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# Proposal for Young Men and Suicide Pilot Intervention in Northern Ireland

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## Context of Pilot Interventions

The Centre for Men's Health in IT Carlow was commissioned by the Men's Health Forum in Ireland (MHFI) to undertake the Research and Consultation phase of the Young Men and Suicide project. There were three strands to their work ...

1. Reviewing international literature on men's health and suicide, and establishing effective practice guidelines on how to promote positive models of mental health and prevent suicide in boys and young men.
2. Inviting suggestions on 'what works' in relation to positive mental health and suicide prevention among boys and young men - using a 'Survey Monkey' questionnaire. Two surveys were undertaken: an in-depth one for 'stakeholders' (organisations which work directly in the field of mental health and suicide prevention) and a shorter 'community' questionnaire focusing upon challenges and barriers (for groups who have an interest in this area, but for whom it is not the main focus of their work).
3. Conducting a consultation with stakeholders to explore, in depth, the principles of effective practice. This involved meeting with a group of young men in Cork (Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> August), and service providers / practitioners in Belfast (Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> September) and Dublin (Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> September).

The consultants produced a number of interim papers to help to inform the design, nature and location of the pilot interventions in Phase 2 of this project. These documents are ...

- *"Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention in Young Men"* - a baseline overview of key issues such as: the complex nature of targeting suicide prevention interventions at young men; the causes and risk factors associated with youth suicide; evidence of effective practice; approaches to interventions.
- *"Summary of findings from the stakeholder survey of suicide prevention and mental health promotion with young men"* - a brief overview of the key outcomes of the online research conducted.
- *"Effective Practice in Suicide Prevention Work with Young Men"* - ten key principles for effectively engaging with young men in suicide prevention work, drawn from some of the main findings from both the literature review undertaken and the elements of best practice for working with men outlined in the National Men's Health Policy in the Republic of Ireland.
- *"Examples of Effective Practice for Suicide Prevention with Young Men"* - a synopsis of the key features of a range of interventions which have been used with young men across the world.

The outcomes of this research - combined with the deliberations of the Advisory Group - have indicated that the two pilot interventions should focus upon ...

- A whole community approach (similar to 'Frameworks' model) in Northern Ireland.
- The use of social media / networking / marketing with young men in the Republic of Ireland.

## **Title of Pilot Intervention in Northern Ireland**

To give a clear and distinct identity to the pilot intervention in Northern Ireland, it is proposed that it should be called "*First Instinct*". This name reflects the underlying goal, i.e. to encourage and foster a 'first instinct' in young men which is to seek help and support at times of difficulty rather taking their own lives.

## **Intervention Approach**

The overall approach adopted will draw upon learning from the "Frameworks / Connect" initiative developed in the USA. Using a public health model, this programme trains community stakeholders to play a critical role in suicide prevention, and strives to strengthen the development of a local coalition of service providers, parents, and youth. The coalition is encouraged and supported to recognise youth at risk, and to connect these young people in an integrated, systematic and comprehensive way with help.

This approach builds upon existing community resources and expertise, and identifies gaps that may exist between schools, youth services, medical facilities, police, mental health services, probation or other services. It also entails encouraging service providers and others to reflect upon the important role that they play within their own settings, as well as their interaction with other providers.

The key emphasis is on coordination, communication, and building connections between local resources, service providers, parents, local citizens and youth, as well as reducing the stigma associated with both suicide and help-seeking behaviour.

## **Aims and Objectives of Pilot Intervention**

### AIM:

The overarching aim of this pilot intervention will be to support the development of a community culture which understands the specific needs of and issues facing young men, and that can offer support to them in times of difficulty. Thus, there will be a specific focus upon the 'gendered dimension' of young men lives.

### OBJECTIVES:

To meet the overall aim, the following objectives will be pursued ...

- Increase local understanding of why we need to target and engage with young men (generally) and to focus upon their mental health issues (specifically).
- Promote better understanding and empathy among community gatekeepers with the life circumstances of local young men.
- Offer a template for organisations to undertake a self-audit of their level of 'young male friendliness'.
- Share examples and models of effective work in this field.
- Identify gaps in support and service provision for young men.
- Kick-start new models of engaging with young men, and establish a Young Men's Forum - as a reference point and advisory body for future community interventions.
- Support the development of an inter-agency network of service providers, practitioners and parents with a focus upon young men's needs.

- Pilot a critically evaluated programme which can help to increase the help-seeking behaviour of local young men (preferably 'Mind Yourself').

## Target Area

It is proposed that the area targeted for this intervention should be the geographic catchment of 'Colin' - situated between Lisburn and West Belfast. Colin is comprised of the housing developments of Poleglass, Twinbrook, Lagmore and Kilwee, and has a population of approximately 30,000 people. This locality has been identified by both the DHSSPS and the Public Health Agency as a preferred target area due to the high levels of male suicide within it, the level of health inequalities, and its disadvantaged status.

## Local Partners

This initiative will work in partnership with the Colin Suicide Prevention Task Group. The main contact people will be the Joint Chairs of this group ...

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## Intervention Participants

A key target group for this intervention (in keeping with the Frameworks approach) will be 'gatekeeper' adults who live / work in this community e.g. teachers, youth workers, community workers, health service personnel, clergy, sports coaches, parents etc. It is also proposed that young men, themselves, should be engaged in an advisory capacity, as well as via participation in an evaluated programme which seeks to increase their help-seeking behaviour and awareness of mental health and well-being issues.

The advisory role of young men will entail ...

- Identification of / engagement with a broad range of young men from across the catchment area, with the aim of establishing a Young Men's Forum.
- Social group work activities with this core sample which explores the lives, experiences, needs of, and issues facing local young men.
- Creating an 'end product' (e.g. video of young men talking, or a 'First Instinct' flyer for young men, or a photographic display portraying young men's lives etc.)

It is proposed that this aspect of the pilot project should be spearheaded by sessional staff from the Work with Young Men Unit in YouthAction NI. Local youth leaders in the Colin area will be invited to participate as co-workers. In this way, they can expand their own skills and experience in this specialist and evolving field of work, and ensure that a level of competence is retained within the Colin community after the YouthAction team leave.

## Timescale

This intervention will take place during the period December 2011 - May 2012. However, the local community will be encouraged to use this experience as a springboard for further action, and to plan local events for Men's Health Week 2012 (Monday 11<sup>th</sup> - Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> June). This, therefore, will ensure continued activity after the pilot has ended.

## Methodology

To achieve the aims and objectives outlined earlier, it is proposed that ...

- A core inter-agency group, comprised of 10-14 service providers, practitioners, and parents from across the Colin area will be recruited. If possible, this should reflect the range of interest groups in the area e.g. education, youth work, community work, health, church, sports, probation, family work etc.
- This core group will be offered a package of training, support, mentoring, reflection and practical action in the field of working with young men on mental health issues.
- This package will have a number of key components:
  - Half day briefing meeting with line managers / senior staff in each organisation (if applicable) - to ensure they fully understand what their organisation is committing to, and to confirm their assent.
  - Internal organisational audit / review of level of 'male friendliness'.
  - One day training session on why we need to target young men, and an exploration of the experiences of local young men.
  - One day training session on how to improve the mental health and health-seeking behaviours of young men - showcasing principles and models of effective practice from other places.
  - One day training session on what practical actions could be undertaken locally to improve the 'First Instinct' of young men.
  - Each participating organisation will be asked to plan and deliver a realistic 'in-house' initiative which will contribute to meeting the needs of young men in their own workplaces / contexts.
  - Half day interim support meeting, plus ongoing telephone / email support from MHFI.
  - Writing-up the 'projects' that were delivered.
  - De-briefing meeting.
- Each participant in this package and their line manager (if applicable) will be asked to give the following commitments:

Trainees will be asked to ...

- Attend all the training / support sessions.
- Undertake 'homework' between meetings.
- Keep their own organisation updated.
- Plan, implement and review a practical project with / for young men in their own work setting.
- Submit a short report on their project.

Line managers will be asked to ...

- Attend the briefing session at the outset and the interim support day.
- Support and encourage their worker.
- Look at internal organisational issues in relation to working with young men.
- Ensure that their organisation contributes to the end-of-training evaluation.

- After this package has been offered, all participants - and the Colin area generally - will be asked to consider the possibility of working collaboratively to plan a community-wide programme of activities to coincide with Men's Health Week 2012. In doing so, they will be asked to draw upon their learning from the programme.
- Depending upon the cost and licensing implications, a programme which has been shown to be effective in promoting mental health in young men (e.g. 'Mind Yourself') will be initiated in the area.
- Sessional staff from YouthAction NI will work with a cross-section of local males to develop a Young Men's Forum, and will seek to produce an 'end product' which highlights young men's experiences and concerns.
- MHFI will identify and purchase some key group work resources on working with young men. These will be deposited with the Colin Neighbourhood Partnership.
- A number of standalone workshops will be offered (as need arises) which focus upon, for example, the important role of fathers in boys' mental health, or how to successfully engage men in programmes, or activities which work well in a young men's group etc.

## Mind Yourself

The 'Mind Yourself' programme is a brief school-based problem solving intervention aimed at adolescents. Essential elements of the programme include ...

- A holistic life-skills approach encompassing coping and problem solving skills.
- A strength based approach which focuses on hope, optimism and solutions.
- A whole population approach to working with young people. This way, those who are more 'at risk' - but who may never come into contact with services - might be reached.
- A community based approach that consults young people on their needs.
- A firm grounding in strategies to enhance problem solving skills, emphasise optimism, and promote resilience among adolescents.
- The provision of information on resources and services available to young people.
- An empirical evaluation of the intervention in order to measure its effects on helplessness and hopelessness. Levels of depression, self-esteem, problem-solving strategies and coping methods might be looked at here.

Methods: The original programme entails two sessions, of approximately 90 minutes each, delivered to adolescents in groups of 15 or less (ages 15-17) in school settings.

Session 1	Session 2
The kinds of problems young people face and coping strategies	Identification of problems
Optimism and pessimism	Problem solving methods
Thoughts and feelings	Two topics - as chosen in Session One
Group work to illustrate the potentially positive effect of optimistic thought on our feelings	Community involvement ideas
Crisis Situations - dealing with traumatic situations	Evaluation sheet to be completed by participants
Two topics are chosen for the next session	

Evaluation: There has been a randomised pre and post between subjects group study, with experimental and control groups. Results show that the programme was effective in creating significant positive changes in terms of problem solving and emotional resilience. Other results indicate positive, but non-significant, changes in depressive symptoms (greatest reduction in boys) and self-harm thoughts.

The National Suicide Research Foundation has indicated that it would be possible to tailor this programme to target 17-21 year olds who are not in education. However this would be contingent upon available resources. An alternative 6 week programme also exists which can be delivered to youth who are considered more at risk and outside of secondary education.

## **Key Outputs and Outcomes Anticipated**

It is anticipated that the following outputs and outcomes will be achieved as a result of this intervention ...

- A core group of 10-14 service providers, practitioners, and parents from diverse fields of work across the Colin area will have undertaken training and reflection in the area of young men and mental health.
- Each of the core group members will have implemented a realistic action in their own workplace / context, and written this up for others to learn from in the future.
- A range of local organisations will have analysed their level of 'male friendliness' and identified gaps in provision.
- Young men's voices / concerns will have been heard, and they will have produced a resource that is useful to their wider community.
- A Young Men's Forum will have been established.
- Local youth workers will have been exposed to methods and models of engaging with young men.
- An externally evaluated programme, which seeks to tackle suicide in young men, will have been piloted in the community.
- Core elements of a working with young men resource library will be established in the Colin area.
- The Colin Neighbourhood will be primed for future action in this area - especially in relation to Men's Health Week 2012.

## **Evaluation**

MHFI will work in partnership with the Centre for Men's Health in IT Carlow to evaluate this intervention. The fieldwork will be conducted by a student studying for their Masters degree. They will work under the supervision of the Centre's Director, Dr Noel Richardson.