

**SAMARITANS**  
Ireland

**Engaging  
men in  
Ireland  
earlier:  
a guide  
to service  
design**

June 2021



# Contents

## Introduction

Who this handbook is for  
What this handbook is for 3

**Background** 4

**A short note on methodology** 4

**The coronavirus pandemic and wellbeing initiatives for men** 4

**Principles for wellbeing initiatives for men** 5

**Principle 1:**  
Use activities to facilitate conversation 6

**Principle 2:**  
Be welcoming and accessible 8

**Principle 3:**  
Communicate clearly 11

**Principle 4:**  
Foster meaningful relationships over time 13

**Principle 5:**  
Foster a sense of achievement 15

**Appendices:**  
Checklist 18  
Action plan template 19



## Introduction

### Who this handbook is for

**This handbook is for anyone commissioning, designing, evaluating or delivering initiatives, services or activities aimed at improving the wellbeing of men.**

#### This includes:

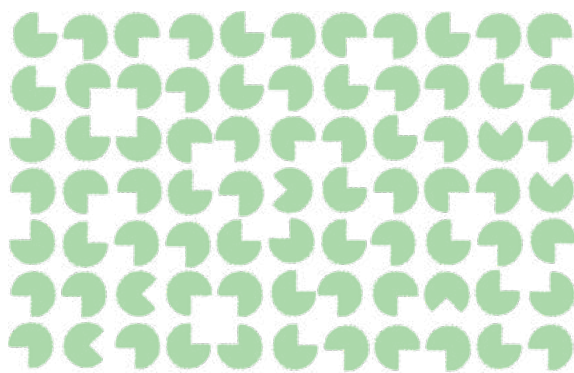
- charities
- local government
- community groups
- health services across Ireland
- social enterprises
- commissioning groups
- health boards and trusts

### What this handbook is for

This handbook provides a set of principles upon which wellbeing initiatives for men should be based, drawn from what men have told us is important to them. By following these principles, wellbeing initiatives are more likely to be effective for, and appeal to, men going through tough times before reaching crisis point.

**This handbook addresses three key questions that successful wellbeing initiatives for men must consider:**

1. How can wellbeing initiatives engage less well-off men on a preventative basis earlier in their lives?
2. How can those wellbeing initiatives be seen as relevant to less well-off men earlier in their lives?
3. How can wellbeing initiatives maximise their impact for less well-off men by:
  - Increasing meaningful connections
  - Providing a sense of purpose





## Background

**This handbook is the product of co-design workshops with men as well as research conducted by Revealing Reality on behalf of Samaritans.**

It builds on the findings of the first phase of our research, *Out of Sight, Out of Mind*, which showed that we must reach less well-off men who are struggling earlier, to help prevent them ever reaching a crisis point. The report found that men didn't receive support early enough in their lives, and that opportunities to engage them were missed. It found that help was usually only offered once men became a risk to themselves or others. Men told us they wanted services to facilitate two key things which were lacking in their lives: meaningful connections and purposeful activity.

Importantly, preventative support that was available before the point of crisis – such as wellbeing initiatives in the community – was not seen as relevant by the men we spoke to until they had hit rock bottom and were looking to rebuild their lives.

For this handbook, we explored which activities and initiatives might support men's wellbeing *before* they reached a mental health or suicidal crisis. We tested the resonance and efficacy of existing services with them. This helped us to develop principles of what a good initiative looks like in terms of communication, initial engagement and ongoing participation. We also co-produced the elements of service design which run throughout this handbook.

## A short note on methodology





For this handbook we ran a series of co-design workshops with 27 less well-off men across Northern Ireland (5), the Republic of Ireland (5), and Great Britain (17). The research was conducted by the agency Revealing Reality. A comprehensive methodology can be found on Samaritans website: [samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/middle-aged-men-suicide](https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/middle-aged-men-suicide).

## The coronavirus pandemic and wellbeing initiatives for men

Wellbeing initiatives for men are facing unexpected and unfamiliar operational challenges due to the coronavirus pandemic. Rules around social distancing are regularly changing across Ireland. At the time of writing, depending on where initiatives are taking place, coming into physical contact with others will have been stopped completely or have been heavily adapted. It should be noted that as more activities and services move online, for some less well-off men existing issues of digital exclusion will be exacerbated.

### Adapting wellbeing initiatives during coronavirus pandemic

**This handbook includes ideas for how to adapt to social distancing restrictions based on existing examples. To do this successfully, there are four key things services should do:**

-  **Communicate clearly**
-  **Show flexibility**
-  **Consider digital exclusion**
-  **Be proactive**



# Principles for wellbeing initiatives for men

## Overview

Throughout the co-design workshops, participants made reference to the things they saw as contributing to good mental health and important elements of a 'good life'. These ranged from fulfilling work and hobbies, to goals, progress and achievements. The men were clear that strong social networks and close relationships were also important for wellbeing. These elements are central to the five principles, outlined in this handbook, which wellbeing initiatives should aim for.

*It should be noted that the terms 'activity', 'service' and 'initiative' are used interchangeably throughout.*

Reflecting the importance of wellbeing services supporting men earlier, we engaged men who had not yet reached a mental health or suicidal crisis point, but who had been exposed to risk factors. The majority of these risk factors came before the coronavirus pandemic, which could lead to them struggling in future. These included job loss or unemployment, relationship breakdown and deterioration of physical health.

When we explored practical examples of how these elements of a 'good life' might be fostered by wellbeing initiatives, our participants gravitated towards services that already exist within communities and hobby-based activities focused on meeting general wellbeing needs, rather than formal mental health or crisis services. Therefore this handbook is principally concerned with initiatives which are likely to reach men before crisis point, on a preventative basis.

It is important to note, in terms of commissioning and designing services, that the men we spoke to were not particularly drawn to activities that were exclusively for men or based around what might be considered stereotypically 'male'. There is no 'one-size fits all' when it comes to appealing to and supporting men; many factors, including a person's life situation, influence this. The designing and commissioning of wellbeing initiatives must be sensitive to this fact, ensuring services are designed and promoted in a way that appeals to men, without being limited to traditionally male activities.

Co-design was central to the development of this handbook, and where possible the same approach should form the basis of all wellbeing initiatives for men. By co-designing services with men and taking regular feedback from participants to inform future service development, wellbeing initiatives can ensure that they are as responsive as possible to the needs of those they are serving.

## A successful wellbeing initiative should

1. Use activities to facilitate conversation
2. Be welcoming and accessible
  - Have a sense of irreverence
  - Start with low commitment and increase
3. Communicate clearly
4. Foster meaningful relationships over time
5. Foster a sense of achievement



# Principle 1:

## Use activities to facilitate conversation

### Overview

**Men we spoke to recognised the importance of talking to others, making friends through new activities and fostering strong social connections and networks. However they were most keen on those initiatives based on an activity, which provides participants with something to do, as well as the opportunity to chat and meet other people.**

Almost all of the men who took part in our workshops felt talking or making friends should come about as a natural by-product of a shared interest, activity or goal with other participants, rather than being the primary focus of a service or initiative. Avoiding 'awkwardness', especially when first joining an initiative, was important to them, and it was felt that a focus on activities could help.

The men we spoke to acknowledged the importance of social connections while expressing discomfort at the idea of talking or opening up to people they don't know without the support of an activity. This presents a possible challenge as to how talking-based initiatives market their service and appeal to this group.

““ With these talking group things, there's no anchor. Nothing other than the chat. No table, no games, no food. Nothing in between the people. That's intimidating. It's terrifying to open up to people you don't know ””

Alex, 36

““ For example, with the repair café, maybe they could ask you to bring something broken along. That's an automatic ice-breaker and avoids awkward introductions ””

Rowan, 45

““ A picture of men just chatting and having a brew makes me feel a little uneasy ””

Dan, 32

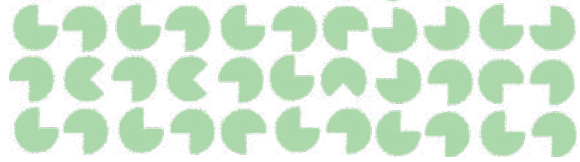
### What does this mean for engaging participants and keeping them engaged?

#### Wellbeing initiatives should:

- Consider framing promotional materials and early engagement around activities.
- Make only subtle implications or references to socialising in advertising materials.
- Consider how activities and goals related to activities can be used to encourage conversation.

#### Wellbeing initiatives should not:

- Use abstract imagery. Posters and ad campaigns that clearly showed the activity which forms the basis of the service were the most appealing.
- Advertise their service as being for lonely people, or for people struggling to make connections.



## What are the implications for this principle in times of social distancing?

Coronavirus pandemic restrictions mean that face-to-face activity will be reduced for the foreseeable future, impacting the type of activities that groups are able to safely offer. The pandemic may also impact men's willingness to participate in activities with other people outside their own household.

In response, many groups have developed new, remote activities or have adapted their previous activities to comply with restrictions. It is important to acknowledge possible barriers to adaptation, such as the digital literacy or access of group members.

### How can initiatives best adapt to this new context?

#### ➤ **By empowering their members to provide ideas and solutions.**

Ideas of how to adapt wellbeing initiatives should not rest solely on group leaders or organisers; group members often best understand their own barriers to participation, and how to overcome them:

- The [Repair Café Belfast](#) held an online event for 'Basic Bike Maintenance' to encourage people to share their skills and get people back cycling.
- A member of the Portlaoise Men's Shed started a [Modular Railway Club](#).

#### ➤ **By changing activities or starting new ones during lockdown.**

For many men's groups, flexibility was vital to their response. Group members and leaders showed they were willing and able to try something new:

- [Heads Up Kildare](#) recognised some participants' reluctance and/or limited access to technology so they distributed "Be Well" packs filled with little activities, recipes, and tips for looking after your mental health.
- The [North Belfast Men's Shed](#) developed and produced their own personal protective equipment (PPE) visors. This allowed them to safely meet when restrictions lifted and give back by sharing the equipment with the wider community.

#### ➤ **By adapting old activities to meet guidelines.**

For some groups, lockdown meant that they had to stop their activities altogether. Reopening quickly and safely required clear communication and planning to meet guidelines.

- The [Dublin Boys Club](#) adapted to outdoor walks and hikes or going for a swim in the sea. As well as being COVID safe, they found there was less pressure to engage and conversations happened more naturally for the men.
- [Men's Action Network Father Families Project](#) in Derry hosted a virtual 2020 Father's Day event and encouraged men to send in pictures, messages, poems, artwork, and/or video clips, and posted them on their fathering webpage.

#### ➤ **By adapting to local restrictions on physical contact.**

Some groups have found ways to maintain limited physical contact between members, dependent upon local restrictions.

- The [New Community Men's Shed](#) in Waterford City specifically engages men living in Direct Provision with the aim to help its members find work and better integrate into the community. Recognising the impact of the shed and wanting to comply with restrictions, they reduced group size but continued to offer support.





## Principle 2:

### Be welcoming and accessible

#### Overview

## Be accessible

**The men we spoke to wanted wellbeing initiatives to feel accessible and open. They were clear that activities which appeared exclusive or financially inaccessible did not appeal.**

There are some important caveats to this. It was generally agreed that some level of exclusivity is unavoidable or even necessary for initiatives with limited resources. A reasonable requirement for proficiency will make certain activities more accessible for some people rather than others.

However, where possible it is important that people are not rejected from wellbeing initiatives, especially if they are already struggling with their overall confidence. It was noted that the first point of contact with a service is important in managing expectations around which criteria, if any, are required to access a service.

““ Introductions to other members would be good, so that you don't feel alienated. And you start to build bonds with other people. And can turn to them if you need advice or help ””

Jeff, 53

““ The more diverse the group, the better. I don't want it to be a moan fest if the people have similar issues ””

Rick, 41

““ Maybe there could be groups where there are beginners or people at your level, so you know everyone is in the same boat as you. Then there's no fear of looking like an idiot ””

Jacob, 44

## Have a sense of irreverence

Those we spoke to told us that central to creating a welcoming atmosphere within a service or activity was creating a sense of fun. A healthy level of 'banter' can be important to ensure that activities don't come across as too serious. Feeding the 'inner child' can be a way to break the ice and make participants feel comfortable. Activities which come across as overly earnest, solemn or serious in their advertising were rejected by those we spoke to, especially by younger men (30-45 year olds).

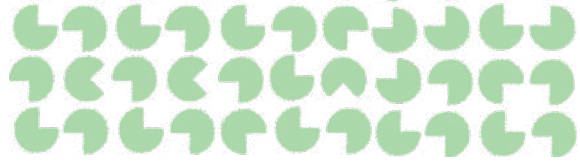
Men told us that encouraging a playful and fun atmosphere is the best way to foster healthy, organic and ultimately meaningful relationships among participants. If an activity is too serious or takes itself too seriously, it risks putting participants off.

““ I assume the atmosphere at this walking group would be very politically correct. I'm wary I wouldn't have much in common with people ””

Dion, 33

““ I like the photos where they are pulling funny faces – they are not taking themselves too seriously ””

Dom, 35



## Start with low commitment and increase

An important way for wellbeing initiatives to ensure accessibility and be welcoming is to offer participants a sliding scale of commitment in terms of participation over time. Rather than expecting too much too soon, services should encourage participants' commitment to build in a natural way, based on enjoyment of the activity. Most of the men we spoke to felt that they would ultimately aim for high commitment to a service or activity but would be reluctant to start off this way. Life circumstances are likely to inform how much time a person is able to commit to a wellbeing initiative. Older men, as well as those out of work with fewer commitments, were more likely to be attracted to activities requiring a high level of engagement. Conversely, those who were younger with jobs and children felt less able to make such commitments. For many this was because involvement in a wellbeing service could be viewed as less of a priority than their existing responsibilities.

Services should aim to empower participants by giving them the option of trying things without having to commit either time or money. Commitment can be encouraged through personal goal setting from an early point – in line with the later Principle 5 – Foster a sense of achievement.

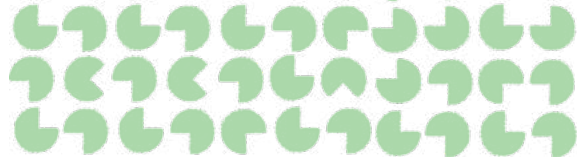
### What does this mean for engaging participants?

#### Wellbeing initiatives should:

- Prioritise ensuring that the first contact with a participant is a really positive one. This could be by having someone to meet and greet participants and introduce them to others.
- Provide taster sessions and trial periods for beginners and use language around 'giving it a go' to lessen any possible pressure.
- Ensure posters and campaign ads come across as fun, playful, irreverent and friendly.
- Allow a low financial and time commitment to start with.
- Provide drop-in rates and the ability to 'freeze' membership.

#### Wellbeing initiatives should not:

- Expect participants to pay for whole blocks of sessions at first.
- Advertise their offer in ways that make it seem serious, earnest or 'preachy'.



## What does this mean for keeping participants engaged?

### Wellbeing initiatives should:

- Facilitate invitations from the friends and networks of those already involved where possible.
- Give participants unofficial roles over time ie ownership or responsibility over elements of a service to help increase commitment.
- Consider the use of informal 'props' such as t-shirts as a way of engendering commitment and a feeling of investing in oneself without a big time or financial commitment.

### Wellbeing initiatives should not:

- Allocate 'official' roles or responsibilities to participants too early.

## What are the implications for this principle in times of social distancing?

As initiatives adapt to social distancing restrictions by moving to online models, the impact in terms of accessibility is likely to be mixed. This is dependent on individuals' access to, and experience with, the technologies that facilitate this shift.

The divide between those who are digitally excluded and those with access has been amplified during the pandemic. Many participants who experience digital exclusion will now find it more difficult to access initiatives, and services may find it more challenging to welcome new participants.

## How can initiatives best adapt to this new context?

Many adaptations to improve accessibility are mentioned with regards to other principles, such as encouraging remote interactions between members, maintaining clear communication, and training members to use online tools.

Some groups have taken extra steps to create a friendly and playful presence remotely.

### ➤ **By reaching out in a new format, such as a podcast or a weekly radio show.**

- [Belfast Men's Health Group](#) runs a bi-weekly podcast covering a variety of topics. Numerous guests have discussed the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on their mental health and the wider impact it will have on men and society going forward. Guests often share their own struggles and coping skills.

### ➤ **By increasing their presence on social media to create a welcoming and open atmosphere.**

- The [Waterford Estuary Men's Shed](#), set up a virtual art group where they watch YouTube videos where artists show you how to paint certain scenes that they all then do together.
- Members of [An Scioból Men's Shed](#) in Donegal livestreamed music sessions every night and invited other shed members to join.

### ➤ **By making registration easy and allowing for men to take part flexibly.**

Smooth registration processes and clear, simple rules about participation can make it easier for men to get started.

- [Parkrun](#) organise free, weekly community runs in local parks and open spaces for men, women and children. Their website allows people to register for runs remotely with an online form. You only have to register once, and registered people can participate in any event without notifying the group in advance.

# Principle 3:

## Communicate clearly

### Overview

Many of the men we spoke to, especially those in the older category (46-59 year olds), preferred activities with greater structure and expressed concern that less structured activities would be unproductive or a waste of time.

Advanced notice of what is likely to be expected of them was important to those who took part in our workshops; it assures participants that they will not be thrown in at the deep end before they are ready.

Providing participants with practical information such as how to travel to a service, its car parking and other issues of accessibility, offers reassurance and makes some participants feel more confident about getting involved. Such information was noted as missing from many of the real example promotional materials that we shared in our workshops.

Conversely, there is a chance that highly structured activities could put off men who are working or have other commitments. A balance must be struck, as too much structure could lead to worries about the level of commitment required or feeling afraid to give things a go.

“ The structure needs to be clearly communicated. It would be good to know if there is ten minutes at the beginning and the end to chat ”

Alex, 43

“ On this poster, it doesn't actually tell you what they do there. It needs more clarity ”

James, 39

### What does this mean for engaging participants?

#### Wellbeing initiatives should:

- Where appropriate, provide a structure, agenda or idea of what is to come ahead of the first interaction with a participant. This will help to alleviate anxiety about starting something new and meeting new people.
- Provide practical, itinerary style information in the initial engagement of a participant including whether there will be parking, the nearest train station/bus stop, and an idea of what the room looks like.
- Provide clarity as to who the activity or initiative is for. This includes clear language about the level of proficiency that a person needs.

#### Wellbeing initiatives should not:

- Treat men in a blanket or uniform way; some men with work or childcare commitments might feel daunted by lots of information up front, which could imply a higher commitment than they are ready for.



## What does this mean for keeping participants engaged?

### Wellbeing initiatives should:

- Continue to keep participants in the loop with developments around the service or activity by providing clear information.

### Wellbeing initiatives should not:

- Provide so much structure that the service seems inflexible or overstructured, or that participants are scared off or daunted by the level of commitment required.

## What are the implications for this principle in times of social distancing?

As initiatives continually adapt to changing social distancing rules across Ireland, maintaining clarity of structure has become more difficult. For some men, access to groups may have become easier, with a lower commitment in terms of time, money, and transport.

For others, however, new and unexpected barriers will have arisen. Practical adaptations and clear communication are necessary to help participants navigate an ever-changing environment.

## How can initiatives best adapt to this new context?

### ➤ **By proactively and clearly updating their members.**

The most obvious way in which initiatives can bring clarity for their members is through accessible communication. Guidance that is specific to the activity and location may help to ease concerns about attending.

- Many groups are using the news and blogs pages on their websites to keep members updated about changes to events and rules, alongside publishing updates on their social media pages.
- Some groups have published more specific guidance about how they will safely reopen or adapt activities, including offers to provide free hand sanitiser or new physical arrangements.

### ➤ **By building members' confidence to participate remotely.**

- For many men, online communication will raise barriers to participation. Extra effort is needed to ensure group members feel confident in their ability to take part.
- The [Irish Farmers' Association](#) published a breakdown of various virtual communication tools and encouraged members to contact them directly for additional support or follow-up.



# Principle 4:

## Foster meaningful relationships over time

### Overview

**While explicitly framing initiatives and activities around ‘making friends’ was not popular with the men we spoke to, strong relationships were recognised as being crucial to maintaining wellbeing. Initiatives can provide a route to help men develop friendships with people who they share interests with, can trust and turn to in tough times.**

While casual conversations can lead to a temporary uplift in mood, they rarely touch on the more deep or meaningful issues that a person might be going through. The men we spoke to were clear that building meaningful relationships is important and that activities can and should play a part in this. However this will not happen overnight; meaningful relationships must be fostered over time.

Echoing Principle 1, it is important that making friends is a natural by-product of activities, rather than their focus. Wellbeing initiatives must strike a balance between giving participants enough autonomy over interactions to make them feel comfortable, while nudging them into initially uncomfortable situations which can eventually foster strong relationships.

“ Friends come as a by-product when you do things you like. If my objective was to make friends, I could go along to something like this [tool library] and that would work ”

Jacob, 44

“ I wouldn’t want there to be pressure to tell your whole life story. You begin to disclose things as you feel more confident ”

Mark, 56

### What does this mean for keeping participants engaged?

#### Wellbeing initiatives should:

- Where resources allow, offer frequent sessions to give participants the best chance of building relationships.
- Consider how social support within an activity, such as being paired with a buddy, can be used to keep a participant engaged.
- Aim to build rapport and communication among participants as time goes on. This should start with encouragement to talk but without pressure to do so.
- Consider group or team activities where possible to help foster relationships.
- Facilitate ‘extensions’ of the activity – for example having a coffee afterwards, setting up email or WhatsApp groups.
- Allow participants an element of autonomy over how much interaction they have with others.
- Offer participants a buddy to help them reach their goals, but only after a person has been involved for a while.

#### Wellbeing initiatives should not:

- Force, or make participants feel forced, into interactions with others they might not be comfortable with.



➤ **Principle 4: Foster meaningful relationships over time**

## What are the implications for this principle in times of social distancing?

Fostering meaningful relationships over time is one of the principles potentially most impacted by social distancing. Remote contact is less comfortable for most people, as natural conversation is made more difficult by the mechanics of online communication.

“ Meeting online is better than nothing however it can't beat the personal conversations that take place face to face. Just chatting with one another and the banter makes you feel less alone and helps to build your confidence. ”

**HEADSUP Kildare participant**

Addressing this lack of 'natural' face-to-face interactions, while allowing relationships to develop in an organic and unforced way, is a challenge for all wellbeing initiatives during the coronavirus pandemic.

## How can initiatives best adapt to this new context?

➤ **By supporting their members to communicate remotely.**

Many groups sought to facilitate online interaction between their members, without formalising these processes.

- Many men's groups started informal group chats on Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp, to encourage their members to stay in touch with each other. For example, [Naas Community Men's Shed](#) in Co Kildare, has set up a WhatsApp group with 52 out of 60 members involved.
- Lots of groups have also become more active on or set up new Facebook pages, Twitter accounts or dedicated online forums. [HEADSUP](#) has kept active social media pages of available programmes, helpful tips, and signposts to other support organisations.

➤ **By creating new processes to foster communication.**

Some groups tried more proactively to encourage members to maintain their relationships during lockdown.

- [Irish Men's Sheds Association](#) started a buddying system which involved sorting the members into pairs and tasking them with staying in touch by text or phone.



# Principle 5:

## Foster a sense of achievement

### Overview

**Wellbeing initiatives for men should aim to foster a sense of achievement among participants. They should also aim to develop participants' skills where possible. In doing so, they can foster an important supporting principle: to help people feel confident in their abilities.**

Wellbeing initiatives should integrate the setting of, and working towards, realistic goals. Whether these are individual or collective, this should be based on the mutual development of skills, within realistic timeframes. These goals should be tailored according to the person's ability and level of commitment.

Most of the men we spoke to said that trying new things can be scary. Participants do not want to feel like 'the new kid in the class', or as the only person who doesn't know what they are doing, particularly the first time they engage with a skills-based activity such as sport. Men told us they didn't want to feel the spotlight is on them or to 'look stupid'. Wellbeing initiatives can prevent this by avoiding creating situations in which there are large skill disparities among participants, providing introductory sessions and generally making them feel welcome (see Principle 2 – Be welcoming and accessible).

It is important that participants can see progress throughout their engagement with a service or activity. Empowering participants to help with the running of an initiative wherever suitable can be an important way of making them feel invested and allowing them to contribute. This should be considered in terms of co-designing services too.

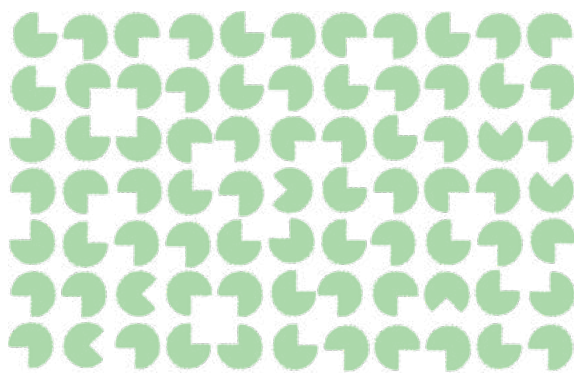
By getting this right, participants are more likely to feel 'justified' in spending time involved in an activity. This is very important as a few of the men we spoke to expressed concern that they wouldn't want to be perceived as spending time and money involved in something that wasn't viewed as totally 'necessary' compared to, their parental responsibilities. This might be another reason that undertaking activities, rather than 'just talking' (see Principle 1), also appealed to the men we spoke to.

“It would be nice if there was a goal you could chip away at – no pressure to achieve it in just a few sessions.”

Dion, 33

“I'd need to be able to go to a session or induction or something so that I could learn how to use [the tools]”

Pratesh, 51







## What does this mean for engaging participants?

### Wellbeing initiatives should:

- Sell the advantages of an activity and set out what might be achieved by taking part, even if these aren't explicit goals.
- Highlight the possibility of developing skills where possible – especially if those skills are seen as 'useful'.
- Allow participants to set personal goals and timeframes for themselves at the beginning of their engagement with an activity and make time to check back in on progress.
- Provide introductory sessions or inductions to help participants become familiar with skills and/or equipment.
- Ensure that the framing of sessions in advertising reduces pressure or expectation to be proficient straight away – this could be in terms of 'getting skills back', trying new things.

### Wellbeing initiatives should not:

- Overpromise on potential achievements – advantages of an activity should not be oversold, especially if health related.
- Pressure attendees to achieve too much too quickly.
- Promote the activity as a kind of test or something that can be failed.

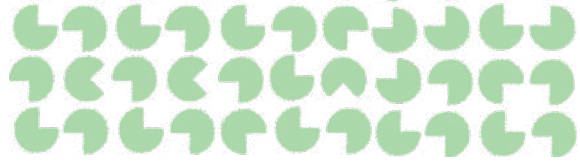
## What does this mean for keeping participants engaged?

### Wellbeing initiatives should:

- Where possible, make it easy for participants to track their progress as they go.
- Provide a progressive structure within a service which participants can work their way up as they improve.
- Empower participants to contribute to the service by running parts of a session or deciding which activities to undertake.
- Encourage friendly competition among participants – ie, beating an achievement from last month or week.
- Assign participants to groups where others are at a similar level to them or introduce people to others who are a similar standard.
- Consider 'buddying' people up to support one another or providing a 'coach' who could help identify areas for improvement in a supportive way.
- Encourage participants to share their skills with others when they have reached a certain level to facilitate bonding.
- Reflect back to participants the skills they have developed over time.

### Wellbeing initiatives should not:

- Set unrealistic timeframes or objectives for progress.
- Put too much pressure on achievement – remember that for some people maintenance will be just as important as improvement.



## What are the implications for this principle in times of social distancing?

Fostering a sense of achievement does not necessarily require face-to-face contact and may be one of the principles least affected by social distancing. However, some initiatives have been required to adapt as their usual mechanisms for measuring progress changed or lost relevance.

### How can initiatives best adapt to this new context?

➤ **By being open to new ways of showing and sharing achievements.**

Fostering a sense of achievement can be difficult to quantify, but some initiatives have been able to integrate their activities across online platforms to allow members to achieve objectives and share their results.

- Samaritans, Realbuzz and LadBible collaborated on [8K with a M8](#), which challenged two friends to run 4k each. The website could be used to recognise achievements with ideas such as a digital medal and a virtual 'finisher's photo.
- The Irish Men's Shed Association has run various competitions online such as '[Shed Factor](#)', '[Dundalk's Got Talent](#)' and the '[Shed Art Competition](#).' There were winners' prizes such as money vouchers for their local shed or just general bragging rights and social media fame!

➤ **By borrowing ideas from free app-based models for maintaining participation and rewarding achievement.**

Downloads of fitness and skills apps rose considerably this year, as people sought to monitor their progress towards personal goals remotely.

- [Duolingo](#) measures the progress of its members using tiered achievements based on specific skills gained, and rewards consistent learning with awards for 'streaks'.
- [MyFitnessPal](#) offers badges and accomplishments as rewards, and tracks an individual's predetermined goals through its app.





# Appendices

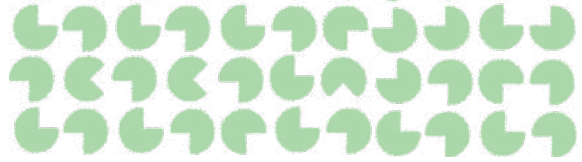
## Checklist

<b>Principle 1: Consider using activities to facilitate conversation</b>	
How are activities being used to facilitate conversation?	
Are there opportunities for participants to talk casually before, during or after the activity?	
Do promotional materials make the activity clear?	
<b>Principle 2: Be welcoming and accessible</b>	
Have you considered the necessary basic skills participants will need to take part?	
How will participants be greeted and introduced to other group members?	
How easy is it for participants to 'give it a go'? Do you have taster sessions or trial periods?	
<b>Principle 3: Communicate clearly</b>	
Is practical information about the group easy to access, ahead of time, and regularly updated?	
Do promotional materials make clear expectations of participants, such as their level of proficiency?	
Has a suitable level of communication with participants been considered to keep them engaged?	



<b>Principle 4: Foster meaningful relationships over time</b>	
Does the frequency of sessions encourage the fostering of relationships?	
How are participants expected to engage with others during activities? Are they in teams or working with a buddy?	
Is it possible to encourage relationships outside the activity, perhaps by setting up optional online groups or social events?	
<b>Principle 5: Foster a sense of achievement</b>	
Are there skills or goals which can be highlighted which men joining the group might want to develop?	
Is there an opportunity for participants to consider their own goals and how to achieve them?	
How effective is the activity or service at supporting men to reach their goals?	





## Action plan template

<b>Principle to improve</b>	
Identify one of the five principles that your group(s) could do better.	
<b>Actions</b>	
Specific steps to improve the group – the first step might be identifying examples from other groups.	
<b>Person responsible</b>	
Identify the person(s) who will perform these actions.	
<b>Resources</b>	
What resources, including volunteer/staff time, you might need and outline any costs.	
<b>Success indicators</b>	
How you will know if you have been successful – what is your desired outcome and how will you know it has been achieved?	
<b>Timeframe</b>	
Set a deadline or timeframe within which you want the actions to be completed.	



## Our service

- Samaritans is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for anyone who needs support.
- Every life lost to suicide is a tragedy, and our vision is that fewer people die by suicide.
- Samaritans is here for anyone who is going through a difficult time. People call for many reasons including loneliness and isolation, depression and anxiety, relationship and family problems, bereavement, financial worries, pain, employment or education related stress. Only one in five people who call say they feel suicidal.
- We have over 2,300 amazing volunteers across 22 branches throughout the island of Ireland.
- The first branch in Ireland opened in Belfast in 1961, followed by Dublin in 1970.
- Each branch is run independently by volunteers and is registered as a separate charity.
- Our service is provided primarily on our freephone 116 123 helpline, email service, written correspondences, and during non-COVID times through face-to-face support in branches, our local communities, and festivals.
- We operate a prison Listener scheme in almost every prison in Ireland.
- Six different helplines in the ROI divert into Samaritans when their lines close after hours: Aware, LGBT, Family Carers, Niteline, GROW and ALONE.
- Irish Diaspora living in Australia, Canada, Poland, UAE and China are supported via freephone numbers supported by the Government of Ireland's Emigrant Support Programme.
- Workplace training and awareness is delivered from our staff team to multiple corporate, voluntary, and State agencies.
- Awareness and emotional health talks/support training delivered in schools and colleges and to local communities.

## Our values

**These are Samaritans' shared values, which shape everything we do:**

### Listening

Exploring feelings alleviates distress and helps people to reach a better understanding of their situation and the options open to them.

### Confidentiality

If people feel safe, they are more likely to be open about their feelings.

### Non-judgemental

We want people to be able to talk to us without fear of prejudice or rejection.

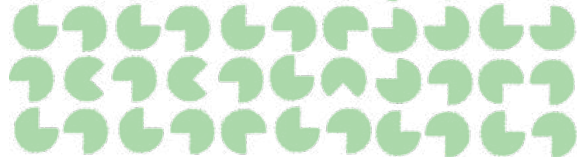
### People making their own decisions wherever possible

We believe that people have the right to find their own solution and that telling people what to do takes responsibility away from them.

### Human contact

Giving people time, undivided attention and empathy meets a fundamental emotional need and reduces distress and despair.





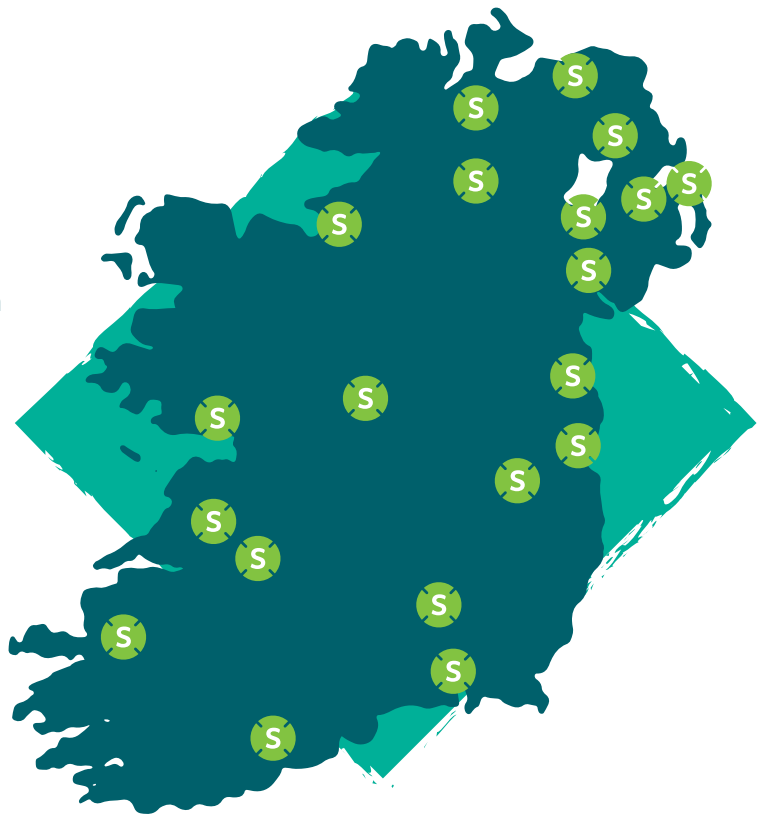
## Reaching men in Ireland

“Men account for three out of every four suicides in Ireland and have long been identified as a high-risk group. The men Samaritans spoke to had been struggling for years and despite experiencing many well-known risk factors, opportunities to help them at critical points before they reached crisis were missed. More needs to be done to keep these men from falling through the cracks, starting by ensuring men with lived-experiences are at the roots of service design to guarantee supports are available at the right time and in the right ways.”

**Niall Mulligan, Executive Director Samaritans Ireland**

“Social connections are really important, and it always feels good to help others at the same time. Joining or starting a men’s group does not mean you have to just sit around having a cuppa – you can engage in activities that give back to your community too. If you have a special skill or hobby or see a need within your community, you can set up your own group and find others with similar interests and experiences. Helping others will often help you feel good too.”

**Rory Fitzgerald, Regional Director (ROI)**



Samaritans branches across Ireland

“It’s really important for men of all ages to look after their mental health and wellbeing and not be afraid to ask for help particularly as a result of the past year with coronavirus and the additional pressures and challenges the pandemic has brought to their lives. You do not have to wait until you’re at your wits end to reach out to someone or join a group. There are lots of online options now too so no matter where you live or what your interests are you can always find ways to get involved.”

**Alan Heron, Regional Director (NI)**



# SAMARITANS

Contact Samaritans free –  
day or night, 365 days a year

Call free on

**116 123**

Email

[jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) (NI)  
[jo@samaritans.ie](mailto:jo@samaritans.ie) (ROI)

**samaritans.ie**

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**Cover photo:** Chris O'Donovan Photography/Samaritans

Samaritans Ireland is a charity registered in the Republic of Ireland (20033668) and incorporated as a company limited by guarantee (450409). Samaritans Ireland's registered office is located at 4–5 Usher's Court, Usher's Quay, Dublin 8, D08Y223. CHY number: CHY11880. The directors/trustees of Samaritans Ireland are as follows: E Farrell, K Flood, D O'Criodan, C Skelly, D Walsh (United Kingdom), G Danton (United Kingdom) J Trenaman, É Ní Mhuircheartaigh, R Fitzgerald, A Heron (United Kingdom)

