanor - National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)

AGENDA ITEMS ...

1. Welcome and Overview

Shane welcomed everyone to the meeting (particularly those people who had to make a long journey to be here) and gave a brief overview of the agenda and 'housekeeping' arrangements.

Apologies were tendered from a broad range of organisations who were unable to make today's date, as well as from others who - due to the distance to travel - have committed to contributing 'remotely' via email and telephone follow-up calls. A number of other organisations still have to reply to confirm if they will be able to participate this year.

The meeting was reminded that membership of the Planning Group is open to anyone who wishes to contribute, and that the wide reaching partnership approach to planning MHW adopted in recent years has proved to be very beneficial. It is based upon the premise that many heads generate better outcomes. Everyone is welcome to invite other organisations to attend future meetings and/or to input electronically.

Shane highlighted that the purpose of today's meeting was to build group relationships, clarify what MHW is, reaffirm the core value base of the week, reflect upon our past experience of the planning process, and explore a possible theme for MHW 2019.

2. Round of Introductions

Paul 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. Overview of MHW

Finian gave a short PowerPoint presentation on what the Men's Health Forum in Ireland (MHFI) is (see: www.mhfi.org) and the previous themes that have been adopted during International Men's Health Week (MHW) each year (see: www.mhfi.org/mhw/about-mhw.html).

MHW always begins on the Monday before Father's Day and ends on Father's Day itself. During 2019 it will run from Monday 10th until Sunday 16th June. It is celebrated in most European countries, as well as in the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and a number of other places worldwide.

The themes in previous years were:

- 2005 - Obesity
- 2006 - Mental Wellbeing
- 2007 - Long-term Conditions
- 2008 - Workplace Health
- 2009 - Access to Services
- 2010 - Physical Activity
- 2011 - These are Challenging Times. It's No Joke. Let's Talk.
- 2012 - What's Your First Instinct ... Fight? Flight? Find Out?
- 2013 - Action Men: Turning Words into Actions
- 2014 - Challenges, Choices and Celebrations: What's Your Aim?
- 2015 - Creating Culture Change - it's time for a new script
- 2016 - Men United: for Health and Wellbeing
- 2017 - It's All About HIM - how are you doing?
- 2018 - One Small Step for Man. One Giant Leap for Men's Health.

4. Value Base Underpinning MHW

During the planning process for previous Men's Health Weeks, considerable discussion took place as to what the value base underpinning the week should include. Lorcan gave a brief overview of the agreements that were made, referencing the paper on these which was circulated before today's meeting:

- Health and wellbeing is about much more than physical health problems and/or treating illness. It is a holistic vision-led concept.
- It is important to focus on the positive aspects of men's lives, and to avoid the usual caricatures of unresponsive men who don't care about their health. Such deficit-based approaches often portray men as a problem to be solved, rather than an asset to themselves and everyone around them.
- Men can - to a degree - take responsibility for and influence some aspects of their health. However, their health and wellbeing is not only about what they do or how they act as individuals. It is also often affected by the environment in which they live, the jobs that they carry out, the pressures that they face in a world which emphasises gendered roles, the way that services engage with them ... These social determinants are very powerful influencers of men's health and wellbeing.
- We need to be careful not to blame men for their own poor health or to focus solely upon their personal shortcomings. The key messages for MHW must also recognise the responsibilities of everyone who can have an impact on the health of men and boys, and highlight the breadth of organisational, political, structural, environmental, cultural, service provision, individual choice ... factors that can be influential.
- Where possible, we should use positive terms / phrases such as: *'listening to men', 'hearing men's voices', 'responding to need', 'creating opportunities', 'offering support', 'providing encouragement', 'seeking change', 'promoting positive action', 'respecting men's lives', 'self / organisational reflection and introspection', 'planning for the future', 'learning from men's experience', 'overcoming barriers', 'expanding options', 'promoting equality', 'offering choices', 'making the connections', 'working together', 'having new conversations', 'diverse needs', 'challenging the myths', 'partnership and cooperation' ...*

- While it is often easier to get media and public attention for a specific illness or negative issue (e.g. aggressive cancers or suicide or domestic violence) rather than a 'good news' story, MHW should seek to promote men's needs and issues in a positive light. This will, probably, mean that we will miss the high profile shock-horror media coverage that is generated by 'Men in Crisis' or 'Men Behaving Badly' headlines.
- In Ireland, we tend to think of a 'real man' as being one single model, and his characteristics are often perceived as: white, heterosexual, able-bodied, physically fit, muscular / large body frame, fairly young, into sport, can handle himself ... Whenever possible, MHW imagery and text needs to challenge this stereotype and to reflect the diversity of men's lives and personal traits.
- Hearing about / exposure to the real life experiences of local men can help to bring MHW to life.

There was agreement that these 'big picture' values and positive approach are still valid for MHW 2019 and set the right tone for the week. No amendments or additions were suggested, and it was decided that they should be adopted once again.

5. Learning from Previous Years

Lorcan asked the meeting if there was anything from Men's Health Week 2018 - or previous MHWs - which we should continue, change, avoid or learn from ...

- It was pointed out that MHW improves each year, and that we should retain everything that works and add to / build upon it.
- The face-to-face planning meetings in Dundalk encouraged in-depth discussion of issues and helped to forge working partnerships between members.
- Early planning is crucial - as many groups (particularly large statutory bodies) need a long lead-in time. Therefore, having the theme agreed early is a key priority.
- Last year's personal stories, and videos of how men took '*one small step*' to improve their health, were particularly positive and powerful. They also generated a lot of online and media interest.
- MHW can give groups an occasion and reason to: celebrate what they are doing; raise awareness of their specific needs; and signpost to support and help that is available. It's not just about highlighting problems.
- The daily themes / social media campaign was a positive aspect of MHW 2018. However, like the overall theme, the content needs to be agreed well in advance of MHW to ensure that it can be lined-up for publishing within partner organisations.
- The 'Challenges and Choices' Man Manuals were, once again, popular and offered a tangible 'giveaway' for partner organisations.

6. Theme for MHW 2019

Colin introduced the agenda item on the theme for MHW 2019, and highlighted that ...

- MHW offers an opportunity and an occasion to start a national conversation about men's health and wellbeing.
- The overall aims for the week are:
 - Heighten awareness of preventable health problems for males of all ages.
 - Support men and boys to engage in healthier lifestyle choices and activities.
 - Encourage the early detection and treatment of health difficulties in males.

- In the early years, the MHW theme in Ireland tended to mirror the theme in other countries. However, from 2011 onwards, there has been a tendency for each country to choose a theme which is most relevant to its own circumstances and needs.
- From 2005 - 2010, MHW focused upon a specific medical condition each year, and tended to follow the lead of the Men's Health Forum in England and Wales. However, after this, it tended to adopt broad and generic themes which could facilitate 'buy-in' and participation from the widest possible range of organisations and individuals. This was, in large part, due to advice from the ever increasing range of partner organisations who volunteered to be part of the all-island Planning Group from 2010 onwards.
- The purpose of the theme / strapline is simply to create a common identity for everyone to rally around. However, it needs to be a broad enough concept for everyone to see that it is relevant to them.
- Whatever theme is chosen is less important than the overall aims of MHW. Anything which celebrates and promotes the core aims is welcome - even if this does not fit rigidly with the designated theme.
- The theme / strapline is a central feature of the promotional materials for MHW. However, it is important to remember that the main purpose of the poster and publicity materials is to alert everyone to the fact that there is a week dedicated to men's health, and to let them know when it will happen. It seeks to put men's health on the public agenda. It is not, in itself, a campaign tool. The bulk of the campaign element needs to be taken on by partners in the Planning Group who are experts in their fields, and can target / promote specific issues.
- It is useful to have a call to action (e.g. last year it was '*what's your small step going to be?*') which poses a question for policy makers, service providers, practitioners and men themselves, and helps to kick-start a wider discussion on improving men's health.
- Whatever theme is selected, it needs to be catchy, easy to explain, and easy to express visually.

A conversation ensued about possible issues to focus upon during MHW 2019. These included ...

- How men cope with anxiety.
- Men and mental health / mental fitness - especially focusing upon the '*Five Ways to Wellbeing*' model (i.e. connect, be active, take notice, keep learning, give).
- Men's isolation and lack of connection ('*The Secret to Living Longer may be your Social Life*': www.ted.com/talks/susan_pinker_the_secret_to_living_longer_may_be_your_social_life)
- What it means to be a man today / men who are 'lost' - exploring changing roles / identities / expectations / models of masculinity / images of men etc.
- Inter-generational differences in opinion as to what is 'normal' behaviour / attitudes.
- The diversity among, and between, men.
- The dismissive and undermining language which is used about men.
- '*Healthy masculinity*' - rather than the current focus on '*toxic masculinity*'.
- Seeing the world using a '*gender lens*'.
- What is a '*man's man*'?
- The need for men to talk about their needs / issues i.e. '*it's good to talk*'.
- '*Small talk*' as a means to interrupt suicidal thoughts (see the Samaritans campaign: www.samaritans.org/media-centre/our-campaigns/small-talk-saves-lives) ...

In determining a theme for MHW 2019, it was suggested that we might also consider recycling some of the most popular ideas that were generated in previous years, but which weren't used. These could include, for example ...

- It's MANAGEABLE - every MAN of any AGE is ABLE to make a change to his health. What change will you make?
- The Ordinary Man.
- Look after yourself.
- Dare to do something different!
- Take a chance. Give it a go.
- Men's Health Matters. Discuss.
- Just for a change.
- Get back to basics.
- Connect for health.
- Take five / five steps to wellbeing ...

The three strongest themes which emerged from the discussion were:

1. Ordinary Man

This could, for example, play on the ideas of ...

- No Ordinary Man?
- An Ordinary Man?
- The Ordinary Man
- Personal stories such as: 'I'm just an ordinary man and I...'
- Issuing an invitation to do something extra-Ordinary to improve your health.
- Finding the extraordinary in the ordinary (e.g. the Patrick Kavanagh view of the world).

2. Get Connected

Social isolation and loneliness have recently been referred to as the public health crisis of this generation, and something which often leads to profound mental and physical health problems (see: <https://lonelinesstaskforce.files.wordpress.com/2018/06/loneliness-taskforce-a-connected-island-an-ireland-free-from-loneliness.pdf>). There is, subsequently, a need to highlight the need to make / re-establish connections between individuals, groups, communities and services if health and wellbeing is to be improved. Thus, a call to action could be: '*How are you connecting?*'

3. Take 5

The five ways to wellbeing model (i.e. connect, be active, take notice, keep learning, give) struck a deep chord with many of the participants, and covers a lot of important issues e.g. mental health / fitness, decreasing social isolation, expanding friendship and support networks, physical activity, volunteering, mindfulness, increasing knowledge, environmental awareness etc. Although this model focuses upon improving mental health, there is a strong correlation between mental and physical wellbeing, and research evidence now indicates that the former is intrinsically important to supporting the latter.

The phrase 'Take 5' can also be used in the context of '*have a break / chill out*', or can be a call to create a realistic and manageable Top 5 list of virtually anything e.g. Top 5 tips for losing weight / stopping smoking / staying active / cutting down on drink / finding support services / managing a particular medical condition / reducing stress ... MHW partners and others could, possibly, develop their own 'Take 5' lists and infographs to illustrate these, and/or collate five personal stories / video clips to illustrate how progress can be made.

7. Possibilities for Poster / Graphics

'The Ordinary Man'

A possible visual for 'The Ordinary Man' could be the face of a man (or, indeed, 'Superman') which is a composite / mosaic of many smaller head-shots (see example below) - representing a diverse range of men and boys. This would indicate that there is no such thing as simply 'The Ordinary Man' and would represent a broad spectrum of faces of masculinity.

The smaller 'building block' photos could be a mixture of well-known males (and the viewer could 'Spot the Star' when looking at the posters) and unknown men (we could consider asking people to submit their own images for inclusion). The challenge could be: *'who do you see...?'* Some of the people in the images could be targeted because they have a positive health story to share. This approach would, therefore, be moving towards an 'everyman' graphic. Debbie has a contact for Colin Keegan, a poet from Clondalkin, who might be willing to contribute.



However, it was noted that this concept might be too complicated for our relatively small A₃ and A₄ posters, and almost certainly too cluttered for the A₆ postcards (as it would be impossible to see who is in the photos). Colin will ask a few graphic designers for their opinion on this.

Get Connected

Have two (or more) very different arms / hands reaching out to each other (e.g. black and white people; adult and child; 'manual work' and 'office' hands etc.) - to symbolise a handshake as the starting point for building a relationship. Men do handshakes. Therefore, this could adopt a strapline such as *'a handy way to health and wellbeing'*.

For example ...



Take 5

Use the 'Connect 4' children's game as the main image (see following graphics), but call it 'Connect 5'. If possible, have the key 'Take 5' words (i.e. connect, be active, notice, learn, give) written on the winning line of the five same colour counter pieces in the image.



Whatever option is decided upon, the poster image needs to be simple and clear, and to also have the core content on it:

- Men's Health Week
- Monday 10th - Sunday 16th June 2019
- Theme
- Call to Action
- Find out more at ...
- Hashtag (#MensHealthWeek)
- QR Code

8. Planning Group Membership

Finian reminded everyone that the Planning Group is open to anyone who is willing to contribute to it - either in person or electronically. A number of suggestions for new people were tendered, and these will be followed-up by the person who proposed each of them.

9. Any Other Business

International Men's Day (IMD) takes place on the 19th of November each year. Historically, it has not been widely celebrated in Ireland and has, in some quarters, even been viewed as an anti-women occasion. This year, however, a number of groups and workplaces across the island are marking IMD and promoting a positive message. For example:

- Men's Action Network is organising a concert in the Millennium Forum in Derry~Londonderry to raise awareness of men's mental health issues.
- QUB Film Theatre is showing 'The Shawshank Redemption'.
- Men's Development Network is leading a White Ribbon seminar in Dr Steevens' Hospital, Dublin, focusing upon gender equality ...

It was suggested that the MHW Planning Group might think about doing something to mark IMD next year.

10. Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Planning Group will be held in the Diocesan Pastoral Centre, Dundalk, on Tuesday 22nd January 2019. It will begin at 11.00am sharp.